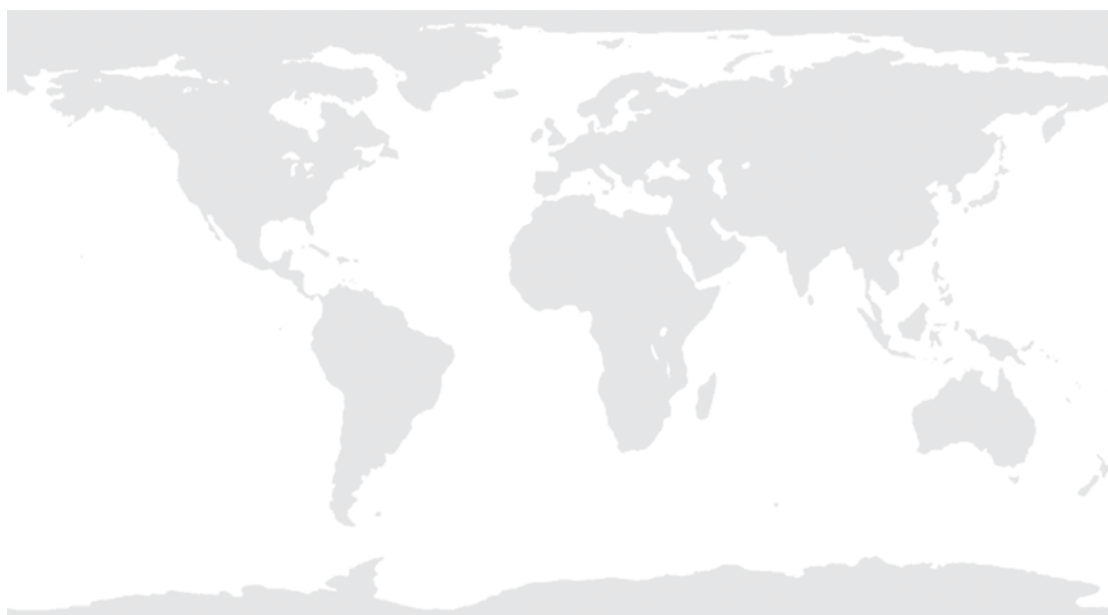




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Principles and general objectives of education

In terms of the Law on Education of 1991 (as last amended on 13 June 2006), education is an activity intended to provide an individual with a basis for a worthy independent life and to assist him/her in the continuous cultivation of abilities. Every person has an inherent right to learn. Education is a means of shaping the future of the person, the society and the State. It is based on the acknowledgement of the indisputable value of the individual, his/her right of free choice and moral responsibility, as well as on democratic relationships and the country's cultural traditions. Education protects and creates national identity. It guarantees continuity of the values that make a person's life meaningful, that grant social life coherence and solidarity, and that promote development and security of the State. Education serves its purpose best when its advancement leads the overall development of society. Therefore education is a priority area of societal development that receives State support.

The amended Law on Education stipulates that the general goals of education are to:

- develop a young person's values enabling him/her to become an honest, knowledge-seeking, independent, responsible and patriotically-minded person; to cultivate the communication skills important in contemporary life; to assist in internalizing the information culture characteristic of the knowledge society, by providing for mastery of native and foreign languages, information literacy as well as social competence and the skills to shape life independently;
- identify a young person's creative abilities and upon this basis to help him/her acquire a vocational qualification and competence conforming to contemporary culture and technology; to assist him/her to get established and successfully compete in the changing labour market; to convey the basics of modern technological, economic and business culture necessary to ensure the progress, competitiveness and sustainable development of the country's economy; to create conditions for continually satisfying cognitive needs as well as improving oneself through lifelong education;
- reinforce the capability of society to ensure sustainable development of the country's economic, environmental and human resources, internal and external economic competitiveness, national security and the advancement of a democratic State;
- convey to each person the basics of national and ethnic culture, the traditions and values of the humanistic culture of Europe and of the world, to foster the maturation of each person's national identity, moral, aesthetic and scientific culture and personal outlook; to guarantee the continuity of ethnic and national culture, the preservation of its identity and continuous renewal of its values; to promote the nation's openness for interaction and dialogue with other cultures;



- ensure conditions enabling a person to acquire the basics of civic and political culture that embody democratic traditions, and to develop the abilities and experience needed by a person for competence as a citizen of Lithuania and a member of the European and global community as well as of a multi-cultural society.

The amended Law on Education also states that the education system is based on the following main principles:

- *Equal opportunities*: the educational system is socially fair, it ensures equality for individuals irrespective of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social position, religion, beliefs or convictions; it ensures access to education for each individual, opportunity for attainment of a general education level and a primary qualification and creates conditions for in-service education or gaining a new qualification.
- *Contextuality*: the educational system is closely linked to the context of national economic, social and cultural development; it renews itself as this context does and meets the continuously changing needs of society.
- *Effectiveness*: the educational system pursues high-quality results by rationally and economically using available resources; by continuously evaluating, analyzing and planning its activities; and by relying on effective management (i.e. proper and timely decision).
- *Continuity*: the educational system is flexible, open, based on interaction of various forms and institutions; it creates conditions for each individual to engage in lifelong learning.

The National Education Strategy 2003-2012 approved in July 2003 sets the following key goals for the development of education: (i) developing an efficient and consistent educational system which is based on the responsible management, targeted funding and rational use of resources; (ii) developing an accessible system of continuing education that guarantees lifelong learning and social justice in education; and (iii) ensuring a quality of education in line with the needs of an individual living in an open civil society under market economy conditions, and the universal needs of society of the modern world.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

From 1940 to 1990 education in Lithuania was regulated by Soviet legal acts. With the reestablishment of Lithuania's independence on 11 March 1990, the educational reform was started.

The **Constitution** of the Republic of Lithuania, approved on 25 October 1992, stipulates that educational establishments run by the state and local governments are secular; religion may be taught at parents' request. Education is compulsory for all citizens until the age of 16 (i.e. ten years). Instruction in public schools of general education, vocational schools and colleges is free of charge. Instruction in public preschool institutions (with the exception of childcare institutions) as well as in institutions of further education maintained or supported by the state is partially free.



The State grants allowances to pupils and students in need of financial assistance and allocates funds for grants and credits. Private educational institutions charge fees.

Since independence, the development of new education legislation became a priority for the Parliament. Until 1998, the education system was regulated by the **Law on Education No. I-1489** of 25 June 1991. The amended **Law on Education No. VIII-854** of 2 July 1998 introduced some substantial changes in the former law, such as the establishment of ten-year general (basic) education, the admission of students aged 14 to vocational schools, and changes in the system of teachers assessment among others.

The **Law on Vocational Education and Training (VET) No. VIII-450** of 14 October 1997, amended in 2007, regulates the organization of the vocational education and training system and its structure and administration, based upon the cooperation of state government institutions and social partners. The amended version of the Law, which came into force at the beginning of 2008, sets principles for the VET system management and quality assurance, defines the national qualifications framework, introduces the apprenticeship scheme, and creates legal preconditions to bridge initial and continuing VET.

The **Law on Special Education** of 15 December 1998 determines the structure and management of the system of special education as well as the procedures for organizing educational services for students with special needs. The **Law on Higher Education** of 21 March 2000, amended in 2006 and 2009, determines the mission and structure of the higher education system in line with the Bologna process, establishes the principles of quality assurance in higher education and research, and regulates the management of higher education and research institutions, organization and supervision of their activities. This Law also defines the main objectives of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education.

The activities of educational establishments in administrative territorial units are regulated by the **Law on the Governing of the County** and the **Law on Local Self-Government**.

Formal education is regulated and controlled by the government and ends with examinations and the award of diplomas or certificates recognized by the State. The **National Education Register** defines formal education by spelling out standards of general education, listing specialties and professions, general requirements for curricula and modules (individual curriculum sections), and qualification requirements. Non-formal education consists of self-education based on individual or societal interests and is not defined by the National Education Register. It is regulated by the **Law on Non-formal Adult Education No. VIII-822** of 30 June 1998.

All citizens are required to attend school from the age of 6(7). They receive general education or attend a general secondary school or a school of a different type until the age of 16 (grades 1-10).

Administration and management of the education system

Education is under the responsibility of the **Ministry of Education and Science** (MES). To a certain extent, responsibility for the provision of education is shared between the central government, county governors, local governments and governing bodies of educational institutions. The country is divided into ten administrative areas or counties, each with a Department of Education. The counties comprise sixty municipalities governed by municipality councils. A significant part of the competencies belonging to the Ministry of Education and Science has been delegated to the Departments of Education, primarily responsible for organizing the supervision of schools.

The role of the State in education is based on the following principles:

- Coordination of the activities of state institutions regulating educational policy and self-governing institutions created by private initiative.
- Control at the central level of results of the educational process. The State regulates: the registration of professions; the mandatory requirements for programmes and modules, giving to schools and regional councils the opportunity to determine part of the educational content; the teachers' qualification requirements; the conditions of schools, which are monitored by inspections; the control over the evaluation of pupils' and students' learning achievement.
- Responsibility of each organizational level of the system (the Ministry, county governor's administration, local government and educational institutions) for the functioning of that part of the formal education system within its sphere of competency. The **Departments of Education** of local governments are responsible for: approving the regulations for the educational institutions under their control; ensuring the application of laws, decisions of the government and acts of the Ministry; managing the accurate registration of school-age children; preparing and implementing regional education programmes; organizing inspections; creating opportunities for the improvement of teachers qualification; creating optimal conditions for educational institutions. The financing of secondary schools is arranged through the Regional Departments whereas teachers' salaries are established at the central level. The **county governor** is responsible for: ensuring the functioning and maintenance of public educational institutions under his/her control; approving the regulations of public educational institutions under his/her control; supervising and registration of educational institutions in the county; initiating the establishment of the County Council of Education and other institutions of the local government; implementing the general educational policy in the county. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for: defining and implementing educational policy; preparing and developing State educational programmes; determining and controlling educational standards; determining criteria and methods for financing education; creating optimal conditions for the educational institutions under its control; organizing inspections; encouraging pedagogical research;



providing teacher training, coordinating qualification improvement, preparing certification.

In accordance with the Law on Education, educational institutions under central and local authorities are established by the MES as well as by the administration of the governors of the counties and the councils of local government, upon written approval of the Ministry and of the administration of the governor of the county. Other ministries and governmental institutions can establish educational institutions with the approval of the Ministry of Education.

Non-public educational institutions are established by legal persons registered in the Republic or individuals upon approval of the MES. Legal and natural persons of other countries are in a position to establish educational institutions or constitute a founding body of joint educational institutions after the approval of the Ministry. An educational establishment is run by the director. The director is appointed by the founder of the establishment upon the approval of the Ministry of Education as well as of the county governor's administration. The responsibility for the operation of an educational establishment lies with the founder and the director.

Schools operate following official curricula approved by the MES or those reconciled with the Ministry. Responsibility for curriculum implementation lies with the deputy headmaster of the school. Extra-curricular programmes and optional/elective subjects are defined by the teacher and approved by the school headmaster. The **National Examinations Centre** was established in 1996 in order to organize national *matura* examinations in a centralized way.

Vocational education and training (VET) institutions are under the responsibility of various ministries: the Ministry of Education and Science, the **Ministry of Internal Affairs**, the **Ministry of Agriculture**, and the **Ministry of Social Security and Labour**. The **Vocational Education and Training Council** functions as a national advisory body in making decisions regarding strategic VET issues. It comprises members representing state and municipal institutions, employer and business organizations, as well as members representing employee organizations. County councils play an advisory role at the regional level. The **Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Centre** (since January 2010; formerly the Methodological Centre for VET, established in 1996) under the MES compiles and analyses information on VET and human resources development, initiates and/or implements applied VET research, designs methodologies for the development of VET, defines VET standards, and assesses the quality of VET provision.

Institutions of higher education come under the Ministry of Education and Science, responsible for operation and financing of the universities. Universities enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy. The **Higher Education Council** provides advice on strategic issues concerning the higher education system. The **Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education**, established in 1995, organizes the external evaluation of higher education institutions, makes suggestions for quality improvements, assesses new study programmes, and evaluates the requests for establishing new institutions. The Ministry of Education takes the final decision concerning the accreditation.

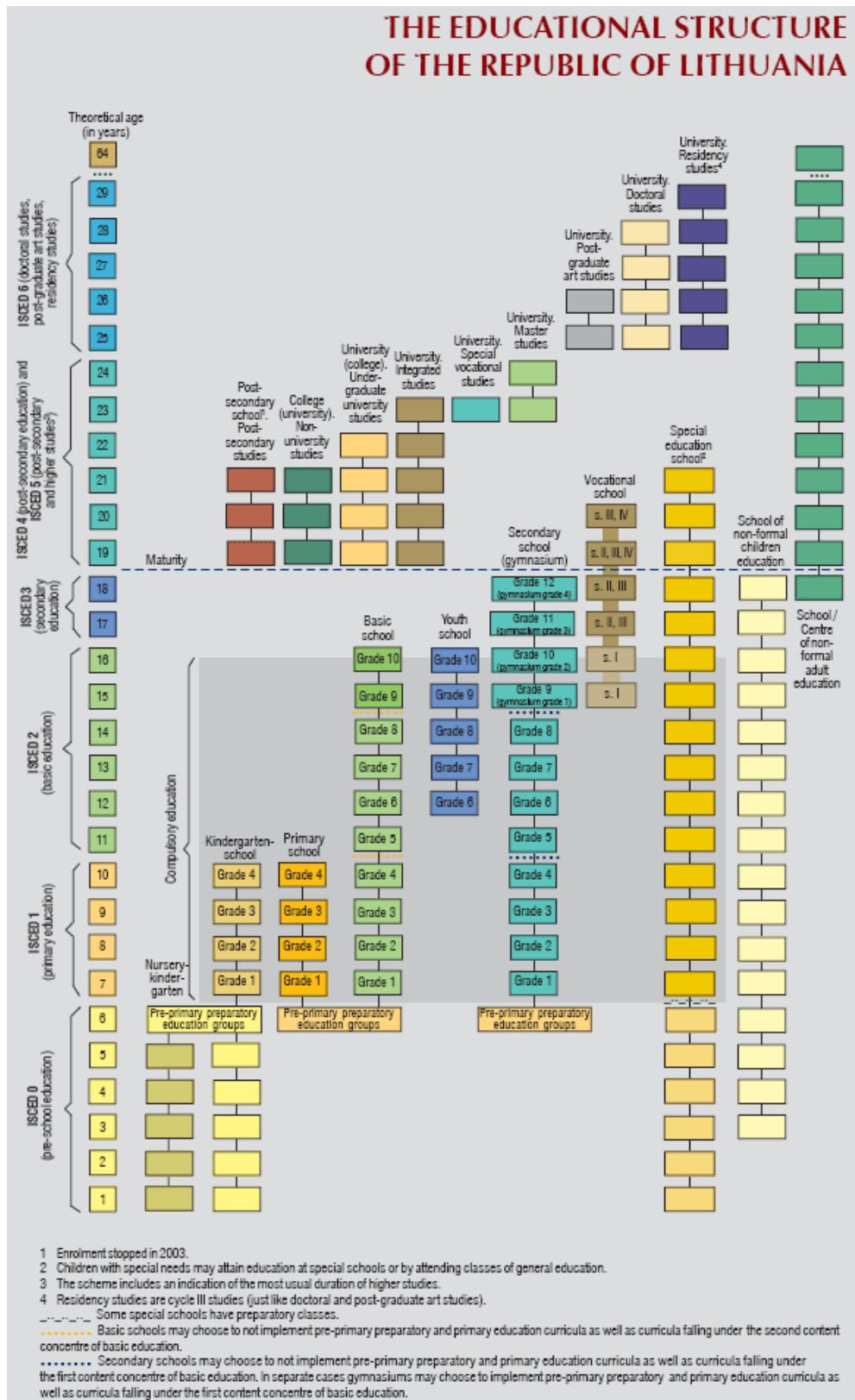


The **Lithuanian Education Council** provides advice on strategic issues related to education development in the country. The Council analyses the national education strategy and monitors its implementation. The conclusions and proposals of the Council submitted to the Parliament, the government, the MES, local self-government institutions, educational and research institutions, have the force of recommendations.



Structure and organization of the education system

Lithuania: structure of the education system (2004)



Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2004.



Pre-school education

Preschool education caters to children in the age group 1 to 5 or 6 and is provided in nursery-kindergartens, kindergartens, and kindergarten-schools. One year of pre-primary preparatory education free of charge for children aged 6 has been introduced in general education schools during the period 2003-2005.

Primary education

Primary education is the first stage of basic education and lasts four years (grades 1-4). Primary schools admit children aged 7 years. Attendance is compulsory. There are no examinations at the end of grade 4; upon completion of the programme pupils receive a certificate.

Secondary education

Secondary education consists of basic (lower secondary) education and upper secondary education. Secondary schools admit pupils aged 10-11 years. The second stage of basic education lasts six years (grades 5-10) and is compulsory. Upper secondary education lasts two years. Gymnasias normally admit students who have completed grade 8 for studies lasting four years (grades 9-12), but there are also gymnasias offering primary to upper secondary education (grades 1-12) and basic to upper secondary education (grades 5-12). At the end of the basic school (grade 10), successful students are awarded the basic school-leaving certificate. It entitles them to enter vocational schools and some colleges or to continue their studies at the upper secondary level. At the end of secondary education (grade 12), students sit the *matura* examinations and if successful are awarded the secondary school-leaving certificate (maturity certificate), which entitles them to enter higher education institutions or colleges. Secondary education can also be acquired at vocational schools, the main providers of initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET). Initial VET is intended for the acquisition of initial qualifications and continuing vocational training; it may be provided in parallel with general lower or upper secondary education. The duration of the training programmes at the lower secondary level, designed for students over 14 years of age, is two to three years. Successful graduates receive a qualification certificate. Students who complete general lower secondary education receive the basic school-leaving certificate which provides access to upper secondary education, either general or vocational. The duration of VET programmes at the upper secondary level is two to three years. Since 2000 technological gymnasias have been set up at vocational schools; they provide upper secondary and pre-vocational education. Graduates are awarded a *matura* certificate.

Higher education

At the post-secondary level, colleges offer higher vocational (non-university) education; full-time programmes usually last three years. Since 2006 colleges can also offer professional bachelor's degree programmes. Upon completion of college studies, a diploma of college graduation is awarded indicating the programme followed and the qualification acquired. Academic degrees following international standards (i.e. bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees) have been introduced since 1994, and the Law on Higher Education of 2000 (as amended in 2006) has fully implemented the



Bologna process. University education consists of basic or first-cycle studies and specialized professional or master's degree studies (second cycle). Upon completion of basic studies (normally lasting four years), a bachelor's degree or a professional qualification is awarded. Graduates from basic studies can follow specialized professional programmes or studies leading to a master's degree (lasting eighteen months to two years). Doctoral degree programmes take a maximum of four years to complete, of which eighteen months to two years are spent on doctoral courses. Doctoral studies can be jointly organized by higher education and research institutions. Postgraduate art studies take two years to complete. In the case of medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine the duration of residency university studies at postgraduate level is between two and six years.

In 2009/10, at the first level of basic education (grades 1 to 4), the school year consisted of 170 days (162 days not including eight national holidays or about 32 five-day teaching weeks). At the secondary level, the school year consisted of 32 teaching weeks in grade 5, 36 weeks in grades 6 to 9, and 34 weeks in grades 10-12. In grades 1-10 the school year can be divided into terms or two semesters; in grades 11 and 12 it is divided into two semesters. (Eurydice, 2010).

The educational process

The General Curriculum Framework and educational standards for the pre-primary preparatory year and grades 1–10 were approved in 2003, thus completing an important stage in the process of restructuring educational content in general education schools that started in 1994 when the project of General Curriculum Framework for general education schools was launched. (Eurydice, 2010).

A strategy for developing, evaluating, renewing, and implementing the curriculum of general was approved by a ministerial order on 23 May 2007. It was developed by a working group set up by the Education Development Centre and sets forth the priorities, aims and principles of the curriculum process, the functions of educational levels, the responsibilities in this process, and the implementation steps until 2012. The strategy provides for the upgrade of the curriculum on the basis of the development of key competencies. Following the strategy, the general education content has been revised and programmes for primary and lower secondary education have been developed and approved. The new content of general education is targeted at developing the key competencies of the knowledge society. The revision of general education programmes and standards involves balancing the volume of contents and reducing the learning loads. The revision of the content of general education programmes is geared to the differentiation and individualization of learning with the main focus on learning outcomes and the relationship between the educational content and life.

The strategy also sets out the principles of management of the educational content and provides for the municipalities to take decisions on the adjustment of the state level education content to the demands of the local communities, for schools to adapt the education content to the needs of the pupils and the school community, and for teachers to decide on adjusting the education content to the needs of the class and individual pupils. The strategy does not provide for decentralization of the general education content, rather it defines more precisely the principle of the interpretation



and adaptation of the education content, and the rights of the education providers to do so. Following the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes in a certain field, and proven ability to fulfill tasks and actions according to agreed requirements. Key competences are the competences necessary for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social cohesion, and employability: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence, and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic skills, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression. One of the main priorities for the period 2007-2012 will be to orient the curriculum towards the acquisition of key personal competences, in particular learning to learn, citizenship, entrepreneurship, and digital literacy, so that a student graduating from a basic education school is prepared to live, learn, and work in contemporary society.

With the view to tackling the issues of learning outcomes and acquisition of key competencies, the following programmes have been approved and are now in the process of implementation: the National Programme of the Promotion of Entrepreneurship Skills of the Youth for 2007-2011, the Programme of Compulsory Early Foreign Languages Teaching (according to which starting from 2009-2010, all pupils in their second year of primary education should study a foreign language), and the Long-term Programme of Citizenship and National Identity Education. (Lithuanian Eurydice Unit, October 2010).

The upgraded General Curriculum Framework for pre-primary preparatory, primary and basic education was approved in 2008. Schools have been working according to the upgraded General Curriculum Framework since 2009. Primary and basic education curricula are based on pupil competencies. Emphasis is placed on the importance to develop the skills of learning to learn, communicate and reveal the child's artistic capabilities at the stage of primary education, and the importance to develop the pupil's entrepreneurship and cultural competencies and the skills of learning to learn and communicate at the stage of basic education. Within the General Curriculum Framework, the content of education is described with regard to educational outcomes. In this way, effort is made to achieve important targets of the upgraded general curricula, such as reduction of the learning load and bringing different areas of education content into line with one another. (Eurydice, 2010).

The MES Resolution of 26 August 2008 approving the General Curriculum Framework for primary and basic (lower secondary) education specifies a number of principles that must be observed in the process of preparation of the Framework. The first relates to relevance. The curriculum must help the student to know him/herself and others, find answers to the essential questions of human life, and absorb the basics of culture and cognition. The curriculum encourages students to rethink the diversity of the cultural heritage of their own country and the world; human values and the necessity to preserve and foster them. It also cultivates respect for the culture of the students' own country and a tolerant attitude towards the physical, religious, social, and cultural differences of people. The curriculum helps students become thinking, active, and creative members of society who are ready to learn all their life, improve themselves, and contribute to improving society. The second principle is value for

further learning and work. The curriculum must be valuable and significant to further learning, professional activity, and self-expression. The content of all subjects is selected so that it would be related to the life of students, their family, and society, and develop the students' ability to communicate and collaborate, solve problems, work in a group or team, assume the role of a leader, build relationships with people on the basis of mutual understanding, and constructively solve conflicts. The third principle relates to accessibility. The curriculum must help the student acquire quality basic education. Possibilities must be foreseen to adapt the curriculum to each student according to his/her social and cultural experience, gender, learning style, and other individual needs to ensure the development of the individual capabilities. The curriculum is prepared in such a way that a student can consistently expand his knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. The fourth principle is sustainable development. The curriculum is based on the provisions of the sustainable development of society. The mutual dependence of the natural environment, culture, and social and economic life of society; future-oriented creative thinking; and active participation of each person in creating quality living for oneself and future generations are emphasized.

Pre-primary education

Preschool education is provided in nursery-kindergartens (age group 0-5/6 years), kindergartens, and kindergarten-schools (age group 3 to 5/6 years). One year of pre-primary education free of charge for children aged 5/6 has been introduced during the period 2003-2005. The activities of preschool institutions are regulated by the Requirements for Statutes of State and Municipal Schools (adopted in 2004) that define the structure of the institution, types of its activities and their organization as well as management, self-governance and other aspects of the institution. Preschool institutions draw up their own statutes based on these requirements. (Eurydice, 2010).

Articles 7 and 8 of the Law on Education (as last amended in 2006) stipulate that the aim of preschool education is to help a child satisfy inherent cultural (including ethnic), social and cognitive needs. Preschool education is provided to children of 1 to 5 (or 6) years of age. The objectives of preschool education are to: encourage the child's self-dependence, initiative and creativity, reveal and cultivate his/her various skills and foster individuality; help children understand common human values and cherish their integrity as an indispensable basis for a democratic way of life; develop most favourable conditions for the child to take over the basic principles of the nation's spiritual culture (moral, esthetic, communicative, etc.); protect and strengthen children's physical and mental health, cherish their natural abilities and satisfy their essential needs for physical and mental security, communication, cognition, self-expression and self-respect; cultivate the mental capacities (intellectual, emotional and relating to willpower) of the children by stimulating the formation of the basic elements of their character; and ensure the continuity of preschool and pre-primary preparatory education. (*Ibid.*).

The aim of pre-primary education is to prepare children for successful learning according to the primary education curriculum. The provision of pre-primary education to a child commences on the calendar year when a child turns 6 years of age. Pre-primary education may begin earlier upon the parents' request if the child has achieved the maturity required for this kind of education, but not before he/she reaches the age of 5. The objectives of pre-primary preparatory education are to:



ensure a safe, purposeful, enjoyable and creative year immediately preceding school, respect and support the child and create conditions for the child's development; encourage the child's activities and communication with his/her peers and adults by enriching his/her emotional, social and cultural experience; protect and strengthen the child's mental and physical health, ensure the child's safety, help the child adapt to the new educational environment and meet the child's need for activity and movement; expand the child's understanding of the surrounding world by creating possibilities for the child to experience the joy of discovery and develop the child's intellectual powers to discover and master various methods of attaining knowledge; develop the child's speaking skills as a means of self-expression, communication and learning, create preconditions for the future development of his writing skills and foster the child's interest in books; foster the child's creativity, stimulate his/her sensitivity to the beauty of the surrounding world and art and also respect for traditional art and encourage the child's self-expression through artistic means and in various other ways. (*Ibid.*).

In the past, preschool education was provided following two state programmes: *Guidelines for pre-school education—a curriculum for teachers and parents* (1993) and the kindergarten curriculum *Vērinēlis* (The String) of 1993. Both the programmes pursued the same goals, i.e.: to foster, in collaboration with the family, children's self-reliance, positive self-assessment, initiative, and creativity; to help children to acquire positive life experiences; to support the sound development of mental abilities; to strengthen children's health; to meet children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs; and to create the appropriate conditions for the assimilation of the national cultural background. These programmes, however, were alternative with regard to their methods.

The content of preschool education is regulated by the *Outline of Criteria for Preschool Education* adopted in 2004; preschools develop their own programmes in accordance with these criteria. Preschool education programmes are not broken down into separate subjects. They set forth the goals and modes of activities for each age group, including physical exercises, games (traditional, creative, agile and didactic), communicative activities, development of speech, artistic activities (art, drama and music), cognitive-exploration activities and work related activities. The various kinds of activities are integrated with a view to the child's developmental peculiarities and the rhythm of his/her life.

The content of pre-primary preparatory education is regulated by the *General Programme of Pre-primary Preparatory Education and Self-education* approved in 2002. It defines the main aims and principles in educating children aged 5–6/7, the most important competencies necessary for the child to continue education at school as well as activities and methods practiced at this stage of education. The *Outline of the Models for Organizing Pre-Primary Preparatory Education* of 2003 sets forth recommendations aimed at assisting local education authorities, founders and principals of schools in organizing pre-primary preparatory education provision in view of family needs and municipality resources. According to existing recommendations, the pre-primary curriculum should include educational activities covering at least 640 annual hours. The curriculum involves the following types of activities: communicative (mother tongue communication); artistic (art, music, dancing and theatre); cognitive (social, cultural, environmental, including

development of elementary mathematical images); physical training and health care; and working activities (games and basic working skills). These activities are integrated, i.e. they are not broken down into discrete units, and last 700 minutes (or 20 regular tariff hours) per week. It is also possible to choose a module of a different duration, for example, that of 1,260 minutes (or 36 regular tariff hours) per week. In the event of choosing the 36-hour modules, children are provided with facilities for having meals and rest. Children who are native speakers of other languages or come from mixed families are taught Lithuanian according to special programmes that meet the level of the children's mastery of the official language. (Eurydice, 2010).

One of the key principles in the organization of pre-primary education specified in the *Outline* of 2003 is accessibility. The document stipulates that pre-primary education is to be developed in such a way and in such forms so as to ensure that every family raising a 5- or a 6-year old child has access to pre-primary education services. One of the main objectives included in the *Programme for the Development of Preschool and Pre-primary Preparatory Education 2007-2012* is to increase availability of preschool and pre-primary education provision, particularly in rural areas. (MES, 2008). In 2009, the government approved the *Model for Improvement of the Living and Education Conditions for Children from their Birth to the Beginning of Compulsory Education*. This model is designed to ensure provision of comprehensive assistance to children and their parents, and its implementation covers the period of 2009–2012. (Eurydice, 2010).

The performance of preschool age children is not subject to assessment; the main object of assessment is the children's physical, emotional-social and cognitive maturity. Concerning pre-primary preparatory education, learning achievements are evaluated and progress checked by the teacher. Children's progress is subject to continuous assessment based on a freely selected assessment means and methodologies. The evaluation of children's achievements is carried out at the beginning and the end of the school year. Within four weeks from the start of the pre-primary curriculum, the teacher carries out the initial evaluation of the children's attainments. On completion of the curriculum implementation, the teacher(s) providing pre-primary education carries(y) out the final evaluation of the children's attainments and prepares a free-form record/recommendation for the primary school teacher. (*Ibid.*).

The prevailing age groups in preschool institutions are children of 3, 4, 5 and 6 years of age. In kindergartens, when groups comprise children of the same age, they are usually organized into three education levels: level 1 for children aged 3–4, level 2 for 4- to 5-year-olds and level 3 for 5- to 6-year-olds (children over 6 years of age attend level 3). The proportion of children aged 1–6 enrolled in preschool institutions has been gradually increasing. Slightly more than half (50.3%) of children of the corresponding age attended preschools in 2004. The share of children in preschool education establishments in urban areas was noticeably higher than that in rural areas (68.2% in urban areas and 19.9% in rural areas in 2004). In 2004/05, the total enrolment (all ages) in preschools was 88,423 children; in addition, there were 10,342 children aged 5–7 years enrolled in pre-primary preparatory groups organized in general education schools (in 2004 there were 896 of such a groups). Lithuanian was used as the language of instruction for 92.7% of children in preschools. In 2004, the total number of staff in preschools was 11,901, including headmasters, deputy



headmasters, tutors, artistic development instructors, special pedagogues, speech therapists, psychologists, other pedagogical staff, and pre-primary education pedagogues. (MES, 2006).

By the end of 2008 there were 654 preschool education providers (of which 648 were municipalities), including 534 nursery-kindergartens, 120 kindergartens and 209 general education schools with preschool settings. The total enrolment was 95,136 children, of whom 74,649 in nursery-kindergartens, 8,114 in kindergartens, 10,627 in kindergarten-schools, and 1,746 in general education schools with preschool settings. The percentage of children attending preschools, as compared to the total number of children in the respective age groups, was 56.9% for the age group 1 to 6 years and older (75.3% in urban areas and 23.7% in rural areas), 23.2% for children up to 3 years of age (32% in urban and 6.2% in rural areas), and 74.8% for the age group 3-6 years (99.2% in urban and 32.2% in rural areas). In 2008/09, there were 1,963 pre-primary preparatory education settings (of which 881 in general education schools and 1,082 in preschools) with a total of 28,096 children enrolled (of whom 19,226 in preschools). Some 3,000 children with special education needs were enrolled in 84 special purpose preschools or institutions with special purpose settings. The total number of staff in preschool education institutions was 13,120, including 1,244 directors/deputy directors, 9,568 teachers/educators, 890 art education teachers, and 277 pedagogical staff. (Eurydice, 2010).

According to Statistics Lithuania, in 2010 there were 626 preschool establishments in the country, of which 499 were in urban areas. Furthermore, a total of 188 general education schools organized preschool education groups. The total enrolment in preschools and preschool education groups was 94,700 children, representing 54% of the children aged 1-6 years; a total of 84,200 children were attending preschools in urban areas. Childcare groups in nursery schools were attended by about 14,500 children aged 1-2 in urban areas and 1,400 children in rural areas. (Statistics Lithuania, 2011).

Primary education

Primary education is the first level of compulsory schooling and comprises the first four years of basic education. It is provided free in state schools. Primary schools are co-educational and admit children who are not younger than 6 years and who have attained the required psychological and physical developmental stage. To facilitate the transition from preschool to primary school, preparatory classes are being established in schools for children aged 5-6 years.

According to Article 9 of the Law on Education (as last amended in 2006) the general aim of primary education is to provide children with the basics of moral and social maturity, the basics of culture (including ethnic culture) and with elementary literacy, social, cognitive, informational and activity skills as well as to prepare children to continue learning according to the basic education curriculum. The main objectives of primary education are to: assist the children in acquiring meaningful, relevant knowledge about them, the world and other people; help the children develop the skills needed to accumulate knowledge and experience, discover and put forward ideas and also design and implement projects; help develop the personal competencies, necessary skills, abilities and values; and create conditions conducive

to the development of personal competencies and a democratically mature personality recognizing national and universal values.

General education can be delivered in different types of school: kindergarten-schools; primary, basic, and youth schools; secondary schools and gymnasias; special schools; vocational and adult schools. The content of the programme consists of compulsory subjects decided at the central level, and some 8-9% decided independently by schools. All subjects are assigned a compulsory number of lessons fixed by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and distributed at the discretion of the school. The teacher can decide to integrate subjects of instruction. Extra-curricular activities are not compulsory. All subjects should be taught by one teacher with some exceptions (for example foreign language or the Lithuanian language in non-Lithuanian schools). The weekly lesson timetable applied in 2003 is shown below:

Primary education (first stage of basic education): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	I	II	III	IV
Moral education (religion or ethics)	1	1	1	1
Lithuanian language	8	7-8	7-8	7-8
Understanding the world	2	2	2	2
Foreign language (English, German or French)	-	-	-	2-3
Mathematics	4	4-5	4-5	4-5
Art and crafts	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2
Physical education	3	2-3	2-3	2-3
Total compulsory weekly periods (max.)	22	23	23	23
Additional periods (free choice)	2(*)	2	2	2
Additional instruction (free choice)	3	3	3	3

Source: Ministry of Education, 2003. (*) For children with special education needs. Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in Grade I and 45 minutes in Grades II-IV.

The updated primary and basic education curricula approved in 2008 are the main documents currently regulating the contents of education and specifying what and how pupils are taught and what results they are expected to attain. The roll-out of the curriculum renewal across the country started in September 2009. The aim is to move away from memorizing and reproduction of knowledge and focus on the development of skill- and value-based general competencies. The curriculum describes the content of such competencies as communication, sociability, cognition, creativity, healthy lifestyles and learning to learn and also highlights the importance of transition from knowledge acquisition to the development of skills and values. The curriculum also describes the general didactic principles which the competence-based primary education should be based on, brings out the content of pupils' aptitudes, values and knowledge necessary for the development of those competencies. The curriculum change is accompanied by introduction of a new assessment concept in primary schools. The emphasis is placed on formative assessment based on the

principle of individual progress and criteria defined in the educational standards to the exclusion of the customary traditional assessment in marks. (Eurydice, 2010).

The weekly lesson timetable being applied since September 2009 in accordance with the General Teaching Plan of the Primary Education Curriculum for 2009-2011 is presented below:

Lithuania. Primary education (first stage of basic education): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			
	1	2	3	4
Moral education (religion or ethics)	1	1	1	1
Lithuanian language	8-7	7-8	7	7
Foreign language (English, German or French)	-	2	1	1
Understanding the world	2	2	2	2
Mathematics	5-4	4-5	5-4	4-5
Art and technologies	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2
Physical education	3-2	2-3	3-2	2-3
Total weekly periods (min.)	22	23	22	23
Total weekly periods (max.)	22	24	24*	24

Source: Eurydice, 2010. (*) For children who have chosen early foreign language learning (starting in grade 2). Each teaching period lasts 35 minutes in grade 1 and 45 minutes in grades 2-4. Out of the 90 (min.) or 94 (max.) periods over grades 1-4, six periods are distributed at the school's discretion. In addition to these periods, a total of 8 (non-compulsory) periods over grades 1-4 can be devoted to non-formal education activities designed for the development of personal, social, educational and professional competencies of children who have opted for artistic, sports or other activities. These activities are freely chosen by the pupils or their parents/guardians.

The General Teaching Plan is intended to assist schools in planning, organizing and implementing the primary education curriculum in the most purposeful and efficient way. In line with the General Teaching Plan and other legal acts, the Primary Education Teaching Plan at the school level is developed by a working team set up by an order of the school principal. The drafting of the plan is coordinated with the school council and the founder. Teachers are free to choose forms and methods of pedagogical activity and work out individual programmes within the framework of the general curriculum. Individual and group work methods are applied to encourage exploration, explanation, interpretation, problem resolution, project development, and creativity. Such methods include conversation, discussion, interview, role play, simulation, games, projects, exploration (test, experiment), brainstorming, etc. Teachers use textbooks or sets of textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science; they have full discretion to choose additional teaching materials and aids and submit proposals to the school council. Textbooks are provided free of charge. (Eurydice, 2010).

Within the process of assessment of pupils' progress and achievements, the following types of assessment are used: formative assessment (orally and in writing), diagnostic assessment (according to the formalized way of assessment chosen by the



school) and informative assessment (used to report on a child's progress to parents/guardians). The teacher is free to choose any form to formalize assessment (by making notes, entries, reviews, descriptions, etc.), the results of which are recorded in special assessment sheets, journals or class registers. In primary grades, pupils' progress and achievements are not translated into marks.

At the end of each term (semester), information on pupils' progress is entered into the Primary Education Record Book. In the 2009/10 school year, achievements of pupils in grades 1 and 3 are recorded by indicating the level of attainment (satisfactory, basic or advanced) in the corresponding columns of the Record Book according to attainment characteristics described in the General Curriculum Framework. Achievements of pupils in grades 2 and 4 are recorded according to assessment arrangements established by the school itself. At the end of the school year, the progress of the fourth grade pupils in all subjects is assessed in the pupil's educational record in compliance with the requirements of the Standards of Education.

Pupils progress to the next grade following the decision of the teachers' council of the school or of the class teacher in the case of small primary schools. Pupils with non-satisfactory assessment in some subjects at the end of the school year are, at their own request, given additional assignments. The duration of the assignments is determined by the teacher council. On completion of additional assignments and having been satisfactorily assessed, pupils can progress to the next grade. At their parents' request, also pupils with a non-satisfactory assessment in some subjects can proceed to the next grade. Grade 4 pupils who have satisfactory annual assessment in all subjects of the teaching plan are considered to have completed the primary education curriculum, acquired primary education and are entitled to follow the basic education curriculum. (*Ibid.*).

In 2003 the gross enrolment ratio in grades 1-4 was 100% and the pupil/teacher ratio was 1:16. (MES, 2006). In 2009, the total enrolment in grades 1-4 was 122,481 pupils; the gross enrolment ratio was estimated at 96.5% and the net enrolment ratio at 93%. (Eurydice, 2010).

Secondary education

Secondary education comprises basic (lower secondary) education lasting six years (grades 5 to 10), and two years of upper secondary (grades 11 and 12), the latter being part of the post-compulsory education system. General education is also offered by other types of school, namely basic schools, youth schools, secondary (comprehensive) schools, gymnasia, boarding schools, and special education (boarding) schools. Gymnasia usually offer the last four years of general education (grades 9 to 12) and admit students who have completed grade 8 after having tested their performance and maturity, their motivation and their interest and abilities for certain subjects. Some gymnasia also offer primary and basic (lower secondary) education. There are also art gymnasia. Graduates from gymnasia are encouraged to enter university-level higher education institutions. Youth schools (covering grades 6 to 10) are an alternative to the regular general education or basic schools. They are attended by pupils who lack motivation and who cannot adapt themselves to the learning conditions of comprehensive schools. General secondary education can also



be acquired at vocational schools. Pupils with physical or mental handicaps can receive general education in general education schools or in special education schools.

The aim of basic education is to provide an individual with the basics of moral, socio-cultural and civic maturity, general literacy and the basics of technological literacy, to cultivate national consciousness, to foster an intent and ability to make decisions and choices and to continue learning (Article 10 of the Law on Education). The aim of secondary education is to assist a person in the acquisition of general academic, socio-cultural and technological literacy; moral, national and civic maturity; and the basics of vocational competence and/or qualification (Article 11 of the Law on Education). In all public schools education is free of charge. Private schools charge fees. All general education schools are co-educational.

As mentioned, secondary education can also be acquired at vocational schools, the main providers of initial and continuing vocational education and training (VET). Initial VET is intended for the acquisition of initial qualification and continuing vocational training; it may be provided in parallel with general lower or upper secondary education. The duration of the training programmes at the lower secondary level, designed for students over 14 years of age, is two to three years. Successful graduates receive a qualification certificate. Students who complete general lower secondary education receive the basic school-leaving certificate which provides access to upper secondary education, either general or vocational. The duration of VET programmes at the upper secondary level is two to three years. Since 2000 technological gymnasias have been set up at vocational schools; they provide upper secondary and pre-vocational education. Graduates are awarded a *matura* certificate. VET programmes at the post-secondary level last one to two years. The main objectives of the VET system are to: help a person acquire qualifications and competencies in line with the level of modern science, technology, economics and culture that would enable him to find his/her place and compete in the changing labour market and ensure the country's economic progress, international competitiveness and sustainable development; and create conditions for lifelong learning and the improvement of qualifications obtained, while ensuring that these qualifications meet the country's economic needs.

After independence, the process of curriculum revision has been based on the following principles: the curriculum must move away from ideological or political influences; it must be based on the national culture; it should be both specialized and integrated; and it should have a greater socio-cultural significance. The curriculum is implemented through textbooks and teaching aids approved by expert commissions of the Ministry of Education and Science. When more than one teaching aid is available, teachers are free to choose between them. Teachers have also the freedom to choose the most appropriate teaching methods. The teacher-centred approach is being superseded by a new one centred on the needs of students. Active teaching methods, group work, integrated instruction, differentiation and individualization of teaching content and methods are also promoted.

The teaching plan establishes the compulsory (core) subjects of instruction, optional and elective subjects, as well as the number of weekly lessons per subject. The offering of optional subjects and additional education is at the discretion of the school council, which also approves the curriculum and decides how the school will

operate, i.e. five or six school days per week. In the teaching plans of the basic school, 90% of the compulsory number of lessons is decided at the central level; at the upper secondary level, the teaching plans centrally determined represent approximately 65% of the compulsory number of lessons. A varying number of periods of instruction may be allocated to compulsory subjects, depending on the profile of the school or gymnasium as well as on the instructional level of the subject chosen by the student.

Students have also free choice concerning optional and elective subjects offered by the school (e.g. third foreign language, philosophy, psychology, basics of law, computer programming and office work, applied economics, etc.). The curriculum in gymnasias has some differences in comparison with the curriculum of comprehensive schools. The weekly lesson timetables applied in 2003 are presented below:

Basic school (second stage of basic education): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade				
	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Moral education (religion or ethics)	1	1	1	1	1
<u>Languages:</u>					
Lithuanian language	5-6	5-6	5-6	5	5-4
First foreign language	3-4	3	3	3	3
Second foreign language	-	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3
Elective subjects					
<u>Natural sciences and mathematics:</u>					
Mathematics	4-5	4-5	4-5	4	4-3
Nature and man	2	2	-	-	-
Biology	-	-	2	1	1-2
Physics	-	-	1	2	2
Chemistry	-	-	-	2	2
Computer science	-	-	-	-	1-2
Elective subjects					
<u>Social sciences:</u>					
History	2	2	2	2	2
Civics	-	-	-	1	-
Geography	-	2	2	2	2
<u>Fine arts and crafts, physical education:</u>					
Fine arts	1	1	1	1	1
Music	1	1	1	1	1
Crafts	2	2	2	1-2	2
Physical education	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3
Elective subjects					
Total weekly periods (five-day school week)	23	27	28	28	31
Number of lessons distributed at the school's discretion	4	2	2	3	1
Total compulsory weekly periods (max. for a five-day school week)	27	29	30	31	32

Source: Ministry of Education, 2003. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Upper general secondary education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade			Min. number of periods for individual subjects in Grades XI and XII
	X	XI	XII	
Moral education (religion or ethics)	1			2
<u>Languages:</u>				
Lithuanian language	5-4			8
First foreign language	3			
Second foreign language	2-3			
Language chosen	-			4-6
Elective subjects				
<u>Sciences and mathematics:</u>				
Mathematics	4-3			6
Computer science	1-2			2
Physics	2			
Chemistry	2			
Biology	1-2			
Biology or physics + astronomy or chemistry	-			3-4
Elective subjects				
<u>Social sciences:</u>				
History	2-3			
Geography	2			
Civics	1			
History or geography and political education	-			3
Elective subjects				
<u>Fine arts and crafts, physical ed.:</u>				
Fine arts	1-2			
Music	1-2			
Physical education	2-3			4-6
Arts or music or theatre or dance	-			2
Elective subjects				
Total weekly periods (five-day school week)	26	22	22	
Number of lessons distributed at the school's discretion	6	10	10	
Total compulsory weekly periods (max. for a five-day school week)	32	32	32	

Source: Ministry of Education, 2003. Students must have not less than twenty-eight weekly lessons. Grade X has been integrated into the ten-year compulsory basic education programme. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.



In the school year 2009/10, the new General Curriculum Framework for primary and basic education (2008) was introduced in grades 5, 7 and 9 (and first year of gymnasium). This framework defines the national curriculum content. Based on the framework, schools and teachers develop school- and classroom-level curriculum content adapting it to the individual needs of students and classes so that learners achieve the best possible results according to their capabilities. The General Curriculum Framework provides new optional programmes that were previously non-existent and curriculum activities that help students choose a course of learning, as well as guidelines for teachers on how to tailor the syllabus of individual subjects according to students' needs. The Framework includes programmes on entrepreneurship and economics, ICT, integrated programmes of general competencies, etc.

In accordance with the basic education curriculum, the minimum number of compulsory lessons per week is: 26 in grade 5; 28 in grade 6; 29 in grade 7; 30 in grade 8; 30–31 in grade 9; and 31–32 in grade 10. The maximum number of lessons per week is: 27 in grade 5; 29 in grade 6; 30 in grade 7; 31 in grade 8; and 32 in grades 9 and 10. In grades 5-8 a total of eight lessons per week of non-formal education can be provided (five lessons per week in grades 9 and 10). Concerning the (upper) secondary education curriculum, the minimum number of compulsory lessons per week is 28 (29 in schools with the ethnic minority language as the language of instruction) in each grade. The maximum number of compulsory lessons per week is: 32 lessons; 34 lessons (36 lessons in schools with the ethnic minority language as the language of instruction) for students of national fine arts schools, conservatoires, art, fine arts and musical gymnasiums and also of classes or groups with integrated modules of vocational training; and 33 lessons in schools with the ethnic minority language as the language of instruction. A lesson (or teaching period) normally lasts 45 minutes. Lessons distributed at the school's discretion are set aside for: differentiated teaching of subjects; optional subjects; subject modules and other activities (lessons and counselling) that would contribute to the development of competencies. In grades 5-6, students study 14 subjects, in grades 7-8 they study 16 subjects, and in grades 9-10 they study 18 subjects. The subjects taught are divided into groups, including languages, natural sciences and mathematics, social sciences, fine arts and technological education, physical education, human safety, and information and communication technology (ICT). Moral education (religion and ethics) constitutes a separate subject. In grades 9-10, ICT is introduced. (Eurydice, 2010).

The number of lessons earmarked for different subjects in grades 11 and 12 (and years 3 and 4 in gymnasias) is distributed at the school's discretion. A student taking a general or extended course may have more weekly lessons than those prescribed in the teaching plan. (*Ibid.*).

At the basic school and secondary levels, students' learning achievement, abilities and skills are assessed according to a 10-point system. The subject teacher is in a position to choose the type of assessment: in a written or oral form, utilizing tests, credits, projects, etc. The teacher may also decide upon the frequency of assessment. All students must be assessed three times per year.



Examinations are taken at the end of basic school (grade 10) and upon completion of upper secondary education (grade 12). Gymnasias are entitled to organize entrance and advancement examinations. Examinations are compulsory for all students provided that they obtained a satisfactory (i.e. 4 to 10 in the 10-point system) end-of-school-year assessment. Examination results are evaluated by commissions consisting of teachers of the relevant subject. On completion of basic school, successful students are awarded the basic school-leaving certificate listing the marks obtained. This certificate entitles them to enter a vocational school and some colleges. On completion of upper secondary education, successful students receive a school-leaving certificate (Maturity Certificate) listing the examinations passed, the marks obtained as well as the end-of-school-year assessment of compulsory and optional subjects. The Maturity Certificate entitles students to enter higher education institutions and colleges. Colleges admit students on the basis of the assessment of the subjects listed in the certificate. Higher education institutions may arrange entrance examinations or test the knowledge or skills of applicants, and they adopt entrance requirements based on the State graduation examinations. Regulations for entrance examinations are set by the individual institutions.

In 2004/05, there were 120,445 pupils in basic schools, 1,985 students in youth schools, 302,338 students in general secondary schools, and 77,299 students in gymnasias. The number of teachers was 11,284 in basic schools, 1,985 in youth schools, 22,434 in general secondary schools, and 4,957 in gymnasias. In the same year, there were 36,180 students enrolled in stages 1-3 vocational education programmes; the number of teachers in vocational schools was 4,907. In 2004/05, 11.7% of all pupils with special needs were enrolled in special education schools or special education centers (a total of 5,600 pupils), and special education classes in general education schools (906 pupils). The remaining 88.3% (i.e. 51,970 pupils) were in mainstream general education classes. Furthermore, some 361 pupils were in sanatorium schools. (MES, 2006).

According to Statistics Lithuania, in the school year 2010/11 public and private general education schools included: 496 basic schools, 285 secondary schools, 212 gymnasias, four art gymnasias, four conservatories, 18 youth schools, 62 special schools, and nine sanatorium schools. The total enrolment was: 114,316 students in basic schools, 129,649 students in secondary schools, 124,925 in gymnasias, 2,114 in art gymnasias, 685 in conservatories, 1,438 in youth schools, 4,027 in special education schools, and 354 in sanatoriums. About 42,600 students with special educational needs were integrated into mainstream classes of general education schools. In the same school year, there were 38,104 teachers in general education schools, of whom 95.9% (or 36,539 teachers) with higher education and 96.1% (or 35,097 teachers) with a pedagogical qualification. A total of 8,098 teachers were teaching in grades 1-4, 25,842 were in grades 5-12 (including years 1-4 in gymnasias), 1,277 were principals, and 2,203 were senior educators. In 2010/11 there were 78 vocational schools with 3,962 pedagogical staff (including 1,312 teachers, 2,194 vocational instructors, 116 educators, 266 senior educators, and 74 principals); the total enrolment was 49,489 students (of whom 18,775 were girls). In 2010, the gross enrolment ratio was estimated at 103.5% at the lower secondary level (95% net), and at 113.7% (82.5% net) at the upper secondary level. (Statistics Lithuania, 2011).



Assessing learning achievement nationwide

In 2005, the Ministry of Education and Science established a National School Evaluation Agency with the main function of external improvement-oriented evaluation of general education schools. On a national basis, the external audit (evaluation) methodology has been applied from the 2007/08 school year onwards. (Lithuanian Eurydice Unit, October 2010).

In 2001, on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Education Development Centre, the *Assessment of Learners' Progress and Achievements* project was launched. It was aimed at developing an effective assessment system that would meet education goals and at initiating and implementing new assessment methods. The project was run until 2003 and, building on its results, the *Assessment in the Process of Education* project was started in 2004. The *Programme for the Implementation of the National Education Strategy 2003-2012* envisaged that in 2007 the rate of learners with basic or higher levels of achievement in the Lithuanian language, mathematics, natural sciences and social sciences could be 65%, 60.8%, 71.3% and 67.5%, respectively. However, in 2007 the rates were 44%, 44.5%, 48.5% and 48% respectively.

The results of the 2007 national survey on the achievements show that the level of proficiency of grade 4 and grade 8 students in the Lithuanian language as a mother tongue and in natural sciences has not been increasing. Comparison of the 2005 and 2007 achievements in mathematics did not show any significant change in either grade 4 or grade 8 results. A certain improvement, compared to the year 2005, was achieved by grade 8 students in the social sciences subjects. The data derived from the survey suggest that achievement levels differ depending on the locality of the school, the level of urbanization and the type of school. Among grade 4 learners, pupils of rural or small town schools demonstrated a lower degree of proficiency. The best results of grade 4 learners were achieved in kindergarten-school type educational institutions and some primary schools. The best results among grade 8 students were achieved in gymnasium-type schools; however, the disparity between them and basic or secondary schools has been decreasing. Also, certain differences in boys' and girls' achievements at school have been observed. The evidence suggests significant gender-based differences in the Lithuanian language achievements, where boys are lagging well behind girls. The findings of studies, carried out for several years, suggest that the gap between grade 8 boys and girls in mathematics achievement has been narrowing.

Concerning international student assessment exercises, Lithuania participates in: the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) since 1995; the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) since 2001; and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) since 2006.

The 2006 PISA survey in Lithuania was carried out among 4,746 15-year-olds from 197 schools. Its primary focus was on natural sciences, where Lithuanian scored 488 points (the international score being 500 points), with less attention devoted to mathematics and reading performance. The findings of the survey revealed that, in natural sciences, boys outperformed girls. The gap is small, only 2 points, which is nevertheless statistically significant. Out of the four natural sciences areas (earth and



space systems, living systems, physical systems and knowledge about natural sciences) Lithuanian students demonstrated greater proficiency in the living systems area, while the level of proficiency in knowledge about natural sciences was the lowest. In mathematics Lithuania scored 486 points (with Taiwan scoring the top 549, Finland 548, and Hong Kong 547 points). The OECD mean score was 498 points.

On the reading literacy scale, Lithuanian 15-year-olds scored 470 points. The Republic of Korea, with 556 score points, was the highest performing country in reading; Finland followed second with 547 points, and Hong Kong third with 547 points. The international OECD score was 492 points. Girls performed better in reading than boys.

Lithuania also participated in the 2006 PIRLS, whose target population includes learners in the fourth grade of schooling. The study was aimed at measuring trends in children's reading literacy achievement and policy and practices that can influence learners' performance in reading. The survey in Lithuania involved 5,000 pupils from 150 schools. Lithuania scored 21st among 45 countries, with 537 points. The result is statistically significantly higher than the PIRLS international average. The mean reading score of girls was higher than that of boys. For both, performance was better when reading literary texts than informational texts. Only 1% of grade 4 pupils did not achieve the minimum level in reading literacy, while 5% performed at the highest level. The study data show that compared with 2001, the number of learners achieving high and the highest levels has fallen. (MES, 2008).

Teaching staff

Teachers are trained at universities and colleges according to the requirements determined by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). The right to train teachers may also be granted to separate departments of universities.

Preschool and primary school teachers are trained at higher education institutions and teacher training colleges. Teacher training colleges offer three-year programme and also four-year programmes (for primary teachers when an additional specialization is pursued). Programmes offered at higher education institutions lead to a bachelor's degree (four years' duration) and a master's degree (one year to eighteen months of study following the bachelor's degree). Primary school teachers are trained to teach all subjects. Prospective teachers at the basic and secondary education levels are trained as subject teachers. The Vilnius Pedagogical University is the main teacher training university-level establishment in Lithuania.

Graduates from teacher training colleges are awarded the diploma of college education entitling them to teach in basic schools. Graduates from higher education institutions are awarded the diploma of higher education entitling them to teach at all levels of secondary school, as well as in gymnasias. Graduates from non-pedagogical universities can receive pedagogical training at universities accredited to train teachers. The length (usually not less than one year) and form of studies are determined by the university. Vocational education teachers can also be trained in specialized non-pedagogical universities. They must have vocational training, work



experience in the field of their specialization, and pedagogical training (through specialized licensed courses).

The contents of training programmes are defined by the colleges and universities. Graduates should be able to teach at least two disciplines. Curricula include both common subjects and specialized subjects, including: didactic, pedagogy (for different age groups), philosophy, political science, psychology, social work, social sciences, health education, management of education, etc. Training institutions determine the content of courses in the humanities and social disciplines, pedagogy, psychology, teaching methodology as well as the length of practical training in coordination with the MES.

Since 1995, all teachers are entitled to in-service training (at least five days per year) and to qualification assessment, financed by the educational institution. In-service teacher training can be compulsory (i.e. professional training necessary for the implementation of State educational programmes and standards) and optional (i.e. teacher self-education, which is encouraged by educational institutions and supported by the State). The MES, Regional Departments of Education, schools and teachers' unions may request qualification improvement courses. Programmes are offered by colleges and universities. Only those programmes which are approved by the Ministry are financed from the state budget. The main institution where teachers could improve their qualifications prior to 2009 was the Teacher Professional Development Centre. Following the reorganization of this institution into the Education Development Centre, the latter took over the functions of teacher professional development and improvement of their competencies.

The educational level of teachers and school managers is quite high. In the period 1995-2004, the share of teachers and school managers with higher education increased to 90.2% (96.7% of the teachers and school managers had pedagogical training in 2004/05). Some 82% of those with advanced vocational education also have pedagogical training. Teachers' salaries have been steadily increasing; however, according to GDP per capita they are still low. The minimum annual relative salary of Lithuanian teachers is the lowest in Europe. The difference between the minimum and maximum salary, which shows career opportunities, is also small. The salary of teachers is not affected by the level at which they work. (MES, 2006).

The arrangements governing the conditions of service of teachers are based on the Labour Code, government resolutions and other legal acts. The responsibility for teachers' working and living conditions lies with the government, the MES, county governors, local authorities and the administration of every educational institution. In 2008, the government approved the Long-term Programme for Increasing Teachers' Salaries. The Programme was developed in light of objectives regarding the further development of education specified in the provisions of the National Education Strategy 2003-2012 and the necessity to increase remuneration for teachers as a means to improve teaching and education. The Programme envisaged salary increments to teachers until 2013. In January 2010, the new procedure of salary payment to the staff of educational institutions and educational employees of other institutions came into effect. It defines a new way of remuneration for the work of the teaching staff of budgetary educational institutions.



Currently, the standard norms of teaching load per week are the following: 18 hours for teachers; 18 hours for teachers in charge of extra-curricular activities; 30 hours for educators in general education institutions; 36 hours in preschool institutions; 24 hours in special education needs institutions; 40 hours in vocational schools; 24 hours in sanatorium schools; 24 hours in boarding schools in sanatoriums; 24 hours for special education needs teachers in preschool institutions; 20 hours in general education schools and 20 hours in health care institutions. After the remuneration for the work of teachers according to the full tenure is introduced, the workload of teachers with full tenor will comprise no fewer than 30 hours and no more than 36 hours per week, out of which at least 18 will be class contact hours.

Evaluation of teachers' performance is carried out at the level of the school and its founder. At the level of the school, the principal determines the promotion and career advancement system of the teaching staff, monitors, examines and evaluates the teachers' performance, is in charge of their in-service training and professional development, and creates conditions for their performance appraisal. The principal's deputy for education is in charge of the educational process, evaluates the outcomes achieved, provides assistance to teachers and encourages them to get engaged in their professional development and performance appraisal. (Eurydice, 2010).

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Qualifications and Vocational Education and Training Development Center: <http://www.kpmc.lt/> [In Lithuanian and English. Last checked: October 2011.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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