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IMPLEMENTING THE “EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010” WORK PROGRAMME

2005 Progress Report



National Contact Person:

Ms Inita Juhnevica (inita.juhnevica@izm.gov.lv)

Commission Contact Persons:

Ms Luce Pépin (Luce.Pepin@cec.eu.int)

Mr Sebastian Volkers (Sebastian.Volkers@cec.eu.int)

NATIONAL REPORT

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010

National Report on the progress of implementation of the European Commission's programme *Education and Training 2010* in Latvia

Riga, 2005

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1. Introduction

Education in modern Europe is viewed in connection with the diversity of society, economic and social rights of individuals, human rights, equity and gender equality. Education processes are not perceived unambiguously either. Today education is not only teaching and learning; it includes also lifelong learning, mobility integration, further education, self-evaluation and other areas. In order to create a democratic education space in modern Europe, it is necessary to have public responsibility, unity, social cohesion, the ability to change and improve.

Over the past few years the Latvian education system has improved and has become a component of the European education system. Its development is planned taking into account international basic approaches in the field of education. Ministers of education of European countries have agreed on three major goals to be achieved by 2010 for the benefit of the population and the European Union (EU) as a whole:

- to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems;
- to ensure that they are accessible to all;
- to open up education and training to the wider world.

In accordance with EU strategy goals, which are the same as the ones laid out in the Latvian Development Strategy, the main development goals of the Latvian education system, defined also in the Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005, are education quality, effectiveness and accessibility.

Latvia, as an EU member state, has undertaken obligations to implement the goals set in the **Lisbon strategy**, and by 2010, together with other EU member states, create the EU economy which is the most competitive and dynamic in the world. The current situation in the Latvian and EU labour market requires lifelong learning and improvement of professional skills, and this process is being more and more supported both by the state and employers.

When implementing a national programme Development and Implementation of a Lifelong Learning Strategy aimed at the development of **lifelong learning**, a uniform state strategy for lifelong learning and its implementation programme will be developed; organizational, informative and educational support for the development of lifelong education programmes in regions will also be provided.

- The national programme will ensure the creation of a uniform conceptual approach to lifelong learning thus helping each region individually and the state as a whole to gather information on the existing education resources and to define the necessary development trends. In order to reduce social and economic disparities, the programme will ensure education planning in compliance with regional economic development plans. Regions will have a possibility to get the necessary support for human resources development.

- Focus will be on developing civic, educated and economically active society which, in its turn, will ensure the increase of the population's welfare level.

According to the Lisbon strategy goals, it is essential to ensure quality vocational education in line with the labour market demand. Reforms carried out in this field in Latvia foresee to update the curriculum of vocational education in line with the labour market requirements, to include practical use of theoretical knowledge in education programmes, as well as to enhance the increase of the proportion of students in engineering programmes. The readiness of pedagogues to promote the acquisition and

improvement of pupils' skills and provision of a respective material and technical basis are also important.

Currently EU goals are aimed at enhancing short-term study visits of professionals of various fields to other countries to gain experience. This idea is closely linked with the **Bologna process** – the creation of a common higher education area in Europe. In accordance with the Bologna process, mobility of students has been especially promoted. In order to further develop mobility in Latvia, particularly its enhancement in higher education establishments, the following activities have been foreseen: practical use of the created system in higher education, increase of financial support, and popularization of good practices. It is important to introduce *Europass*, a single European framework for qualifications and competencies, since documents contained by it provide significant support for the implementation of education mobility, as well as promote mobility in vocational education.

Education policy is crucial for achieving the aforementioned goals. The development and implementation of an effective education strategy is based on several principles that include access to information, cooperation, systemic approach, continuity and sustainability.

Factors influencing the development of these processes have to be taken into account when implementing education policy planning initiatives and activities. Regarding the priorities set out in the programme Education and Training 2010, the following factors hinder to fully develop national education and training policy fields:

- the labour market demand is insufficiently harmonized with the education supply;
- insufficient resources for renewal and upgrading of the material and technical basis of education institutions;
- insufficient financial resources for the creation of new study places in the thematic fields of science and mathematics, as well as engineering and technology education;
- negative features regarding the number and age structure of academic staff;
- insufficient international mobility of students and university lecturers;
- the slow pace of the state territorial and administrative reform which hampers designing of regional development plans and planning of human resources;
- insufficient cooperation between professional education institutions and employers.

In order to promote participation of local governments and employers, international comparability of vocational education programmes has been enhanced, competitiveness of labour force has increased in the local and foreign labour market. A uniform assessment of educatees' learning results has been ensured, a uniform procedure for centralized professional qualification examinations has been introduced in the systems of primary vocational and further vocational education. In the context of lifelong learning, the normative and legislative basis has been put in place with regard to the fields of general, vocational and higher education. An optimal network of all level and type education establishments and education support institutions exists in the country. Cooperation with social partners has been determined at political level.

When developing an education policy and defining further development needs, a situation analysis is carried out in Latvia and progress towards achieving the Lisbon strategy goals has been assessed. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia is planning new education policy initiatives and activities connected with the implementation of this strategy by taking into account both public development priorities

and economic growth of the European common area. The goals and recommendations of the Lisbon strategy will be taken into account when designing a development concept paper of the Ministry of Education and Science for the time period of 2006-2009.

2. Increasing the effectiveness of education reforms

2.1. Identification of national priorities

Changes in today's society and economy set new requirements for the education system. It must be qualitative, effective with regard to expenses, and accessible for each inhabitant of Latvia. Support provided by the state to education and science can substantially influence Latvia's further development. It has been mentioned in the long-term economic strategy of Latvia that the significance of social policy and investments in education and science is increasing within the context of economic policy.

Investments in education are one of the main conditions of Latvia's successful economic development, since education promotes social, economic and cultural progress, tolerance and international cooperation. Investments in the development of education increase the national budget income both directly and indirectly.

The increase in salaries of pedagogues, scientists and academic personnel supplements the national budget in terms of personal income tax and compulsory social insurance contributions. Investments in education development increase employment and decrease unemployment thus diminishing the amount of social costs to be covered by the budget. Investments in higher education, in promotion of innovations and research are the basis for economic development in a longer term and for the growth of the gross domestic product.

Discussions on further trends of the Latvian education system development have been taking place since Latvia regained its independence. Education system democratization and decentralization took place from 1990 to 1994. Changes were mainly connected with transformation of the system to meet the needs of an independent and democratic state.

From 1995 to 2001 special attention was paid to putting in place the education system by substantially supplementing the normative and legislative basis. The Law on Higher Education Institutions created a principally new legal basis for functioning of higher education institutions and established autonomy of higher education establishments for the implementation of higher education. Interoperability of the state higher education with requirements of the European and world education area enhanced rapid increase of the number of higher education institutions and students. In 1997 integration of research institutes into higher education establishments started in order to ensure the development of quality study programmes.

The Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005 underpins the third development stage of the education system. Cooperation between education policy makers and its executors – the Ministry of Education and Science, municipal education boards, pedagogues' professional organizations, designers of vocational and higher education programmes, and employers, as well as public awareness raising and public involvement in education development processes have been particularly important during this period of time.

The Education Development Concept Paper provides the education system development goals and action trends for their achievement.

The **overarching goal** of the Education Development Concept Paper is:

To carry out the necessary changes in the education system that would enhance building of a knowledge-based, democratic and socially integrated society, that would increase competitiveness of the Latvian population and economy, and that would simultaneously preserve and develop cultural values typical for Latvia.

The **goals** of the Education Development Concept Paper are as follows:

Increase education quality in all stages and types of education and shape it according to the public and economic development needs.

Education quality in all its stages and types is a crucial factor for successful development of Latvia and for competitiveness. According to the education quality studies carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), achievements of Latvia's educatees are, on the whole, in line with the proportion of resources invested in education, and regarding science, the progress is even higher than that of educatees of other countries. However, concerning basic education, acquisition of theoretical knowledge still dominates. Skills of practical use of knowledge are insufficient, and the skills of independent thinking are not sufficiently developed during the education process. Results of OECD studies show that the objectives of the curricular reform are correct, however, in future it is necessary to focus more on the implementation of the reform by providing pedagogues with further education opportunities, appropriate teaching aids and methodology, as well as by strengthening the link among education, science and economy, and by enhancing cooperation between employers and education institutions. The aforementioned measures will provide an opportunity to improve the ability of the education system to respond to the changes of demand in the labour market.

The insufficient number of qualified specialists has been indicated in the National Development Plan as one the most critical factors for Latvia's socio-economic development. Latvian labour force is educated in most of the operation areas (including middle and top management staff), but it is not qualified enough to get effectively adjusted to the changing requirements of market economy. Provision of new basic skills meeting today's requirements for all Latvia's population, and quality of vocational and higher education are crucially important for Latvia's socio-economic development.

Ensure education accessibility for the population of Latvia in the context of lifelong learning

The problem of education accessibility manifests itself as disparities in the provision of quality education in the countryside and cities. Education services are not equally accessible for children with special needs, for children from needy and risk families. A big part of the population is not able to overcome financial obstacles due to low salaries, expensive transport and cost of living, and because people have to pay for higher and further education. The mentioned factors hamper the population's involvement in all level further education within the context of lifelong learning.

The rapidly growing demand for higher education has been largely met due to paid studies; therefore the accessibility of higher education is cumbersome for the needy

population. The study loan system has been introduced to prevent this situation, however, its operation needs improvement.

The accessibility of quality education is connected with the location of education institutions; with possibilities of social partners and local governments to get involved in the provision of education; and with regional economic activity and the consequent public welfare level. Therefore, it is necessary to substantially improve cooperation among ministries, local governments and other institutions in order to ensure coordinated implementation of the state policies whose objectives are to overcome social problems, reduce poverty, achieve balanced regional development, create new jobs and develop qualified labour force meeting the requirements of the labour market.

Increase cost-effectiveness of education in all stages and types of education

Changes in education are carried out by using financial resources provided mainly by the state. Insufficiently effective use of finances invested in education can restrict education quality and accessibility. The increase of cost-effectiveness in Latvia is possible in all stages and types of education.

2.2. Link between national priorities and European goals in education

The Education Development Concept Paper has been developed by taking into account the objectives and courses of action set out in the Latvian Long-term Economic Strategy, National Development Plan, National Employment Plan, European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, and bearing in mind public and education development guidelines provided in the UNESCO programme Education for All, as well as in other education policy planning documents.

This four-year period has set special tasks determined by Latvia's integration into the European Union. The education system of Latvia has to ensure compliance of education to be acquired with the increasing requirements regarding education quality and competitiveness on the global scale. Living standard of Latvia's society and development of the country in the future depend on education effectiveness and quality, on the public preparedness for professional work and free competitiveness in the European common economic space. Further tasks of the education system are in line with the long-term objectives of education development providing the necessity to ensure education quality, accessibility and cost-effectiveness.

The major **action trends** that are implemented within the context of Latvia's education reforms and that are in line with internationally set goals in education are as follows:

- broadening of adult education opportunities by ensuring a professionally oriented lifelong learning offer;
- promotion of integration of educatees with special needs into general, vocational, higher and interest education programmes;
- broadening of vocational education accessibility;
- improvement of the pre-school education system;
- provision of informatization of the education system;
- introduction of an internationally comparable system of education indicators;
- provision of vocational and higher education quality in line with the labour market demand.

2.3. Monitoring and evaluation of the education policy

The following basic principles are taken into account during the implementation of changes in the education system according to the developed Concept Paper:

The accessibility principle – all society members have equal opportunities to acquire education.

The conformity principle – interests of individuals, public development tendencies and economic needs are taken into account when planning changes in the education system.

The public participation principle – experience and recommendations of educators, nongovernmental professional organizations and beneficiaries of education services are used for the implementation of changes.

The lifelong learning principle – foresees within the education system an opportunity for members of the public to acquire knowledge throughout their lifetime by increasing qualification or obtaining another qualification in line with the labour market requirements.

The coordination principle – implements an integrated approach for planning and implementation of changes by providing uniform administration and coordination of changes among different education stages and types.

The purpose principle – planning of changes is result-oriented in education institutions; education development priorities are assessed and set at all levels during the planning process.

The succession principle – results of the previous reforms are evaluated before starting the new ones, and the positively evaluated initiatives are continued.

The control principle – supervision is foreseen in all levels of education development planning, and reports on the implementation of the set objectives are prepared.

The implementation of reforms is ensured by structural units and subordinate institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as by other central public administration institutions involved in the implementation of the education policy. The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates the operation of the central public administration institutions, as well as municipal education boards and establishments regarding the implementation of the Concept Paper. At the end of each year the Ministry prepares and submits to the Cabinet a report on the implementation of the Concept Paper.

In order to have an objective opinion concerning the achievement of the set goals in the Latvian education system, pupils' achievements have to be assessed on a regular basis, as well as a detailed analysis of school work quality must be carried out. Thus the effectiveness of the Latvian education system can be determined and compared to education systems of other countries. Consequently, an overall assessment of the interaction among the economic, social and education fields can be carried out.

The Programme for International Student Assessment 2006 of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is used to determine pupils' achievements in the European context. The analysis and assessment provide an opportunity to develop the education policy based on facts, i.e. pupils' achievements.

In order to obtain credible and safe data for the analysis and development of the education policy, a unified education quality assessment system has been introduced in the country in 2005. This system provides the use of the same criteria both for the school work self-evaluation and external evaluation. The new education quality evaluation system is in line with EU recommendations which foresee to ensure a link between the school work self-evaluation and external evaluation. The State Agency for Evaluation of General Education Quality is being established to ensure a unified school work quality evaluation procedure. The Agency's tasks are: to organize school work quality evaluation; gather and analyze data related to general education quality issues; provide proposals for the improvement of the evaluation methodology and process, as well as for the development of the education policy. Institutionalization of the evaluation process will ensure information accessibility, transparency of the evaluation process and impartiality of results in the field of education.

In order to get integrated into the EU common education area, it is necessary to have a broad overview system allowing to evaluate the progress achieved within the European education context by each country, and at the same time allowing to preserve national identity and cultural values characteristic for individual countries.

3. Implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy

The Lisbon strategy, as a crucial EU strategic document regarding lifelong learning, defines a new goal – progress towards a dynamic, knowledge-based and sustained economic growth. Starting with the discussion of the Lifelong Learning Memorandum in 2002, Latvia has participated in European processes whose objective is to implement measures for the development of a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of lifelong learning at individual and institutional levels, and to achieve broadening of adult education opportunities by providing an offer of professionally oriented lifelong learning.

On the basis of the lifelong learning principle, the main task is to ensure education accessibility to all population groups. Several social exclusion risk groups can be identified in Latvia. Social integration of all groups by providing equal opportunities for them to participate in social and economic life is essential for sustainable economic development of the country.

3.1. Lifelong learning policy

Taking into consideration the projected decrease in the number of working population in the long term (especially during the time period of 2000 to 2010 – by 10%), as well as the goals set in the Lisbon strategy, the introduction of balanced and modern education and employment policies meeting the labour market requirements is one of the preconditions for the creation of competitive economy and labour force in Latvia within the EU and global context.

The creation of a lifelong learning system in Latvia started in 1993 when the Ministry of Education and Science and the German Adult Education Association of the International Cooperation Institution supported the establishment of the Latvian Adult Education Association. One of its major action trends is the strengthening of the lifelong learning system development. Adult education centres and a network of coordinators providing a significant institutional support to further development of lifelong learning are established at municipal level.

The Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005 defines lifelong learning as a priority of the education policy. One of the action trends within the lifelong learning context outlined in this Concept Paper is broadening of adult education opportunities by providing an offer of professionally oriented lifelong learning.

Coordinated implementation of a lifelong strategy

A national programme the Development and Implementation of a Lifelong Learning Strategy has been developed and approved within the framework of European Social Fund. The programme will provide education planning in line with regional economic development plans to reduce social and economic disparities. Regions will have an opportunity to get the necessary support for the development of human resources.

A lifelong learning strategy is being developed in the framework of the national programme. The strategy will define objectives and tasks of lifelong learning until 2010, and will provide division of responsibilities regarding its implementation among the state and local governments, private sector, social partners and individuals. Civic and economically active society will be purposefully developed, which, in its turn, will ensure the increase of the level of population welfare.

The national programme the Development and Implementation of a Lifelong Learning Strategy includes seven projects:

- the development of a lifelong learning strategy and action plan (a national level project);
- regional lifelong learning support system development and capacity strengthening projects (6 similar regional projects covering the whole territory of Latvia).

The implementation of these projects will ensure cooperation among education institutions, adult education centres, local governments, employers and trade unions to promote education accessibility, quality of adult education services and competence of local governments, to plan the development of human resources in line with economic development perspectives of local governments. The most important task of regional project coordinators is active involvement of all regions in project activities, as well as the provision of informative, educational, organizational and technical support to promote activity of regional lifelong learning coordinators. The mentioned activities will ensure the creation of a functioning lifelong learning cooperation network.

In parallel with the planned project informative activities, publicity is provided by reflecting the content and implementation process of the national programme on the home page of the Ministry of Education and Science: www.izm.gov.lv.

The national programme defines the following **long-term** objectives of lifelong learning:

- the introduction of a balanced and modern education system and employment policy meeting the labour market requirements by taking into consideration the projected decrease in the number of working population in the long term (especially during the time period of 2000 to 2010 – by 10%), as well as the goals set by the Lisbon strategy, is one of the preconditions for the creation of competitive economy and labour force in Latvia within the EU and global context;
- provide lifelong learning in line with the population's interests, abilities and regional economic development plans;

- ensure capacity of the education sector for the implementation of a lifelong learning strategy in long term;

Short-term objectives of lifelong learning:

- develop unified conceptual approaches and a strategy regarding lifelong learning;
- define education objectives for the development of human resources in the planning regions concerning economic development goals;
- reduce disparities regarding access to education services among regions of the country and local governments;
- strengthen capacity of the education sector and its influence on the promotion of the population's economic activity;
- enhance cooperation in the planning regions among sectors, fields and institutions in order to plan and coordinate the development of lifelong learning in a harmonized manner.

Priority reforms for the implementation of lifelong learning in the country:

Cooperation in addressing lifelong learning issues

Lifelong learning includes close cooperation of the education sector with other public and nongovernmental sectors. The content, tasks and planned activities of the national programme foresee close cooperation among ministries, local governments, social partners, as well as the public and private sectors throughout all its implementation stages. A supervisory board consisting of delegated representatives of line ministries, regions and respective nongovernmental organizations has been established.

A topical issue in the field of vocational education is the increase of the role of social dialogue by involving social partners in the education process and by improving the quality of vocational education.

For this purpose the Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Sub-Council was established in 2000. It cooperates with nongovernmental organizations and sectoral associations to address various issues. The Sub-Council is a part of the institutional system of the National Tripartite Cooperation Council which was established to promote participation of the state, employers and trade unions in the development of a vocational education strategy and in the implementation of the policy. The Vocational Education and Employment Tripartite Cooperation Sub-council reviews policy planning documents on a regular basis, as well as considers and approves profession standards.

Work is currently going on to set up its structural units in Latvia's regions. They will enhance addressing vocational education issues all over the administrative territory. The first regional Vocational Education and Employment Council was established in Latgale region in 2003, but in the first half of 2004 – in Zemgale region.

Reforms in pre-school and basic school education

To implement the goals regarding lifelong learning set by the Lisbon strategy, reforms have been carried out also at initial stages of education – in pre-school and basic school education. Compulsory preparation of five- and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education was introduced as of 1 September 2002. The normative and legislative basis was established, requirements for education and qualification of pedagogues were defined to ensure compulsory preparation of pre-school age children for school. In order

to implement pre-school education programmes, the following activities have been carried out: a model programme of pre-school education has been developed, a list of compulsory documentation and material basis has been provided, an instruction for registration and enrolment of five- and six-year-old children in the pre-school education programme has been developed. Statistical data show that the number of children up to the age of seven enrolled in pre-school education programmes is increasing every year (in 2004 – 72%).

The acquisition of basic education is also compulsory in Latvia. Data of the school year 2004/2005 show that 93.26% of the children aged from 7 to 15 and 85.33% of the children aged from 16 to 18 have been enrolled in the education system.

In the school year 2003/2004, 64.4% of those who graduated from the 9th grade, continued their education in secondary education programmes; 32.4% - in vocational education programmes, some of which also provide an opportunity to simultaneously acquire secondary education. Approximately 90% of the enrolled educatees finish the acquisition of the general secondary education programme. 70% of those who graduate from the 12th grade continue their studies in higher education programmes; 10% - in vocational education programmes; and 20% - do not continue education.

The analysis of results of 2003 provided by the programme for international student assessment of OECD countries shows substantial improvement of education quality in Latvia in all the surveyed areas (reading, science, mathematics) compared to the results of 2000. The increase of average achievements of Latvia's pupils is mainly due to the fact that results of those pupils, who previously demonstrated low achievements, have improved (source: Learning for Future. Latvia within the International Student Assessment Programme of OECD Countries. Education Research Institute of Latvian University).

The data show that in 2000, 95% of pupils had at least 288 points, but three fourths of schoolchildren had at least 393 points. In 2003, 95% of pupils had at least 339 points, but 75% - at least 424 points respectively. Achievements of 5-10% of the best schoolchildren have not substantially changed (625 and 626 points, and 593 and 596 points respectively).

Improvement of the system for further education of pedagogues

In order to improve the system for further education of pedagogues, measures have been taken in Latvia in the field of provision of lifelong learning and vocational education. In compliance with the Law on Vocational Education adopted in 1999, as of 1 January 2004, only the person, who has respective vocational education (qualification) and pedagogical education, is entitled to work as pedagogue in a professional education institution.

The system for further education of pedagogues includes the improvement of pedagogues' pedagogical knowledge and skills, their technological practice (internship), as well as a complex of methodologies and activities for evaluation of the knowledge and skills (acquired informally) necessary for pedagogue's work.

According to the Education Development Concept Paper 2002-2005, several reforms regarding the system of further education of vocational education pedagogues have been started in Latvia. The implementation of these reforms will provide positive results, e.g. after updating of pedagogues' further education programmes and forms of their

implementation, pedagogues, while continuing their work at a vocational education institution, will have an opportunity to perfect their knowledge and skills in the respective profession, as well as in the following fields: the organization of professional orientation activities; work with risk target group educatees (persons with a low level of preliminary knowledge and children with special needs); the conduction of theoretical and practical classes; the assessment and analysis of educatees' achievements; and the development of methodological materials and education programmes.

In order to follow improvements in the system for further education of pedagogues, data on teachers' distribution according to their education and age, as well as regarding the number of teachers who have improved their professional skills over the past year, and who use computers and the Internet are being compiled.

Improvement of non-formal education

Regarding the field of non-formal education, the Ministry of Education and Science is implementing the education recognition procedure of vocational education pedagogues. During this procedure the Certification Commission assesses the acquired formal and non-formal education of working pedagogues. A Training Programme for Vocational Education Pedagogues has been developed. Its scope is 320 hours; it can be acquired by modules or as a whole. It has been foreseen to certify the pedagogues who acquire the programme by modules. Respective documents (certificates) are submitted to the Certification Commission, and experts assess the conformity of the acquired knowledge and skills to the model programme approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Work has been started to promote the recognition of non-formal education also in other professions.

Education institutions and learning centres offer varied distance learning programmes. Computerization of the school network and libraries provide opportunities for pupils and adults to use IT in the learning process. Within the framework of ESF education institutions can implement projects to improve the existing or develop new education programmes, including distance learning programmes.

Higher education institutions of Latvia implement 97 accredited teacher education and further education programmes. In 2004, approximately 400 further education programmes of pedagogues were implemented; all these programmes were harmonized with the Ministry of Education and Science.

Within the framework of ESF education institutions and learning centres can get support for the implementation of projects aimed at improving pedagogues' competence.

Provision of professional orientation

In order to improve professional orientation at different stages of education, and to reduce the number of learners who start learning, but leave an education institution before graduating from it, a national programme Support to Professional Orientation and to the Introduction of Career Education in the Education System has been developed.

During the implementation of this programme, 3 700 teachers/practitioners of professional orientation will be trained; kits of the developed methodological and informative materials will ensure the implementation of the career education programme at education institutions (at the final stage of basic school, in secondary schools and

vocational secondary education schools) in compliance with the available budgetary funds.

The study programmes for professional orientation consultants, being implemented at higher education institutions, and the prepared teaching staff will provide long-term preparation of qualified specialists for the system of professional orientation and consultations in Latvia.

Informatization of school network

The Ministry of Education and Science has been carrying out the school network informatization process since 1997. Schools are provided with computers and the Internet connection. Teachers' training concerning the use of computers during the learning process is under implementation. On average, there is one computer per 16 educatees in education institutions. Whenever possible, IT is used during the learning process and at qualification examinations. E-learning is widely used during the learning process at higher education institutions and is being introduced also at vocational education institutions. Computer science is a compulsory subject at all education institutions.

Integration of educatees with special needs

Special attention within the education system is paid to educatees with health and mental development disorders. There are 63 special education institutions in the country, including 43 institutions for pupils with mental development disorders, 20 – for pupils with hearing, vision and language disorders. Educatees with different health disorders are being integrated into 29 general education institutions; 34 general education institutions have special classes for educatees with special needs. 43 correctional learning groups operate at vocational education institutions, where educatees with unfinished basic education can acquire education.

Projects promoting accessibility of education institutions for pupils and students with movement disorders are under implementation. Within the framework of ESF education institutions can get support for the implementation of the activity Development and Implementation of Pedagogical Correction Programmes or Rehabilitation Programmes and Courses. An education working group under the auspices of the National Council for Disabled Persons is developing measures regarding the provision of access to education services for persons with health problems.

Preparation and implementation of the curricular reform

Over the past ten years significant changes regarding curricula have taken place in the education system of Latvia. The most important changes during the process of basic education curricular reform are connected with the following aspects: incorporation of modern themes in the curriculum; emphasis on conclusions and skills useful for practical life; incorporation of themes adequate to pupils' age and development in the curriculum; integration of the curriculum and its harmonization with subjects by preventing its overloading or duplication of individual themes; transition from the acquisition of high volumes of information to skills operate with information.

The following ESF projects have been developed: Improvement of Education Programmes Regarding the Primary Vocational Education and Practical Training System in Economically Significant Sectors; Development and Improvement of Study

Programmes in Science and Engineering; and Support to Theoretical and Practical Training for the Improvement of Professional Skills of Academic Teaching Staff and Teachers.

Provision of education opportunities to the population of all ages

The development of vocational further education enhances the provision of the following lifelong learning opportunities:

- to persons irrespective of their age and previous education or professional qualification - to acquire classified professional knowledge and skills meeting the labour market requirements;
- to persons with previous education and professional experience – to acquire professional qualification of a specific level; to persons with qualification – to acquire the highest level professional qualification;
- to the population – to acquire professional education meeting the labour market requirements as close as possible to their place of residence (work), as well as to reduce migration of the economically active population and rural youth;
- prepare the labour force competitive among EU countries;
- to the population of other EU member states – to incorporate in the Latvian labour market;

In order to assess the support provided by the state for lifelong learning and for the increase of education accessibility and opportunities for older population and the employees, the following indicators have been used:

- the number of population (aged 25-64) having at least secondary education;
- the number of population (in 3 age groups) involved in non-formal education;
- the number of population according to gender in proportion to the degree of secondary education involved in non-formal education;
- the number of population according to the employment status (the employed, unemployed, passive job searchers) involved in non-formal education.

3.2. Obstacles for the implementation of the lifelong learning policy and further education needs

After carrying out an education analysis within the lifelong learning context, it can be concluded that **strengths and promoting factors** in addressing lifelong learning issues are as follows:

- legislation regarding the field of general, vocational and higher education has been put in place;
- the Education Law regulates the basic approaches in the Latvian education system;
- an optimal network of all level and types of education establishments and education support institutions exists in the country;
- cooperation with social partners has been defined at political level.

1.1.1. Problems and hindering factors

- Problems related to the state territorial and administrative reform complicate the regional development planning process and the implementation of planned activities, thus also making it difficult to develop human resources.
- Fragmented administration of the vocational education system.
- Insufficient funding for the development of lifelong learning on the whole.

Development perspectives

- During the implementation process of the national programme the Development and Implementation of a Lifelong Learning Strategy, a uniform lifelong strategy and its implementation programme will be developed in the country, as well as an organizational, informative and educational support will be provided for programme development in regions.
- The national programme will provide a unified conceptual approach to lifelong learning thus helping individual regions and the state on the whole to gather information on the existing education resources and to set the necessary development trends. The programme will provide education planning in line with regional economic development plans to reduce social and economic disparities among regions. Regions will have an opportunity to get the necessary support for the development of human resources.
- Civic and economically active society will be purposefully developed, which, in its turn, will ensure the increase of the level of population welfare.

4. Higher education reforms

Integrating into the common European education system, Latvia is in the course through a planned and focused work phase to enforce higher education reforms.

As a member state of the European Union (EU), Latvia has committed its efforts to implement the objectives set in the Lisbon strategy, and along with other EU member states to work to transform the EU economy into the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based global economy. Latvian economic development strategies are in line with the priorities of the Lisbon strategy - to create a knowledge-based economy. To promote economic development and foster its productive capacity, Latvia views the attraction of investment in hi-tech, research and technological platforms as a crucial task along with building an open economy, as well as increasing the capacity of the education system and science.

In line with the requirements of the Lisbon strategy, the declaration of the Government of Latvia states that the Government should work to ensure by the year 2010 the total funding for science at the level of 3% of the GDP, wherein 1% must be state funding.

4.1. Higher education policy priorities

Introduction of Diploma Supplement

Higher education of Latvia supports the Bologna process and there is an overall awareness that this will facilitate the recognition of Latvian diplomas both European- and world-wide. Technical preparatory work has been made for higher education institutions to successfully introduce the single European Diploma Supplement. All the necessary documents have been translated into Latvian. There are detailed instructions for doing the respective paperwork in Latvia (both in Latvian and English). Since 1999 the Academic Information Centre on an annual basis and in accordance with Section 8 of the Diploma Supplement prepares the required description of the Latvian higher education, including information on the specifics of the academic/school year.

Categorization of higher education into academic and professional

The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) opens wider opportunities for European higher education systems and higher education institutions, provided they are open for external cooperation and care for their own competitiveness. Moving towards the EHEA, the categorization of education in academic and professional areas must be revisited because one of the EHEA cornerstones is employment of graduates of all level higher education. Study results attained at each stage are recorded in the diploma and its supplement and graduates of each level must be employed. Solution finding to these issues will determine further development of the scientific degrees structure in Latvia. This also has its impact on the introduction of ECTS, it will facilitate defining short-term higher professional education status, types of documents attesting professional qualification, conditions of the implementation of study programmes.

Introduction of a system of credits

Since 1998 all higher education establishments in Latvia have introduced the system of credits. It is based on the definition that credits reflect student's weekly workload. A full study cycle comprises 40 credits. Taking into consideration the fact that European countries, including those that had their own national systems of credits, are introducing ECTS, Latvia has to gradually introduce the allocation of credits in line with the ECTS system.

Quality assurance

In 1996, both the programme and institutional accreditation was introduced in Latvia, and now this certification process is being implemented. This means that only in the case both a higher education establishment and the programme are accredited, the respective institution may issue a national diploma.

Accreditation has been the prime facilitator for improving the quality of education in Latvia. However, the process of self-evaluation has stimulated the introduction of internal quality assurance mechanisms. An amount of thought should be paid to consider the option of replacing the two-fold external expertise, i.e. the process of licensing and accreditation/certification with a system based on permanent internal quality assurance culture in higher education establishments, maintaining at the same time annual external evaluation approach, registration of study programmes and comprehensive analysis of the accreditation objectives, benefits, costs and conditions. Another subject to evaluation and consideration is that of the profession standard as an eligibility requirement for entering a specific programme. In view of the fact that the development of profession standards is a process going on outside the higher education system, the absence of this may not hinder entering a specific study programme, at least not in the sector of higher education.

Further activities in the quality assurance area in Latvia must be done in the following directions:

- using the European Network of Quality Agencies (ENQA), disseminate information on Latvian accreditation results and working towards recognition of and knowledge about these results in the rest of countries parties to the Bologna process, hence providing basis for successful recognition of Latvian scientific degrees and diplomas in the entire EHEA;
- pay attention in future work to internal quality culture of higher education institutions thus ensuring continuous improvement and facilitation of external accreditation.

Developing joint scientific degrees

One of the most powerful instruments building the way to easier diploma recognition and harmonization of education systems is the development of joint scientific degrees. Therefore, European higher education ministers have put the “high priority” mark on the Prague Communiqué for developing joint scientific degrees. The building of joint scientific degrees is a positive contribution with regard to almost all of the main aspects of the Bologna process.

A number of Latvian higher education establishments since the introduction of the TEMPUS programme and various bilateral cooperation events have accumulated valuable experience in joint course and programme development. A notable experience to mention is the cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic technical universities and cooperation between agricultural universities from the same two regions. Nevertheless, the process has not resulted in the conferring of joint scientific degrees. In part it is due to the gaps in legislation that hinder the conferring of joint scientific degrees according to the acquisition of a jointly developed programme in Europe, while partially it is also due to the fact that foreign partner higher education institutions in the mid-nineties thought of this cooperation as their assistance to the Latvian side rather than a joint work process. However, this cooperation may serve as a great platform for the beginning of joint scientific degree estimation in the single European higher education area.

Latvia has to pay a more detailed attention to building joint scientific degrees first of all in accordance with the recommendations provided by the Committee of Higher Education and Science of the Council of the European Union at its meeting in October 2002; it has to assess its legislative acts to see which norms could have a direct or indirect negative effect on the process of conferring joint scientific degrees and then initiate work in evaluating these norms. Besides, funding must be allocated for cooperation with foreign higher education institutions for the development of joint programmes. One of the relatively easy tasks in view of the above is the organization of Baltic and Nordic representative discussion. The discussion could focus on analyzing opportunities, based on the former cooperation within the TEMPUS programme and bilateral cooperation projects in order to move towards the development of joint scientific degrees.

4.2. Obstacles for higher education policy implementation and further development needs

Strengths and facilitating factors

- The number of students has increased.
- Stable student loan and study loan system is in place.
- The first six-year cycle of the higher education establishment and programme certification is completed; a re-certification process has been commenced.
- Academic staff remuneration reform in higher education has been commenced.
- Absorption of EU structural funds in higher education has been started.

Problems and hindering factors

- Insufficient resources for updating the material and technical basis.
- Additional resources are required to establish new study places in science and mathematics, as well as in engineering and technology education areas training specialists for knowledge-based, hi-tech areas that are significant for Latvia's development.

- Study places are not covered by optimum funding yet.
- There are problems to provide students with practical placements.
- Negative features in the number and age structure of academic personnel.
- Higher education establishments lack sufficient study-related research work.
- Insufficient international mobility of students and lecturers.

Development perspectives

In order to provide the quality of higher education programmes, their competitiveness, further development in the common European higher education area, as well as opportunities for higher education to meet the demand, it is necessary not only to attract additional state funding, EU structural fund resources and private funding, but also to:

- continue the improvement of legislation and regulations in the higher education field;
- renew and update buildings of higher education establishments;
- provide that higher education establishments have modern equipment for studies, technologies and mainframe networks;
- continue the on-going reform of academic personnel remuneration and salary increase in order to preserve the staff in higher education institutions and to attract younger academic personnel;
- provide for optimum study costs at higher education establishment;
- increase the competitiveness of universities as research centres;
- develop e-studies in higher education;
- improve the social security system for student;.
- provide for the opportunity of students and lecturers to participate in international study-related and students' activities.

5. Increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training

5.1. Priorities in vocational education and training

The long-term goal of vocational education is to create the system of vocational education that would flexibly meet the labour market requirements, would enhance employment, would be in line with EU conceptual approaches of human resources development, and would promote preparation of competitive labour force on EU scale.

Development trends of the vocational education system in 2004 were defined by the Vocational Education System Development Programme 2003-2005. They are as follows: the quality of vocational education (the curriculum, education process, evaluation of education quality, pedagogues), accessibility and cost-effectiveness.

Assurance of the quality of vocational education in line with the labour market requirements

Simultaneously with the development process of Latvia and stabilization of its economy, requirements regarding the education sector also keep changing, i.e. the demand for qualified labour force is increasing. The development of human resources is equally influenced by the programme offer, territorial provision and education quality of three education sectors – initial vocational education (IVET), higher vocational education (HVET) and continued vocational education (CVET).

In order to address these issues at state level and to strengthen cooperation with social partners, it has been planned, with the support of the European Social Fund, to develop methodology for the increase of professional qualification and involvement of social partners and their education. A single and successive system of methodologies will be created. It will include separate methodologies for sectoral research, for the development of profession standards, for designing education programmes, for the development of content for professional qualification examinations, for the assurance of the quality of vocational education institutions, including the introduction of the evaluation system of education establishments by providing a link between self-evaluation and external evaluation of an education institution. A training programme and methodological materials for education of social partners regarding the aspect of the increase of vocational education quality will also be developed.

The single methodology and presence of social partners will provide an opportunity to improve the structure of sectoral qualification, to provide all basic stages for the implementation of vocational education, i.e. the development of education programmes, the implementation of the education process (including practical training of educatees in enterprises operating within the respective region) and evaluation of the acquired education in terms of its conformity with the labour market requirements.

Broadening access to vocational education

Latvia is specially focused on increasing the participation and responsibility of regional municipalities and employers in broadening access to vocational education. This stimulates better correspondence of initial vocational and further education programmes to the structure of employment and territorial distribution of socially marginalized population target groups.

The establishment of regional tripartite (state and municipalities, employers and employees) cooperation councils provides the territorial governance unity of vocational education and further education system, as well as the coordination of the pertinent institutional work in defining the national demand, diminishing social isolation, identifying the number of educatees in initial and continued vocational education programmes, organizing practices, etc.

Over the past few years vocational education opportunities have been widening for persons with low level of previously gained knowledge, for disabled persons and children with special needs. Programmes have been developed for children with special needs, graduates of grades 7-8 of basic school, as well as for children who have finished grade 9 with a grade certificate corresponding to the professions of 1-2 qualification level. Professional orientation activities are regularly organized for the potential students and there are also orientation courses for the 1st year students. Institutions of vocational education cooperate with the schools specializing in education of pedagogues, in the development and implementation of vocational education programmes. Local enterprises and municipalities are interested in providing financial support to education institutions in implementing such programmes. Financial support is also provided by setting specific education programme funding norms, attracting resources from the European Regional Development Fund for adjusting vocational education institutions for the needs of persons with movement disorders, as well as involving the resources from the European Social Fund for the organization of professional orientation events and involving target risk group educatees in vocational education programmes.

Increasing the cost-effectiveness of vocational education

Education lacking in effectiveness versus the resources invested therein may be limiting for the quality of education and access to it. The provision of harmony in vocational education system work and efficient use of financial and material resources is related to the participation of Latvian regional governments and increasing their responsibility in planning the development of vocational education, as well as efficient use of resources. The equalization of similar education programme costs is needed and increasing the amount of national funding in vocational education in order to attain the required education programme implementation cost minimum per educatee as stipulated by the government. There is on-going work in evaluating and improving vocational education institution network, attraction of national funding and funds from the European Regional Development Fund and other international programme funds for improving the infrastructure and equipment of vocational education establishments and their renovation.

Resources will be used more efficiently with improving the network of vocational education establishments, as well as giving up functions not typical for education establishments. By improving infrastructure and study technical equipment according to the development trends of priority areas, the territorial socio-economic disparities among regions will decrease, and hence also migration of the economically active population and rural youth will diminish. The population will have then opportunities to acquire vocational education that meets the labour market requirements without going to school far from their place of residence (employment). Regional enterprises will obtain better qualified and more competitive employees with various required skills.

5.2. Obstacles for the implementation of vocational education policy and further development needs

Strengths and facilitating factors

- The implementation of ESF and ERDF national programmes has been commenced thus ensuring the conformity of education quality to the labour market requirements.
- A uniform procedure for the examination process in initial vocational and continued vocational education systems has been provided.
- Access to education for socially hard-to-adopt target groups has been enhanced.
- Professional orientation and advisory centre service provision in all types of education establishments has been improved thus increasing the understanding on lifelong learning and involving the population in that.
- The implementation of a uniform European system of qualifications and competences has been started thus ensuring the comparability of the Latvian education system internationally.

Problems and hindering factors

- The slow pace of the state territorial and administrative reform is hindering the designing of regional development plans – hence the planning of human resources. This, in its turn, causes inconsistencies in identifying what specialists will be required in each region, and is an obstacle in planning efficient use of human resources.
- Cooperation between vocational education establishments and employers is insufficient. Employers lack adequate stimulus to offer practical placements to students from vocational education institutions. This is then one of the key

reasons why graduates from vocational education establishments have good theoretical knowledge, but weak practical skills.

- There is a lack of funding for research purposes in various areas, for the creation of qualification structures, setting profession standards and preparation of the content of centralized qualification exams, as well as their sufficient delivery.
- In regions buildings of vocational education institutions are physically old, their use and load are insufficient while maintenance resources leave much to be desired.
- Material basis for studies does not cover all the needs to obtain all the professional skills and knowledge required in the labour market.
- Still a number of education institutions have not been adjusted to be used by persons with movement disorders.
- A great part of educatees at vocational education institutions enter those institutions with very low level of knowledge.
- In a number of cases vocational education institutions perform a social, but not an educational function.
- The number of pedagogical correction programmes is increasing.
- Due to the limited funding not all young people up to the age of 18 can be enrolled.

Development perspectives

- To introduce vocational education programmes providing pedagogical correction for students with low level of preliminary knowledge.
- To bring up-to-date the vocational education programmes and to improve evaluation of education quality.
- To stimulate the participation of regional municipalities and employers and their responsibility regarding the provision of access to vocational education.
- To develop a system for further education of pedagogues, promoting the advancements in professional pedagogical skills in the chosen area.
- To decrease the number of dropouts.
- To develop methodologies and sets of activities for the assessment and recognition of non-formal skills, as well as to create methodology for modular vocational education programmes.
- To develop a system of credits and to introduce it in the secondary education level in vocational education.
- To introduce in Latvia Europass documents (CV, MobiliPass, Certificate Supplement, Language Portfolio) used in the EU.

6. European dimension in the Latvian education system

6.1. Stimulating education mobility and eliminating obstacles

Laws and regulations concerning education in Latvia pose no formal legal obstacles for mobility of educatees and recognition of foreign education. Section 82 of the Law on Latvian Higher Education Establishments stipulates that the residents of Latvia can enter and study higher education establishments outside the territory of Latvia, to receive loans and scholarships. Section 83 stipulates that the residents of other countries have no limitations concerning entrance in Latvian higher education establishments provided these persons meet overall requirements to enter a Latvian higher education establishment. At the level of the law there are provisions concerning the parts of higher education acquired abroad or concerning the recognition of education documents

obtained abroad. Latvia has successfully implemented the Bologna process guidelines, the credit system (ECTS) has been introduced and a structure of academic and professional degrees has been developed.

At the moment the key education mobility system coordinated at national level is in the framework of the EU education programmes the Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth; vocational education mobility is implemented only within the EU education programme Leonardo da Vinci. Since the opinion on the quality of such mobility is positive, the state plans to maintain and support such education mobility within the EU programmes without creating obstacles for other initiatives in the area.

Since the year 2000, when Latvia started participating in the EU education programmes, the number of students participating in mobility programmes is increasing from year to year. However, on the whole the number of students participating in international mobility programmes is relatively small (approximately 0.26% of the total number of students a year) as the costs of staying in other EU countries versus those of staying in Latvia are higher while the state does not actually grant additional funding to cover lodging on a regular basis. The positive role of such funding, however, may be seen on the basis of the year 2003 and 2004 showings – when there was national funding allocated for Erasmus scholarship co-funding and the student and academic staff mobility increased by 20% and 35% in the respective years. Therefore, starting from the year 2006, regular funding is earmarked to ensure that on the average 0.37% of the total number of students could have the mobility opportunity both within the framework of the existing programmes and those planned to be active as of 2007. Mobility stimulating events will be foreseen in the lifelong learning strategy to be developed by the end of 2005. The introduction of the uniform European qualifications and competences framework Europass has been commenced, and it is planned that by mid-2006 the procedure for issuing Europass documents will be developed and approved.

In order to facilitate the understanding of mobility positive impact with regard to the quality of the study process, Latvia has created a national student mobility programme – *Krišjānis Barons Programme*. It is available for all officially accredited Latvian higher education establishments, for all academic disciplines and accredited study programmes. The most significant part of the programme is the “physical mobility” among Latvian higher education establishments. On the whole, there is an insufficient number of top level lecturers in Latvia. They work in various Latvian higher education establishments. The mobility programme enables Latvian students to acquire more comprehensive and on individual needs based education. The development of this programme is based on the intention to attract funding from private companies as well.

After Latvia's accession to the EU, the flow of students interested in studying in the EU has increased. On the whole, the number of students studying abroad equals 3% of the total number of students, and close to 1.37% is studying in Europe. A positive aspect in this is the fact that Latvian residents are eligible for receipt of study loan abroad. Priority study programmes are those that may not be acquired in Latvia.

At the moment there is a relatively low level of inward student mobility. Latvia as a study venue is most often selected by those who are interested in studying in Europe at a relatively low cost or who are interested in acquiring very specific study programmes (for instance, the Baltic studies or Latvian). Latvian higher education establishments have a lot to do to increase the attractiveness of the studies offered and of the study environment to attract more foreign students. The admission system introduced in 2004

defines that students are admitted on the basis of the results of centralized examinations. On the whole, it is a positive trend while at the moment the issue regarding the application of this system to foreign students has not been solved.

The main national tasks for further development of education mobility are the following:

- practical application of the system developed in higher education, increase of financial support and popularization of best practices to promote mobility, particularly with regard to enhancing the inward student mobility in higher education institutions;
- the introduction of the uniform European qualifications and competences framework Europass, since the documents within the framework provide significant support to the implementation of education mobility;
- enhancement of mobility within vocational education.

6.2. The development of a European dimension in education

In the course of the entire learning process both pupils and students of higher education establishments are continuously informed and educated on European issues. Both the standard for basic education and the general secondary education standard define the compulsory results to be achieved with regard to educatees' knowledge and skills related to the European dimension.

The following compulsory subjects cover the European dimension: civil sciences, history and geography. Within the subjects students are introduced to the history of European integration, economics of the European countries, geography and culture, social processes, EU idea development and forms of cooperation. Teaching foreign languages indirectly covers the European dimension, as well as along with the direct aim in language teaching, i.e. to acquire knowledge of one or several foreign languages, the understanding of educatees regarding the importance of proficiency of several languages in further professional and civil development is enhanced.

At the end of the ninth school year pupils are obliged to take a centralized examination in civil sciences and history that also include issues pertinent to the European dimension.

As of the school year 2004/05 the compulsory part of the standard for basic education contains a new subject – social sciences that will be taught from the 1st grade. A significant role in that is devoted to the understanding of the European dimension.

At the level of secondary education the European and international dimensions are incorporated in several subjects, including politics and rights, history, geography, fundamentals of economics. Within these subjects the main focus is on international relations, the key directions of foreign policy, participation in international organizations (UN, NATO, OSCE), and building economic relations. Pupils must be able to argue their opinion on the Latvian integration in the EU and NATO, as well as to understand the motifs of this integration. In secondary school the subject of history continues to be “Euro-centred”, since a big part of learning time is devoted to the history of Europe and its course of development from the Middle Ages until nowadays. Attention is also paid to Latvia's place in the historic European course. Pupils must be informed about various European nations and peoples, their beginnings, as well as on the place of Latvia within the European cultural and historical context.

At the level of higher education, the EU-related issues are included in 83 different courses. Such courses are normally a part of social science programmes, such as economics, politics, journalism, management sciences, communication studies, public relations, sociology, psychology, law, pedagogy, international relations and other programmes.

Projects carried out within the EU non-formal education programme Youth, play an important role in promoting intercultural education, since these projects give an opportunity to make a practical use of the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired during the study process.

The state ensures education of pedagogues and their professional training according to the requirements laid out in the education standards. However, this area needs further development as the acquisition of the aforementioned subjects requires large volume of current information. There is in Latvia a good cooperation between education institutions and various NGOs working with EU-related issues. The information materials developed by these organizations are willingly used in the study process. However, the development of new study aids and course materials must be continued on the basis of the fact that visual information plays a significant role in these subjects.

Minister of Education and Science

I. Druviete

Inita Juhņēviča

7047932, inita.juhnevica@izm.gov.lv