



**National summary sheets on
education systems in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2008 Edition



LATVIA

DECEMBER 2008

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2008, the number of people under 29 years of age was 797 876 (35 % of the population). The number of children attending general education schools (age 7-19 years) was 263 944 in the school year 2007/08. At the same year 196 759 pupils of Latvia were acquiring compulsory basic education.

The official language of instruction in public sector schools is the state language – Latvian. However, residents of other nationalities have the right to education in other languages in private schools or public sector schools implementing minority education programmes (implemented bilingually, i.e. as Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL).

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

The administration of education is organised at three levels – national, municipal and institutional. At **national** level the main decision-making bodies are *Saeima* (Parliament), Cabinet of Ministers and the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry is the main education policy-making institution. It issues the licences and credentials needed to open comprehensive education institutions, and sets educational standards along with teacher training content and procedures. The Ministries of the Interior, Welfare and Culture can also establish education and training institutions and supervise their administration and financing. Teachers working in the public sector are remunerated from the state budget. The Ministry of Education and Science is directly responsible for school inspection. The **local authorities** (in liaison with the appropriate ministry) can establish, reorganise or close education institutions, while observing education legislation. Cities and districts are responsible for pre-primary school institutions, primary schools, lower and upper secondary schools, with the exception of education and training institutions run directly by the central government, or those that are privately maintained. **Education institutions** are relatively independent as regards organisation of their work, drawing up of internal regulations, appointment and responsibilities assumed by their teaching and technical staff and use of their resources.

Accredited private schools (ISCED level 0-3) receive funds from the state and local government if they provide accredited education programmes. The public/private sector share is quite small except higher education – only 3.5 % of general education institutions, 8.3 % of vocational schools and 38.3 % on higher education institutions are private schools.

3. Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education (<i>pirmsskolas izglītība</i>) in <i>pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde</i> ; <i>pirmsskolas izglītības konsultatīvais centrs</i> ; <i>pirmsskolas izglītības grupas pie skolām</i> (ISCED 0)	Age 1-7
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Pre-primary education (*pirmsskolas izglītība*) for children less than seven years of age is a part of general education. Pre-primary education for 5-6 year olds is compulsory. In 2007/08, 74 % of all children fewer than seven years of age participated in pre-primary education programmes in Latvia, 3 % – bilingually and 23 % in Russian, Polish, Ukrainian or other languages.

Education programmes are implemented by various pre-primary education establishments (*pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde*; *pirmsskolas izglītības konsultatīvais centrs*; *pirmsskolas izglītības grupas pie skolām*) as well by families who receive methodical support from municipal advisory centres for pre-primary education.

There are public and private pre-primary education institutions. Public sector institutions require that parents make a financial contribution to cover the cost of meals and managing expenses, but access to educational activities is free of charge. The fee in private sector institutions covers full costs of the programme, except for salaries of teachers teaching five and six year olds.

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Basic education (*Pamatizglītība*) is compulsory until the age of 16 and organised as a single structure; or primary (ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED 2).

<i>Sākumskola</i> (first stage of basic education, ISCED 1),	Classes 1-4/6, Age 7-11/13
<i>Pamatskola</i> (full basic education, ISCED 1+ ISCED 2),	Classes 1-9, Age 7-16
<i>Vidusskola</i> (full basic education, ISCED 1+ ISCED 2); these schools implement not only basic education, but also secondary education (see chapter 5)	Classes 1-9, Age 7-16

Unfinished basic education may also be completed in some vocational schools.

Most often these levels are institutionally united, e.g. in *pamatskola* or *vidusskola*.

(ii) Admission criteria

When children reach the age of 7, their parents must enrol them in the school of their choice. However, student is entitled to commence the acquisition of the basic education programme one year earlier or later depending on his or her state of health and psychological preparedness in conformity with the wishes of parents and the opinion of the family doctor.

Everyone has rights to attend the school, closest to his place of living. Education is free of charge for all pupils in public sector schools. None of the public sector education institutions implementing compulsory education may organise admission tests.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

The length of the school year in basic education comprises 34 weeks of teaching in the 1st class, 35 weeks in the 2nd – 8th class and 37 weeks in the 9th class. The school week is five days long. The school day may not exceed:

5 lessons in classes 1 to 3; 6 lessons in classes 4 to 5; 7 lessons in classes 6 to 7; 8 lessons in classes 8 to 9.

(The length of a lesson is 40 or 45 minutes, and is decided by the school head).

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Class size regulations are: minimum 8 pupils and maximum 30 pupils in a class. The classes are made up of pupils of the same age. During the first four years classes are taught by one teacher replaced by others for specialized activities. During classes 5-9 subjects are taught by a specialist subject teacher or semi-specialist.

(v) Curricular control and content

The curriculum is set at the national level. All subjects are compulsory and are taught at an equal level to all students, except in schools with a more intensive provision in foreign languages or music. Schools may also provide a possibility for pupils to specialise in a specific subject.

Teachers are free to choose their teaching methods and textbooks from those approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Schools may purchase the textbooks recommended by the Ministry from public funds.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Teachers at classrooms carry out continuous assessment on pupils' progress, using a grading scale 1-10 and non-grade system. Achievements of pupils are assessed without marks in the 1st class; a grading scale from 1 to 10 is used in the 2nd and 3rd class for all subjects except mathematics, native language, Latvian language for minority pupils and also natural sciences (in the 4th class) where the descriptive assessment is used. Descriptive assessment is a short oral and written assessment report on pupils' progress, describing development of knowledge, skills, attitude towards learning and class participation.

Achievements of pupils in classes 5-9 are assessed by using the grading scale 1-10.

Those having difficulties can repeat the school year or receive further help in remedial classes. At the end of compulsory education pupils take the examinations set by the Ministry of Education and Science. Pupils, who have received assessment in all subjects, state tests and examinations, receive a certificate on the completion of compulsory education and an achievement sheet. Lower secondary vocational schools also award a certificate on the completion of compulsory education together with a certificate of a professional qualification.

5. Upper secondary and post-secondary level**(i) Types of education/institutions**

<i>Vispārējā vidējā izglītība</i> (general (upper) secondary education (ISCED 3) in <i>vidusskola; ģimnāzija</i>	Classes 10-12, Age 16-19
<i>Profesionālā vidējā izglītība</i> (vocational (upper) secondary education (ISCED 3) in <i>arodvidusskola; arodģimnāzija; tehnikums</i>	Age 16-19/20

In order to ensure united management and to promote quality as well as cost efficiency of vocational education, transfer of education institutions to subordination of the Ministry of Education and Science from other ministries has been carried out in the recent years.

(ii) Admission criteria

Pupils are free to apply for admission to their preferred type of school. Each school can define its own admission criteria but they should be based on the state basic education standards. Public sector upper secondary schools are free of charge.

(iii) Curricular control and content

The curriculum for general and vocational upper secondary education is set at the national level. Pupils are allowed to choose between several programmes offered by schools, having emphasis on different groups of subjects. Eight subjects are required by the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science, and are the same for all pupils: Latvian Language and Literature, Mathematics, first and second Foreign Language, History, Sports, ICT and Basics of Economics. (In schools where the language of instruction is not Latvian, one of the foreign languages may be replaced with the language and literature of the particular minority). In vocational schools, the ratio of general subjects to vocational subjects varies according to the type of school.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

All secondary education institutions require a certificate on compulsory education. To assess pupils' progress in general secondary education, grading scale of 1-10 points is used. Post-study tests and consultations at the end of an academic year are mandatory for students on the study subjects where the assessment does not comply with the results to be achieved or the annual assessment is below grade four or the annual assessment has not been received in Grades 1-4. In Grades 5-8 and 10 and 11 it is mandatory in study subjects where the annual assessment is below grade four or no assessment has been received. Pupils take centralised examinations and tests at the end of secondary education. A centralised system for the organisation and assessment of these examinations has been set up. Pupils who have received assessment in all subjects, state tests and examinations receive a certificate on the completion of secondary education, and can enter higher education. After the completion of vocational education persons receive the respective professional qualifications (levels I-III ⁽¹⁾).

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

Higher education institutions (*augstskola*) in Latvia are university type and non-university type higher education institutions. While *koledža* is not a higher education institution, it provides academic programmes as well.

Academic education programmes last three or four years for Bachelor degree, one or two years – for Master degree; scientific activities last three or four years for Doctoral degree.

⁽¹⁾ The first qualification level – theoretical and practical training, which provides an opportunity to perform simple tasks in a specific sphere of practical operation;
The second qualification level – theoretical and practical training, which provides an opportunity to perform independently qualified artisan work;
The third qualification level – higher theoretical preparedness and professional skill, which provides an opportunity to perform specific artisan duties, which also include planning and organizing of the work to be implemented.

Professional higher education is divided into first level professional higher education (college programmes) and second level professional higher education. First level professional higher education programmes lead to Level IV professional qualifications; they are called 'college programmes' and are mainly established to train specialists for the labour market. College programmes last two or three years. Second level professional higher education programmes lead to Level V professional qualifications (the highest professional qualification that provides planning and research possibilities in the respective branch). These programmes last at least four years.

(ii) Access

All higher education institutions require a secondary education diploma. All higher education institutions from 2004 have to enrol students on the basis of the results of centralised examinations passed at the end of secondary education. However, higher education institutions may still organise one or several additional entrance examinations, aptitude tests or a competition with an emphasis on subjects pertinent to the chosen programme. The standards required for the entrance examinations correspond to secondary education standards. The government sets the number of places in public sector institutions financed from the state budget. Students themselves or other legal entities or physical persons pay tuition fees if the place is not financed from the state budget. In the school year 2007/08, 75 % of students pay for studies. There are two types of loans available to students: one to cover tuition fees and another for living expenses. At the end of 2006 the provision of working students as not being eligible to pretend for a grant was deleted, and now the only aspect considered in conferring the grants is the student's progress.

(iii) Qualifications

In a state-accredited study programme provided by higher education institutions it is possible to receive:

- 1) Academic education resulting in the following degrees: Bachelor and Master (academic degree) and Doctor (scientific degree).
- 2) Professional higher education resulting in level IV or level V professional qualification and Bachelor and Master professional degrees.

Bachelor degrees give access to Master studies and Master degrees or its equivalent give access to doctoral programmes.

7. Special Needs

At present, most children with special educational needs attend special schools or special education classes in general schools or general classes in general schools. The structure of special education in these schools is very similar to that of mainstream education. In 2007/08, 3.9 % of all pupils attended special schools or classes.

Special education institution and pre-primary education institutions can enrol children with sight, hearing, speech, mental and physical disorders, delay in mental development and learning difficulties, psycho-neurologic disorders and serious somatic diseases in a special group, providing possibilities to acquire an appropriate education programme. Special education institution and pre-primary education institutions can enrol children during the whole academic year on the basis of the parents' (guardian's) application and resolution of the pedagogic medical committee of the state or municipality.

8. Teachers

All general education teachers have to complete initial teacher training, i.e. higher pedagogical education resulting in an academic degree or professional diploma in pedagogy and obtain teacher's qualification in the respective level of education. This requirement became compulsory in 1 September 2004. Various possibilities are provided for those teachers who are not entitled to teach in accordance with the new provisions, to acquire the necessary qualification through in-service training, e.g. general secondary school teachers may work also if they have obtained academic education in the respective field of science and a teacher's qualification, or have started its acquisition within two years after they started to work as teachers. The latter option was introduced in order to enlarge competition as well as to fill vacancies in the teaching of certain subjects due to the ageing of teaching staff. Taking into account the lack of pre-primary school teachers, primary school teachers are eligible to teach in pre-primary institutions.

Teachers working in basic and secondary education should also hold a teacher's qualification corresponding to the subject or course they teach. Teachers at vocational schools offering lower secondary education programmes have to be trained at least at vocational secondary level and in pedagogy as well. All teachers working with children with special needs must have higher professional education in pedagogy and the teacher qualification corresponding to the respective branch of special education.

Teachers do not have a civil servant status.

9. Ongoing Reforms and priorities

General reforms, new policy papers

In 2006, the National Development Plan 2007-2013 was adopted. It is a national mid-term planning document conveying the main directions of development and the main tasks of the state and society. Education and knowledge for the growth of economics and technological distinction is defined as the main strategic aim with the following priorities: a well-educated and creative individual, technological distinction and flexibility of enterprises, and research development. During this period it is necessary to achieve an important turn in education, science and industry, in order to establish a stable intellectual and material basis for gradual improvement of life quality in Latvia.

In February 2007, the 'Basic Standpoints in Lifelong Learning for 2007-2013' document was approved. This policy planning document plays an important role in promoting the development of a balanced and knowledge-based society, and its long-term aim is to ensure education through entire life in accordance with people's interests and skills as well as regional needs for socio-economical development. The next steps are to establish a supervision council and secretariat as well as to develop an action programme for implementation of the Standpoints.

Basic Standpoints in Education Development 2007-2013 were adopted in September 2006. Taking into account the guidelines for society and education development defined both in European and national policy papers and the analysis of the results of the previous Concepts of Education Development 2002-2005, as well as recommendations from the involved bodies, it defines the main action course for the next seven years. Particular attention is paid to the quality of pre-primary and basic education, modernization of vocational education, raising competitiveness of higher education, improvement of teaching quality and implementation of lifelong learning.

Teachers

The reform of **teacher salaries** was initiated in 2000 and still continues. Salaries are being increased gradually according to a special schedule of the salary rise for pedagogues.

In 2005, a programme for raising teacher salaries 2006-2010 was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. Its aim is to ensure a continuous increase of teacher salaries to approximate it with the mean rate of teacher salaries in European Union countries. It entails changing the wage rate attraction to the average wage in the public sector, instead of the minimum wage which has been a reference point up to now, applying a definite coefficient. The first step toward its achievement is amendments made at the end of 2006 stating that teacher wage is not lower than the one fixed in the salary rise schedule for the respective period as approved by the Cabinet of Ministers.

A new system for teacher work evaluation is developed. According to the model teachers will be divided into 5 qualification levels: junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, teacher expert at local level, teacher expert at state level. 19 qualification criteria and 4 competence areas have been developed. These qualification levels will be taken into account while drawing up the standard base for the inclusion of teacher salary system into united salary system for state administration employees. This is planned to be implemented on 1st September, 2010.

Recently, an increasing **teacher shortage** is observed, and various measures have been considered to resolve the problem. Thus, official amendments in the Education Law were made that changed teacher's qualification requirements, see section 8 for details. Starting with 2008 the teachers of priority subjects (chemistry, biology, physics, science, mathematics, computer science and foreign languages – official languages of the European Union), who teach in Forms 7 are able to receive special grants. Special grants will be allocated for one year, with the possibility to apply repeatedly for the grant for two more years. In general, the project is planned to last three years.

Basic and secondary education

Gradual implementation of basic education **curriculum reform** was started in September 1, 2005 and is ongoing. It covers changes in curriculum, introduction of new subjects and increase of learning load. A number of new subject standards were developed in order to ensure a logical link between the subjects and acquiring basic skills instead of overloading pupils with the factual material. Gradually, all pupils of basic education were involved in three years time thus completing implementation of this reform in the school year 2007/08.

In 2nd September, 2008 the Cabinet of Ministers approved the 'Regulations on National Standard for General Secondary Education and Secondary Education Subject Standards'. The regulations foresee both gradual transition to modernized curriculum, and changes in criteria for assessment of pupil study achievements at general secondary education level, beginning with school year 2008/09 and providing a succession of basic education content changes at general secondary education level. New subject standards for Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Natural Science, Mathematics, Sports and Foreign languages are in force since 2008/09; the standards of remaining subjects will enter into force in 2009/10.

Introduction of **bilingual education** in minority schools have been going on during the recent years. Apart from basic education programmes for minority schools (the programmes provide a definite part of learning bilingually, and the school may itself choose one out of four sample models), also in minority secondary schools there have been changes starting with academic year 2004/05, namely, 60 % of subjects may be taught in Latvian, while 40 % (according to the school's own choice) – in a minority language, according to the amendments of the Education Law. The aim of this long-term reform is to ensure a sufficient knowledge of the state language, i.e. Latvian in order to grant access to higher education and labour market.

In order to improve the state of pupils' health and ensure them with healthy food, as well as to support families with children, all 1st grade pupils are provided with **free school lunch** starting with school year 2008/09. It is planned to gradually provide all primary school children with free school lunch.

Also, a possibility to establish general (upper) **secondary education as compulsory** has been under debate for the last few years. Advocates of this idea underline its role in rising one's competitiveness and in reaching one of general aims of the state, i.e. to develop a knowledge-based society.

Higher education

In the recent years, the work on a draft law on Higher Education Institutions was ongoing. A new draft law was developed in September 2006, and is still widely discussed among policy makers, involved bodies and general public. It is expected to be adopted in 2008. The law is supposed to strengthen the integrity of Latvian higher education within the European higher education system, autonomy of higher education institutions and their responsibility for study results. It intends to make study process more attractive (academic freedom, three-cycle structure, ECTS, lifelong learning, detailed description of study fee terms). The draft eliminates the current division in academic and professional study programmes as well as improves higher education funding mechanisms. The cooperation between higher education and employers will also be strengthened.

In 2006, the legislation on establishment of Higher Education and Science Administration was adopted. Its aim is to separate the functions of state administration involving licensing higher education study programmes, maintaining registers of higher education institutions, scientific institutions, academic staff, diplomas etc. and organising the development of professional standards, from those of policy-making and planning. It will make the fulfilment of these functions more operative and rational and will improve the work organisation in the Ministry of Education and Science. It is planned that the Administration will start operating in 2012.

<p>For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (http://www.eurydice.org)</p>
