ESTONIA

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Overview

Estonia is the northernmost of the three Baltic republics that broke away from the Russian Empire in 1918, enjoyed a little more than three decades of precariously independent life, and then were occupied by the Soviet Union under the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939. Independence was restored for all three in 1990.

The Estonian language is related to Finnish and (more distantly) to Hungarian and to Lapp. Estonian-speaking people have lived in the area since the third millenium B.C., though often under German, Danish, Swedish, Polish or Russian domination (Raun, 3-34).

Russian rule was imposed in 1710, though Baltic German elites continued to dominate economic, cultural and even administrative affairs until the late nineteenth century, when Russian authorities, in reaction to the failed Polish rebellion of 1863 against Russian rule, sought to impose cultural Russification in all parts of the Tsar's dominions. The Estonian educated class that had been emerging within the German cultural milieu was inspired to undertake a movement of national awakening, seeking to extend schooling to the predominantly-rural population and to train teachers. At first, this movement was directed against German cultural hegemony rather than Russian political hegemony, and indeed saw the Tsar’s government as an ally, but gradually the pressure for Russification alienated Estonian intellectuals and by the early twentieth century they were demanding universal elementary schooling through Estonian and control over the educational system (Raun, 62-95).

The collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917 and the ensuing civil war allowed an independent Estonian state to emerge; in 1920, the Soviet regime recognized the independence of Estonia and renounced forever all claims to its territory. Free, compulsory elementary education in Estonian was decreed by the new government, though the system inherited from Russian rule was so deficient that the goal was barely achieved in the short life of independent Estonia (Raun, 134).

The Soviet regime that took control again in 1939 moved quickly to suppress all possibilities of resistance, executing thousands and deporting to Siberia tens of thousands of leading Estonian citizens. Even in the face of impending war with Germany, the Soviets remodeled Estonian education, deporting or executing all schoolteachers considered unreliable– about 10 percent of the total, initially – and abolishing all private schools and religious instruction in state schools. As was already the practice in the Soviet Union, “all subjects were henceforth to be taught in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.” Books published before 1940 were destroyed in large numbers, including 70,000 volumes of theology (Raun, 154-55).

After World War II and several years of German occupation, the campaign to achieve the complete "sovietization" of Estonian life was resumed; farms were collectivized, landowners and their families were deported to the Gulag (from 8 to 12 percent of the rural population in March 1949), together with many of the clergy, and religious literature was banned (Raun, 176-88).
Resistance to Soviet rule, though largely suppressed during the period of Stalinism and its aftermath, began to emerge in the late 1960s. At first, the protests had to do with abuse of human rights, but gradually Estonian nationalism became the predominant theme. The steady influx of Russian workers into the Baltic republics, the most industrialized section of the Soviet Union, led to fears that the Estonian language and culture would be overwhelmed; “will the nation disappear?” they asked. For example, only

17 percent of the television programming provided in 1980 was in Estonian. There was growing pressure to use Russian, though Estonians were very resistant to making it their first language (Kionka, 23; Raun, 195-97, 205).

Despite pressures to use Russian, as the unifying language of the Soviet Union, most parents continued to take advantage of their right under Soviet law to send their children to schools using the prevalent language of their republic. This inclination did not change significantly in the second generation to live under Soviet rule, even as the proportion of Estonians in the population of the republic dropped from 74.6 percent in 1959 to 61.5 percent in 1989. In 1956-57, 77 percent of the elementary and secondary schools used Estonian as the primary language of instruction, and the proportion fell only to 73 percent in 1972, rising back to 77 percent in 1988. Although there was strong interest in Estonian-medium instruction, however, actual treatment of the two languages was by no means equitable, especially with the drive to teach more Russian that began in 1981. The study of Russian began in the first grade of Estonian schools, while that of Estonian began in the third grade of Russian schools in Estonia; moreover, Estonian schools were required to provide nearly three times as many periods of Russian instruction as Russian schools provided of Estonian instruction (Misiunas, 214; Hilkes, 38).

In April 1988, resistance to Soviet – and Russian – hegemony came to a head with a declaration drawn up by leaders in Estonian cultural organizations, charging that the relationship between the Soviet Union and its republics was responsible for “an unprofitable economy, uncontrolled migration, increased risk of an ecological catastrophe, and failure to satisfy the population's social and cultural needs.” A declaration of “sovereignty,” the right to veto all Soviet laws, was adopted seven months later. Sixteen months after that – March 1990 – the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared that it was moving toward restoration of the pre-1940 independent status (Hosking, 96; Diuk and Karatnycky, 130).

Since declaring full independence in 1991, Estonia has been vigorous in asserting its distinctive cultural identity and seeking to reduce Russian influence. Although almost one-third of the population is Russian, only those whose families lived in the country before the Soviet takeover were initially granted citizenship. Others will have the option of becoming citizens in 1993, after elections in which they will not be allowed to vote. Language requirements intended to substitute Estonian for Russian in all public transactions have been especially galling, and the Russian Federation Parliament accused Estonia of violating the rights of Russians on its territory.

Estonian educators have developed textbooks and other materials; retraining of teachers was needed in the case of history, but also in literature and other subjects. New methods of teaching have been introduced. In the initial years of restored independence, reform was largely a grass-roots phenomenon with great variation throughout the country in the extent and direction of change. Multiple well-intentioned but often uncoordinated foreign initiatives and pilots both stimulated reform and contributed indirectly to the lack of coherence in education reform. Frequent changes in governments and ministers of education have created serious problems in sustaining national educational policy. There is a permanent educational reform in Estonia.

The Structure of Schooling

Pre-school education

Pre-school enrolment dropped precipitously following independence;, many families tried to raise their children at home. The result has been an unequal level of development before entering the compulsory education. Estonia is now taking steps to strengthen pre-school education including strengthening the requirements for teacher preparation and the initiatives to achieve the goal of ensuring that *all* young children are prepared to enter school.

It is not compulsory to attend pre-school in Estonia. The parent or parents have the responsibility to ensure that a child has an adequate primary education and local municipalities are required to maintain the pre-schools and offer a variety of types of primary education.

Pre-primary institutions are for children aged up to age 7. In order to improve their children's readiness for basic school, most parents of 5-6-year-olds try to make the most of opportunities offered by pre-school establishments. Special school preparation groups are also quite common, although attendance at them is not a pre-condition for entry to the first grade.

Pre-primary school groups are based on the age of children, as follows: 1-2 years, 2-3, 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6, with 7 the upper age limit; sometimes, combined groups bring together children of different ages. Groups are not based on children's level of personal development. Evaluation is informal and plays no part in the possible transfer of children from one group to another.

Special pre-school learning groups and institutions support children who have problems with their eyesight, hearing or speaking, or who have physical or mental handicaps. The number of children in these groups is usually smaller. In addition, family advice centres have been established to run regular rehabilitation sessions for children unable to attend pre-primary institutions.

The number of pre-school children in classes immediately preceding basic school is greater than in pre-school classes for the very youngest. The maximum class size is determined by law.

Kindergartens are mainly owned by local governments, but there are also some private kindergartens. Public kindergartens have their "attendance districts" and all children from this district should be admitted. In Tallinn and in Ida-Virumaa County, 64 to 65% of all 0-6 year olds were in kindergartens but in Jõgeva and Põlva Counties, only 27% to 28%.

In the last few years, many new forms of education and care have emerged, including private kindergartens, children's centres, groups to help children with special needs cope and parental counselling sessions. Many schools also organize preparatory classes for 6 year-olds who have not been to kindergarten. About one-tenth of all 6-year-old children join these groups.

In fact there are waiting lists for many kindergartens and some parents have to find another kindergarten or keep their children at home.
Pre-school education institutions receive their funding from the local budget and parents. Parents contribute to teaching and catering expenses in a proportion decided by the local authority. The amounts parents pay in fees can be means-tested at the discretion of local councils. The maximum amount parents have to pay per child cannot exceed 20% of the official minimum salary.

Basic school and upper secondary school

The March 1992 Law on Education established compulsory lower secondary education in grades 1-9 (normally corresponding to ages 7-15/16). Compulsory education begins in the first full school year after children have reached age 7. However, students whose seventh birthday is in September begin school in the same September. Compulsory education continues until students have satisfactorily completed basic education, or have reached the age of 17. Since then eleven years of schooling have been compulsory.

After satisfactorily completing basic school, pupils are entitled to continue their education free of charge in upper secondary education schools *(gümnaasium)* or vocational education institutions (*kutseõppeasutused*).

Basic schools and upper secondary schools are usually owned by municipalities. As a rule, twelve grades are in the same school, though in smaller schools there are only nine grades or even fewer. If there are few pupils, two or three grades may study in the same classroom. The state runs the schools for students with special needs and also some special gymnasiums (for sciences and for Swedish language). There are a few gymnasiums offering only secondary education without lower grades. There are also many private schools; all Steiner schools are private.

The state finances the salaries of teaching staff, school heads and their deputies and the expenses for textbooks for all schools, regardless of their ownership, up to the end of upper secondary education, in accordance with the number of students at the school concerned. All other expenses are borne by the authority responsible for the school (whether the central government, a municipality or a private concern).

Schools have their own budgets, which includes funds for major or minor construction work, and expenditure for running costs and the salaries of staff other than teachers, heads and deputy heads.

The Legal Framework

In 1992 Estonia established a Constitution (based largely on the earlier Constitution) and the Law on Education (*Eesti Vabaariigi Haridusseadus)* was adopted on 23 March 1992, setting forth the general principles of the Estonian educational system. The law enunciated the following general goals:

> To promote the development of personality, family and the Estonian nation, as well as of national minorities, of Estonian economic, political, and cultural life and of nature preservation in the global economic and cultural context.
> To educate loyal citizens; and
> To create the prerequisites for continuing education for all.

In the period since 1992, Estonia has made step-by-step progress in establishing and refining the legal framework for the education system. Other significant laws include:

> The Law on Basic and Upper Secondary Schools *(P hikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus)* of September 1993, setting forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing state and municipal primary schools, basic schools and gymnasia, as well as the principles governing basic and general secondary education.
> The Law on Adult Education (*Täiskasvanute koolituse seadus)* of November 1993, setting forth the legal conditions for training adults, along with legal guarantees for lifelong learning in accordance with the wishes of the persons concerned.
> The Law on Private Schools *(Erakooliseadus)* of June 1998, setting forth the conditions for establishing such schools as the property of private individuals or legal entities, together with the principles for operating these institutions and the requirements for education that the schools deliver.
> The Law on Pre-School Childcare Institutions (*Koolieelse Iasteasutuse seadus)* of March 1999 sets forth the conditions for establishing, operating and closing pre-school institutions in municipalities, as well as the principles governing the pre-school education system. In 1996 a national curriculum was adopted with assessment and testing policies drawing on the expertise of foreign advisors and reflecting the best practice of many Western countries. The National Curriculum for Pre-school Education governs the work of pre-school institutions as well as providing the basis for family advice services.

In Estonia there has been a broad discussion around the concept "Learning Estonia", developed by the Academic Council convened by the President of the Republic of Estonia, "Estonian Education Strategy" compiled by the Ministry of Education and "Estonian Education Scenarios 2015" designed by the task force of the Committee of the Education Forum.

Several laws establish the rights of children and adolescents to be educated and delineate the extent of compulsory education. These include the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia; the Law on Education of 1992, the Law on Basic and Upper Secondary Schools of 1998, and the Law on Pre-school Childcare Institutions of 1999. A legal requirement of the Ministry of Education is to provide an education to all children living in Estonia according to their abilities, including children with special needs. In Soviet times, it was believed that some children, because of their differences or disabilities, should not be educated. However, the situation has since improved, as the prevalence of this understanding is diminishing. In contrast to the past, Estonian legislation now supports the education of children with disabilities.

Freedom to establish non-state schools

By the late 1980s, Estonian educators were exploring new possibilities, initially within the Soviet Union, and then increasingly with the realization that full re-establishment of independence was possible. In addition to concerns about the language of instruction and of society, many Estonian parents and educators sought fundamental changes in the nature of schooling. They complained that

> the present centralized school schedule and curriculum plans are oriented toward an impersonal, statistically-average Soviet pupil, giving only second- or third-place consideration to his abilities, preferences, interests, his national, maturational and social particularities. . . . Initiatives by pupils and even by teachers in the school have been limited, which has had serious effects for the entire society (Virkus, 46).

As a result of these frustrations, several alternative schools were established since 1988; early examples (descriptions from Priimägi and Bläsi-Käo) include:

(1) The Music House of the Old City (Vanalinna Muusikamaja) was the first of these schools, seeking, according to one account, to unite Roman Catholic teaching with alternative pedagogies including some derived from the Waldorf schools based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner.
(2) The Kolga School was an "open school" stressing learning through activities, with the major emphasis on communication and on self-knowledge.
(3) The Rosma Free School in Pölva was a Waldorf (Steiner) school, occupying the former home of an Estonian education reformer, renovated for this purpose by the local government.
(4) The Free School of Tartu and the Nömme Free School in Tallinn were other Waldorf school, beginning (as so often) with kindergarten and the intention of adding elementary grades.

Although the Waldorf pedagogy is especially popular for alternative schools, a Finnish school that used the Freinet pedagogy helped to establish a similar school in Järve in Estonia. In Narwa, near the border with Russia, Russian-speaking parents organized an alternative school seeking to develop in children an appreciation of both the Estonian language and culture and also what they consider the authentic, non-Soviet Russian culture.

The Law on Private Schools *(Erakooliseadus)* of June 1998, set forth the conditions for establishing such schools as the property of private individuals or legal entities, together with the principles for operating these institutions and the requirements for education that the schools deliver. A school has to present its

by-law, program of development, curriculum, list of teachers and the rooms for operating a school. It should have also a certain amount of capital to avoid bankruptcy.

In the beginning and middle of the 1990s, many private kindergartens and schools were established. As there have been some problems with the quality of education and some parents or students have lost their money the state is setting more strict rules to open a new (private) school. State supervision is held in private schools like in public schools once in 5 (now in 6) years. As a rule supervisors try to visit all private schools while if fact they are not able to go to all public schools.

Home schooling

Home schooling is regulated by a special decree of the Ministry of Education (#24 of the 18th of July 2000. A student has to go to school, but the parents may ask an exemption for the first six grades, sometimes giving as a reason the values, beliefs, and principles of the parents. The parents may ask for this right until the 20th of August. The child remains on the list of the school and gets textbooks from the school, but parents are responsible for the teaching. The child may participate in some lessons (music, arts, physical education, crafts) together with other pupils.

Home schooling may also be justified by the mental or physical health of a child or youth from the first till the ninth grade. In this case teaching is organized by the schools, teachers go home or the student comes to school once a twice a week. There are 6-8 lessons a week. They may participate in some lessons (music, arts, physical education, manual training) together with other pupils. Home schooled pupils have to pass examinations in the local school.

Home schooling is also organized in hospitals by a school appointed by the local government.
A pupil with special needs may also be given an individual curriculum and has no obligation to attend lessons (Minister of Education 12. September 1997 #17).

It is possible to graduate from a gymnasium by passing the examinations as an extern, but this is not possible in elementary school.

School choice not limited by family income

Estonia has paid much attention to civil liberties, but the differences between family incomes have increased rapidly. Tuition is free in public schools, students use textbooks owned by their school and the first four grades get free meal at school. Local governments help the poorest students to buy necessary study materials and pay for their meals. Local governments provide transportation to school. There are also some public boarding schools for pupils whose home circumstances prevent learning.

Private schools are more expensive than public schools, although they get paid by the state like public schools, but this is not the main problem. School choice is not limited directly, but indirectly. Some public schools are allowed to choose their students and have entrance examinations. Not all families can afford extra preparation or these examinations.

So-called street-children comprise the most difficult group of children who do not go to school. In addition to children without a home or parents, this group also includes boys and girls who are members of a family but whose parents do not care for them. These children usually spend time with street-gangs instead of going to school. On the street, some develop an addiction to drugs and others become thieves

or beggars. When the problem was first acknowledged a few years ago, Estonians were shocked by the existence of street-children; unfortunately, the problem continues to exist.

In some counties there are no vocational secondary schools and parents have to send their children to other counties.

Distinctive character

On the basis of the national curriculum each kindergarten works out its own curriculum. Rather than regulating the time spent on specific activities, the national curriculum defines the fields, subject matter, knowledge and skills that have to be presented to or acquired by children. A pre-school institution is entitled to draw up its plan of activity and daily work schedule, in accordance with national tradition and the cultural peculiarities of its region. The local government authority determines which language should be used in institutions employing only a single language for their classes.

Teaching staff are responsible for methods of instruction and materials used in support. Institutions have to establish rules for the effective evaluation of teaching and children's progress, in accordance with curricular requirements.

Several novel practices have emerged, including family care, the setting up of "integration" groups (in which children with special needs are able to mix with other children and develop alongside them while remaining close to home), family advice services, and the establishment of private kindergartens and centres for children. Step-by-step program is used in many public kindergartens. Private kindergartens may use different approaches.

The national curriculum provides a list of compulsory subjects with a syllabus (list of subject content) and study time (number of lessons) for each subject. The curriculum provides directions for optional subjects and requirements for completing stages of education (stage I: grades 1-3; stage II: grades 4-6; stage III: grades 7-9; stage IV: gymnasium) and school (primary: stages I-III; secondary: stage IV).

Each school has to work out its own curriculum and decide how to organize teaching and which textbooks and other materials they use. Some schools are specialized on some subjects and instead of optional subjects they teach English, mathematics and other main subjects. Others may teach very different subjects from tourism, economy or philosophy to car driving. For some years gymnasiums were oriented only to universities, but in recent years vocational disciplines have also been included in gymnasium curricula.

The real character of a school first of all depends on its teachers. It may officially be a language school, but the results may be better in sciences, or vice versa.

Private schools have to be more creative to compete with public schools, so they may co-operate more with parents and use different approaches.

Schools and kindergartens function in Estonian or in Russian. There are also some schools and kindergartens for Russian-speaking students which instruct in Estonian for some or all subjects. Schools are also free in choosing second languages to teach. Usually, the first foreign language is English, but in some schools it is German, French or Russian. Swedish, Finnish, Latin, Japanese and other languages are also taught in Estonian schools. Some private schools for foreigners instruct through English.

Decisions about admitting pupils

Admittance to public schools is regulated by the Ministry of Education (#10 of July 16th 1994).

Public kindergartens and basic schools have to admit all students from their service territory/catchment area. They may select only on the basis of the language level of the students.

Some basic schools and all gymnasiums do not have an attendance catchment area and admit all students on the basis of their own selection procedures, which must be approved by the county government. There are no public regulations for admission to private kindergartens and schools.

The State recognizes that all children have an equal right to education. Children with special needs (*e.g*. children with disabilities) must be provided with opportunities for learning in special schools created for that purpose. In every county, commissions of specialist counselors are responsible for recommending for disabled children an appropriate curriculum or school type. With parental consent, they also have the right to send children to a so-called "sanatorium school," which is a special school specifically catering to the needs of children with chronic diseases or to the special school for disabled children. Also, upon application from the parent(s), the commission may decide to extend the period for fulfilling the educational obligation.

The establishment of classes for children with special needs within state or municipal schools is regulated by the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act. These class lists are drawn according to the specific health problems and disabilities of the children. Children with moderate and severe mental disabilities are taught the national curriculum in "coping schools" focusing on the development of life skills. Aside from addressing the curriculum, Estonian law guarantees children a number of rights, including the right to receive support for the development of their hobbies.

In 1998/99, special education was provided for 10.9% of students at basic school level (with 2.9% attending special schools and classes). Every attempt is made to place children with only minor disabilities into mainstream schools, reserving special schools for those with more serious problems.

Decisions about staff

The headmaster is hired by the owner of the school (usually the municipal government) for 5 years, while all other staff are hired and fired by the headmaster without deadlines on the basis of recommendations of a commission appointed by the owner. The state has fixed the minimum qualification level (university teacher training, special courses for headmasters, etc).

There is no right to discriminate on the basis of sex (although most of teachers are women and sometimes an idea of positive discrimination is recommended) or religion. There have been some cases, where a teacher has been fired for religious propaganda which was not allowed by the owner and the parents.

Depending on qualifications, effectiveness of work and length of service, a teacher is appointed to the position of: junior teacher (junior vocational teacher, junior kindergarten teacher, etc.), teacher (vocational teacher, kindergarten teacher, etc.), senior teacher (senior vocational teacher, senior kindergarten teacher, etc.) and teacher-methodologist (vocational teacher-methodologist, kindergarten teacher-methodologist, etc.). A teacher is appointed to the one position, regardless of the number of subjects taught; the position is valid in all institutions of the same type. Teachers undergo attestation by the director of the institution, or an institutional or inter-institutional attestation commission (senior teachers), or an attestation commission established by the Ministry of Education (teacher-methodologist).

On the basis of qualifications and length of service, the Ministry has established salary levels for educational workers. These salary levels apply for teachers and directors with higher education. The salary for a certain level must not exceed the minimum salary of the next level. Salaries for teachers and directors with post-secondary technical education are lower than the salaries of their colleagues with higher education. The salary for a deputy director (instruction and education) is 5-15% less than the salary of the director and the salary for a head of a department is 15-25% less than the director's. A class teacher has a salary 5-15% higher than a subject teacher, and the salaries for special teachers are 1.2-2 times higher. Teachers in regional priority areas (north-eastern Estonia, small islands) have higher salaries (20-30%), as do state language teachers.

Fifty percent extra of the salary paid for a certain level can be paid for additional tasks and for effective results. The director also has the right to pay one-off additional payments and bonuses that are not limited by the restrictions described above. They have also a right to decide the amount of lessons (from 18 to 24) a teachers has to give and pay additional salary for lessons over this amount. This gives the director an opportunity to motivate teachers.

The director of an institution establishes in the employment contract for each teacher the hours of direct instruction, the general working time and salary level at the beginning of every study year. The basis for this is the state curriculum and the salary fund allocated to the educational institution.

In basic, upper-secondary and vocational schools where the language of instruction is not Estonian, the monthly salary for teachers of Estonian is increased depending on their qualifications and years worked in the school.

The state pays salaries of teachers directly to municipalities based on a formula (key factors include the number of students and location of school in an urban or rural area). Local authorities may

decide how many teachers to hire and whether to pay them bonuses. Municipalities are responsible for providing space, maintenance, and equipment. On average between 40 to 50% of municipal budgets is spent on education.

The reality is that many of Estonia's municipalities are too small or otherwise do not have the capacity in either fiscal or public administration capacity to assume fully their education as well as other critical responsibilities. The Estonian Constitution establishes a one-tier local government and delegates extensive powers to the municipalities. The transition from Soviet party political administration to locally governed units following restoration of Estonian independence was an important change, but it placed
extraordinary new responsibilities at the local level.

Accountability for school quality

Estonia has established an elaborate system of externally set and/or administered tests, including national assessment efforts for grade 3 and 6 and national tests for grade 9 and 12 exams. The grade 12 examination fulfils the functions of a school leaving and a university entrance exam, a feature that, among the Central and Eastern European countries, Estonia thus far shares only with Slovenia.

Standards

All external assessment efforts are based on the National Curriculum, which also gives guidelines for internal assessment, to be based on school-specific curricula. The new core curriculum (adopted in 1996; implementation started in 1997) gives attainment targets for all subjects for grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12. It is clear that these are not specific enough to be used as assessment standards. Also grade or level-descriptors are lacking. Efforts are being made to define at least a minimum level for grade 12 tests.

The National Examination Tests and National Assessment Tests ("Progress Tests") play an important role in specifying and communicating the objectives of the new core curriculum.

The law prescribes certain subjects to be examined at certain stages and gives directions for a marking and grading system (changes made in the Law on Education passed by the Parliament on 18 March, 1997). Administrative aspects are set by ministerial decree.

Examinations

National exams are held at the end of grade 9 and grade 12 of general education. In vocational schools there are only school exams. Grade 9 exams consist of compulsory tests for mathematics and mother tongue, and one optional test. Grade 12 national exams consist of five tests, three of which should be external and two may be school based. Of the external ones, the mother tongue test (a five-hour written essay) is compulsory. The national tests for modern foreign languages have an oral part, which is administered internally.

Different question formats are used: constructed response, multiple choice and oral. Modern foreign language tests are proficiency tests in the true sense, setting out to test all four skills. Other tests are mostly testing knowledge and algorithms in an academic context, but an effort is made to add some questions of an applied character.

Exams for grade 9 are graded on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being highest. For grade 12 exams, only raw scores are given. There is no cut-off (pass) score as the minimum level has not yet been determined. Passing grade 9 exams gives immediate access to upper-secondary education.

Universities accept Grade 12 exams as entrance exams. As for the moment there are more applicants than places for many (especially the more prestigious) university studies, universities have some selection procedures in place, based either on average examination marks and interviews, or on entrance tests for the major subject. The rapidly dwindling number of school leavers may influence this practice in the near future.

National Assessment Tests began in 1997. Each year, representative samples of 1 000 students from grades 3 and 6 are tested on reading comprehension (language of instruction) and mathematics to check mastery of a pre-set minimum level. The results are analysed according to average scores for the whole population and some sub-groups related to gender, ethnicity and location (urban/rural). From 1999 onwards test and item analyses will be conducted and all schools will receive feedback on their results. Results from grade 9 and 12 tests are analysed and used in a similar way.

International Comparison

Estonia is represented in some International Subject Olympiads, and, more importantly, is taking part in the IEA civics survey for age 14 and 16. Estonia has not participated in other international studies such as TIMSS or PISA, but has decided to participate in TIMSS.

Teaching of values

The National Curriculum consists of the following sections:

General Goals. A list of general attitudinal "goals" (*e.g.* "respect of home and family") and affective goals (*e.g.* "love their homeland"), and a set of functional skills (*e.g.* "obtaining and using information").

General Principles. A set of general criteria for teaching in Estonian schools that should be reflected in school curricula, such as "equal opportunities for receiving education" and "humanism and democracy". The general principles emphasise the responsibility students should take for their own learning and the fact that this should prepare them for their future life as a citizen of Europe and the world. The learning tasks should focus on the capacity of solving problems, making choices and taking decisions.

The competencies are very broadly formulated. Competencies connected to "development of opinions" for the different stages may serve as an example:

Stage I: The student understands that people, their opinions and their wishes differ.

Stage II: the student recognises the differences between people, views, and situations and takes these into account when communicating with other people.

Stage III: the student is able to see problems and situations form the point of view of other people.

Stage IV: the student has a critical attitude towards mass media and mass culture.

Underlying the competencies as formulated for different stages is a specific pedagogic conception of the development of students during their schooling: starting from an orientation of the child on the relation between the I/we/ home and the home region during stage I, via the I/we/home and Estonia during stage II and the I and surrounding people and the world during stage III to the relation between the I and the region, Estonia, Europe, the world and the universe in stage IV.

A school has to include religious lessons into their curriculum, if parents ask it. Parents may also ask to include their mother tongue and their culture into the curriculum and this will be free of charge.

Curriculum

State curricula for preschools, basic schools and gymnasiums are approved by the Government and for special schools by the Minister of Education. School curricula are sanctioned by the headmaster.

The existence of the curriculum and its accordance with the state curriculum is controlled at the licensing of the school (article 12 prim of the Basic School and Gymnasium Act). A school may lose its license if it does not follow the state curriculum.

One task of state supervision is the evaluation of the accordance of school academic outcomes with the state curriculum (article 48 of the Basic School and Gymnasium Act), a task described in more detail by the Minister of Education. Unfortunately the criteria are not related with curriculum in general.

Article 23 of the Basic School and Gymnasium Act stipulates that text-books and other materials should be in accordance with the curriculum. In fact, this concurrence has not yet been accomplished. State exams, text-books and study-aids include more facts than prescribed in the Curriculum. In some subjects such as history there are informal agreements that state exams do not deal the whole curriculum, but only some themes and more deeply.

There is no legal precedent of student applications to the courts against such state exams. Students may apply against their results of state exams but not against the exams themselves. Schools and other interested persons can apply only on the basis of general principles of law but our legal system is too young for such legal actions.

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