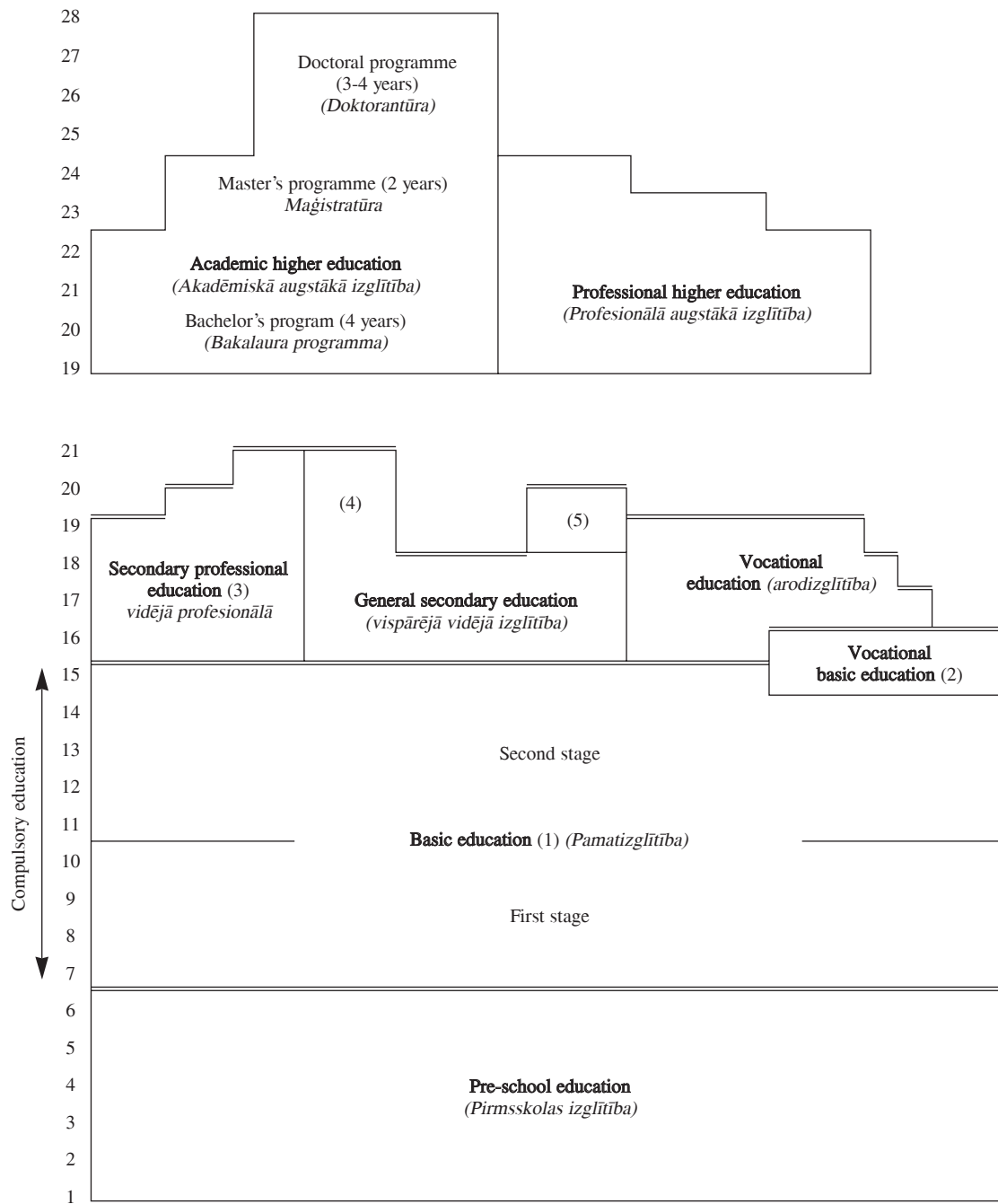


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# Latvia



- (1) Basic schools last nine years with a four-year first stage and a five-year second stage.
- (2) Two-year vocational basic education (*arodpamatizglītība*).
- (3) At present in Latvia, secondary professional education is called *Vidējā speciālā* (secondary specialised education).
- (4) Secondary specialised education has a three-year programme after general secondary education.
- (5) Vocational programmes after secondary education can last one to two years.



## 1. Responsibilities and administration

### 1.1. Background

The Republic of Latvia regained its independence in 1991 after 51 years under the control of the Soviet Union. Since then, the Republic has had to accomplish several difficult tasks, such as consolidation of a sovereign State and the transition to democracy and a market economy. Three parliamentary elections have been held – in 1993, 1995 and 1998.

At the start of 1998, the population of Latvia was 2 458 403 in a total area of 64 589 km<sup>2</sup> (38 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>). Of this population, 55.5% are Latvians, 32.4% Russians, 3.9% Belorussians, 2.9% Ukrainians, 2.2% Poles, 1.3% Lithuanians and 1.7% other nationalities.

Latvia is now an independent and democratic Republic whose governing principles are set out in its *Satversme* (Constitution) of 1922, but with some recent amendments in 1994, 1996, 1997 and 1998. One hundred members of its *Saeima* (Parliament) are directly elected by secret ballot for a three-year term. The *Saeima* enacts all legislation, and elects the President of the Republic, also for three years. Local government is exercised by 26 *rajoni* (districts).

Education policy in Latvia is based on the 1991 Education Act. Educational institutions may be state (central or local), or private. The right to education in the official state language (Latvian) is guaranteed by the 1991 Act, while the right to education in other languages is also enjoyed by Latvian residents of other nationalities, in accordance with the Language Act. In national schools, the language of instruction from grade 1 upwards is Latvian which has also to be learnt by pupils in schools providing instruction in other languages, the main one being Russian.

### 1.2. Basic principles

The 1991 Act sets out the basic responsibilities for educational policy that are assumed by the different branches of government, including the Cabinet of Ministers, the Ministry of Education and Science, other ministries and departments and the municipalities. It also refers to the rights and obligations of education and training institutions, teachers, trainees, students and pupils, the financing of education, and the right to education of foreign citizens and stateless persons. However, since 1991, the Education Act has been revised (in 1995 and 1998), and additional legislation relating to general and higher education, institutional licensing and accreditation, has been introduced. The Act, in its present form, takes effect from the summer of 1999.

The basic principles of modern education in Latvia combine values that are humanistic, democratic, individualistic and national. Its goal is for all young men and women to achieve their full potential as intelligent, creative, cultured and responsible citizens. It also naturally seeks to train skilled competitive professionals who can make a valuable contribution to national well-being, and to encourage the development of lifelong learning in all fields of art, science and technology.

### 1.3. Distribution of responsibilities

The structure of education management, which operates at national, municipal and institutional levels, corresponds to the administrative structure of the State.

All relevant legislation, including the national budget for education and the budget for the Ministry of Education and Science, is confirmed by the *Saeima* (Parliament). Regulations are invariably approved by the

Cabinet of Ministers, following discussion and agreement in the Committee of State and Social Affairs, although regulations regarding educational institutions may be approved by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The operation and curricula of schools are determined by regulations based on the Education Act, and institutions run by municipalities throughout the country implement the decisions of their local government authorities while, at the same time, working in close cooperation with the Education State Inspectorate (*Izglitības Valsts inspekcija*).

School curricula are drafted in line with a model designed by the Ministry of Education and Science, and incorporate national standards for each subject. However, within this framework, individual institutions may design their own syllabus, and even introduce new subjects.

## 1.4. Administration

Institutions at every stage, or educational level, of the Latvian education system enjoy a certain measure of autonomy. The 1991 Education Act provides for the following distribution of responsibility by administrative level of authority.

### Central level

The Cabinet of Ministers determines funding levels for all educational and training institutions, as well as minimum salaries and salary scales for institutional staff. Besides approving the samples and acquisition procedures regarding the licensing and accreditation documents required by educational and training institutions, as well as the certificates awarded by them, the Cabinet takes decisions regarding the setting up, reorganisation and closure of higher education institutions, research establishments or other educational institutions run by one of the central government ministries.

Most state education policy is implemented by the Ministry of Science and Education. The Ministry issues the licenses and credentials needed to open mainstream educational institutions or change their status. It also determines educational standards, as well as teacher training content and procedures, and concludes international cooperation agreements in the field of education.

However, other ministries and departments, such as the Ministries of Agriculture, Welfare and Culture, also establish education and training institutions. In accordance with broad guidelines, they work out and approve their regulations, determine education content in certain specific subjects, and oversee the administration and financing of the institutions concerned. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, they also contribute to the licensing and programme accreditation of the educational institutions under its supervision.

The Government controls the quality of the education system mainly in two ways: first, through the licensing of educational institutions and the accreditation of curricula; and, secondly, through the assessment and formal accreditation of teaching activity.

### Local level

Local authorities are responsible for all boarding-schools, special schools for mentally handicapped children, children's homes and centres for after-school activities (such as supervised games, theatre and painting outside normal school hours), which are not administered by the central government or privately maintained. It thus establishes, reorganises or closes such institutions, in liaison with the Ministry of Education and Science (or other appropriate ministry), and ensures respect for educational legislation within the area under its jurisdiction. Each local authority also prepares proposals for all the others, to optimise the operation of the entire network of institutions for which they are responsible. In addition, authorities appoint and dismiss heads of the institutions within their area (with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Science), and provide organisational assistance to them, through the supply of educational and methodological literature, as well as other forms of support.

Cities and districts are responsible for pre-school training institutions, primary schools, basic schools and secondary schools, with the exception of education and training institutions run directly by the central government, or those that are privately maintained. The authorities concerned have to ensure that they supervise and maintain at least as many such schools as the number prescribed by the minimum standards of

the Ministry of Education and Science. The authorities register children who have reached the age of compulsory school attendance (between six and seven), allocating them to schools of basic general education.

### **Institutional level**

Education and training institutions are governed by their head persons (headmaster, rector, etc.) and their administrative staff, in accordance with the educational legislation applicable to them. Institutions are relatively independent as regards the organisation and implementation of their work, the drawing up of internal regulations, the appointment and responsibilities assumed by their teaching and technical staff and the use of their resources.

The founder of an education or training institution may be the central government, a local government authority, any other legal entity or a person. Founders delegate to their heads the responsibilities of institutional financial management, including the determination of staff salaries in line with the regulations approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. In accordance with the regulations of institutions, councils now have to be set up within them to help settle various issues related to their teaching or administrative activity, including the use of financial resources.

Rectors of higher educational institutions are elected in accordance with the statutes of the institution concerned, although their appointment is subject to the approval of, first, the *Saeima* and then the Cabinet of Ministers. The heads of private educational and training institutions are appointed and dismissed by their founders (in this case legal entities or private individuals), in accordance with institutional regulations or statutes.

## **1.5. Inspection/Supervision/Guidance**

The Educational State Inspectorate is an institution responsible to the Ministry of Education and Science for which it ensures that the activities of all educational institutions comply with national interests. An inspector is appointed by the Ministry to each local authority throughout Latvia.

The Inspectorate carries out the following responsibilities:

- monitoring the compliance of educational institutions with the relevant legislation, regulations and standards;
- supervision of the educational process, including implementation of the educational guidelines;
- contributing to work on (state and non-state) examinations and tests, and monitoring procedures in this area of activity;
- analysing institutional operations, and formulating proposals for their refinement;
- ensuring that local authorities, educational institutions and the Ministry of Education and Science are in regular contact, and securing feedback on the implementation of educational legislation and regulations;
- running the work of accreditation commissions and procedures in schools, and participating in the accreditation of vocational and secondary professional institutions;
- participating in the assessment of the work of head teachers, and managing regional commissions for their certification;
- ensuring respect, in institutions, for the educational standards defined by central government.

A single inspector is responsible for all educational institutions supervised by a given local authority, subject to the following exceptions:

- one inspector is responsible for the institutions of professional education in the city of Riga;
- an accreditation commission has been established for special schools in the city;
- an accreditation commission has also been set up for Latvia's Polish schools.

Experts, including teachers and ministerial and school board specialists, are invited to take part in the work of the accreditation commissions of city district schools, as well as in school inspections.

## **1.6. Financing**

The state financing of education accounted for 5.8% of GDP in 1997. It has been channelled into basic financing and developmental expenses.

Basic financing, which amounts to 97% of the total educational budget, covers the expenses needed to maintain educational institutions, staff salaries, transport, energy and other resources.

Developmental expenditure is associated with implementation of larger scale projects and strategic changes in educational activity. Instead of being used for institutional maintenance, it is earmarked for the further training of teachers and the purchase of equipment. Most such expenditure is covered by state investment.

Educational institutions, including national minority schools and centres for after-school activities, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science are funded out of the central and local government budgets. In these institutions, central government expenditure is earmarked for staff salaries, including those of teachers, employer social assistance contributions, scholarships, contributions to in-service teacher training and transport concessions (including school bus services, reimbursement to parents of the cost of sending their children to school by public transport in rural areas, and reduced rates for the use of city public transport by pupils and students).

Educational institutions supervised by other ministries receive a special share of the central government budget for their administration.

In educational institutions run by local authorities, central government resources contribute to the salaries of teaching staff, employer social assistance contributions, partial contributions to the purchase of textbooks, transport subsidies and capital construction subsidies exclusively for building or rebuilding school premises.

Central and local government budget allocations for the operation of educational and training institutions are based on estimates by them of their budgetary requirements.

In all cases, the 'employment salary fund' (ESF) for teaching staff is provided by the founder of the educational institution concerned (whether the central government, local government or private bodies).

The minimum salary of teaching staff, or the salary scales dependent on the qualifications, length of service and seniority (position) of individual staff members, are determined by the central government. If employment salary funds permit, an institution's management (including its director, administration and labour union and, in some cases, its local authority) may fix higher salaries for teaching staff.

In order to ensure that local government authorities can budget for salary funds, a subsidy is provided from the central government budget through a so-called Municipal Equalisation Fund, in accordance with the number of students, and certain considerations related to regional development. This subsidy covers the total outlay on employment salary funds for teaching staff in all schools (other than special institutions for mentally or physically handicapped children), and around 95% of the fund contributions to salaries for staff at centres for after-school activities.

Money for teaching staff salaries and social assistance contributions in pre-school educational institutions supervised by local government, as well as pre-school groups in basic schools, is provided by the authorities responsible for them.

The State partly contributes to the purchase of textbooks by schools at a rate directly proportional to their pupil enrolment. It also invites tenders for the subsidised publication of textbooks for special schools (such as those requiring Braille or material for mentally and physically handicapped children), and for the preparation of books in the wake of sudden demand, so that when a new subject is introduced into the curriculum, all pupils can study it.

The material and technical facilities of educational institutions are developed and improved, by means of central and local government budgetary resources, as well as other sources of funding.

Local authorities are independent in formulating the development policy for the network of educational institutions under their control, and determining the salary funds for each of them. They are also responsible for use of the central government subsidy on which they report to the Ministry of Education and Science.

The funding of vocational education is based upon the field of specialisation at a training institution – for example, training in carpentry usually needs more funding than a secretarial course – and the number of student groups enrolled for the field concerned. The breakdown of the total annual budget is 52% from the Ministry of Education and Science, 14% from other ministries and central government bodies, and 34% from local authorities.

Indeed, institutions of both vocational and higher education are mainly supervised by central government through the Ministry of Education and Science or other ministries, each of which draws on its budget to finance the establishments for which it is responsible. Even where vocational institutions are run by local authorities, the Ministry of Education and Science covers their salaries, and social assistance contributions.

Higher education is financed from the central government budget, from income earned through the economic activity of individual institutions in the sector and from private endowments.

The state contribution provides exclusively for the advanced training of specialists in accordance with the national interest. The use of other income is determined by the higher education institution itself.

All expenses incurred by special institutions (for mentally or physically handicapped children), including their individual teaching staff salary funds, are covered from the central government budget.

Money for the salaries of teaching staff in local government adult education centres comes from the local authorities concerned.

## 1.7. Advisory/consultative/participatory bodies

Several advisory bodies have been set up and attached to the Ministry of Education and Science.

The **Centre for Educational Curricula and Examinations (CECE)** is responsible for developing curricular content, diagnosis and control at levels appropriate to pre-school, basic, general secondary and special education. The Centre establishes official norms related to matters such as plans for lessons, standards, examination materials and systems for assessing the results of teaching. It also offers a consultancy service and information on curricular issues, for the benefit of professional unions and associations of teachers, deputy head teachers in education and training<sup>1</sup>, and heads of locally-based methodological unions for teachers of specific subject areas.

The **Centre of Vocational Education (CVE)** is concerned with the content of professional education and the methodological support its application requires. In the same kind of way as the CECE, this Centre carries out the preparation and analysis of draft written material (including teaching plans and curricula) for vocational basic or secondary professional education, as well as the general development of professional skills. The CVE also monitors appropriate coordination of the content of secondary professional education with that of higher professional and general secondary education. The Centre is authorised to provide assistance to teachers, coordinate the work of methodological unions in certain specific branches of professional activity, and cooperate with other ministries, professional associations and chambers.

The **Teacher Training Support Centre (TTSC)** is responsible for implementing and supporting government policy for the promotion of teacher training and the development of teaching skills. In so doing, the Centre undertakes the preparation, translation and circulation of teaching materials, along with resource materials for teacher training and other forms of support relevant to the development of professional skills and education of the general public.

Finally, a **Consultative Council for Teacher Training and Professional Skills Development** has also been established for the purpose of improving and developing the system of in-service teacher training.

## 1.8. Private schools

The 1991 Education Act created opportunities for private education and training institutions to operate once more in Latvia. As long as they have material facilities, methodological provision and staff resources that match those of the publicly-maintained sector, private schools can be set up by persons or legal entities. Licences to establish them are issued by the Ministry of Education and Science, and they may receive a state subsidy to cover up to 80% of the expenditure defined as normal for an institution of the particular type, or category, to which they belong.

The activity of private institutions is monitored by the state inspectorate to ensure that it is legal and complies with national policies for education. The inspectorate have also established a commission for each local area responsible for accrediting schools. Licences to establish them are issued by the Ministry of Education and Science.

In 1998/99 there were 59 private schools with 3144 pupils. They comprised 10 kindergartens, 11 elementary schools, 21 basic schools (to ninth grade) and 17 secondary schools (to 12th grade).

<sup>1</sup> Head teachers themselves do not normally make use of the service, since their work is more purely administrative in nature.

## 2. Pre-school education

Pre-school education is an integral part of the educational system. Its aim is to develop the self-confidence of children through the awareness of their own actions, emotions, desires and interests, and to channel their emerging aptitudes into participatory activity respectful of general human values.

The first group of pre-schools are general institutions or kindergartens for those aged between one and seven, play groups and consultative centres. The second group comprises similar but special schools for children with apparent handicaps.

Although no special tests are taken by children, parents have to submit a health certificate for them prior to their registration in pre-school institutions. Registration in special kindergartens is dependent on the conclusions of a medical/educational commission.

Depending on their pupil enrolment, institutions may be divided into a maximum of 12 groups. Children aged one to three are always placed in groups of ten; those aged between three and seven in groups of 16.

Although children are offered the next stage of education in the nearest basic school to their home, parents can choose any other school if they wish. Some pre-schools provide the first grade of basic schooling on their own premises while, in 1996/97, 148 kindergarten groups were housed in basic schools.

### 2.1. Organisation of the pre-school

In pre-school institutions, there is one daily class. While the length of the school day depends on the capacity of the school building, kindergartens are open for 12 hours a day on average. The maximum length of classes increases with the age of children as follows: 15 minutes (children aged up to two), 25 minutes (2-3), 35 minutes (3-4), 50 minutes (4-5), one hour (5-6) and 75 minutes for children aged between six and seven.

Pre-schools may organise groups for children of the same age, or groups of different ages between two and four. The kind of group formed depends on the wishes of parents and varies from one local authority to the next. Children in groups of the same age are transferred to the next (higher-age) group automatically each year.

Publicly maintained pre-school education is financed by the local authorities, while special pre-school institutions receive subsidies from the central government.

In publicly-maintained institutions, parents pay an amount directly proportional to the cost of providing meals. In private ones, they additionally pay a registration fee on their children's behalf. Indeed, the private pre-school sector is somewhat expensive, and has been developing slowly.

New pre-school institutions may be founded by local authorities in the area under their jurisdiction, private persons, municipal services (such as those for transport) and firms. In 1998/1999, there were 10 private kindergartens.

### 2.2. Curriculum/Assessment

The pre-school curriculum comprises 15 subjects, including mathematics, speech development, literature, visual arts, music, and physical training, with a strong emphasis on swimming. Special attention is also paid to the acquisition of Latvian and foreign languages.

Parents may choose a pre-school which uses languages of instruction other than Latvian (usually Russian or Polish), if one is available in their area. While Latvian is taught at all institutions and used as the language of instruction in 376 of them, 71 have Russian as their main language, and a further 135 include some groups that use Latvian and others, Russian.

Play is central to the pre-school activity organised by teachers, using appropriate teaching resources to support their work which is based on the idea that the environment of children is a basic factor in their cognitive development.

## 2.3. Teachers

Trained pre-school teachers hold a higher education diploma as a pre-school psychologist/educator.

Persons who have satisfactorily completed secondary education may also teach in pre-schools, as long as they continue their training at a higher teacher training institution, by correspondence or at evening classes. Courses last for four to five years.

Secondary education qualifications alone may be acceptable where there is a serious teacher shortage. The Ministry of Education and Science stipulates that teaching practice for pre-school teachers – as well as for their heads – should last 20 weeks. Just two days a year have to be spent in further in-service training courses.

## 2.4. Statistics 1998/99

Pupils	66 143
Teachers	8 647
Institutions	586
Pupil/teacher ratio	7.2
Pupil/group ratio	19.0

Source: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 1998.

After 1991, as a result of reforms aimed at enabling children to benefit from their home environment for a longer period before attending school, the number of pre-school institutions declined. In 1990, there were 1115 kindergartens attended by 83% of children in the corresponding age-group, while in 1993, 640 kindergartens were attended by around 25%. More recently, this percentage has significantly risen again standing at 38% in 1997. However, the overall decrease is the result of staff salary funds being transferred to local authority budgets. In some cases, this led to a fall in the number of pupil groups within these institutions, or their complete closure.

# 3. Compulsory education

One of the most essential tasks of compulsory education is to solve problems associated with the fact that a large proportion of the population (45%) do not speak Latvian, satisfactory command of which is one of the preconditions for Latvian citizenship. For this reason, acquisition of Latvian in school is very important.

### Basic School

This level has a definite structure inherited from the period of the first Republic (up to 1940) and transformed under Soviet occupation. With restoration of the independent Republic in 1991, the Education Act of the same year was partly inspired by both.

Compulsory schooling lasts from the age of six or seven until basic schooling has been satisfactorily completed between the ages of 15 and 18. Basic school (*pamatskola*) consists of two stages:

- The **first stage**, also known as primary school (*sākumskola*), comprising grades 1-4;
- The **second stage** (grades 5-9).

Some schools only provide for grades 1-6, incorporating the whole of the primary stage but with the following stage incomplete. Others may offer the full nine-year curriculum covering both stages.

In addition, there are vocational programmes in some basic schools. The curriculum of the basic school can be also acquired at evening shift schools. In 1997/98 there were 2775 pupils studying in these evening shift schools, most of them at grades 7-9.

For children with special needs, compulsory education is offered in special basic schools.

There are no entrance examinations to basic schools, and in those founded by central or local government, there is no tuition fee, as is often the case of private basic schools.

Classes are coeducational, and their normal maximum size is 36, although in special cases this number may be increased with the approval of the state inspectorate. The size of a school depends on the ability of its local authority to maintain it, as well as the number of school children in the area under its jurisdiction.

### **3.1. Organisation of the school**

In general, basic schools accommodate several sets of classes. However, in those with fewer children, either joint classes are formed, or there may be only one set of classes for a particular age-group. The length of the school day depends on the number of lessons for a given class, and may also be longer if teaching takes place in shifts to prevent too many classes being given at the same time.

In some basic schools, pupils are encouraged towards professional education in their final year.

Although schools plan their own timetable, the Education Act stipulates maximum weekly teaching workloads, as follows: grade (year) 1, 20 lessons; grade 2, 22 lessons; grades 3-4, 24 lessons; grade 5, 30 lessons; grade 6, 32 lessons; grades 7 to 8, 34 lessons.

There are two semesters – from 1 September to Christmas, and from the beginning of January until the end of May. These dates, together with holiday periods, have been laid down by the Ministry of Education and Science.

Grades are generally organised in accordance with age, but with some exceptions, as in the case of children who for any reason, have attended school earlier than usual or remained in the same grade for a second year. Schools with several parallel classes, may also divide them in accordance with an emphasis on certain subjects within the curriculum.

Teachers are free to choose their books and other teaching resources, with several books used for almost all subjects.

### **3.2. Curriculum**

All subjects in basic school are taught on an equal level to all students, except in schools with more intensive provision in foreign languages or music. Basic schools may also enable pupils to prepare for specialisation in a specific subject.

Schools may adopt various teaching methods, including independent work by pupils or group work. Recently, methods have become diversified, with a special emphasis on active learning.

#### **Model curriculum for the 1997/98 school year**

Model curricula are prepared at the Ministry of Education and Science, while the specific curriculum for each school is drawn up by the institution itself, taking account of educational requirements, pupil interests and preferences, and possibilities offered by the school, including the qualifications of its teachers.

### Model curriculum and lesson plan for basic schools (primary stage)

Teaching subject	Number of lessons per week for each grade			
	1		4	
1. Latvian	8	2*	8-9	4*
2. First foreign language	–		3-4	
3. Minority language	7*		8-9*	
4. Mathematics	4	4*	4-5	4-5*
5. Environment and nature studies	1	1*	1	1*
6. Music	2	1-2*	2	1-2*
7. Visual art and handicraft	3	2-3*	3	3*
8. Physical training	2	2*	2-3	2-3*
<b>9. Maximum load per student</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>24</b>	
<b>10. Optional classes</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>3</b>	

\* Model curricula in pre-schools with language of instruction other than Latvian.

### Model curriculum and lesson plan for basic schools

	Teaching subject	Number of lessons per week for each grade
	5	9
1. Latvian	3-4	3-4
2. Literature	2-3	2-3
3. First foreign language	4	2-3
4. Second foreign language	–	3-4
5. History	2	
6. Social studies Introduction into economy Civil studies	– –	– 1-2
7. Mathematics	5-6	5-6
8. Computer studies	–	–
9. Biology	1-2	2
10. Geography	–	2
11. Physics	–	2
12. Chemistry	–	2
13. Music	2	1-2
14. Visual art	2	1
15. Housekeeping or trade	2	2
16. Physical training	2-3	2-3
Maximum load	30	34
Optional classes	4	4

### 3.3. Assessment/Guidance

Pupils receive a report at the end of each semester. Later, on completion of basic school, they sit school-leaving examinations and are awarded certificates testifying to their knowledge of the subjects they have studied.

From grades 1 to 3, children are assessed orally in each subject. Then, from grade 4, their knowledge is assessed in accordance with a 10-point scale. Proficiency in and attitudes towards subjects are assessed by teachers both in the course of their daily activity, and by regular testing. This rating is recorded in a results book, with a final result based on all assessment conducted in the course of the year. However, there is no special certification to mark the end of grade 4, in a way comparable to the full completion of basic school at grade 9.

Satisfactory results are needed for pupils to progress from one grade to the next and enter secondary school. If their results are unsatisfactory, their parents decide whether they should repeat a year or move on to the next grade. Besides being used to try and analyse the reasons for unsatisfactory school attainment and adapt teaching methods where appropriate, results also provide general information on educational performance throughout the country.

Some local authorities organise so-called 'remedial classes' for children who have been absent from school for a long period (the precise definition of which varies from one municipality to the next).

Examinations are compulsory for all pupils about to leave basic school, and passing them is a precondition for award of the basic school certificate. Responsibility for them lies with the Centre for Educational Curricula and Examinations.

### 3.4. Teachers

At basic school level, teachers work on either grades 1-4 or 5-9 and, in the case of the latter, also specialise in a particular subject or limited group of subjects. Teachers of grades 1-4 teach all major subjects, except art, music and physical education.

The status of teaching staff depends on the provision of their school but, in general, institutions try to offer their staff full-time permanent work.

Eight higher education institutions in Latvia provide accredited curricula for teacher training.

The training concerned lasts four to five years, depending on the qualifications aimed at. By means of teaching practice, schools are in regular contact with the institutions that train their teachers. The Ministry of Education and Science stipulates that teaching practice for primary school and special school teachers, as well as for heads of schools, should last 20 weeks. For second-stage basic school teachers (grades 5-9) and teachers of comprehensive and special subjects (including music and art), practice is meant to last 12 weeks.

In accordance with the 1995 Higher Education Institutions Act, teachers who satisfactorily complete their courses, are awarded a diploma testifying the level of education and subjects for which they are qualified to work.

According to the 1998 Education Act, all teachers have the right to engage in appropriate further training of a total 30 days in a three-year period

The teaching workload is specified in regulations established by the Cabinet of Ministers, and is now 21 lessons a week.

The workload of teachers includes not only classroom activity, but the correction of written work in mathematics and languages. School heads conclude employment contracts with teachers for specified periods of time and their corresponding workloads.

The continuing education of qualified teachers takes the form of full-time extramural courses, 'self-education' and external studies.

At present, all university and non-university higher education institutions, irrespective of whether they provide training for teachers as such, are involved in the continuing education of teachers through the provision of Bachelor's and Master's study programmes. Continuing education courses are also offered at local government

learning centres, regional teacher education centres, and by other facilities or means, such as the following:

- continuing education support centres for teachers (including vocational education and training centres for those who teach in vocational education);
- international support from different organisations and programmes (including the British Council, TEMPUS projects, PHARE, bilateral cooperation projects with Germany and Denmark, the Canada College Association, and Baltic and Nordic country cooperation projects).

In law, employees are themselves responsible for upgrading their qualifications and skills to match work requirements, but employers have to provide them with the opportunity to do so. Teachers therefore share responsibility with the local authorities responsible for their schools.

Every year, the Ministry of Education and Science invites proposals from local authorities for curricula for continuing education. Following its formal approval of recommendations by an assessment commission, it then awards funding to accepted proposals from a special state budget for this purpose, from which an average 6 000 teachers have benefited annually. Some of the same budget is also earmarked for a Teachers' Continuing Education Support Fund from which 3 000 teachers on average receive partial compensation for their tuition fees for extramural or postgraduate courses. And every year, a further 8 500 teachers receive funding from local authority budgets, international projects and other resources.

### 3.5. Statistics

1998/99

Pupils (Grade 1-4)	141 396
Pupils (Grade 5-9)	159 675
Pupils in Basic schools	301 071
Teachers (Grade 1-4)	9 191
Teachers (Grade 5-9)	15 615
Teachers in Basic schools	24 806
Primary schools (sakumskola)	100
Basic schools (pamatskola)	534
Pupil/teacher ratio (Grade 1-4)	15.4
Pupil/teacher ratio (Grade 5-9)	10.2
Pupil/teacher ratio in Basic schools	12.1
Pupil/class ratio (Grade 1-4)	19.0
Pupil/class ratio (Grade 5-9)	19.0
Pupil/class in Basic schools	19.0

Source: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 1998; Ministry of Education and Science, 1999.

## 4. Secondary education

The term secondary education concerns schooling from grades 10 to 12, which is not compulsory.

Secondary education (*vidējā izglītība*) may be general or special education (for children with special needs), or secondary specialised education (see the introductory diagram).

The aim of general secondary education is to impart the knowledge and skills needed for subsequent higher education, to further the all-round development of students and prepare them for life in a democratic society. Secondary specialised schools and some secondary general schools are also orientated towards certain professions.

Although students in secondary education are usually aged 16-18, there is not normally an upper age-limit.

There are central and local government secondary schools, and also some private ones.

In order to be admitted to secondary school, pupils have to hold the basic education certificate, although some schools will impose yet further requirements. Attendance at central and local government institutions is free, whereas private ones may charge tuition fees. Parents can choose the school which their children will attend, although their choice may also be partly dependent on the results pupils achieved in basic school. No special preparatory courses are organised for children whose knowledge is insufficient for continued education at publicly-maintained secondary school.

There are comprehensive day secondary schools, evening secondary schools, gymnasiums and public gymnasiums.

All the schools teach up to the 12th grade. The state gymnasiums also have the status of methodological resource centres, which makes them eligible for additional funding from the central government budget. Gymnasiums for which the central government is responsible also provide education for pre-gymnasium grades 7-9. Gymnasiums may also specialise in a specific group of subjects, such as languages, or mathematics. No instruction below grade seven is normally provided at them.

## 4.1. Organisation of the school

General secondary school premises are generally used for several sets of classes. In these institutions, the length of the school day depends on the number of lessons and not, as a rule, on the capacity of the premises.

Secondary general education may be acquired at evening classes for which there is no age limit.

While the daily timetable is determined by each individual institution, it must be consistent with a maximum total weekly teaching load specified by the Education Act of 34 lessons for grades ten to eleven, and 36 lessons for grade 12.

As at basic school, the two semesters decreed by the Ministry are from 1 September to Christmas, and from the beginning of January until the end of May, with grades normally a function of age.

Although secondary schools adopt the educational methods of basic schools, they also run seminars and project work. Teachers select textbooks appropriate to the courses for which they are responsible. All such course material is approved by the Centre for Educational Curricula and Examinations which publishes a list of recommended titles, and proposes a variety of curricula to teachers enabling them to satisfy official requirements relating to standards in specific subjects.

## 4.2. Curriculum

All schools have to offer two kinds of course in most subjects, the 'general' course (*vispārējais kurss*) and the 'profile' course (*profilkurss*), each reflecting the level to which students acquire knowledge. General courses provide basic knowledge in the subject concerned and are shorter in terms of classroom hours (see the sample curriculum on p. 21). Profile courses explore subjects in more depth and require a greater number of classroom hours. Secondary schools offer both compulsory and optional subjects and, in the latter, pupils have to include at least two profile courses.

The class is divided into groups, depending on whether the basic or profile formula is chosen. Schools may also form parallel classes of students at the same grade. For example, city schools usually have 2-5 parallel classes at grade 10, and 2-4 parallel classes at grade 11, but others may have only one class for either of these grades. In secondary schools with several classes, teaching may be organised with respect to certain broad areas of specialisation (such as humanities, sciences, etc.).

Five subjects are compulsory for every student in secondary education. The remainder are chosen by students from the courses available at their school, in accordance with their preferences and the subjects they hope to pursue in higher education. Students are obliged to follow a total of 12 courses in all, taking some from each of the four categories of social sciences, foreign languages, natural/technical sciences and culture. The form of teaching chosen by the teachers themselves combines practical and theoretical lessons.

## Sample curriculum and lesson plan for secondary schools

Compulsory courses	General course		Profile course	
	(p)	(h)	(p)	(h)
<b>For students with Latvian as the language of instruction</b>				
1. Latvian language and literature	15	525	21	735
2. Mathematics	12	420	18	630
3. History	6	210	12	420
4. Foreign language (one of the languages taught at basic school)	9	315	15	525
5. Physical training	9	315		
<b>For students with language of instruction other than Latvian</b>				
1. Latvian language and literature	12	420	18	630
2. Minority language and literature	15	525	21	735
3. Mathematics	12	420	18	630
4. First foreign language	9	315	15	525
5. History	6	210	12	420
6. Physical training	9	315		
<b>Types of optional courses to be selected</b>				
Social sciences				
* Philosophy	3	105		
* Geography	3	105	6	210
Basics of business economy	3	105	6	210
Ethics	2	70		
Psychology	2	70		
Logic	2	70		
Politics and rights	2	70		
History of religion	2	70		
Health education	2	70		
<b>Foreign languages</b>				
* Second foreign language	9	315	15	525
Third foreign language	9	315	15	525
<b>Natural and technical sciences</b>				
* Physics	10	350	17	595
* Chemistry	7	245	14	490
* Biology	6	210	12	420
Informatics or applied informatics	2	70	6	210
Astronomy	2	70		
Technical graphics	2	70		
Natural sciences	8	280		
<b>Cultural education courses</b>				
* Music	6	210	15	525
* History of culture	6	210		
* Amateur arts	6	210	15	525
Housekeeping	6	210	10	350
Visual art	6	210	12	420
History of art	2	70		

p – the usual total number of lessons a week (weekly workload),

h – total number of lessons during the three-year-period.

\* Optional subjects that all schools have to offer students for possible selection.

From the course list offered by the school, students choose courses in such a way that the total number of points making up their workload (p) lies within the range from 90 to 108, or so that the total number of lessons during the three-year period ranges from 3 150 to 3 780.

### 4.3. Assessment – guidance

Assessment in secondary schools is based on the 10-point scale.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes of students are assessed in the same way as at basic schools (see section 3.3.). Their work is analysed by teachers both to assess their knowledge and, by the same token, evaluate the methodology used to teach the subject and, where appropriate, adapt the approach accordingly.

In the same way as at basic schools, students receive a report at the end of each semester, while results books are used for their final assessment by teachers at the end of each year. Satisfactory results are needed for pupils to progress from one grade to the next, following a decision by the head at the recommendation of the school pedagogical council (the *pedagogiska padome* which is distinct from the school council referred to on p. 6). Results following grade 12 also determine entry to higher education. While there are currently no special classes for unsuccessful students, teachers hold consultation sessions after regular school classes, usually once a week. They provide an opportunity for pupils to obtain advice, ask questions on topics they have not understood, repeat tests in which they obtained unsatisfactory marks or take them for the first time if they have been absent.

On completing secondary school, students normally sit final school-leaving examinations and, if they pass, are awarded the certificate of secondary education. More specifically, examinations are open to all secondary school leavers who have received at least a 4-point rating in the subject concerned, as well as those who have regularly attended the relevant course or who wish to improve their final assessment by taking an examination more than once.

A total of five examinations has to be taken in courses the total workload of which is at least 105 lessons. Two of these examinations are prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Science, one may be determined by the school, and the other two chosen by the student. At least one examination has to be taken in a profile course.

Since the establishment of the Centre of Educational Curricula and Examinations in 1994 the examination system in Latvia has changed.

Formerly, there were two kinds of school examinations – written and oral. The written examination assignments (involving composition in the native language and algebra) were announced on television on the day of the exam.

Teachers marked student papers locally at their schools, with no officially standardised scales or regulations to guide them.

Similarly, although questions for the oral exams were prepared by the Ministry, other tasks and materials were the responsibility of teachers at each school whose examination board evaluated student answers independently.

Consequently, results throughout the country were not comparable and, in order to obtain a broader view of the attainment levels of secondary school leavers, a system of centrally marked examinations was introduced.

The first such examination in English was piloted in 1995 and, in 1997, was held throughout the country. The experience so gained will be used for further similar development in the future.

More recently still, in the Spring of 1998, the Centre of Educational Curricula and Examinations ran centralised examinations in the English, German and French languages and piloted similar examinations in mathematics, the Russian language and Latvian as the state language for Russian schools.

As a result, the Centre is now proceeding with centrally marked examinations for virtually all secondary school subjects.

In addition to the secondary school-leaving certificate required for entry to higher education, additional conditions may be imposed by particular institutions. But the centralised examinations system may merge the secondary school leaving examinations with entrance examinations to individual higher education establishments.

Guidance for secondary school students hoping to enter higher education is provided at 'open days' organised by institutions at this level. But no professional guidance classes or consultation are as yet provided within secondary schools themselves.

#### 4.4. Teachers

Teachers in secondary education are trained in specialised courses in education. For information on their status and in-service teacher training, see the corresponding details in section 3.4. (on teachers in compulsory education).

#### 4.5. Statistics 1998/99

Number of pupils in secondary schools	47 134
Number of pupils in part-time schools	10 767
Number of teachers	5 032
Number of teachers in part-time schools	774
Number of secondary schools	384

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998.

## 5. Initial vocational education and training

The current system of vocational education in Latvia is based on the pre-1991 network of institutions adapted in accordance with the 1991 Education Act. This network of small establishments in terms of their enrolment is itself fairly large, comprising 128 institutions in all, 36% of them in Riga, and the others in rural districts elsewhere. Most of them are directly run by central government, although the creation of private and local authority vocational education institutions has grown in recent years. Vocational education is geared to some 320 professions and areas of specialisation.

Admission to courses in institutions for professional education is possible for those who have completed either compulsory or secondary education (lasting nine and 12 years respectively).

### 5.1. Organisation of initial training establishments

The Ministry of Education and Science and the other ministries that supervise these institutions (including the Ministries of Agriculture, Welfare and Culture) approve admission plans, establish term dates, student numbers and general admission requirements. Institutions themselves announce the details regarding these matters, and organise selection procedures which may or may not include entrance examinations. Some areas of specialisation include specific health or minimum age requirements.

There are several types of course providing vocational training.

Basic vocational education (*arodpamatskola*) provides instruction and training geared to simple occupations for those who have not completed basic education by the age of 15.

Courses in secondary vocational education (*arodvidusskola*) vary from two to four years of education and training, each of which includes at least some elements of general secondary education. Only students on a four-year programme complete a full course of secondary education. The institutions that provide it are named *arodģimnāzija* and their graduates are eligible for university studies. There are also post-secondary vocational schools (*arodskola*) for holders of general secondary education certificates, and schools for craftsmen (*amatniecības skolas*).

Secondary professional education institutions, currently known as 'secondary specialised education institutions' (*vidējās speciālās mācību iestādes*), provide education and training in business, nursing, art, music and

technical and technological subjects. The curricula developed from basic education entail four to five years of study and include a full course of general secondary education. Education and training based on secondary education lasts two to three years, and the curriculum is mainly concentrated on theoretical knowledge and professional training, in fields such as nursing and pharmacy.

Holders of a diploma of secondary professional education may enter higher education.

The future of institutions for professional secondary education – and particularly their courses for holders of the general secondary school certificate – is currently under discussion. There are already moves to reorganise secondary professional education into professional (non-university) higher education along the lines of the German *Fachhochschulen* or Dutch *Hogescholen* (which would place them at ISCED level 5).

## 5.2. Curriculum

The curricula of institutions for professional education include general subjects of professional training. Variations in number and balance between the different courses depend on the type and level of institution concerned. All subjects in these programmes are compulsory, and are divided into the following three blocks:

- practical training;
- professional education;
- general subjects.

Teachers mainly give classes in which lectures are combined with practical training. The number of lectures is to be reduced in order to lay greater emphasis on independent or group work.

## 5.3. Assessment/Guidance

The organisation of centres of practical training and examination is already in hand in order to standardise requirements for the award of qualifications. The knowledge and skills of students are tested against qualification requirements in the five such centres already in operation.

Qualification examinations entail both theoretical knowledge and the testing of practical skills, with the former assessed in a written test. A commission involved in the running of the examinations includes representatives from employers, branch associations, and centres for vocational education.

Institutions of vocational secondary education award either the diploma of basic or secondary vocational education, with a vocational qualification, while institutions of secondary professional education award the corresponding diploma and a professional qualification. The diploma is accompanied by a transcript giving the final marks awarded in all subjects.

## 5.4. Teachers

Teachers working in vocational education and training institutions are traditionally specialists with the appropriate special secondary or higher education in the field concerned. Most of them do not have a specific diploma qualifying them for teaching as such. In 1997/98, there were 5 430 educational and training staff in vocational education, 5 270 of whom were teachers.

Until now, in Latvia, no higher education institutions have offered specialised training for teachers in vocational education and training, or provided courses for subject specialists wishing to teach in this sector. Various higher education institutions which train teachers offer courses in general education, educational psychology and philosophy, theoretical knowledge in the main subject or subjects and areas of specialisation, and didactics. However in the country as a whole, there is an acute need to draw up a special curriculum for the training of teachers in vocational education, enabling them to address its specific problems successfully. It is hoped this kind of study programme may be developed in cooperation with Denmark's Vocational Education and Training Teacher's College.

## 5.5. Statistics 1997/98

Total number of vocational schools	74
Number of students in vocational schools	26 241
Total number of pedagogical staff	2 633
Number of craft teachers	1 047
Number of classroom teachers	997
Number of secondary professional schools	46
Number of students in secondary professional schools	19 996
Total number of pedagogical staff	2 797
Number of craft teachers	429
Number of classroom teachers	1834

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998.

## 6. Higher education

From the legal standpoint, higher education is subject to the three Acts regarding Higher Education Institutions, Academic Activity and Education, respectively.

In 1998, there were 19 state-maintained higher education institutions and 15 private ones in Latvia.

Institutions are accredited in accordance with regulations approved by the Cabinet of Ministers, while their classification is determined by the 1995 Higher Education Institutions Act.

As stipulated in the Act, a quality assessment procedure aimed at state accreditation of all courses is being developed, in recognition of the need for a more uniform system of higher education. Following establishment of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Centre in 1995, quality assessment began in 1996/97, and is planned to cover all courses within five years.

In the last three years, higher education in Latvia has considerably expanded, notwithstanding unfavourable economic circumstances and cutbacks in funding.

### Non-university higher education

**Professional higher education institutions** offer applied courses within professionally-oriented study programmes, and undertake applied academic research. Their aim is to provide opportunities for acquiring extensive, professional, applied academically-based higher education.

The following courses are on offer:

- 1-2 year programmes which follow or run in parallel with studies for a Bachelor's degree;
- professionally-oriented programmes lasting a minimum four years after secondary school, which lead to professional education diplomas.

Other **institutions** provide courses, including doctoral studies, and carry out research in separate branches of science, the national economy and the arts. They may thus establish or incorporate bodies such as research institutes, centres, and observatories within the main branches of learning. The professional courses available at these institutions lead to the award of degrees, and correspond to university-type professional education at International Standard Classification for Education (ISCED) level 6.

## University higher education

**Universities**, over half of whose academic staff hold doctorates, provide courses and academic research in the main branches of learning, to which the results of research themselves contribute. Like the professionally oriented institutions, universities may incorporate research institutes and similar bodies that carry out research at an internationally recognised level, and participate in the implementation of study programmes, international projects, conferences and other forums.

Based on fundamental and/or applied sciences, academic education can be divided into two stages and, at the end of each, students must present a thesis based on their own research.

### 6.1. Admission requirements

The basic requirement for admission to higher education is the certificate of secondary education. Other requirements reflect the area of specialisation and nature of the institution concerned, but there is no *numerus clausus*. Of special relevance are the general qualifications and potential professional ability of students. The admission procedure is determined by the institution concerned, and may include one or more entrance examinations, and a professional aptitude test.

Formal regulations relating to admission consist not only those of the Ministry of Education and Science applicable to all higher education institutions in Latvia, but also regulations established by the senate at each of them. The required standard of entrance examinations corresponds to that of individual subjects as taught in secondary education.

### 6.2. Fees/Financial aid for students

The Government determines the number of students whose higher education is to be financed from the national budget. Other students have to pay tuition fees, in accordance with the decision taken by individual institutions. These fees can be paid by either private individuals or legal entities, depending on the contract that a higher education institution has concluded with the student concerned.

However, since 1997, the most successful full-time students of *Bakalaura* (Bachelor's), *Maģistrs* (Master's), the *Rezidentūra* (a resident programme for first-level medical university graduates) and professional non-university study programmes have been entitled to student loans. However, a loan is available for no more than the acquisition of one bachelor's degree, and then one master's degree (if taken), or for obtaining a higher professional qualification, over a period of study which does not exceed the normal length of the course concerned. The monthly loan for one student may not exceed 35 LVL (around US\$60), and is intended to cover normal cost-of-living expenditure. The financial resources for student loans come from the state budget, as well as from target payments on behalf of the student or the study programme. Repayment of loans has to begin no later than six months after graduation, or three months after the discontinuation of study if the courses are not completed. However, it is cancelled by the State if, following graduation, the recipient becomes an employee at a central or local government institutions, or in a profession approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. Otherwise, the annual rate of interest is 5%. Loans are also obtainable for study abroad.

Tuition fees differ with respect to demand for a given area of specialisation on the labour market, or its prestige in society, and not on the kind of education (university or non-university) obtained.

### 6.3. Academic year

The academic year lasts 10 months, although its organisation depends on each individual institution, so that the actual dates vary from one institution to the next.

### 6.4. Courses

Higher education institutions can offer academic and/or professional higher education courses. Of the two kinds of professional higher education in Latvia, the first leads to an academic degree (university-type education corresponding to ISCED level 6) giving direct access to Master's and doctoral studies, while the

second does not, focusing mainly instead on the acquisition of professional skills (non-university education, ISCED level 5). Courses may be organised on a full-time, or part-time basis, or rely on distance education for their delivery. The main teaching methods used are lectures, seminars, research working groups, case studies, discussions, and individual work by students.

## 6.5. Assessment/Qualifications

Students are assessed by means of a 10-point system. Their knowledge is examined in tests, termly papers, final tests, state examinations, and graduation papers.

The academic degree of *Bakalaura* is conferred on successful completion of a first stage. *Bakalaura* programmes prepare students for a one- or two-year professional training programme, or further academic education. In some cases (such as that of teacher education), professional training may take place concurrently with *Bakalaura* studies, and last five years.

The academic degree of *Maģistrs* (Master's) is conferred after the second stage of academic education which takes one-and-a-half to two years. A *Bakalaura* degree is a prerequisite for admission to a *Maģistrs* course. Graduates from three-year *Bakalaura* courses can either enrol for *Maģistrs* courses at the same institution, or they may continue their studies at institutions with longer *Bakalaura*. In either case, they may have to satisfy additional requirements (such as obtaining extra credits, or passing further examinations).

A *Maģistrs* degree (or the equivalent) is required for admission to doctoral studies which lead to two possible degrees, namely the *zinātņu doktors* (comparable to a Ph.D.), and a higher degree still, the Dr.hab. A *zinātņu doktors* degree may be conferred after public defence of a doctoral thesis following three to four years of full-time university study, or an equivalent amount of independent research carried out during work at university, a research institution or hospital, or in industry etc. The Dr.hab. degree is awarded after defence of a habilitation thesis, which is usually a summary of several major scientific and/or educational publications, or a monograph written following defence of the first doctoral dissertation.

The professional qualifications awarded in **higher professional education** include those of agronomist, physician, pharmacist, engineer, performing artist, artist, social worker, teacher, dentist, technologist and veterinary surgeon.

## 6.6. Teachers

According to the 1995 Higher Education Act, only persons with a university degree, or a degree obtained in non-university higher education, may teach or lecture in higher education institutions.

Their teaching staff are appointed by open competition for a 6-year period. However, when a staff vacancy or temporary vacancy occurs, the senate of the institution concerned may, instead of inviting competitive applications, employ a visiting professor, assistant professor or lecturer.

Academics appointed to professorships must hold a doctoral degree, in addition to satisfying the specific requirements of a given institution. Most professors have acquired an international professional reputation.

Appointments to associated professorships and the position of Docent call for a doctoral degree and teaching experience.

Lectors and Assistants need to hold at least a Master's degree.

Requirements regarding teaching qualifications differ between university- and non-university-type higher education, as teachers in the latter may have no degree. They must, however, have professional experience and a significant track record in the field. For example, in fields of specialisation in the arts, professors must be able to point to the results of creative work, in accordance with the regulations on academic positions adopted by the senate of the higher education concerned.

Teachers may be full-time, part-time, temporary or permanent, but all teachers are obliged to re-train and undergo in-service training.

## 6.7. Statistics

1998/99

Number of institutions	33
Number of students	76 620
Number of teachers	3 911

### Number of students within higher education, 1997/98

	<b>Level 1 – basic studies</b> <i>Pamatstudijas</i>	<b>Master degree studies</b> <i>Maiiistratūra</i>	<b>Doctoral studies</b> <i>Doktorantūra</i>	<b>Total</b>
Universities	11 023	3 645	278	14 946 (73%)
%	74	24	2	100
University-type	2 063	340	23	2 426 (12%)
%	85	14	1	100
Other	2 824	168	0	3 010 (15%)
%	94	6	0	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>15 928</b>	<b>4 153</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>20 382</b>

Source: Ministry of Education and Science.