

# The education system in Latvia

## **Pre-school education (ISCED level 0)**

5-7 year old children have to participate in pre-school programmes provided by general education establishments or kindergartens as a part of the compulsory basic education. The objective of the pre-school education is to foster general development of children and their readiness to enter primary stage of the basic education.

## **Basic education (ISCED level 1 and 2)**

9-year single structure basic education (primary and lower secondary education according to ISCED) is compulsory for all children from the age of 7. The curriculum is determined by the national basic education standard. Pupils, who have received evaluation in all subjects of the compulsory education curriculum, national tests and examinations, receive a Certificate of the basic education (*apliecība par pamatizglītību*) and a statement of records (*sekmju izraksts*) that qualify them and serve as a screening criterion for admission for further education and training in secondary level educational programmes. In case a pupil has not received evaluation in any of the subjects or centralized national tests and examinations, he/she receives a school report (*liecība*) giving the right to continue education and training in basic vocational education programmes.

## **Vocation oriented education**

Vocation oriented education in arts and music is voluntary and provides for a person's individual educational needs and wishes.

## **Secondary Education (ISCED level 3)**

There are two types of secondary education programmes: general secondary and vocational secondary education and training programmes. When admitting students to the secondary level education, schools are free to hold entrance examinations according to the basic education standard, except in those subjects for which students have already received a Certificate of the basic education.

The compulsory curriculum of **3-year general secondary schools** (*vidusskola, ģimnāzija*) is determined by the National Standard in the following profiles: (1) general comprehensive, (2) humanitarian / social, (3) mathematics / natural science / technical, (4) vocational / professional (arts, music, business, sports). All educational programmes must contain 8 compulsory and 3-6 selected subjects according to the profile. Schools can offer some optional subjects that take no more than 10-15% of the total study time or major in any of the compulsory subjects instead. General secondary education programmes, irrespective of the profile, may be combined with a national minority educational programme by inclusion of the minority's national language and subjects related to national identity and its integration into the Latvian society.

Upon graduation students have to take 4 centralized national examinations, the content and procedure of which are determined by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. A Certificate of the secondary education (*atestāts par vispārējo vidējo izglītību*) is awarded to all students, who have received a positive assessment in all subjects according to the chosen profile and the national examinations and a certificate of the passed centralized exams and their

scores, providing the right to continue education in any higher-level education programme. If the student has not received an evaluation in one or more subjects or national examination, he/she receives a school report (*liecība*).

Different **vocational education and training programmes** are developed and offered for all branches of the national economy of Latvia. The National Standard of the vocational education and the Occupational Standards determine the curriculum/content of vocational education programmes. Majority vocational education schools in Latvia provide 4 and 3 year vocational education and training programmes and only some programmes are designed for the basic vocational education and training purposes.

**4-year vocational secondary education programmes** are offered to those students who have successfully completed compulsory basic education in vocational secondary schools (*named: arodividusskola, amatniecības vidusskola, arodģimnāzija or tehnikums*). Graduates of these programmes have an opportunity to combine acquisition of Level 3 of vocational qualification with completion of their secondary education.

**2-3 year vocational education and training programmes** are offered to students who have completed the basic education and provide the opportunity to acquire Level 2 of vocational qualification. Education can be continued in **2-year programmes** leading to qualification Level 3 or **1-2 year programmes** leading to a Certificate of the secondary education (*atestāts par vidējo izglītību*).

**3 year vocational basic education and training programmes** are provided in vocational schools for students without a certificate of the basic education (after completion of at least 7 grades of basic education, but not before the calendar year when they become 15 years old). Besides acquiring Level 1 or 2 of vocational qualification students also have the opportunity to accomplish the basic education.

Depending on the type of vocational education programme, all students who have passed the final subject and qualification exams are awarded a diploma or certificate: a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*), a certificate of vocational basic education and training (*atestāts par arodizglītību*), a certificate of vocational initial education and training (*apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*). Only holders of a diploma of the vocational secondary education are eligible for access to tertiary education.

#### **Post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education (ISCED level 4)**

Vocational continuing or in-service training programmes can be acquired also after graduating general secondary or vocational education and training institutions (duration 1-2 years) or in vocational upgrading/ development programmes (duration not less than 160 study hours, which may be considered as a part of the qualification). These programmes are focused towards mastering purely professional skills and knowledge in line with the requirements of the respective qualification level. The study process, assessment of achievements are organized in a similar manner as it is done in vocational secondary education and training programmes.

### **Tertiary Education (ISCED level 4-5)**

The admission procedure is not centralised: each higher education institution has its own admissions board and criteria. From the year 2004 the entrance examinations are replaced by the results of the national centralised secondary education examinations. Universities and other institutions of higher education mostly run both academic and professional programmes. There can be distinguished three groups of programmes: academic programmes leading to academic degrees, professional programmes based upon a standard of the first academic degree thus making graduates eligible for further academic studies and the applied professional programmes oriented towards higher professional qualifications but not providing background for direct admission to further academic studies.

**Academic higher education** programmes are based upon fundamental and/or applied science; they usually comprise a thesis at the end of each stage and lead to a Bachelor's degree (*Bakalaura*) and Master's degree (*Maģistrs*). Duration of Bachelor's programmes may be 3 or 4 years at different institutions. The 3-4-year Bachelor's degree is considered as a complete academic qualification. Master's degree is awarded after the second stage of academic education and requires at least 5 years of university studies.

The Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Law on Vocational Education and Training stipulate a two level **professional higher education** – the first level of professional higher education or college education (2-3 years) leading to professional qualification Level 4 (*diplooms par pirmā līmeņa profesionālo augstāko izglītību*), and second level of professional higher education leading to qualification level 5 (2-3 years). Having mastered a programme of professional higher education, students are awarded a professional qualification or a professional Bachelor's degree that can be followed by a further 1-2 years of professional Master's studies. The Master's degree (*Maģistrs*) of higher professional education is awarded if the total duration of studies is at least five years.

There can be the so-called “short” second level professional higher education study programmes (1-2 years), where qualification is obtained on the basis of the previously acquired first level professional higher education or academic Bachelor's degree. In total the duration of professional qualification Level 5 study programmes is not less than 4 years after secondary education and not less than 2 years after college education.

### **Postgraduate education (ISCED level 6)**

Master's degree or the equivalent ( graduates of 5-6 year professional higher education programmes in Law and Medicine can continue education at postgraduate level directly) is required for admission to doctoral studies (Ph.D.). Doctoral studies last 3-4 full-time years. They include advanced studies of the subject in a relevant study programme (or an equivalent amount of independent research while working at a university, research institution, etc.) and a scientific research towards doctoral thesis. Publications in internationally quoted scientific journals are required before public defence of the doctoral thesis as an integral part of a study programme. The Council of Science appoints *Promotion Council* and sets the procedures for award of Doctor's degrees.

### **Tuition fee**

The tuition at pre-school, basic and secondary education in a state or municipality founded educational establishments is funded from the national or municipal budget. Private educational institutions may set a tuition fee for providing education. In higher education programmes the state covers tuition fees for a certain number of students' places, according to the State Procurement in the respective academic year. Each higher education institution may set a tuition fee for the rest of students' places. All students are entitled to a state credit for their studies in any higher education programme.

Foreigners or non-citizens pay for their education in accordance with the agreement concluded with the respective educational establishment. In cases when foreign citizens study in Latvia under an exchange programme and an equivalent number of Latvian students study abroad, the foreigners' studies in Latvia are financed from the budget resources of the Republic of Latvia allocated to the respective institution of higher education. The tuition fee for the citizens of European Union countries shall be determined and covered according to the same procedure as for the citizens and permanent residents of the Republic of Latvia.

### **Grading system**

Educational achievements are assessed in a ten-point system: 10 with distinction (*izcili*), 9 excellent (*teicami*), 8 very good (*ļoti labi*), 7 good (*labi*), 6 almost good (*gandrīz labi*), 5 satisfactory (*viduvēji*), 4 almost satisfactory (*gandrīz viduvēji*), 3 weak (*vāji*) 2 very weak (*ļoti vāji*), 1 very very weak (*ļoti, ļoti vāji*).

### **Adult education**

Adult education includes all types of formal, non-formal and informal education including further and interest education, professional upgrading and in-service training. It is provided to satisfy needs in lifelong education process to support personal development and competitiveness in the labour market regardless of person's age and previous education.