

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

NATIONAL REPORT
“EDUCATION AND TRAINING”

National report on the implementation progress of the European Commission
Programme “Education and Training 2020” in Latvia

Riga 2011

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1. CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAMME

Question 1

Please provide a summary of the main education and training elements in your National Reform Programme (NRP).

The Latvian National Reform Programme for the Implementation of the EU 2020 Strategy¹ (hereinafter: the Programme) was developed and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 16 November 2010. Latvia is currently working on detailing and clarifying the measures included in the Programme. In general, the Programme deals with a medium-term macroeconomic scenario (the main macro-structural obstacles, or challenges, for the economy) and Latvia's quantitative targets within the context of the EU 2020 Strategy.

One of the principal macro-structural obstacles in the economy is the reduction of structural unemployment, ensuring the compatibility of qualifications and skills with the requirements of the labour market. As part of the Programme, Latvia has defined the following areas of activity in the sphere of education and training for eliminating the above obstacle:

- implementation of the principle of lifelong learning;
- structural transformation in vocational education;
- modernisation of higher education, including upgrading of the material and technological provision and increasing of resource efficiency of higher education institutions.

Implementation of the lifelong learning principle. This aims to encourage continuous improvement and development of the knowledge, skills and competence among the population by ensuring accessibility to lifelong learning for residents irrespective of their age, gender, educational background, place of residence, income level, ethnicity or functional disabilities, by devising a quality educational offer for adults and creating a concerted system of legislation and effective management of resources (including financial resources), to ensure that, in 2020, 15% of the individuals in the age group 25-64 are continuously involved in the learning process. According to Eurostat statistics, the proportion of such individuals was 5.3% in 2009, with the projected figure of 12.5% for 2013.

This will involve the following:

- development of a national qualifications framework and linking its levels to the European qualifications framework, encouraging a transition to a learning outcomes-based educational offer (by 2013);
- ensuring the assessment of knowledge, skills and competence acquired outside the formal educational system (by 2013);
- providing a sufficient offer of second chance education as a compensation mechanism to reduce the proportion of early school leavers.

Structural transformation in vocational education. This transformation aims to enhance the quality of vocational education by ensuring its compatibility with the requirements of the labour market and to promote a more efficient use of available resources. The structural transformation includes the following:

- optimisation of the network of vocational education institutions (creation of a balanced institutional network within a particular region) and differentiation thereof (vocational education institutions with a specific specialisation). By optimising the number of vocational education institutions (from 56 institutions in 2010 to 29 in 2015), it is proposed that 13 vocational education competence centres, 14 specialised vocational education institutions and two vocational education institutions for the acquisition of basic skills will be formed;
- reinforcement of collaboration with professional business associations for the purpose of enhancing and developing vocational education;

¹ <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/tap/?pid=40196584&mode=mk&date=2010-11-16>

- infrastructure upgrades of vocational education institutions.

By 2015, it is planned to shift the ratio of students in vocational education and general education in favour of vocational education: from a percentage ratio of 37:63 (in 2010) to 50:50 (in 2015), thus ensuring an increase in the share of qualified labour force.

Modernisation of higher education comprises three areas of action:

- in the third quarter of 2011, international discipline-by-discipline assessment of the quality, resource sufficiency and sustainability of study programmes will commence. After the completion of the assessment, proposals will be drawn up for improvements in the study programmes, their consolidation, closing or continuation (by determining the highest quality study programmes demonstrating appropriate quantitative and qualitative performance and by offering proposals regarding the funding of study programmes from the State budget);
- work has begun on upgrading the system of education funding, involving the implementation of a performance-based (“money follows quality”) higher education funding model. A funding principle of this kind will serve as an incentive for higher education institutions to raise the quality and effectiveness of study and research, ensure a more rational use of public funding and promote the consolidation of higher education and scientific resources and State funding at institutions demonstrating appropriate operational performance;
- the modernisation is intended to comprise the modernisation of 29 higher education institutions (12 in 2011, 11 in 2012, three in 2013 and three in 2014). For this purpose, financial support from European Union (hereinafter: EU) Funds is proposed.

As part of the programme, Latvia has defined two quantitative national targets in the context of education and training, attainable by 2020: a share of 34-36% (2020) of individuals with a higher education degree in the age group 30-34; and a share of 13.4% (2020) of residents without a school leaving certificate in the age group 18-24 who have not completed secondary education and are not continuing their education.

2. EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Question 2

What measures has your country taken to reduce early school leaving?

2.1. Measures to analyse current situation and monitor developments in early school leaving (e.g. data collection, surveys and research)

In 2009, the share of residents without a school leaving certificate in the age group 18-24 who had not completed secondary education and are did not continue their education constituted 13.9%. Thus in one year's time from 2008 the share of residents without a school leaving certificate decreased for 1.6% (from 15.5% to 13.9%). The share of residents without a school leaving certificate in the same age group in 2010 was 13.3%. According to Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter - MoES) statistics, as of the beginning of the 2010/2011 study year, 63.3% of basic education graduates enrolled in secondary education and 35.4% of basic education graduates entered vocational education institutions (1.3% discontinued their education altogether). The statistical data for the 2009/2010 study year show that 9.8% of the youths enrolling in general education institutions and 12.57% of those enrolling in vocational education institutions did not finish school.

The most widespread reasons for early school leaving are the socio-economic conditions of the family, lack of motivation and learning difficulties, peer pressure and insufficient school resources. There is not enough collaboration between parents, the educational institution and municipal experts in preventing truancy. Decision-making geared towards the improvement and dynamic development of the educational system is impeded by the slow exchange of information between educational institutions and MoES regarding the results of the current academic year.

A number of measures are being implemented in Latvia that allow the present situation to be analysed and its development to be assessed. Starting 2010/2011 academic year, a State Education Information System² (hereinafter: SEIS) has been created, maintained by MoES. SEIS contains information about education institutions, academic programmes, students and teaching staff. SEIS enables efficient tracking of the educational process, accurate identification of students who have not commenced studies in the compulsory educational system and students who have discontinued studies prematurely. SEIS comprise both general and vocational education institutions. At the beginning of 2011, SEIS allowed it to be established that approximately 2% of the children of the mandatory schooling age who are registered in the Latvian Population Register have not been registered with any educational institution. Based on SEIS data, the State Service of Education takes steps in conjunction with local governments to establish the reasons for not learning. Research shows that, in the event of learning difficulties, if the student does not receive timely and appropriate pedagogical support in eliminating or compensating the causes of the learning difficulties, learning motivation may be lost rapidly, truancy ensues, the learning performance becomes inadequate, which may lead to the same grade being repeated or to early school leaving.

In addition, the Central Statistical Bureau compiles data on the number of students at vocational education institutions and the reasons for leaving them.

The MoES, in its turn, conducts a yearly analysis of the ratio of pupils who have been allowed to move on to the next grade without insufficient assessment in any subject, who have not been made to repeat the same grade, who have successfully left the educational institution and have received an elementary education certificate or a general secondary education certificate. The latest research shows that approximately 97% of the students are allowed to move on to the next grade without any insufficient assessments; approximately 98% of the pupils are moved to the next grade without being made to repeat a year; 25% of the schools have no pupils repeating a year; whereas 96-97% of all students successfully complete the elementary education or general secondary education level.

2.2. Please indicate the areas of priority areas your country is focusing on (e.g. target groups, educational sectors).

In general education in Latvia, special attention is paid to inclusion (students with special educational needs, ethnic minorities, children and youths from disadvantaged families, children and youths subject to a court-imposed security measure: placement of a minor in a social correctional educational institution).

2.3. Measures to prevent early school leaving. Please mention the most effective measures taken at system level, at school level and in support of individual pupils/learners.

In order to improve the situation, mandatory 2-week additional academic measures (advising) and final tests have been prescribed for all students in academic subjects in which their achievement has been assessed as inadequate; furthermore, a number of supportive measures for youth are being implemented within the framework of EU Funds.

In order to prevent an increase in the number of residents without a school-leaving certificate, Latvia has embarked on the active implementation of the opportunities afforded by e-learning environments. Thus, for example, in 2010, MoES commenced work on developing a sample curriculum for a distance learning form of general secondary education. It is planned that it will be approved in the third quarter of 2011, and implementation of such a distance learning program will commence starting in the 2011/2012 academic year. The distance learning offer is geared towards a broad group of the population who, for various reasons, have discontinued their education and who could resume study in the form of e-learning.

MoES has various measures planned for the prevention of early school leaving:

² Cabinet Regulation No. 788 of 17 August 2010 "Content and Maintenance and Update Procedures of the State Education Information System"

- enhancement of academic content in the first stage of elementary education (grades 1 to 6) in order to ensure better compatibility with the pupils' age-appropriate learning capabilities;
- introduction of advanced learning methods by encouraging a customised approach to the learning process, and introduction of flexible learning models, including night schools, involving the development of distance learning options for individuals wishing to obtain secondary education;
- offering flexible vocational education programs structured as learning modules;
- providing the opportunity for secondary school leavers to obtain Level 2 or 3 professional qualifications within 1 to 1.5 years.

Pursuant to Section 14, Clause 35 of the Education Law, Cabinet Regulation No. 89 of 1 February 2011 "Procedures According to Which an Educational Institution Notifies Students' Parents, Local Government or State Authorities in Cases of Student Truancy"³ has been adopted, providing for a single regulatory mechanism for the conduct of educational institutions in case of a student not being present at the educational institution at the time of commencement of lessons or in any particular lesson and where the educational institution has no information regarding the causes of the absence.

2.4. Measures to compensate early school leaving. Please mention the most effective measures taken

As part of encouraging a customised approach to the learning process, pedagogical correction is provided in Latvia to students with learning difficulties. Students with social behavioural disorders are provided with social correctional educational programmes, which provide for simultaneous acquisition of the curricula and social correction – and these especially stress individual work with the child in the acquisition of working and life skills.

Adults who wish to complete previously commenced formal education at the basic and secondary education level are provided access to second chance education. At the beginning of the 2010/2011 study year, 12'732 students were enrolled in night and distance education programmes, of these 5'989, or 47%, were female. The majority of the students enrolled in second chance educational programmes this year are adults: 10'900, or 86%, of the students are older than 18.

In order to ensure the offer of second chance education, 143 new evening (shift) education, correspondence tuition, social and pedagogical correction, as well as special education programmes for various target groups were licensed in 2010.

For the purpose of ensuring the flexibility of the educational and training offer and its compatibility with the requirements of the labour market, validation of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education, which is one of the compensating mechanisms for those who have left the educational process early. In 2010 and 2011, a number of acts of legislation were passed in Latvia both governing the assessment of professional competence acquired outside the formal educational system and prescribing procedures according to which persons who have acquired professional competence that is equivalent to professional competence at Level 1, 2 or 3 of vocational qualification will be able to obtain formal vocational qualifications.

3. TERTIARY EDUCATION

Question 3

What measures has your country taken to increase tertiary (or equivalent) education attainment?

3.1. Measures to increase entry rates to higher education, including widening access to under-represented groups.

³ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=225270>

The population ratio with a higher education degree in the 30-34 age group was 30% in 2009 (compared to 18.6 in 2000). With the purchasing power of the population diminishing, the number of students in fee-based courses declined in 2009 and 2010. At present, the number of State-subsidised students has remained virtually unchanged, and 2010 even showed a slight increase thanks to the possibility of using funding from the EU structural funds towards financing studies at private higher education institutions as well. Considering the purchasing power of the population and with the birth rate curve being at its lowest point, the overall number of students will continue to decline in the next four or five years. An increase may resume after 2020 when the purchasing power of the population will have grown, reaching 85,000 to 90,000 students.

In order to attract more new students, Latvia began to implement a number of measures in 2010 which aim to render higher education attractive, accessible and competitive. To ensure more efficient management of the higher education sector and to implement the measures, a Plan of Measures for the Necessary Reforms in Higher Education and Science for 2010-2012⁴ (hereinafter: Plan of Measures) was developed, approved by Cabinet Order No. 458 of 5 August 2010, which proposes to promote the greater international competitiveness of the higher education and science sector.

For the purpose of ensuring equal access to higher education, improvements in the mechanism of awarding scholarships and study and student loans were initiated, which would broaden study opportunities and promote more target-oriented choice of study areas. With respect to access to studies, Latvia stresses that 60% of the students in 2010 (of the total number of scholarship recipients) received scholarships for higher education studies **based on social criteria** (low family income, disability, etc.).

3.2. Measures to improve completion rates of students in higher education.

The objective of Latvian higher education is to increase the share of highly qualified professionals on the labour market in priority areas (natural sciences, mathematics, information technology, engineering sciences, health care, environmental science and creative industries), by carrying out regular assessment of the effectiveness of master's and doctoral studies, developing new and innovative study programmes and providing scholarships to students. It has been proposed that 700 master's and 200 doctoral level graduates will be trained and receive scholarships annually.

MES developed the Plan of Measures in order to promote the greater international competitiveness of the higher education and science sector.

This Plan provides for specific measures in the four principal areas of activity:

- improvement of the quality of study and scientific activity;
- upgrading of the material and technological provision and increased efficiency of resource use at higher education and scientific institutions;
- internationalisation and enhancement of exportability of higher education;
- integration of the higher education and science sector with the economy and social development.

Thirty-five measures have been included in the Plan of Measures, and their implementation is the responsibility of MES, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health, the Higher Education Council, the State Education Development Agency and other institutions related to higher education; the Plan will be implemented in collaboration with the Latvian Employers' Confederation, the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and professional associations. The participation of the associations involved in the implementation of the measures is voluntary and they bear no responsibility for the implementation of the Plan.

⁴ http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/Izglitiba/Augstaka_izglitiba/IZMPlans_280610_AIZref.pdf

4. MOBILITY

Question 4

What measures has your country taken to promote learning mobility?**4.1. Measures to promote outgoing/incoming learning mobility of students in different education sectors (schools, VET, higher education, adults).**

The individual learning mobility of pupils is being implemented within the framework of the EU Lifelong Learning subprogram *Comenius*. Individual mobility of pupils through *Comenius* enables pupils from Latvian elementary and secondary schools to study at a foreign school and to live with a host family, whereas for Latvian schools this is an opportunity to host or send pupils to another partner state.

Mobility in vocational education is being implemented within the framework of the EU Lifelong Learning subprogram *Leonardo da Vinci*. Students in initial vocational education have the possibility to gain the work experience prescribed as part of the academic process in one of the participant states in the *Leonardo da Vinci* Program, thus improving both the professional skills and language ability.

Adult learning mobility is promoted through the activities of subprogram *Grundtvig*. In 2009, 270 adults (including 30 from social risk groups) were involved in individual or group mobility activities. In 2010, 280 adults (including 35 from social risk groups) took an opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills abroad.

Student mobility in higher education takes place as part of a number of international cooperation programmes: these include bilateral programmes for higher education cooperation, the *Erasmus* mobility programme, the *Nordplus* programme and others. Within the framework of these programs, students at Latvian higher education institutions can take advantage of a period of study in another participant state of the programme. Such programmes promote cooperation between higher education institutions in Latvia and abroad and provide an opportunity to obtain valuable academic, professional, linguistic and cultural experience by way of studies in other European countries.

In order to encourage the interest of foreign students in Latvian higher education programmes, the creation of a support function has been proposed to provide higher education institutions with information regarding study opportunities in Latvia and to support and coordinate the export services of higher education:

- to evaluate the available financial resources for the development of joint projects for Baltic cooperation in increasing the exportability of higher education. As part of this measure, a special website shall be created and maintained, which will provide potential international students with a single source of information regarding Latvian higher education institutions, higher education study programmes, tuition fees, contacts, country information, immigration information, work permits for students, as well as enable them to receive answers to the questions that interest them;
- to develop good practice guidelines for organising the arrival of international students in Latvia;
- to compile an electronic catalogue of foreign-language study programmes offered by Latvian higher education institutions;
- to produce information materials in foreign languages about study opportunities in Latvia, to be distributed at international and foreign higher education fairs and international events;
- to coordinate the use of the resources of higher education institutions for participation in foreign and international education fairs and to provide a national higher education booth for participation in such fairs, and for participation in international mobility promotion networks.

4.2. Measures to promote outgoing/incoming learning mobility of teachers and other education professionals in different education sectors (schools, VET, higher education, adults).

Teachers from pre-school educational institutions, general-education, vocational and technical secondary schools and future teachers, educators and further educators of teachers may participate in the *Comenius* mobility programme. The *Comenius* programme supports a variety of activities, including the professional advancement of teachers and other individuals involved in school education (courses, observation of colleagues' work, participation in conferences), promotion of best educational practice, including the development and dissemination of new learning methodologies and materials, the development of the educational sector or an academic subject in a specific discipline.

Diverse international cooperation programmes enable the teaching staff of higher education institutions (lecturers, instructors) and guest lecturers from companies/organisations to provide instruction in another participant state of the programme (*Erasmus*); support exchange trips, projects and cooperation networks in the area of higher education (*Nordplus*); promote academic cooperation and cooperation in comparing and updating study programmes and developing joint study programmes (bilateral programmes for higher education cooperation).

4.3. Steps to identify and reduce the obstacles to learning mobility

In order to promote the mobility of students and teaching staff, various steps are being taken in Latvia to ensure the mobility:

- provision of scholarships to foreign students, researchers and teaching staff within the framework of bilateral and trilateral inter-governmental and inter-departmental agreements (33 bilateral and trilateral [Baltic] inter-governmental and five international agreements between sectoral ministries are currently in force regarding cooperation in higher education, providing for mutual exchanges of students, researchers and academic staff. Pursuant to the agreements in force, Latvian students and academic staff, too, are provided with scholarships from foreign funds. This measure is necessary in order for Latvia to meet its contractual obligations, as a result of which Latvian students, researchers and academic staff are able to receive foreign scholarships);
- promotion of development of study programmes in EU languages;
- development and implementation of joint study programmes with foreign partner institutions;
- continued implementation of the tasks of the Bologna Process in Latvia in order to ensure the international openness of higher education;
- continued participation in the EU educational cooperation programmes (*Erasmus*, *Erasmus Mundus*, *Tempus*) and other international educational cooperation programmes (*Nordplus*);
- continued participation in international events of the ASEM education forum;
- initiation of bilateral treaties with third countries regarding the recognition of educational documents and academic degrees and qualifications;
- attraction of qualified foreign instructors for work at Latvian higher education institutions;
- awarding of a share of the Latvian co-financing of the *Erasmus* programme to higher education institution in proportion to the incoming *Erasmus* students.

As a result of these measures, the share of international students in Latvia should reach 3% of the total number of students in the fourth quarter of 2012.

5. NEW SKILLS AND JOBS

Question 5

What measures has your country taken to improve the assessment of future skills requirements matching since 2009?

5.1. Recent measure to improve skills forecasting (in addition to information provided through Eurydice in June 2010)

In Latvia, youth is one of the groups most affected by the economic downturn, as the diminishing number of employment vacancies has meant that young people are finding it difficult to enter the labour market following the completion of their education. One of the main risks for the onset of youth unemployment is the lack of necessary work experience. The integration of young people into the labour market is additionally hampered by the mismatch of the skills acquired at the educational institution with the needs of the labour market; for example, a person may have acquired academic knowledge but lacks practical experience. Upon graduation from a higher education institution, young people most frequently lack skills such as the ability to work rapidly, the ability to organise and analyse information, decision-making practice, knowledge regarding the resolution of crisis situations, risk analysis and the ability to adopt suitable solutions. At the same time, some young people face difficulties in finding employment because of their insufficient education (nearly 65% of all the young unemployed registered by the State Employment Agency have only elementary or general secondary education qualifications).

In order to resolve the youth unemployment problem in Latvia that is associated with the incompatibility of skills with the requirements of the labour market, in the area of vocational education, MES has developed procedures for the planning of central government funding for the implementation of vocational education programmes, as well as procedures for planning the number of government-funded students in vocational initial education, vocational basic education and vocational secondary education programmes. It is proposed, in the future, to develop a flexible module-based approach to the content of vocational education, its implementation and assessment in accordance with the sectoral qualification structures, and to improve professional standards and vocational education programmes, to provide an offer and quality of professional advancement and further education that matches the demand on the labour market, in cooperation with industry associations.

Whereas in the area of higher education, the concept “A Structural Model for Sectoral Distribution of Higher Education Study Programmes in Accordance with National Development Needs”⁵ (hereinafter: Study Programme Model) has been developed and approved by Cabinet Order No. 30 of 16 January 2009, which aims to facilitate that the available range of professionals trained by higher education institutions meets the projected demand for labour force. The Plan of Measures of the Necessary Reforms in Higher Education and Science for 2010-2012 contains measures for the enhancement of the quality of studies by improving the funding system in higher education, thus ensuring the compatibility of study programmes with economic needs, increasing the role of entrepreneurs and employers in licensing professional study programmes, developing study programmes and evaluating the suitability of study programmes, verifying study outcomes and evaluating the distribution of study places across academic disciplines and ensuring their conformity with the trends in national economic development.

In order to solve the problem of youth unemployment in Latvia that is associated with the low level of education, as of 1 October 2010, MES is providing an opportunity to 950 secondary-school leavers to obtain a vocational qualification that corresponds to Level 2 and 3 vocational qualifications, by encouraging the acquisition of general basic skills and a more rapid integration into the labour market and by ensuring a balanced acquisition of competencies and skills for professional activity and continued education.

⁵ <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/view.do?id=2903>

5.2. Recent measures to take the results on board in education and training planning processes, information and guidance.

On the basis of the Cabinet-ratified Information Report “On Forecasts Regarding the Congruence between Labour Demand and Supply in the Medium Term”⁶ (approved by a Cabinet Protocol Decision of 8 June 2010 [Protocol No. 30, §28]), MES is planning to admit students to the relevant education programmes.

Whereas the Guidelines for the Optimisation of the Network of Vocational Education Institutions for 2010-2015⁷, approved by Cabinet Order No. 5 of 6 January 2010, provide for the optimisation and differentiation of vocational education institutions by creating vocational education competence centres, specialised vocational education institutions, while foreseeing the transfer of individual vocational education institutions with low enrolment to local governments for integrated educational institutions to be formed.

On 16 December 2010, amendments were made to the Vocational Education Law, which provide that a vocational education institution that implements vocational education programmes that enables obtaining a Level 3 vocational qualification and additionally fulfil the functions of a regional or sectoral methodological centre, a further education centre for teachers or evaluation of professional competence acquired outside the formal educational system is entitled to obtain the status of a vocational education competence centre in accordance with the criteria defined by the Cabinet of Ministers (Cabinet Regulation No. 148 of 22 February 2011 “Regulation on granting and revocation of the status of vocational training competence centre”)⁸

In 2010, in collaboration with 16 industry associations and professional organisations, the implementation of further teacher education in accordance with industry needs commenced, thus raising the competence of the teachers and work experience supervisors involved in initial vocational education and vocational further education, ensuring skill upgrades, especially in connection with the modernised content of vocational education and an innovation and knowledge-based economy.

The model of distribution of study programmes and enrolment is geared towards developing mechanisms for increasing the number of highly qualified professionals meeting the needs of the labour market in order to implement an effective higher education and training policy. In the current structure of professionals graduating from higher education institutions, social sciences have prevailed for a long time now in Latvia, whereas the share of graduates from natural sciences, engineering and technology programmes is insufficient; increasing this share is one of the tasks in facilitating the attainment of the objective of the EU 2020 Strategy.

In order to achieve the objectives defined in the EU 2020 strategy, Latvia supports the Youth in Motion flagship initiative, which provides for ensuring effective investment in educational and learning systems of all levels (from pre-school to higher education) and the compatibility of education with the needs of the labour market, facilitation of youth employment and promotion of youth exchanges and mobility.

6. EDUCATION BUDGETS

Question 6

How has the economic and financial crisis affected education and training budgets in your country (please refer to developments in particular education sectors, if appropriate)?

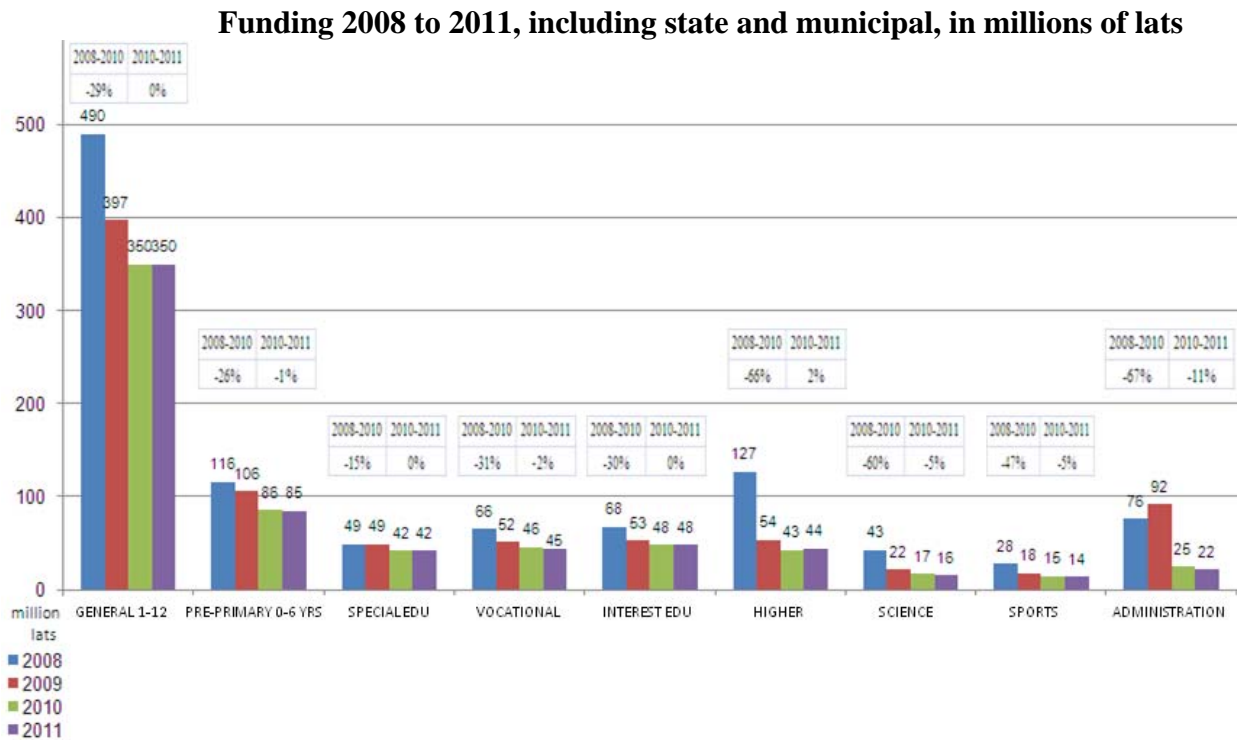
MES has been implementing its functions despite the significant funding cuts (see Figure 1) of more than 260 million lats.

⁶ <http://polsis.mk.gov.lv/view.do?id=3405>

⁷ <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/nozares-politika/izglitiba/profesionala-izglitiba/4605.html>

⁸ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=226688>

Figure 1



Source: MoES based on World Bank Policy Development Loan II report (2011)

One of the most significant tasks that have been initiated is the introduction of the “money follows the pupil” funding model and the adjustment of the school network. The aim of the model is to encourage competitiveness among learning institutions through diversification of educational program offerings, their maximum suitability to the abilities and interests of pupils and to ensure equal and transparent distribution of funding per pupil, while simultaneously promoting the efficient use of the funding allocated for education, the adjustment of the network of learning institutions, thus creating an optimal school network and raising quality and cost efficiency. Upon introduction of the new funding principle, the number of full-time teaching lines decreased considerably at elementary and general secondary education institutions, while the pupil-teacher ratio increased significantly.

In order to ensure cost efficiency, create an optimal school network and provide pupils with educational opportunities in the new financial circumstances, local governments began to adopt decisions regarding the adjustment of the school network.

In 2009, MES approved municipal resolutions regarding the reorganisation of 84 educational institutions, the closing of 57 educational institutions and the establishment of two pre-school education institutions. In 2010, MES approved municipal resolutions regarding the reorganisation of 28 educational institutions, the closing of 10 educational institutions and the establishment of five pre-school education institutions. In 2011, MES has approved municipal resolutions regarding the reorganisation of 13 educational institutions, the closing of four educational institutions and the establishment of two pre-school education institutions and two primary schools.

The rationale for closing educational institutions mainly concerns the rational rate of use of space at educational institutions and the low enrolment. Table 1 summarises the changes in the number of educational institutions, the number of pupils and teachers and the corresponding funding in the recent years. As a result of the implementation of the “money follows the pupil” funding principle in general education and the rapid decline in overall funding, the 2009/2010 academic year saw a considerable decrease in the number of schools with enrolments between 30 and 70, leading to an increase in the average class occupancy. The number of schools in the 2010/2011 academic year equals 87% of the number of schools in the 2007/2008 school year. The decrease of the number of

schools corresponds to the decrease of the number of pupils (86% vs. 2007/2008). Accordingly, the number of teachers has decreased by 10%.

Table 1

Number of general education day schools and pupils

Academic year	2007/ 2008	2008/ 2009	2009/ 2010	2010/ 2011
Number of schools	958	948	846	830
Number of pupils	250,941	236,223	226,034	216,307
Number of teachers	25,567	25,751	22,629	23,108
<i>Funding of state and municipal day schools, LVL million</i>				
	2007	2008	2009	2010
From the central government budget	218.4	260.9	227.3	145.9
From municipal budget	121.8	146.6	113.5	

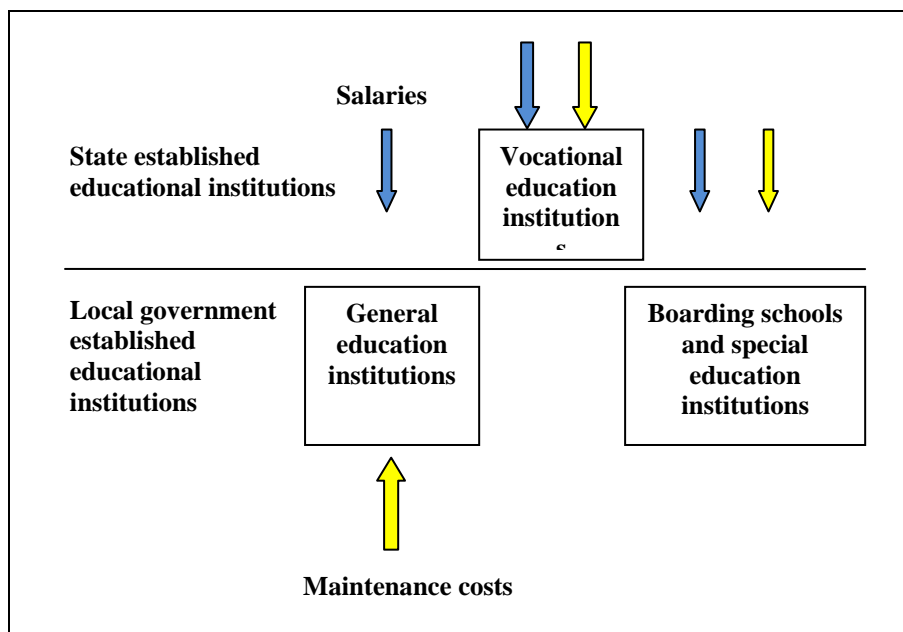
Source: MoES

In 2011, the central government budget funding allocation for the implementation of vocational education programmes constitutes 60.6% of the state-established minimum cost of implementation of vocational education programmes. Considering the insufficient extent of funding in vocational education, the availability of funds from the EU structural funds is a vital aspect.

The investment conditions of the European Regional Development Fund (hereinafter: ERDF) activity “Modernisation of learning equipment and improvement of infrastructure for the implementation of vocational education programmes” have been substantially improved, and agreements have been signed with educational institutions regarding the allocation of approximately **65** million lats. The funding is being concentrated through the creation of competence centres and the development of specialised vocational schools. Simultaneously, regional access is being preserved through the creation of branches or integrated educational institutions. In addition to the previously planned **58.9** million lats, additional funding of **6.8** million lats was received in this ERDF activity for the renovation of residence halls. Nearly **12** million lats in additional funding has been raised from the Climate Change Financial Instrument (hereinafter: CCFI) to raise the energy efficiency of vocational schools.

In accordance with the Guidelines for the Optimisation of the Network of Vocational Education Institutions for 2010-2015, the optimisation of the network of vocational education institutions was commenced in 2010 and continues according to the plan. As these Guidelines are implemented, vocational education institutions with low enrolments should be transferred to local governments in order to create integrated educational institutions, where one building could house educational institutions of different types. At present, the following model of vocational education funding is being implemented in the country:

Model of funding of vocational education



Source: MoES

The Plan of Measures for the Necessary Reforms in Higher Education and Science for 2010-2012 states that changes must be made in the structure of State budget funding and especially the expenditure structure of the educational sector, in order to ensure the funding required for the attainment of the structural reform objectives in higher education: to increase funding for higher education, attaining central government budget funding for higher education equalling **1.2% of the GDP** by 2015, whereas the funding allocated in the state budget for 2011 and 2012 must be no less than that in 2010. At present, it only constitutes **0.7% of the GDP**.

The central government funding allocated to higher education in 2010 (to the higher education institutions subordinate to MES) constitutes **43,956,199 lats**. The funding proposed for higher education for 2011 constitutes **43,222,804 lats**, which is a decrease of **1,334,375 lats, or 1.67%** compared to 2010. The planned decrease will be compensated by savings that will arise from the allocation to higher education institutions of funding for loan-equivalent doctoral scholarships in accordance with actual demand. In 2011, less funding will be required to cover interest differences of student and study loans, as loan interest rates have dropped significantly and are not expected to rise. The enrolment of programmes in lower-priority areas will also be decreased.

Notwithstanding the overall funding decrease, the number of state-subsidised students in 2010 at Latvian higher education institutions was maintained nearly at the 2009 level and equals 25,738 students – or only 714 (3%) fewer than the year before; of these, at higher education institutions subordinate to MES: 19,190 students, or 533 (2.7%) fewer than in 2009.

Higher education institutions and colleges have been awarded more than 100 million lats from the ERDF to upgrade the facilities of higher education institutions, which will enhance the quality and international competitiveness of higher education. Support from the EU structural funds has been provided for doctoral and master's students, which has facilitated an increase in the enrolment of doctoral and master's studies; furthermore, compared to the preceding year, the number of doctoral degree recipients has grown.

International students provide a significant contribution, not merely to the particular higher education institution, by increasing its revenues, but also to the Latvian economy in general. A

foreigner staying in Latvia and spending only the equivalent of the minimum subsistence consumption basket, computed by the Central Statistical Bureau (which equalled 171 lats in January 2011) means that a single student spends a minimum of 2,052 lats per year of stay in Latvia. Thus, according to a rough estimate, the foreign students currently in Latvia increase our yearly revenues by at least four million lats.

Despite the crisis, MES continues to provide study/student loans. The number of borrowers declined due to a decrease in the number of students. In 2010/2011, the number of students has decreased by 18.3% compared to the 2007/2008 academic year, and the number of borrowers receiving a study/student loan has decreased by 15.4%. The crisis does not affect the repayment (retirement) of the loans as such; everything depends on budgetary funds allocated for this purpose. In 2010, a total of 1,549 study loans were retired, of those 1,508 for individuals employed in professions designated by the Cabinet of Ministers, whereas 41 study loans were retired in full due to the disability or death of the borrower. In 2010, student loans were retired for 561 borrowers, of those 548 loans for those employed in the designated professions; 755 loans were retired by 30% of the outstanding principal in connection with the birth of a child; and 13 student loans were retired in full due to the disability or death of the borrower.

7. LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES

Question 7

What progress has your country made in the development and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy?

7.1. Does your country have such a strategy (please indicate where it is laid down).

By Cabinet Order No. 111 of 23 February 2007 “On the Guidelines of Lifelong Learning Policy for 2007-2013” (hereinafter: Cabinet Order No. 111), the guidelines for the lifelong learning policy for the years 2007 to 2013⁹ (hereinafter: Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines) were approved: which is the fundamental policy planning document in the area of developing a lifelong learning policy.

In Latvia, the lifelong learning policy is based on the idea that the personal growth and self-improvement of an individual must be facilitated at every stage of life, in every area of life, for the entire duration of life, thus creating preconditions for developing each resident’s industriousness and ability to adjust and achieving social inclusion, employment and active civic participation.

The long-term objective of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines is to ensure lifelong education according to the residents’ interests, ability and the socio-economic development needs of the regions, while attaining the Europe-wide target of 12.5% in 2013:

- ensuring access to lifelong learning to residents irrespective of their age, gender, educational background, place of residence, income level, ethnicity or functional disability;
- creating an offer of quality education for adults that provides sustainable competencies for work, civic participation, personal growth and promotes the development of a high skill-based, competitive knowledge economy and democratic society in Latvia;
- creating a concerted system of legislative acts and effective resource management (including financial resources) in observance of the principles of shared responsibility and mutual interaction of sectoral policies, towards the development of a unified lifelong learning system.

In order to ensure the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines, pursuant to Paragraph 3 of Cabinet Order No. 111, the Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with responsible and participating authorities, has developed a programme for the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines for 2008-2013¹⁰ (hereinafter: implementation programme of the

⁹ http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/Izglitiba/Muzizglitiba/Pamatnostadnes.pdf

¹⁰ http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/Izglitiba/Muzizglitiba/ProgrammaLV.pdf

Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines). This programme is closely associated with the conclusion of the EU Education and Training 2010 work programme and with the achievement of the outcomes defined therein.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science developed amendments to the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines and the implementation programme of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines, which were approved by Cabinet Orders Nos. 832 and 835 of 9 December 2009.

The above amendments define the correspondence of priorities – and implementation mechanisms thereof – to the economic situation and the revised allocation of structural funds, in order to ensure reinforcement of the knowledge, skills and competencies demanded on the labour market. At the same time, the attainment indicators of policy outcomes were revised and concentrated according to priority without reducing their substantial scope; and, considering the current economic situation, the realistic prospects of attaining the targets were evaluated. In addition, the amendments made to the programme extend the term of operation of the programme until 2013.

The basic activities of the consolidated programme are as follows:

- developing a national qualifications framework, linking its levels to the European qualifications framework;
- improving the system of application of labour market analyses and forecasts in order to ensure an educational offer that is suited to the labour market;
- ensuring the operation of the system of validation of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired outside the formal education system;
- ensuring knowledge, skills and competencies for work: for the unemployed, job seekers and employees;
- ensuring a sufficient offer of second chance education;
- ensuring career services.

The Cabinet of Ministers has appointed MoES as the coordinating authority for carrying out the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines and the implementation programme of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines, instructing it to produce a bi-annual information report on the implementation progress of the programme in the preceding period,¹¹ until 1 April 2013.

7.2 Please briefly refer to the main measures addressing the principles of shared responsibility, effective financial mechanisms, flexible pathways and quality initial and targeted continuing training.

MES is the responsible authority for monitoring the implementation outcomes and assessing the impact of the implementation programme of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines. Sectoral ministries (Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Economics and others), local governments, social partners and higher education institutions are involved in implementing the programme.

In attaining the objectives and fulfilling the tasks of the implementation programme of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines, financing is used from the structural funds (information regarding which is included in the addendum to the Operational Programme “Human Resources and Employment” and the addendum to the Operational Programme “Entrepreneurship and Innovations”), the financial mechanism of the Swiss Confederation, the bilateral financial mechanism of the Norwegian government, as well as funding from the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme for 2007-2013.

Local governments play a significant role in providing an educational offer within their area. According to 17, Paragraph three, Clause 22 of the Education Law,¹² one of the competences of local

¹¹ http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/IZMZino_190508_MIpam2007.pdf;

http://izm.izm.gov.lv/upload_file/IZMZino_220309_MIpam2008.pdf;

¹² <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=50759>

governments in education is the implementation of adult policy. According to Task (1.3.1) of the implementation programme of the Lifelong Learning Policy Guidelines, local governments must provide basic skills to 15% of adults within the municipal territory. A number of local governments support adult education: (1) by funding and co-funding existing institutions engaged in providing informal adult education (adult education centres, folk schools, cultural centres, general secondary education institutions in which informal adult education programmes are implemented, etc.); (2) by providing space or offering discounts on the hire of space for the implementation of informal adult education programmes; (3) by implementing or co-funding projects funded by foreign financial instruments geared towards the implementation and development of informal adult education; (4) by providing grants to non-governmental organisations that ensure access to a service to the population. However, under circumstances of an economic crisis, municipal leaders often make decisions to use the available funds for other, more urgent activities rather than invest in the development of human capital.

In addition, according to Section 46, Paragraph five of the Education Law, local governments ensure the licensing of informal educational programmes. Until March 2010, natural and legal persons that were not educational institutions established by the State or local governments required a local government-issued licence to engage in the implementation of an informal adult education programme. In order to reduce the administrative burden on private educational establishments and to ensure equal opportunity in the implementation of informal adult education, amendments were made to the Education Law in March 2010 that provided for the right of private educational institutions as well to implement informal adult education programmes without being required to obtain a licence.

In ensuring the flexibility and compatibility of the education and training offer with the requirements of the labour market, the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education was introduced. Developed in 2009 and approved in 2010, amendments to the Vocational Education Law govern the evaluation of professional competence acquired outside the formal education system. Cabinet Regulation No. 146 of 22 February 2011 “Procedures by Which Professional Competence Acquired Outside the Formal Education System”,¹³ has been adopted, prescribing the future procedures by which persons whose professional competencies, corresponding to professional competencies of Level 1, 2 or 3 of vocational qualifications, have been acquired outside the formal educational system, will be able to obtain a vocational qualification. Pursuant to the Regulation, professional competence will be assessed in a professional qualification examination in accordance with the procedures of conduct of centralised vocational qualification examinations, established by regulatory enactments.

8. OTHER SIGNIFICANT REFORMS IN THE PRIORITY AREAS

Question 8

What progress has your country made in making reforms in the priority areas not directly addressed in questions 2 – 7? (Please indicate relevant priority area and give a short description)

The distribution model of study programmes and enrolment corresponding to the national development needs provides that the annual proposal for the distribution of enrolment places by area – by educational subject group – is developed by MES, in cooperation with the Higher Education Council, sectoral ministries, higher education institutions, employers, and under consideration of developmental trends in higher education and the medium- and long-term forecasts of labour force demand and supply, produced by the Ministry of Economics. Labour force demand forecasts prepared by employers in the industry are also used.

The percentage distribution of government-subsidised enrolment across areas required for the attainment of national development objectives is established by the Cabinet of Ministers. The Cabinet defines the procedures according to which state-funded enrolment is distributed among higher

¹³ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=226788>

education institutions and the chronological sequence of decision-making. The projected number of individuals obtaining higher education qualifications and the state-subsidised student enrolment is included in the agreements regarding the tasks of higher education institutions, concluded between the relevant ministry and the higher education institution subordinated to it.

This approach allows for a comprehensive picture of the demand for professionals to be created, based on the medium- and long-term forecasts of the demand and supply of labour force.

Readjustments in the system and content of vocational education have been initiated with the purpose of increasing the efficiency of resource use – which has become especially relevant in connection with the economic situation within the country – and promoting the quality and correspondence of the education to the labour market – in conjunction with planning regions, industry associations, employers, educational institutions, local governments, involving the focused and rational use of all types of resources and deploying EU structural funds.

In order to promote the compatibility of the educational offer with the requirements of the labour market, two MES policies were developed in the area of vocational education, which are used to plan central government funding for the implementation of vocational education programmes and the state-subsidised student enrolment in vocational initial education, vocational basic education and vocational secondary education programmes.

9. PROPOSALS FOR THE PRIORITY AREAS OF THE SUBSEQUENT PERIOD

Question 9

Under the 4 broad strategic objectives, described below, the Council also defined mid-term priority areas for the period 2009-11. Which mid-term priority areas would your country wish to cooperate on during the next cycle (please indicate order of priority – high, medium, low)?

9.1 Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality:

The strategic objective of making lifelong learning and mobility a reality remains a high-priority objective.

In order to implement it, work must continue in the following areas:

- lifelong learning strategies: continue the implementation of national lifelong learning strategies, paying particular attention to the validation of non-formal and daily (informal) learning and guidance;
- European Qualifications Framework: pursuant to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of April 2008, relate all national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010, and support the use of an approach based on learning outcomes for standards and qualifications, assessment and validation procedures, credit transfer and quality assurance.

Cooperation must be developed in the following areas:

- expanding learning mobility: work together to gradually eliminate barriers and to expand opportunities for learning mobility within Europe and worldwide, both for higher and other levels of education, including new objectives and financing instruments, and whilst taking into consideration the particular needs of disadvantaged persons.

9.2 Improving quality and efficiency of education and training:

The strategic objective of improving quality and efficiency of education and training remains a high-priority objective.

In order to implement it, work must continue in the following areas:

- language learning: to enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue, promote language teaching, where relevant, in vocational education and training and for adult learners, and provide migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country;

- professional development of teachers and trainers: focus on the quality of initial education and early career support for new teachers and on raising the quality of continuing professional development opportunities for teachers, trainers and other educational staff (e.g. those involved in leadership or guidance activities);
- governance and funding: promote the modernisation agenda for higher education (including curricula) and the quality assurance framework for vocational education and training, and develop the quality of provision, including staffing, in the adult learning sector. Promote evidence-based policy and practice, placing particular emphasis on establishing the case for sustainability of public and, where appropriate, private investment.

Cooperation must be developed in the following areas:

- basic skills in reading, mathematics and science: investigate and disseminate existing good practices and research findings on reading performance among school pupils and draw conclusions on ways of improving literacy levels across the EU. Intensify existing cooperation to improve the take-up of maths and science at higher levels of education and training, and to strengthen science teaching. Concrete action is needed to improve the level of basic skills, including those of adults;
- “New Skills for New Jobs”: ensure that the assessment of future skill requirements and the matching of labour market needs are adequately taken on board in education and training planning processes.

9.3 Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship:

The strategic objective of promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship remains a high-priority objective.

In order to implement it, work must continue in the following areas:

- early leavers from education and training: strengthen preventive approaches, build closer cooperation between general and vocational education sectors and remove barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training.

Cooperation must be developed in the following areas:

- pre-primary education: promote generalised equitable access and reinforce the quality of provision and teacher support;
- migration: develop mutual learning on best practices for the education of learners who are third-country nationals or stateless (immigrants);
- learners with special needs: promote inclusive education and personalised learning through timely support, the early identification of special needs and well-coordinated services. Integrate services within mainstream schooling and ensure pathways to further education and training.

9.4 Enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training:

The strategic objective of enhancing innovation and creativity, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training remains a high-priority objective.

In order to implement it, work must continue in the following areas:

- transversal key competences: in accordance with the December 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, take greater account of transversal key competences in curricula, assessment and qualifications.

Cooperation must be developed in the following areas:

- innovation-friendly institutions: promote creativity and innovation by developing specific teaching and learning methods (including the use of new ICT tools and teacher training);

- partnership: develop partnerships between education and training providers and businesses, research institutions, cultural actors and creative industries, and promote a well-functioning knowledge triangle.

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