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Principles and general objectives of education

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

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

On the basis of the Education Act of 1992, the objectives of education are to create favourable conditions for the development of the individual, the family and the Estonian nation, including ethnic minorities, of economic, political and cultural life in the Estonian society and also of nature conservation, within the context of the global economy and culture; to shape individuals who respect and abide the law, and to create opportunities for everyone to engage in continuous learning. (Eurydice, 2010).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

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

. The **Pre-primary Childcare Institutions Act**, enacted on 9 June 1993 and last amended in 2009, determines the functions and operating procedures of preschool establishments.

The **Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act**, enacted in 1993 and last amended in 2010, regulates the legal status and operating procedures of basic and upper secondary schools (gymnasia). The Act has been amended several times. The 2002 amendment concerned the language of instruction at the upper secondary level. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The **Adult Education Act**, adopted on 10 November 1993 and amended in 1998 and 2004, establishes legal guarantees for adults for their lifelong education and



regulates issues related to vocational education, on-the-job training and open education.

The **Universities Act**, adopted on 12 January 1995 and amended in 2004, contains basic regulations concerning the universities, their management and organization, admission, graduation, and awarding of academic degrees. Since 2003/04, university programmes have been organized into a three-cycle structure according to the Bologna process. The **Law on the University of Tartu**, enacted on 16 February 1995, determines the status and the principles of management of this University. The **Vocational Education Institutions Act**, adopted on 14 June 1995 and last amended in 2009, determines the operation of vocational education institutions, the form and conditions for acquiring vocational education, the principles of school management, the financing of the schools and the use of school property, and the rights and obligations of the staff.

The new **Hobby Schools Act** of 2007 (which replaced the former Act adopted on 14 June 1995), contains basic regulations concerning municipal hobby schools. Hobby schools offer young people hobby education on the basis of a curriculum in different areas, such as sports, music, art, dancing, drama, nature, handicrafts, or technology. There are more than 300 hobby schools in Estonia and approximately 48,000 young people study in them. Hobby activities are offered in schools, open youth centers, hobby centers, youth associations, etc. The **Youth Work Act** of 1999 defines a young person as a person aged between 7 and 26. (MOER, 2008).

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

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

Article 37 of the Constitution, adopted by referendum on 28 June 1992, stipulates that all persons residing in Estonia shall have the right to education. Both state and local governments should have a sufficient number of educational institutions to secure this right. Compulsory education covers grades 1 to 9 (basic education) or up to age 17, whichever comes first. Local governments have the obligation to ensure that all the children in the area of their jurisdiction (including children with special needs), if their parents so wish, have the opportunity to attend childcare institutions in the catchment area.

Administration and management of the education system

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

The administration of education has been divided between different leadership/government levels. There are fifteen counties and over 220 municipalities in the country (data refer to 2008). According to the 2000 census, the population includes Estonian (67.9%), Russian (25.6%), Ukrainian (2.1%), Byelorussian (1.3%), Finnish (0.9%) and other nationalities.

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

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

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

The **Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency** (EKKA) was established in January 2009 to continue the work of the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre and the Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council that operated during the period 1997–2008. The mission of the Agency is to foster the quality of higher education, and to promote and disseminate the best quality assurance practices.



The main functions of EKKKA include: development of principles and the procedure for conducting quality assessment of study programme groups and institutional accreditation; institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study programme groups; training activities and counselling related to evaluation of and quality in higher education; and dissemination of the information related to evaluation of higher education.

The objectives of the **Estonian Qualifications Authority**, established in 2001, are facilitating the establishment and development of an integrated and organized professional qualifications system, and establishing prerequisites for achieving comparability of the qualifications of Estonian employees as well as acknowledgement of other countries. The Authority organizes the activities of professional councils as well as the development, supplementing and improvement of the professional standard, and establishment of evaluation criteria; works out methods for developing and implementing the employees' qualifications system, and the qualification evaluation system; organizes performance of tasks given by professional councils; and manages the state register of professions as an authorized processor of the register.

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

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

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

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



activities in schools and carry out the necessary decisions concerning the management of schools.

Private schools are administered according to the procedures fixed in their statutes. Their educational activities are supervised pursuant to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Research. Universities and higher education institutions are free to determine their academic staff and organizational structure, the content of study programmes and research, curricula and study plans, admission and graduation criteria, organization of research, and eligibility criteria for lecturer applicants and researcher posts, according to the current laws and regulations.

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

The Preschool Childcare Institutions Act, the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act and the Private Schools Act stipulate that the national supervision over schooling activities is carried out according to the rules established by the Ministry of Education and Research, which determines the priorities for state supervision. The national supervision is carried out by the Department of Supervision of the Ministry and Education Departments of the county governments, whereas the **National Exam and Qualification Centre** organizes and administers the national examinations. The **Estonian Qualifications Authority**, established in June 2001, coordinates the national qualifications system.

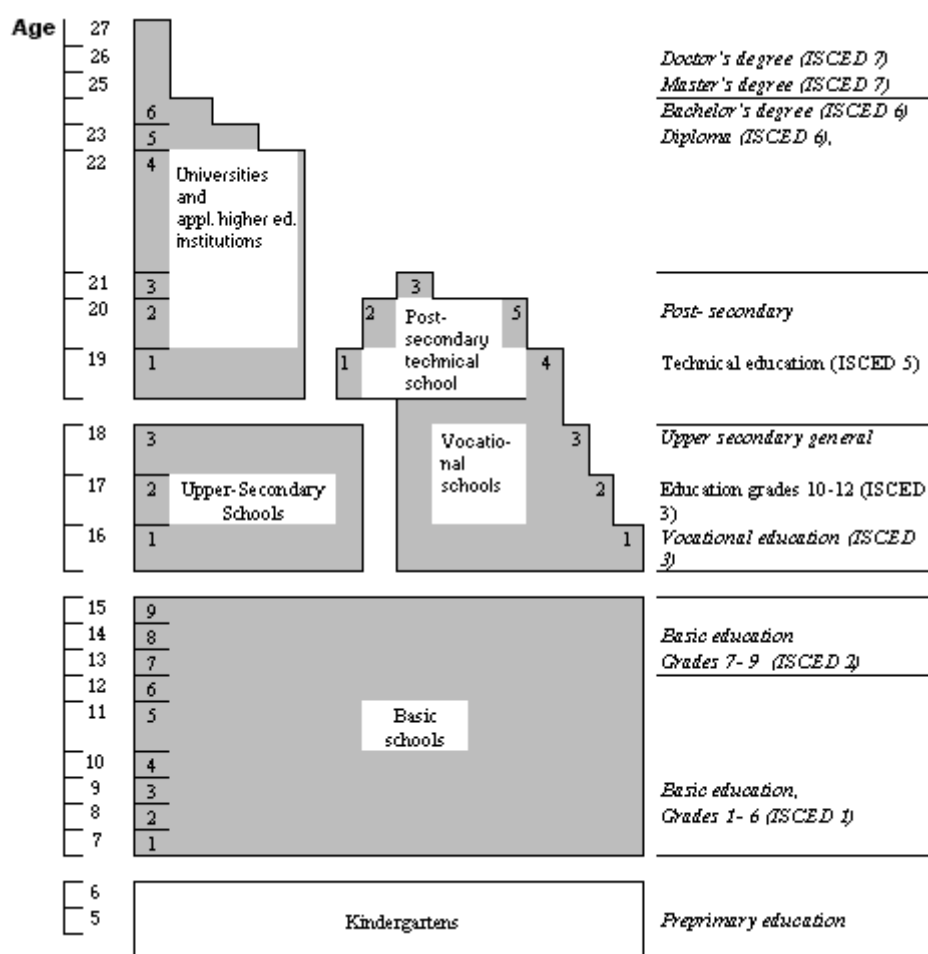
In addition to the external evaluation, internal evaluation of school activities is becoming increasingly more important. From the perspective of self-evaluation, efficiency has been mostly emphasized, in particular concerning the following aspects: material basis; costs per student; teachers' qualifications;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

During the transition from centralized decision-making and financing to decentralized decision-making at local government, county government and school levels, negotiations have become more important. Issues subject to negotiations

include: the comprehensive analysis of the education institutions network; the placement of the student contingent; the needs for education at different levels; the qualifications of teachers working in the region; the curriculum in the regional schools; the teaching material base of schools; the established pedagogical and cultural traditions; the historical consistency; the regional social needs; and the role of the school in the educational and cultural development of the region.

Structure and organization of the education system

Estonia: structure of the education system (2008)



Source: ReferNet Estonia, 2009.

Pre-school education

Preschool education is not compulsory and is mainly offered by the following types of childcare institutions: crèches for children aged 1 to 3 years; crèche-kindergartens for children aged 1 to 7 years; kindergartens for children with special education needs; and kindergarten-primary schools.

Primary and lower secondary education

Basic education is compulsory for all children aged 7 and lasts nine years (grades 1 to 9). Basic education is offered in primary schools (grades 1 to 4), basic schools (grades 1 to 9), and upper secondary schools (gymnasia) with basic school classes (grades 1 to 12). Basic education is organized into three stages each lasting three years (grades 1-3, grades 4-6, and grades 7-9). Students in grades 7 to 9 also have the opportunity to obtain prevocational training in basic schools. Upon completion of grade 9, students sit the basic school graduation examination organized by the school in three subjects (Estonian language and literature or Estonian as second language, mathematics and one elective subject). Students who pass the examinations receive the basic school graduation certificate. Students who have not completed the basic education programme and who are at least 17 years old can enter vocational education; the duration of courses ranges from six months to two and a half years.

Secondary education

Basic education graduates can continue their studies at a school offering upper general secondary education (gymnasium), or a vocational school. Upper secondary education, both general and vocational, lasts three years (grades 10 to 12). Upon completion of grade 12, students sit the final examination in five subjects, of which at least three must be national (external) examination subjects (including mother tongue as compulsory subject) and two (chosen by the student) are school-based examination subjects. Successful students receive the secondary school-leaving certificate and the national examination certificate. Students who successfully complete the vocational education programme receive a certificate. Post-secondary technical schools, the higher level of vocational institutes, offer programmes lasting two and a half years for those who have graduated from an upper secondary education programme (i.e. gymnasium or vocational school), or about five years for basic school (grade 9) graduates.

Higher education

Higher education is offered at universities and professional higher education institutions. Some post-secondary technical schools also offer programmes leading to a higher education diploma. The duration of programmes leading to the award of a professional diploma is three to four and a half years. Within the framework of the Bologna process, university programmes are structured into three cycles since 2002/03. Bachelor's degree programmes take three to four years to complete (equivalent to 120-160 credits); in the case of medicine, the duration of the programme is six years (equivalent to 240 credits). Master's degree programmes last one to two years. Doctoral degree programmes normally require at least three to four years of study and research.

The school year begins on 1 September and consists of at least 175 working days or thirty-five working weeks. At the preschool level, the school year consists of thirty working weeks; it begins no later than 1 October and ends on 1 May. The academic year begins in September and ends in the first half of June; it is divided into

two semesters. As a general rule, the academic year comprises forty weeks including lectures, seminars, practical training and the examination period. At the higher education level the length of studies is measured in credits. One credit corresponds to forty hours (or one week) of studies (lectures, seminars, practical training, and independent works). The nominal study year is comprised of forty credits.

The educational process

The first national curriculum framework was adopted by the government in September 1996, and its implementation started in September 1997. In close cooperation with the working groups that consisted of teachers and researchers for different subjects, the State School Board coordinated the curriculum design process. Two working drafts were published and sent out in order to receive feedback from teachers, school managers, and researchers. Many discussion panels were held. In principle, all stakeholders, individuals and institutions can express their views about the curriculum. Schools draw up their own curricula on the basis of the national curriculum framework.

The Center of Curriculum Development in the University of Tartu was established in 2000 with the responsibility to coordinate the development of the national curriculum for basic and general secondary education. It subsequently prepared a new national curriculum that included extensive changes. Curricula for pre-primary education, for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities and for supplementary learning were also developed. The national curriculum framework adopted in 1996 has given each school the right and obligation to develop its own curriculum, taking into consideration the features particular to the school and the region, as well as the wishes of students. A system of external evaluation for educational achievement has also been implemented. Tests were introduced at the end of various stages of study to determine how close students are to standards, and standardized graduation examinations were introduced at the end of basic and upper secondary school. Also, conditions have been created for inclusive education that allowed students with special needs to study in regular schools (in the past they attended segregated special education schools). The teaching of Estonian to other ethnic groups has become much more efficient as well. (UNICEF, 2009).

In January 2010, the government approved the updated national curricula for basic schools and upper secondary schools. The main changes in the general parts of the curricula were based on the understanding that the goals and objectives of the current curriculum are still worth striving for. The changes are related to the viability of the objectives and are aimed at ensuring that good ideas are actually put into practice. The achievement of general objectives and competences and subject integration have been consciously taken into account in the preparation of subject syllabuses, subject volumes have been reduced, study results have been expressed more clearly, and the freedom of choice of upper secondary school pupils has been increased. The curricula emphasize issues that are related to the study environment. Compared to earlier versions, the updated documents are oriented towards learning rather than teaching. This trend is supported by the principles according to which the school is responsible for organizing learning in a way that protects the pupils' health and well-being and ensures that their study load corresponds to their capacities, developing a helpful and trusting environment in the school, and using teaching



methods that take into account and are appropriate for the pupils' individual characteristics. The curricula go into more detail on the issue of the physical learning environment and study processes, describing the provision of education and the requirements necessary for ensuring such a provision.

In order to reduce the excessive focus on grades found in the evaluation process, the curricula underline objectives that are intended to support the students, including the provision of feedback, motivation and guidance. The role of grades has been retained as input that supports students in their learning process and as indicators. Unlike the previous curriculum, the updated curricula address the issue of graduation. There are no significant changes in this regard in terms of basic schools. After lengthy discussions, it has been decided that state examinations covering Estonian, one foreign language and mathematics will be compulsory for students graduating from upper secondary schools. There is the added option of receiving an upper secondary school leaving certificate based on an examination held by the school if the student fails the state examination. Three specific examinations based on mandatory courses allow for the upper secondary schools to become less focused on state examinations. The curriculum also provides requirements for final examinations and research projects or practical projects.

The most important task in working with curricula is reviewing the load and complexity of contents in order to ensure that what is being taught in classrooms is appropriate for the age and skills level of students. Working groups involved in the preparation of the curricula introduced several changes. The study of subjects was brought closer to the students and was adjusted to their interests and daily life by, for example, emphasizing composition in the case of native language learning, research-based learning in the case of natural sciences, coping in particular language situations in the case of foreign languages, practical issues in the case of social studies, playing music in the case of music classes, etc. Some topics were moved from the basic school to the upper secondary school curriculum, for example in the case of mathematics and natural sciences. In the case of foreign languages, the descriptions of the levels of language proficiency were made more specific in order to allow for the students' skill levels to be assessed in terms of various component skills.

In order to establish better links between closely related subjects, these have been categorized by subject domain, which makes it easier concentrating on their common aims. Connections between subjects have also been established with regard to the general parts of the subjects, their central themes, and other subject domains. The current curriculum has been criticized due to the lack of integration between subjects and the scarcity of connections between individual subjects and the general part of the curriculum.

The development of curricula was preceded by the preparation and approval of the corresponding terms of reference by the Council of the National Curriculum for Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools. A council of experts was convened for the purpose of making substantive decisions. The members of the council of experts include education theorists, officials of the Ministry of Education and Research and of the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre. Issues related to the development of curricula have also been regularly discussed with the representatives of various interest groups (mainly the Association of Parents, the Association of



Teachers, the School Heads Association, and the School Student Councils' Union). The curriculum development process was coordinated by the Curriculum Division of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research. The draft curricula were prepared by the subject working groups formed at the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre and the University of Tartu, which comprised the corresponding specialists (including the representatives of institutions of higher education and the teachers of general education schools).

The work related to the implementation of the curricula will continue after the adoption of the curricula through the preparation of subject textbooks and other reference materials, information activities, training and the publishing of study books. The initial deadlines for schools have been set for the 2011/12 academic year, when grade 1, 4 and 7 students of basic schools will start studying according to the updated curriculum. The deadline for the full implementation of the curriculum is set for the 2013/14 academic year. (Website of the MOER, September 2011).

Pre-primary education

Preschool education is not compulsory and is mainly offered by the following types of childcare institutions: crèches for children aged 1 to 3 years; crèche-kindergartens for children aged 1 to 7 years; kindergartens for children with special education needs; and kindergarten-primary schools. Local governments must provide all their resident children between 1 and 7 years of age the opportunity to attend child care institutions in their catchment areas if parents so wish. Childcare institutions offer instruction until the age of 7. Groups are organized according to the age of the children: between 3 and 5 years of age; between 5 and 6 years of age; between 6 and 7 years of age; and mixed groups for children between 2 and 7 years of age.

On the basis of the Pre-primary Childcare Institutions Act the two main functions of a pre-primary institution are to: create possibilities and conditions for the formation of a healthy personality who is socially and mentally alert, self-confident and considerate of others and who values the environment; and maintain and strengthen the health of the child, and to promote his or her emotional, moral, social, mental and physical development. (Eurydice, 2010).

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

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



hearing, speaking, physical or mental disabilities. In addition, several family advice service centers have been established in order to take care of periodical rehabilitation sessions. Teaching and catering expenses are currently covered by the local government budgets and parents. The part covered by parents may vary according to the respective decision of the local council, based on the parents' financial situation.

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

The objectives and tasks of the pre-primary education are laid down in the Preschool Childcare Institutions Act and in the national curriculum. The curriculum does not regulate the actual time spent on the specific activities, but it defines the fields, the subject matters, the knowledge and skills, which have to be dealt with or acquired by the child. The preschool institution is entitled to draw up its plan of activity and daily work schedule, in accordance with national tradition and the cultural peculiarities of its region, while the local government authority determines which language should be used in institutions employing only a single language for their classes. Teachers are responsible for the selection of instructional methods and materials. The institution has to establish rules for carrying out an effective evaluation of teaching activities and children's progress, based on the curriculum requirements. The evaluation is informal and the transfer of children from one group to another does not depend on the evaluation results.

In May 2008, the government approved the updated national curriculum for pre-primary childcare institutions. The approach to learning has changed from being centered 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 childcare institution. The updated national curriculum for pre-primary childcare institutions specifies the methods for assessing the child's development and the need to have conversations with the parents about the child's development. Based on the general objective, pre-primary childcare provision 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: taking into account the individuality of the children and their development potential; maintaining and fostering the child's health and satisfying their need for movement; supporting the child's creativity; learning through play; valuing humane and democratic relations; creating an environment that promotes the development and socialization of the child; guaranteeing the child's sense of security and success experiences; implementing generally instructive work methods; cooperation between the home and childcare institution; valuing Estonian cultural traditions and considering the unique features of other cultures. Prep-primary



education provision is based on child-centered methodologies. 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. (MOER, 2008 and National Report 2008).

The training of kindergarten personnel entails the necessary theoretical and practical skills, emphasizing: familiarity with the child's development and his/her growing environment; consideration of the child's individual needs and peculiarities; familiarity with the curriculum requirements; and ability to use a creative approach in teaching activities. Staff is trained at diploma-level studies and degree-level studies at higher education institutions and universities. The employer is responsible for provision of opportunities for further training for personnel at the preschool institutions, whereas the employment contract of pedagogical personnel does not include any obligation for the staff to attend further training courses.

In 2006, 80% of children aged 1-6 years attended preschools, while for those aged less than 3 years the percentage was 34.4%. (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007).

Public debates have started regarding a mandatory preschool year financed from the state budget. In 2006, 93.4% of 6-year-old children attended a preschool childcare institution. (MOER, National Report 2008).

By the end of 2009, there were 592 childcare institutions (of which 284 in rural areas) run by municipal authorities with 60,882 children enrolled (of whom 15,313 in rural areas) and 7,788 teachers (full-time equivalent); 62 institutions were Russian-medium and 56 were bilingual (Estonian-Russian). There were also 43 institutions in the private sector with 1,922 children enrolled and 283 teachers (full-time equivalent). Out of a total of 8,071 full-time equivalent staff (including head teachers, deputy head teachers, music teachers, etc.), 42% had pedagogical higher education, 10.7% had higher education, 26.9% had pedagogical professional secondary education, 5.2% had professional secondary education, and 2% had secondary education. (Eurydice, 2010).

Primary and lower secondary education (basic education)

Basic education is free and compulsory for all children aged 7 and lasts nine years (grades 1 to 9). Basic education is offered in primary schools (grades 1 to 4), basic schools (grades 1 to 9), and upper secondary schools (gymnasia) with basic school classes (grades 1 to 12). Basic education is organized into three stages each lasting three years (grades 1-3, grades 4-6, and grades 7-9). Students in grades 7 to 9 also have the opportunity to obtain prevocational training in basic schools. Students who have not completed the basic education programme and who are at least 17 years old can enter vocational education; the duration of courses ranges from six months to two and a half years. More than 95% of all students attend schools with one shift. Usually a school day starts at 8.00 in town schools and somewhat later (until 9:00) in rural schools.

According to the new national curriculum of 2010, the school must assist in raising young people to be creative, harmonious individuals, who can operate well in different areas of life such as family, work or public appearance. The curriculum is



based on the principle that a person's mental, physical, moral, social and emotional development are equally important. School creates opportunities for maximal improvement of each student's abilities, creative self-realization, development of scientific perspective, and the achievement of emotional, social and moral maturity. In addition, the curriculum emphasizes the fact that the process of socializing the new generation is based on Estonian cultural traditions, common European values and worldwide accomplishments of culture and science. (Eurydice, 2010).

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

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

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

Teaching regulations for each stage of schooling consist of a general characterization of the educational work, academic achievements developed and subject schedules (course plans). Subject schedules specify the number of lessons for compulsory subjects and electives in basic school and the number of lessons for compulsory courses in gymnasium. The maximum weekly load for the first stage (grades 1 to 3) is: 20 lessons in grade 1; 23 lessons in grade 2; and 25 lessons in grade 3. In the second stage (grades 4 to 6), the maximum number of weekly lessons is 25 in grade 4, 28 in grade 5, and 30 in grade 6. In the third stage (grades 7 to 9), the maximum number of weekly lessons is 30 in grade 7, 32 in grade 8, and 34 in grade 9.

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

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

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade								
	First stage			Second stage			Third stage		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mother tongue	6	8	5	5	4	3	2-3	2	2
Literature	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2
First foreign language	-	-	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
Second foreign language	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	3	3
Mathematics	3	4	5	5	5	5	5-4	5	5
Computer science									
Economics									
Regional studies	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-
Natural sciences									
Geography	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2-1
Biology	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	1-2
Chemistry	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
Physics, astronomy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
History	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2
Civics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Human development	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Religion									
Music	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Artistic education	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
Handicraft	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Drawing									
Physical training	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2
Total compulsory weekly periods (max.)	20	23	25	27	28	29	29	31	32
Optional lessons	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	3

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

The weekly lesson timetable on the basis of the amended and updated curriculum of 2001 is presented below:

Estonia. Basic education: weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each stage		
	1st stage	2nd stage	3rd stage
	Grades 1-3	Grades 4-6	Grades 7-9
Estonian (Russian)	19	15	12
Estonian (Russian) language and literature	–	–	12
Estonian as second language*	6*	12*	12*
Foreign language A	3	9	9
Foreign language B	–	3	9
Mathematics	10	13	13
Natural sciences	3	7	2
Geography	–	–	5
Biology	–	–	5
Chemistry	–	–	4
Physics	–	–	4
History	–	3	6
Civics	3	2	1
Social study	3	1	2
Music	6	4	3
Art and handicraft	9	–	–
Art	–	3	3
Physical education	8	8	6
Manual training	–	5	5
Subjects decided by the school	7/4*	10/7*	7/4*
Number of weekly periods (max.) in each three-year stage**	68	83	96

Source: Eurydice, 2010. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. (*) In schools using a language other than Estonian. (**) The maximum number of weekly periods is: 20 in grade 1; 23 in grade 2; 25 in grades 3 and 4; 28 in grade 5; 30 in grades 6 and 7; 32 in grade 8; and 34 in grade 9.

Studying Estonian as a second language is compulsory in Russian-medium schools or in schools using a language other than Estonian. Students whose home language is not Estonian but who study in an Estonian-medium school can also study Estonian as a second language.

Children with special needs have the right to learn in schools of their residence like all other children. Disabled children or children who need special care have the right to study in the nearest school that complies with requirements if the school of their residence does not have the possibility and conditions for accommodating children with special needs. A simplified national basic school curriculum, which is used to teach children with slight mental retardation, exists in addition to the national basic school and upper secondary school curricula. There is also the national curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities. The recommendation of the counselling committee of the county or city is required for using the simplified national curriculum or the curriculum for students with moderate



and severe learning disabilities. The counselling committee also gives recommendations about postponing school attendance and selecting schools or classes for children with special needs. In 2008, the percentage of pupils with special educational needs in compulsory education in all educational settings in Estonia compared to the European Union (EU) average was very high, namely 19% (the EU average was 3.6%). The percentage of pupils in compulsory education with special educational needs in segregated settings was 4.8% (the EU average was 2%). (MOER, 2008 and National Report 2008).

As mentioned, in January 2010 the government approved the new national curriculum for basic schools, which will be gradually implemented starting from the academic year 2011/12 and up to 2013/14. Several changes have been introduced, including the following: (a) the basic school curriculum is separated from the curriculum for the upper secondary school (gymnasium) in order to better distinguish the different functions of the two types of schools; this also creates a possibility for separating the institutions of those stages of education in the future; (b) the new curriculum aims at decreasing the students' workload; subjects are more connected; topics have been bound into subject fields to better clarify their common orientations; (c) the general objectives, competencies and subject syllabi presented in the general part have been better coordinated; subject syllabi also include study activities and the related requirements; the learning environment is described more accurately; (d) more attention is devoted to stimulating interest and increasing students' competence in exact and natural sciences and technology; (e) the new curriculum thoroughly describes aspects related to grading and graduating from basic school. Religious education is non-confessional and attendance is voluntary, but the school has an obligation to include it in its curriculum, if at least 15 students in a stage of study request it. Compiling the syllabus for religious education is the school's task, but the national curriculum which will be implemented from 2011, comprises a syllabus for religious education that is mandatory for schools. (Eurydice, 2010).

The amended Law on Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools approved in June 2010 is part of the major quality-oriented reform package which included the approval of the new national basic school and upper secondary school curriculum, the restructuring of upper secondary schools as separate entities (from basic schools) with different educational aims and quality criteria (e.g. introducing wider choices for students, agreeing on minimum standards for the learning environment, etc.), and the provision of wider support services for all students (counselling and guidance services). (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2010).

Assessment at the basic and secondary levels is part of the educational process. Assessment can be verbal (analysis/assessment) or expressed in a numerical mark. Competencies are assessed orally, while study results are usually indicated by numerical mark using a 5-point scale (5: "very good"; 4: "good"; 3: "satisfactory"; 2: "unsatisfactory"; 1: "poor"). National examinations use two scales: a 10-point system and a 100-point system. There are two methods of grading: process grading (grading single or interim results) and estimate grading (grading the results determined in the curriculum). Grading the study process provides information about the course of study and teaching. Students have the possibility to evaluate their previous studying process and, if necessary, make adjustments. Estimate grading is



applied to the results obtained in a particular subject after covering a certain part of the programme.

In order to graduate from basic education, students are required to complete the curriculum and successfully pass graduation examinations in three subjects, namely Estonian and literature or Estonian as a second language, mathematics and one subject chosen by the student. (MOER, 2008). Students who pass the examinations receive the basic school graduation certificate.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Research introduced the compulsory internal assessment of pre-primary childcare 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 analyze 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. (MOER, National Report 2008).

In 2000/01, the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary school was 103%. In 2009/10, there were 555 general education schools in the country and the total enrolment at the basic school level was 113,083 students. Out of the total number of schools, 73 were primary schools, 260 were basic schools, and 222 were combined basic and upper secondary schools. (Eurydice, 2010).

The absolute number of grade repeaters is pretty high: in 2009/10, 1,544 students had to repeat a grade at the basic school level and 1,253 at the secondary school level. (Statistics Estonia, 2011).

Upper secondary education

Basic education graduates can continue their studies at a school offering upper general secondary education (gymnasium), or a vocational school. Upper secondary education, both general and vocational, lasts three years (grades 10 to 12). Students who successfully complete the vocational education programme receive a certificate. Post-secondary technical schools, the higher level of vocational institutes, offer programmes lasting two and a half years for those who have graduated from an upper secondary education programme (i.e. gymnasium or vocational school), or about five years for basic school (grade 9) graduates. The general aim of secondary education is to prepare students for university level studies, competitive participation in the labour market and independent coping as members of society.

The maximum weekly load at gymnasium is thirty-five lessons (each lesson lasting forty-five minutes); in 2002, it has been established that the *minimum* weekly load at gymnasium is thirty-two lessons. (Ministry of Education, 2004).

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

Estonia. Upper secondary general education: weekly lesson timetable (model for the 1993/94 school year)

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

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

The framework of compulsory courses on the basis of the amended and updated curriculum of 2001 is presented below:

Estonia. Upper secondary general education: framework of compulsory courses

Subject	Number of compulsory courses
	Grades 10-12
Estonian	6
Estonian literature	6
Russian	3
Russian literature	9
Estonian as second language*	9*
Foreign language A	6
Foreign language B	6
Mathematics	9
Geography	3
Biology	4
Chemistry	4
Physics	6
History	7
Civics	1
Social study	2
Music	3
Art	3
Physical education	6
Number of compulsory courses (max.) over the three-year cycle	72/81*

Source: Eurydice, 2010. The term 'compulsory course' refers to a 35-hour unit. (*) In schools using a language other than Estonian.

In November 2007 the government approved a regulation pursuant to which at least 60% of studies at the upper secondary level in all municipal and state schools must be conducted in Estonian by 2011. The upper secondary school curriculum of all municipal and state schools where the language of instruction is not Estonian must contain at least 57 courses in Estonian (one course refers to a 35-hour unit) from the 2011/12 academic year. (MOER, 2008).

Upon completion of grade 12, students sit the final examination in five subjects, of which at least three must be national (external) examination subjects (including mother tongue as compulsory subject) and two (chosen by the student) are school-based examination subjects. Successful students receive the secondary school-leaving certificate and the national examination certificate.

Institutions offering vocational training fall under several ministries, municipalities and private organizations, such as: the Ministry of Education and Research, the National Police Board, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, municipalities and private organizations. In June 2001 the Estonian Qualifications Authority was created in order to continue developing the professional qualifications system launched by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1997. There were five vocational



levels in the previous Estonian professional qualifications system. The Professions Act which entered into the force in 2008 introduced a new eight-level qualification framework, corresponding to the European Qualifications Framework. (MOER, 2008).

Since 2006/07, students who have completed the secondary vocational education curriculum in vocational schools can also study general subjects of their choice, to the extent of 35 study weeks (i.e. additional year), and sit state examinations. The (voluntary) additional year can be taken in adult upper secondary schools or in the evening or distance learning departments of upper secondary schools. Vocational education in basic schools and upper secondary schools is meant for students of general education schools and is provided by vocational educational institutions. Studies take place on the basis of a separate curriculum and last for at least 15 weeks during which students acquire basic knowledge of the selected profession and receive a certificate about the studies that they have completed. The knowledge and skills acquired in basic school or upper secondary school can be taken into account in further studies if the students wish to continue their studies in the same speciality. Vocational training based on secondary education means the opportunity to acquire professional skills within six months to two and a half years after graduation from upper secondary school. (*Ibid.*).

During the period 2005-2008, 44 new curricula have been developed on the basis qualification standards. The unified content of the new curricula assures equity and comparability of all vocational education and training programmes across the country. The school curriculum is the source document of vocational training. Schools prepare a curriculum for each profession or speciality being taught and for every type of vocational training, basing such curricula on the Vocational Education Standard and the national curriculum, and taking into account the different forms of study. The volume of study prescribed by a school curriculum shall be calculated in weeks of study whereas the volume of one academic year shall be at least 40 weeks of study. In the case of curricula for internationally regulated professions or specialties, the prescribed volume of study shall arise from the requirements established by international conventions. The school curricula consist of the general part, modules of general and basic skills determined by the national curriculum and modules of elective studies. The content of vocational training established by a school curriculum shall be set forth in the form of modules. A module is a comprehensive content unit within a curriculum which is directed towards study results and determines the knowledge, skills and attitudes conforming to the professional requirements. A module is made up of one or several subjects or topics. The volume of a module depends on the purpose and content of the module. The volume of study prescribed by a module is calculated in weeks of study whereas the volume of a module shall be expressed in full numbers and the smallest volume of a module shall be one week of study. One week of study corresponds to 40 hours of work that a student spends on the studies. Elective modules may make up 5-30% of the volume of a curriculum. The assessment in vocational education and training programmes is similar to that in the general schools. An examination or assessment is considered positive if a student receives a grade ranging from 1 (E) to 5 (A). The practical learning outcomes are described in the modules and those outcomes are evaluated at the end of the learning process. (ReferNet Estonia, 2009).



Students studying under the curriculum for secondary vocational education (i.e. vocational training in upper secondary school and secondary vocational education) acquire the vocational, professional and occupational knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for independent skilled work and the general education knowledge and skills prescribed by the curriculum. The prerequisite for commencing studies under the curriculum for secondary vocational education is the acquisition of basic education. The volume of studies prescribed by the curriculum for acquisition of secondary vocational education shall be at least 120 weeks of study, including at least 40 weeks of study for general education subjects. The volume of vocational training shall constitute at least 50% of the volume of studies prescribed by the curriculum. Practical work and practical training shall make up at least 50% of the volume of vocational training. In order to graduate, the person has to have completed, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and passed the final exam of the profession or area of specialization. Instead of a final examination prescribed for the profession or area of specialization, a student may graduate from a school by taking a professional examination. A person graduating from secondary vocational education shall be issued, by the school, a graduation certificate together with a results report in proof of concluding secondary vocational education. (*Ibid.*).

In 2007/08 there were 47 vocational educational institutions in the country, of which 32 were state, three municipal and twelve were private vocational schools. The total enrolment was 27,381 students, of whom 18,454 in vocational courses after basic education and 8,620 students in vocational courses after secondary education. (*Ibid.*).

In 2000/01, the gross enrolment ratio at the secondary level was 92%, and the pupil/teacher ratio was 10:1. In 1999, 72% of students continued their studies at upper secondary schools. The share of young people who enter higher education after graduating from the secondary cycle has also increased from 24,464 students in 1992 to 56,437 students in 2000.

In 2009/10, there were 242 upper secondary schools, including four schools for students with special educational needs and 16 adult education schools. The total enrolment was 28,719 students. The total number of general education teachers (basic and upper secondary) was 14,701. In 2010/11, a total of 14,394 teachers worked at general education schools, of whom 14% were male teachers. (Eurydice, 2010).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

In 2003 Estonia participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Grade 8 Estonian students ranked fifth in science (first in geography, fifth in chemistry and environmental studies) and eighth in mathematics among the 49 participating countries. Among European countries, Estonia ranked first in science and third in mathematics after Belgium (Flemish Community) and the Netherlands.

In 2006 Estonia participated for the first time in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey which involved 57 countries. A total of 4,865 students participated in the survey, of whom 24.3% studied in Russian-medium schools. The survey included 127 Estonian-medium schools, 38 Russian-medium schools and four bilingual schools. About 71% of the students who took part in the survey were in grade 9, and some 48% of the students attended schools in urban areas.



In terms of average performance, Estonian students ranked fifth in science, thirteenth in reading, and fourteenth in mathematics. In term of the percentage of students at each proficiency level on the science scale, Estonian students ranked second after Finland, twelfth in reading, and ninth in mathematics. (MOER, 2008).

Among all 57 countries participating in PISA 2006, only Finland and Hong Kong did better than Estonia in terms of statistically significant average science performance. In all three literacy domains, Estonia's mean score is higher than all Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS) countries, including its closest neighbours, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation. Only Poland (in reading) and the Czech Republic (in mathematics) scored at the same level as Estonia. It is noticeable that the three CEE/CIS countries with the lowest between-school variance (i.e. Estonia, Latvia and Poland) also have high levels of performance, and no more than 21% of students fall below the Level 2 benchmark of achievement in any literacy domain. This indicates that providing similar learning opportunities across schools is compatible with high overall achievement. When looking at the results on the basis of the test language, it is noticeable that the performance of Russian-medium schools was significantly below the performance of Estonian-medium schools. It should also be noted that, while a very high percentage of students in Estonia acquired the baseline level of competencies in all three literacy domains (more than 85%, above the OECD average), the number of students with higher reading skills is relatively small. Only 6% of Estonian students achieved the highest level in reading, and this is less than the OECD average. This indicates that there is still some room for improvement as far as the reading skills of Estonian students are concerned. In terms of gender issues, boys were considerably behind girls in the development of their reading literacy skills; the gender gap in Estonia was equivalent to the CEE/CIS average, but above the OECD average. (UNICEF, 2009).

As regards PISA 2009, Estonia ranked seventeenth in mathematics, ninth in science, and thirteenth in reading.

Teaching staff

Teacher training is provided in universities and university colleges. Training programmes for subject and class teachers at basic education and upper secondary levels are mainly offered in the University of Tartu and Tallinn University; the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre offers teacher training in music and the Estonian Academy of Art in art. The Tallinn University of Technology offers vocational teacher training programmes in different fields of specialization. Pre-service training of preschool teachers is provided at Tallinn University, the University of Tartu and Tallinn Pedagogical College.

The duration of training programmes for class and subject teachers is normally five years, and basic school teachers are trained to teach several subjects within the framework of this training. Initial training of preschool teachers is primarily based on professional higher education and bachelor's degree curricula. (MOER, 2008).

Higher education institutions are active in developing teacher training programmes. The reform concerns the transition to new forms of study and the



content of education. A new teacher training scheme should lead to a new category of classification: class, cycle and subject teachers. Accordingly, a cycle teacher teaches humanities or science cycle or an integrated cycle in grades 7-9 of basic school, a subject teacher just one subject in grades 10-12 of upper secondary school, and, in the case of a complementary specialty, also another subject.

In addition to the direct teaching activities such as class lectures and their preparation, the teacher's work may as well include preparation of teaching materials, organization of study tours and excursions, consultations, remedial classes, class work, communications between school and parents, preparation of school events, supervision of club activities, contribution to school publications, and substitution of absent teachers. Depending on the qualifications and seniority, teachers are divided into four categories: junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, and teacher specialist on methods. Teachers work according to their employment contracts. On the basis of the Employment Contracts Act of 2008, the standard working time for teachers is seven hours per day, i.e. 35 hours per seven days. The standard teaching load is as follows: 30 hours for pre-primary teachers; 18 to 24 hours for teachers in grades 1-9; and 18 to 22 hours in grades 10-12.

The in-service teacher training system is unified for the Estonian- and Russian-speaking schools. Separate courses in Russian are organized regionally for primary school teachers, whereas the nation-wide subject courses are mostly in Estonian. Teachers must undergo at least 160 hours of in-service training in five years. Professional development of teachers takes place in the form of independent work or in state and municipal institutions, licensed private schools or by legal persons or sole traders governed by private or public law. Teachers can also improve their qualifications abroad. Several European Union programmes support teacher mobility. (MOER, 2008).

In 2004, the professional standard for teachers was developed, setting the basis for updating the initial teacher training curricula, planning the induction year of newly qualified teachers, and providing in-service training. In 2005, the Professional Council of Education approved the professional standard. Since 2004, graduates from teacher training programmes need to undergo an induction year during which they are supported by their colleagues/mentors and they can also benefit from the support programme offered by higher education institutions. The objective of the induction year is to support new teachers and improve their professional skills; at the end of this period they are considered as certified teachers. After working for a minimum of three years, teachers can apply for a higher-level occupational grade (there are four occupational grades). (Estonia Eurydice Unit, 2007; MOER, 2008).

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Web resources

Center for Educational Research and Curriculum Development, University of Tartu: http://www.ut.ee/curriculum/index.aw/set_lang_id=1 [In Estonian and English. Last checked: September 2011.]



Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency: <http://ekka.archimedes.ee/en> [In Estonian and English. Last checked: September 2011.]

Estonian Qualifications Authority: <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/> [In Estonian and English. Last checked: September 2011.]

Estonian Rectors' Conference: <http://www.ern.ee/> [In Estonian and English. Last checked: September 2011.]

Ministry of Education and Research: <http://www.hm.ee/> [In Estonian, English and Russian. Last checked: September 2011.]

National Examinations and Qualifications Centre: <http://www.ekk.edu.ee/> [In Estonian, English and Russian. Last checked: September 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>