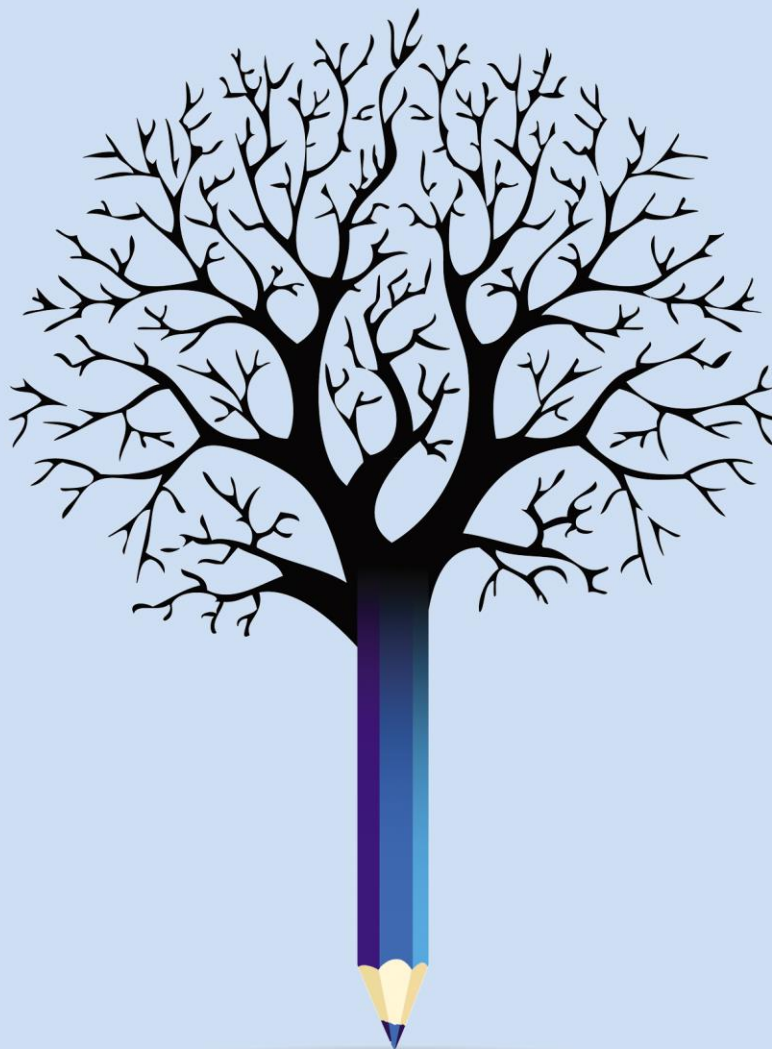




# EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK **LATVIA**





## EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

This **policy profile on education** in Latvia is part of the *Education Policy Outlook* series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the OECD's substantial comparative and sectoral policy knowledge base, the series offers a comparative outlook on education policy by providing analysis of individual countries' educational context, challenges and policies (education policy profiles), analysis of international trends and insight into policies and reforms on selected topics. In addition to country-specific profiles, the series also includes a recurring publication. The first volume, *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*, was released in January, 2015.

Designed for **policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of the country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- **Students:** How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future.
- **Institutions:** How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment.
- **System:** How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles contain Spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries. This country profile also includes a Spotlight on the European Union perspective for Latvia, based on challenges and recommendations identified by the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, as part of their activities with EU member countries.

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**Sources:** This country profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, vocational education and training, and tertiary education. Much of this information and documentation can be accessed through the Education GPS (<http://qpseducation.oecd.org>).

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the different sources used throughout the country profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills ([www.oecd.org/edu](http://www.oecd.org/edu)) and its web pages on Education Policy Outlook ([www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm](http://www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm)), as well as on the EU Education and Training Monitor ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm)) and Eurydice (<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Latvia:Overview>).



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## HIGHLIGHTS

### Latvia's educational context

**Students:** In PISA 2015, Latvia's performance was slightly below the OECD average in mathematics and reading and close to the OECD average in science, although performance in science decreased between 2012 and 2015. The impact of socio-economic factors on students' performance was below the OECD average. In Latvia, education is compulsory from age 5 to age 16 (including pre-school for 5-6 year-olds). Early childhood education and care (ECEC) starts at age 1.5, and enrolment rates for 4-year-olds were above the OECD average in 2014 (90%, compared to OECD average of 86%). At upper secondary level, attainment rates are comparatively high, but enrolment and graduation rates for vocational education are below the OECD average. Tertiary education attainment rates for 25-34 year-olds are around the OECD average.

**Institutions:** Teacher education in Latvia can take two main paths, a four-year bachelor's degree (the more popular option) and a three-year degree followed by a two-year second-level professional programme. Once hired, teachers must do 36 hours of professional development training every three years. Teacher salaries were cut by 50% in 2009 as a result of the economic crisis. Salaries have since recovered, but they are lower than those of other public-sector professionals and below the OECD average. Compared to the TALIS average, fewer teachers in Latvia think that their profession is valued in society, and a smaller proportion would become teachers if they could decide again. School evaluation combines internal self-evaluation and external evaluation by expert teams appointed by the State Education Quality Service, a subordinate institution of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Budget cuts have reduced the frequency and scope of external school evaluations.

**System:** The education system in Latvia is highly decentralised. The MoES is responsible for drafting policy and legislation, as well as organising and co-ordinating its implementation. Latvia has a fragmented regional structure, with 119 municipalities responsible for providing ECEC, primary and secondary education closest to students' residences and non-formal education. Tertiary education institutions have autonomy to design education programmes, establish rules and regulations, hire staff and distribute the funding allocated to them. Almost all funding from primary to secondary level, including post-secondary non-tertiary education, comes from public sources, a proportion higher than the OECD average. Annual expenditure per student at secondary level was lower than the OECD average in 2013, with large differences in spending between municipalities. Compulsory education is free of charge, with the exception of pre-schools, where parents pay for school meals (although there are municipal subsidies for low-income families).

### Key policy issues

The education system in Latvia is highly decentralised and affected by multiple demographic factors that have contributed to declining student enrolment numbers in recent years; such as rural-to-urban migration, emigration, low fertility rates and an ageing population. The overall education system needs to adapt to the changing demographic reality. Evidence has shown large performance differences between rural and urban schools, as well as between boys and girls. The teaching workforce is ageing, offering both a challenge and an opportunity to improve the quality of the teaching profession in Latvia. Although there are ongoing efforts to improve quality, particularly at the school level, a more comprehensive quality assurance framework could be beneficial. Some of the challenges for tertiary education include improving the funding model, developing a robust quality assurance framework and strengthening leadership capacity at both national and institutional levels. With already low levels of funding in the Latvian education system, the considerable budget cuts following the 2008 financial crisis imposed challenges in terms of efficiency, co-ordination, policy implementation and optimisation of provision, although there has been an increase of funding in recent years.

### Selected policy responses

Latvia's [Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020](#) outline the medium-term challenges, priorities and solutions in the education system. The areas for action are grouped under three goals: education environment, individual skills and effective management.

A new model for teachers' wages, accepted in 2016, aims to improve the quality of teachers' work, promote transparent wages and make more effective use of financial resources.

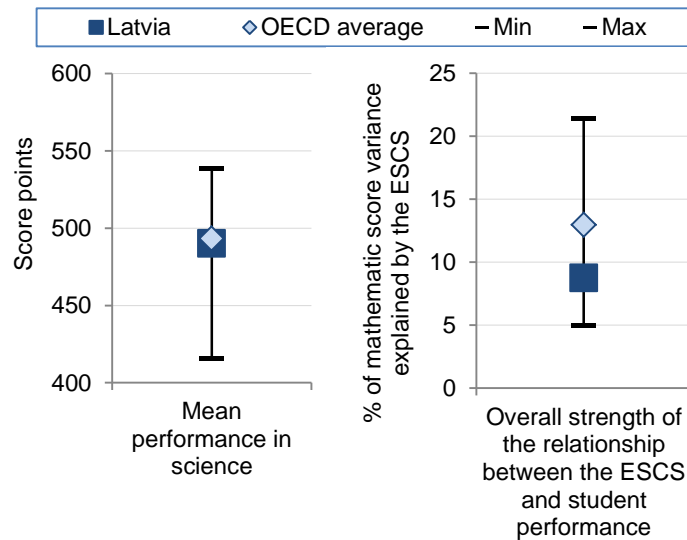
Several policies aim to improve the quality, attractiveness and labour market relevance of vocational education in Latvia. These include optimising the network of vocational education and training (VET) institutions, modernising VET infrastructure, reforming VET curricula by transitioning to learning outcomes and introducing modular VET programmes, implementing work-based learning, and strengthening co-operation with employers in the VET sector.

In 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers endorsed a new model proposed by the World Bank for financing tertiary education, which aims to increase quality, internationalisation and labour market relevance of tertiary education.



In PISA 2015, Latvia's performance was around the OECD average in science and below the OECD average in reading and mathematics. The impact of students' socio-economic status on science scores (9.3%) remained unchanged between 2006 and 2015 and is well below the OECD average of 12.9%.

**Figure 1. Student performance in science and relationship between student performance and the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS), for 15-year-olds, PISA 2015**

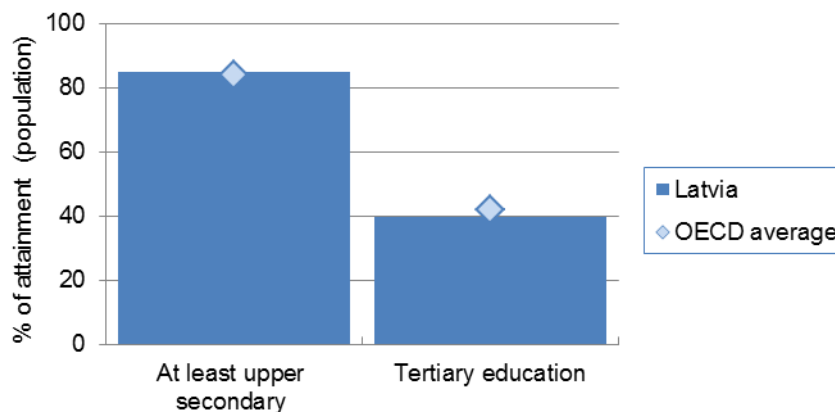


Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>.

In Latvia, the share of 25-34 year-olds with at least an upper secondary education is just above the OECD average (85%, compared to the OECD average of 84%). About 40% of 25-34 year-olds in Latvia have tertiary education. Although this is below the OECD average of 42% in 2015 (Figure 2), the share has increased significantly, from 22% in 2005.

**Figure 2. Upper secondary and tertiary attainment for 25-34 year-olds, 2015**



Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.



### Spotlight 1. The European Union perspective: Latvia's education and training system and the Europe 2020 strategy

In the European Union's growth and employment strategy, *Europe 2020*, education and training is recognised as a key policy area in contributing to Europe's economic growth and social inclusion. The European Union set a two-fold target in education by 2020: reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10%, and reaching at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary or equivalent education. Countries set their own related national targets. The Europe 2020 goals are monitored through the European Union's yearly assessment of the main economic and growth issues.

The *European Semester Country Report 2017* identified a number of key issues for Latvia in education and training:

- The demographic decline exposes over-capacity and quality disparities in the education system. Student-to-teacher ratios and average class sizes are among the lowest in the OECD in both primary and secondary education. This is due to the number of small schools in rural areas. Moreover, learning outcomes in rural schools significantly lag behind those of urban schools. This has also been a link to low remuneration of teachers based on the number of students.
- Conditions on the minimum number of students are set to reduce the number of schools and teachers. Minimum numbers of students per class in secondary education are set to gradually increase until 2018. In addition, a new teacher remuneration model was introduced in September 2016, based on a clearer definition of teachers' base salaries. The model provides for a 30-hour working week, including contact hours and preparatory work, aiming to make teacher remuneration fairer and more transparent. However, the model implicitly allows for teachers to work more than 40 hours per week, provided that the additional hours are not in the same school. This could encourage teachers to work extra hours to increase their salary, without paying sufficient attention to the quality of teaching.
- Students' proficiency in mathematics and science has deteriorated - although it remains above the EU average - but scientific subjects are receiving more attention. As a policy effort, diagnostic tests in STEM subjects have recently been introduced in the last years of basic education and in upper secondary education. The new competence-based framework curriculum, aiming at modernising teaching methods in general education, is being piloted in 80 schools in 2016. Its success depends largely on teachers' ability and motivation to implement it.
- Latvia has a high proportion of the population with secondary education but no professional qualification. Around one-third of secondary school graduates do not continue their studies in the same study year in either vocational education and training (VET) or higher education. Yet, the labour market prospects for people holding VET qualification are better than for those holding general secondary education, and this applies both to recent graduates and to the population as a whole.
- The attractiveness of VET has improved, but there has been little progress on curricula reform in 2016, as priority was given to the modernisation of buildings and equipment. In 2016, secondary legislation to create sectoral expert councils and procedures for updating curricula was passed. The sectoral expert councils comprise representatives from employers, trade unions and government and have wide ranging powers including involvement in VET curricula, school networks and work-based learning. The curricula reform is expected to be finalised in 2021.
- Latvia is implementing higher education reforms. It is introducing a new model for higher education financing, with elements that reward quality. An independent national accreditation agency was also set up in 2015-2016. In 2016, a World Bank study was commissioned to assess the governance of higher education institutions with a view to enhancing internal governance, funding mechanisms, academic recruitments and remunerations schemes, to be completed in April 2018.





## EQUITY AND QUALITY: IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY FOR STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS

In PISA 2015, overall performance in science of Latvian 15-year-olds was around the OECD average (490 score points, compared to the OECD average of 493 points). Latvia had a slightly lower share of low performers in science than the OECD average (17.2% of students performed below Level 2, compared to the OECD average of 21.2%) and a lower share of high performers in science (3.8% of students at Level 5 or above, compared to the OECD average of 7.7%) (Figure 3). The relationship between socio-economic background and performance in PISA 2015 is well below the OECD average, and Latvia also has a higher proportion of resilient students in science (students with lower socio-economic status who perform in the top quartile of PISA) than the OECD average (35.2% of resilient students, compared to the OECD average of 29.2%). Score differences in Latvia between immigrants and non-immigrants are also lower than average (20 score points, compared to the OECD average of 31 score points). However, Latvia was one of three OECD countries where boys scored significantly lower than girls in PISA 2015 (11 score points lower, compared to the OECD average difference of 4 score points higher for boys). Early school-leaving rates also remain high for boys.

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC)** policies are important to foster equity and increase the participation of children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. In 2014, 86% of 3-year-olds and 90% of 4-year-olds were enrolled in pre-primary education (above the OECD average of 69% and 85%, respectively). Pre-school is mandatory for 5-6 year-olds and is free, with the exception of school meals. The number of ECEC institutions increased from 550 to 617 between 2003 and 2014. Despite this increase, Latvia has faced shortages of ECEC places in urban areas in recent years, mostly due to migration from rural areas. To respond to this demand, municipalities and the private sector have opened several child development and play centres. While extended coverage is an achievement for Latvia, more clarity could be achieved in terms of quality. As pointed out in [recent OECD work](#), there is no national-level data on the quality of ECEC, and monitoring of the quality of ECEC depends exclusively on municipalities, which use varied approaches.

**Some system-level** policies favour equity, such as the comparatively longer duration of compulsory education, delayed tracking and low grade repetition. Education is compulsory in Latvia from age 5 to 16, including pre-school education, which is compulsory for 5-6 year-olds. This is one year more than the OECD average (from age 6 to 16). Almost all students (98%) attend government or public schools. Tracking (sorting students into different educational pathways) begins at age 16 (after Grade 9), later than the OECD average of age 14. Latvia also has lower-than-average grade repetition. According to PISA 2015, 5% of 15-year-olds had repeated at least one year in primary education (ISCED 0 or 1) or secondary education by the time they reached age 15 (compared to the OECD average of 12%). According to PISA 2015, ability grouping into different classes in Latvia is also less common than in other OECD countries, with 18.7% of 15-year-olds grouped by ability for some or all subjects (compared to the OECD average of 45.8%). The education system of Latvia also delivers bilingual or content-language integrated learning in Latvian and seven ethnic minority languages (Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Hebrew, Lithuanian and Estonian), as well as in English and French. Schools providing ethnic minority education programmes can decide which subjects are taught in Latvian, but at least 60% of all subjects must be taught in Latvian. The curriculum for general upper secondary education dedicates 420 hours per year to studying a minority language and literature, the same number of hours as mathematics.

Latvia faces challenges in providing equal educational opportunities in **all geographic areas**, due to significant demographic changes in recent years, driven by substantial emigration and urbanisation. [Evidence](#) shows that resulting complications include providing enough places for ECEC in urban areas, improving outcomes for rural students (who as a group have shown lower performance and higher dropout rates than their urban counterparts) and optimising the school network to align with the new demographic reality.

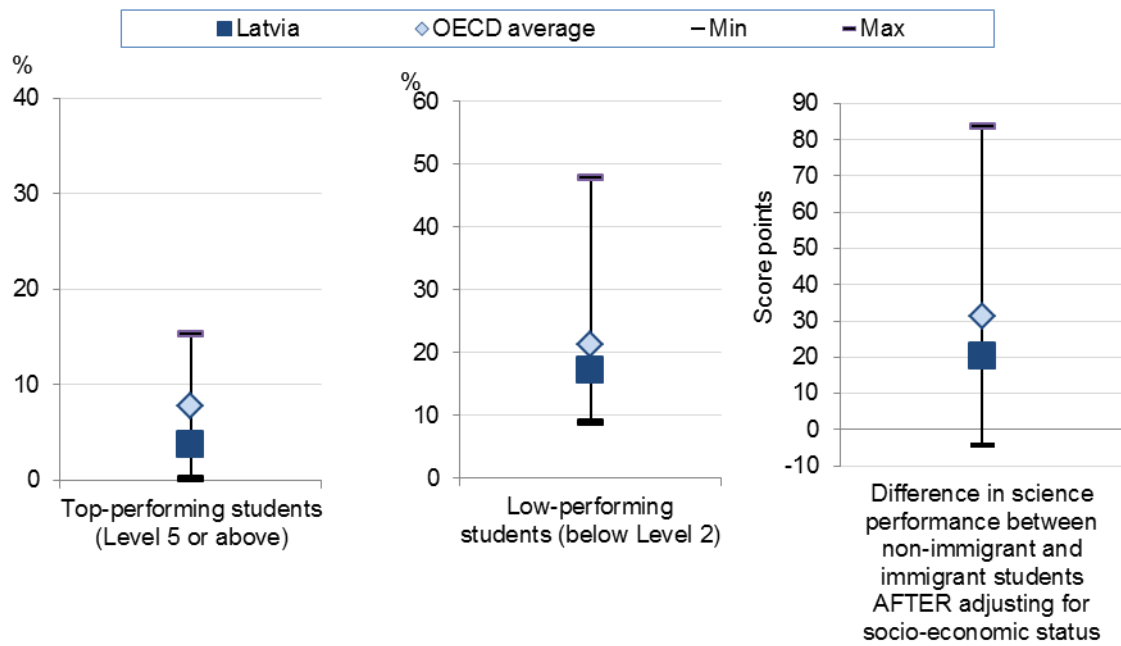
**The challenge: Decreasing the urban-rural performance gap in education across the country.**

### Recent policies and practices

The [Cabinet Regulation on family daycare registration](#) came into force in 2013. It defines the basic qualification and safety requirements for family daycare providers. For example, prospective family daycare providers must have completed a professional education programme of at least 40 hours in order to be registered, unless they have completed secondary or tertiary pedagogical education or obtained a professional qualification as a family daycare provider. Quality requirements on infrastructure cover fire safety, labour protection, hygiene and first aid.



Figure 3. Percentage of low and top performers and performance difference between non-immigrant and immigrant students in mathematics (PISA 2015)



Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume I): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264266490-en>.





## PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: MATCHING SKILLS WITH LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

**Labour market perspectives** can play an important role in the decision to stay in education. In Latvia, the unemployment rate in 2015 for all education levels combined was above the OECD average (9.5%, compared to the OECD average of 7.0%). The share of 15-29 year-olds neither employed nor in education or training (NEET) (13%) was slightly below the OECD average (14.6%). However, the gap in unemployment rates between high- and low-qualified adults in Latvia in 2015 is one of the largest among OECD countries: 19.6% of adults with below secondary education are unemployed, compared to 10.7% of adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education as their highest level of attainment, and 4.5% of adults with tertiary education are unemployed (compared to the OECD averages of 12.4% for adults with below secondary education, 7.3% for adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education and 4.9% for adults with tertiary education).

Although **upper secondary education** is not compulsory in Latvia, 88% of 25-64 year-olds attained this education level in 2015 (above the OECD average of 80%). Most students follow a general upper secondary programme, with 67% of students expected to graduate from general upper secondary education over their lifetime as of 2014 (OECD average: 54%). The student population in upper secondary education has decreased significantly in Latvia in recent years. In 2014/15, 62 430 students were enrolled in upper secondary education, compared to 108 212 students in 2005/06, a decrease of over 45 000 students. According to a recent [OECD report](#), Latvia's upper secondary system (Grades 10-12) is largely school-based and characterised by a stark divide between general and vocational pathways. To better prepare students for education and the labour market, the gap between these educational pathways could be further narrowed.

Compared to other OECD countries, the share of Latvian students attending **vocational education** remains limited. Only 27% of students were expected to graduate from vocational upper secondary programmes over their lifetime (compared to the OECD average of 46%) as of 2014. In 2014, 38% of 20-24 year-olds who were enrolled at upper secondary level followed a vocational education programme (below the OECD average of 66%). In Latvia, the term 'vocational education' is generally used, rather than 'vocational education and training (VET)'. This is because most vocational education is implemented through school-based programmes that include practical learning at schools and in enterprises, although work-based learning is also part of VET. Latvia's post-secondary non-tertiary education programmes are considered part of the upper secondary level. The government has been working for several years to increase the attractiveness, quality and labour-market relevance of vocational education. While good progress has been made in the reorganisation of school networks, progress on curriculum reform seems to have been slower. Latvia could also benefit from establishing a coherent career guidance system.

Latvia has 58 **tertiary education** institutions or colleges. In 2015, 40% of 25-34 year-olds had attained tertiary education (close to the OECD average of 42%). Labour market forecasts have emphasised a skills shortage in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) and in health. In response, the government aims to increase the number of state-funded study places in STEM fields from 44% in 2013 to 50% in 2017, and to 55% in 2020 (see Spotlight 1). After a rapid expansion of the tertiary education system since Latvia's independence in 1990, [OECD evidence](#) points out that the system needs to adjust to recent demographic decline, fiscal realities, evolving labour market needs and wider national priorities. Strengthening the quality assurance framework and leadership capacity at national and institutional levels have also been identified as priorities.

**The challenge: Adjusting the education system to wider development priorities, labour market needs and new fiscal and demographic realities.**

### Recent policies and practices

In 2010, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the [Guidelines for the Optimisation of the Network of Vocational Education Institutions 2010-2015](#), which foresaw a reduction in the number of vocational education schools that MoES is responsible for from 60 in 2009/10 to 24 by 2015, and 17 of them have received the vocational education competence center (VECC) status by the end of 2016.

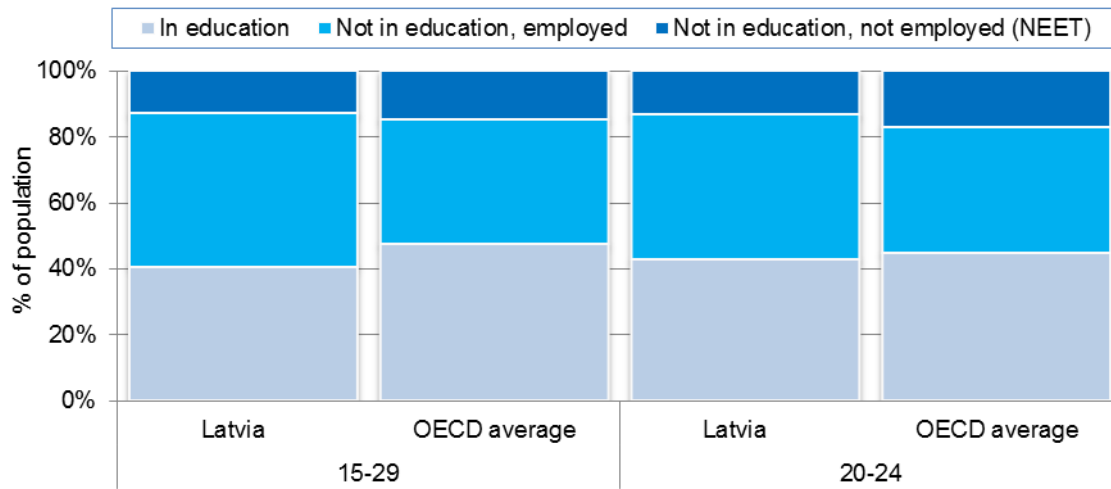
As part of the ongoing reform of vocational education curricula (2008-20), 80 of 240 occupational standards and basic qualification requirements have already been updated, a third of modular programmes have been introduced and 13% of examination content has been formulated.

A work-based learning (WBL) programme was piloted in 6 vocational schools with 148 students and 29 companies in 2013/14. In 2014/15, it included 500 students and 200 companies. Based on this programme, regulations on implementation of work-based learning were developed and adopted in 2016, thus establishing system-level WBL.

In 2013, Latvia took part in the [Youth Guarantee](#), particularly targeting 15-24 year-olds, to provide free training opportunities to up to 6 500 young people for more than 90 different careers until 2018. [EC evidence](#) shows positive results attributed to this: the share of young NEETs decreased significantly (to 10.5% in 2015, below the EU average of 12%). Challenges persist, however, since the programme has been slow to start up, and its visibility across the target group remains low. The Latvian government intends to tackle these challenges by reaching out to young NEETs who are not registered at the public employment service.



Figure 4. Percentage of 15-29 year-olds in education and not in education, by age group, 2015.



NEET: Neither employed nor in education and training.

Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.



## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A NEED TO MAKE THE TEACHING PROFESSION MORE ATTRACTIVE

Developing positive **learning environments**, where school leaders and teachers can succeed, is important to raise achievement in schools. The Latvian education system served 408 588 children and students in the 2015/16 school year. The number of students in school has decreased by almost 124 000 in the last decade, due to population decline and migration. In 2016, students in Latvia received fewer hours of compulsory instruction than the OECD average: 599 hours per year in primary education and 794 hours in lower secondary education (compared to the OECD average of 799 hours in primary education and 915 hours in lower secondary education). Instruction time is usually complemented by after-school activities. According to PISA 2015, students had 18.2 hours of study time after school per week (above the OECD average of 17.1 hours). Students reported slightly more positive views of their learning environments than the OECD average (Figure 5).

**School leaders** in Latvia are responsible for hiring staff, managing the schools' financial resources and implementing regulations related to education. Municipalities are responsible for hiring and firing school leaders, and recruitment is mostly determined by teaching qualifications and experience, since no additional competences are required to become a school leader. In PISA 2015, Latvian principals reported having much greater freedom in hiring teachers (96.8%) than the OECD average (70.3%). School leaders are required to do at least 36 hours of professional development training every three years. In fact, only 0.7% of Latvian principals did not participate in any professional development activity (compared to the TALIS average of 9.5%). According to their self-reports, they had followed an average of 15.2 days of courses, conferences or observation visits in the previous 12 months (above the TALIS average of 12.6 days). A recent [OECD review of Latvia's education system](#) suggests that professional development in Latvia should acknowledge that teachers and school leaders have different needs over the course of their career and implement a lifelong view of professional development.

In 2013/14, there were 41 034 full-time-equivalent **teachers** in Latvia, of whom 84% were women (compared to the OECD average of 68%). The ageing teaching workforce and falling student numbers highlight the need to make the teaching profession more respected and competitive. To become a teacher in Latvia, there are two main paths, a four-year bachelor's degree (the most common path) and a three-year bachelor's degree followed by two years of additional study in a second-level professional programme. Once hired, teachers are required to do at least 36 hours of professional development training every three years. Almost all lower secondary teachers (96.1%) have done some professional development in the last 12 months (above the TALIS average of 88.4%).

Teacher remuneration was affected by the economic crisis, with teachers' salaries cut by 50% in 2009. Salaries have recovered since then, but they are still lower than those of other public-sector professionals and below the OECD average. In Latvia, teachers' statutory minimum gross annual salary can increase by up to 4% after ten or more years of service, the lowest increase among all EU countries. Many Latvian teachers do not think their profession is highly valued: 22.8% were positive about the value that society places on the teaching profession (compared to the TALIS average of 30.9%). Two-thirds (67.6%) of teachers would choose to work as a teacher if they could decide again (compared to the TALIS average of 77.6%). According to a recent [OECD review](#), the single most important step Latvia could take to improve learning outcomes would be to establish the conditions for high-quality teaching and leadership to thrive. Further steps from Latvia in this direction could include adopting a comprehensive human resource strategy for the education system (i.e. raising salaries to nationally competitive levels as part of a well-designed career structure founded on teacher and school leadership standards that guide appraisals and inform professional development).

**The challenge: Increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve teaching quality.**

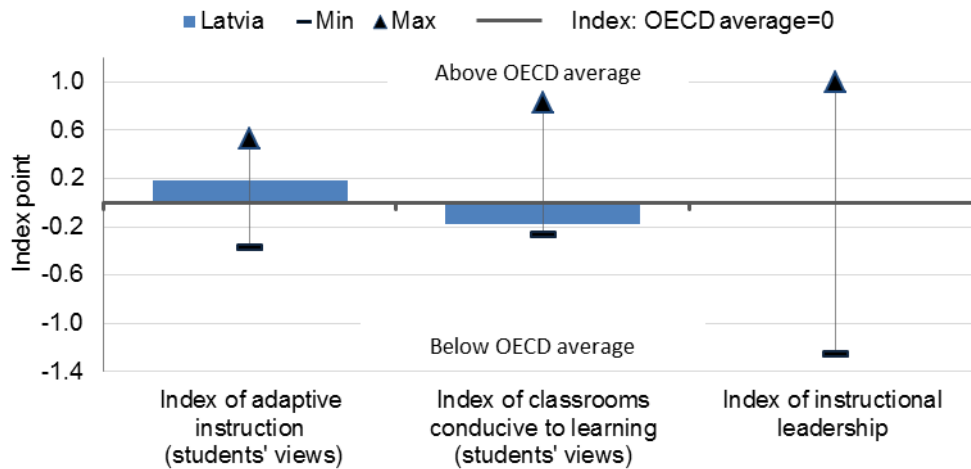
### Recent policies and practices

In 2016, the government approved a new teacher remuneration scheme as part of a new funding model to recognise different dimensions of teachers' work, to improve the quality of their work, and to promote a transparent wage system and effective use of financial resources (see Spotlight 2).

From 2010 to 2013, Latvia implemented the Comprehensive Education Teachers Further Education Project, designed to improve the professional competence of general education teachers, in which more than 3 500 teachers participated.



Figure 5. The learning environment, PISA 2015



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

### Spotlight 2. Per-student funding and the new teacher remuneration scheme

In 2009/10, the Latvian government introduced a school funding model based on per-student funding for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.

The model had two components: teacher workload calculation and salary budget calculation. The basic calculation of teacher workload was widely known as “money follows the student”. The starting point for calculating teacher workload was the number of students, in addition to the education level of students and programme cost. In some cases, municipalities also reallocated funds to small schools that were no longer viable. Based on these calculations, the formula established that a full-time workload comprises 21 hours of teaching.

In 2016, following consultations with social partners, the government approved a **new teacher remuneration scheme**, as part of a new funding model to recognise the additional workload of teachers outside of instruction hours. It is based on a 30-hour weekly workload (in contrast to the 21-hour teaching load), in which teaching takes up 70% of the work time, the rest being devoted to other activities like lesson preparation and grading.



## EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES: WORKING TO IMPROVE MONITORING MECHANISMS

Effective evaluation and assessment strategies are important for developing evidence-based education policy and a better, more equitable school system. Municipalities and schools in Latvia are in charge of the quality of implemented education programmes, while the central government is responsible for the overall quality of the education system.

The State Education Quality Service (SEQS) carries out **system evaluation** in Latvia. SEQS is responsible for the legal accreditation and external evaluation of schools (every six years) and licensing of their education programmes (every two or six years). Latvia also established the State Education Information System (SEIS) in 2009 to collect, generate, and store information on education institutions, programmes and staff, from ECEC to upper secondary education. Responding to concerns about the quality of some SEIS data (e.g. the exact number of school staff is unknown, and there is limited information about them), the MoES will finish implementing modifications to the system by 2020 to improve it and link it further with tertiary education, interest-related education and adult learning.

**School evaluation** in Latvia is composed of external and internal evaluation. External evaluation of schools is carried out every six years by expert teams appointed by SEQS, which include key stakeholders, experts in education and leaders from other institutions. The expert team considers different sources of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation report, classroom observations, school policy documentation and surveys. Schools are evaluated against 19 quality criteria covering key areas, including management and leadership, teaching and learning, supports for students, material resources, and curriculum. School and programme accreditations may be refused if any key criteria, or more than one-third of the 19 overall criteria are evaluated as "insufficient". Budget cuts have reduced the frequency and scope of school evaluations in recent years. Once schools receive accreditation, they are required to implement any recommendations made by the expert team, and submit an annual progress report. Starting in 2015, schools are also expected to do a yearly self-evaluation and produce an annual internal evaluation report, which is collected by SEQS and made available to the public.

**Teacher appraisal** in Latvia was implemented by the MoES in 2009. The Assessment System of Teacher Performance is a voluntary, performance-based pay system in which most teachers participate. The system evaluates teachers according to their performance in teaching and educational work (36%), individual work with students (17%), contribution to the development of the educational institution (28%), accumulation and transfer of experience and knowledge (15%), and self-reflection and participation in activities to improve pedagogy (4%). According to TALIS 2013, 43.8% of teachers in Latvia reported that appraisal and feedback had little impact on their teaching (similar to the TALIS average of 43.4%).

**Student assessment** in Latvia is organised at the central and school level. Students take state exams in Grades 9 and 12, and diagnostic tests are also carried out in Grades 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 in order to assess students' competence, including in STEM subject areas. The exams have a dual role of awarding certificates of completion and monitoring the education system. Some [evidence](#) shows variable grading of exams by teachers, which undermines the validity and reliability of exam results. To qualify for a Certificate in General Secondary Education, students must pass four centralised exams, in Latvian language, mathematics, a foreign language of choice and an elective subject. At school level, teachers are in charge of assessing student progress continuously, although Latvia lacks information systems to track students' performance.

### The challenge: Further improving systems of teacher appraisal and student assessment.

#### Recent policies and practices

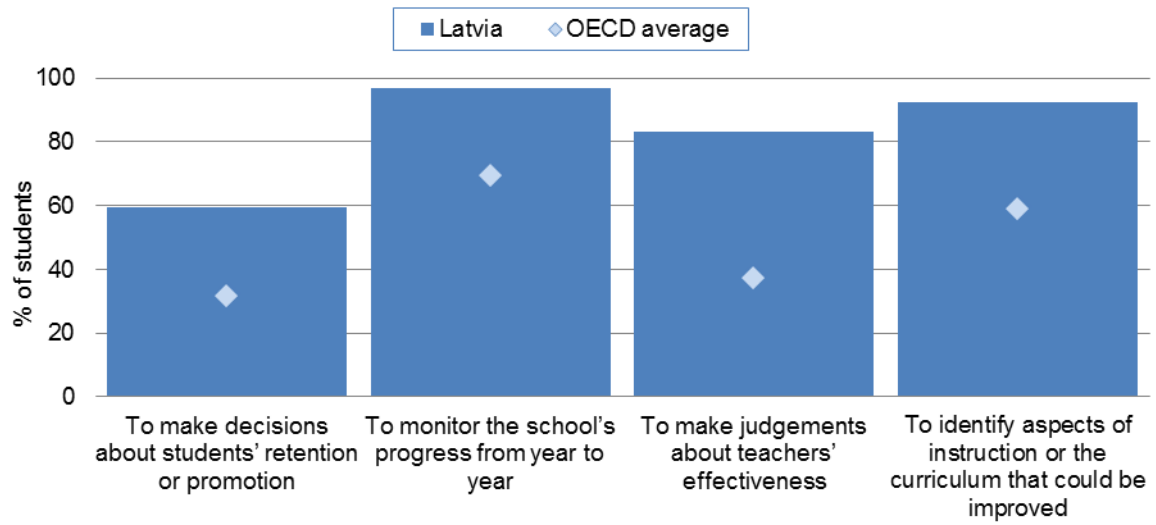
Starting in 2017, the list of indicators for school performance will be expanded to include eight additional performance indexes, including further education pathways, employment status of graduates, number of students taking interest-related (extra-curricular) education or vocationally oriented education programmes.

In 2015, to further strengthen the quality assurance of the higher education system, a regulation was passed to transfer the function of accreditation and licensing to the [Academic Information Centre](#) (AIC), which has established the [Quality Agency for Higher Education](#) to carry out these functions.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science embarked on a European Social Fund project: Participation in International Education Surveys. It supports Latvia's participation in various international data collection and analysis projects to ensure availability of data to assess the system and make international comparisons, thus contributing to the development of an education quality monitoring system to strengthen education quality in Latvia.



Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students in national modal grade for 15-year-olds, PISA 2015



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.





## GOVERNANCE: A HIGHLY DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The **education system** in Latvia involves a wide range of institutions organised at the national, municipal and institutional level. At the national level, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), the Parliament (legislative body) and the Cabinet of Ministers (executive body) are the main education policy institutions. The MoES is responsible for policy development, implementation and supervision, as well as setting education standards at primary and secondary levels. Latvia has various government actors involved in supervising the education system. Subordinate agencies that support the work of the MoES include the following:

- The [National Centre for Education](#) (2009) develops curricula and examinations for pre-school, basic and general secondary education, and vocational education, as well as subject standards and sample teaching-learning programmes. It is also responsible for provision of professional qualification development for teachers, education opportunities for students with special needs and interest-related education (which is afforded great importance in Latvian schools).
- The [State Education Quality Service](#) (2009) supervises education quality and is responsible for inspecting the education system from primary to upper secondary and tertiary levels, including all public and private education institutions. It registers education institutions, licenses education programmes and carries out school (re)accreditation.
- The [Latvian Language Agency](#) aims to enhance the status and promote a sustainable development of the Latvian (state) language. The agency implements the state language policy, formulated by the Guidelines of the State Language Policy for 2015-20.
- The [State Education Development Agency](#) (2012) has very diverse functions, including national policy implementation and overseeing activities related to EU programmes and other international co-operation activities.
- The [Agency for International Programmes for Youth](#) (1999) promotes youth activities and mobility within the European Union, implements non-formal learning and information programmes and projects for youth and those working with youth, and supports links between non-formal learning and lifelong education.
- The [Latvian Council of Science](#) and the [Latvian Academy of Sciences](#) fulfil advisory and representative roles regarding research and development (R&D) issues. The Council also funds R&D projects.

Latvia has 119 municipalities responsible for providing ECEC, primary, secondary and informal education and extra-curricular activities, serving a declining population. Education governance is highly fragmented. Municipalities vary significantly in size, socio-economic composition and capacity, and evidence suggests there is a need to rebalance the high level of autonomy of municipalities with greater public accountability. Co-operation between municipalities and the MoES takes place through the Education Boards of Municipalities, which allocate state budget funds for the salaries of pedagogical staff, provide materials for teaching and opportunities to improve teacher qualifications, and organise education for adults.

Latvian **schools** have the authority to develop their own education programmes within the framework of the General Education Law and state education standards, as well as to hire staff. Most public vocational education institutions and special schools are governed by the MoES, but some are also governed by other ministries. Private education institutions, which made up 7% of schools in 2014/15, are subject to the same rules as public schools for registration, licensing and accreditation.

**Tertiary education institutions** have autonomy to determine organisational procedures, establish internal rules and regulations, hire staff, distribute allocated funding and design programmes. Approximately 40% of higher education institutions (HEI) are private. The main bodies that represent and manage the work of HEIs are each institution's Constitutional Meeting, Senate and rector. In addition, a Rectors' Council writes proposals on issues related to higher education, facilitates educational activities in HEIs and promotes the exchange of ideas. Latvian students are also involved in the governance of higher education.

**The challenge: Generating synergies to adapt to demographic change within budgetary restrictions.**

### Recent policies and practices

Latvia's [Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020](#) define the key goals of the education system. The country is also in the process of reorganising the education system from ECEC through to tertiary education (see Spotlight 3).



### Spotlight 3. Latvia's education priorities for 2014-20 and reorganising the system

Latvia's [Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020](#) define goals and sub-goals for the development of the education system, along with directions for implementation and the corresponding performance indicators and desired results. The guidelines define three sub-goals for the education system:

- 1) Education environment: Increasing the quality of the education environment by developing proper infrastructure and enhancing its content.
- 2) Individual skills: Promoting professional and social skills of individuals, based on values such as lifelong learning and competitiveness in the work environment.
- 3) Effective management: Improving the efficiency of resource management by improving institutional excellence. This includes supervision and monitoring of education quality that will enable interested parties to track, evaluate and affect education-related processes and results, in addition to the optimisation of financial models, improvement of international competitiveness in education and availability of education provision.

These sub-goals are converted into 12 actions, which include performance indicators and results to be achieved by 2017 and 2020. Monitoring and evaluation of the progress of these indicators is the responsibility of the Minister of Education and Science.

Latvia has also started to reorganise its education system from ECEC through to tertiary education:

- 1) At the ECEC level, the government implemented a reform in 2009 to establish regions that, in association with local governments, can ensure high-quality provision of services.
- 2) For upper secondary education, the MoES plans to provide education services at the regional level. In addition, the vocational education school network has been reformed, reducing the number of schools to 24 in 2015 and creating strong institutions with status as vocational education competence centres.
- 3) At the tertiary level, reorganisation of the education network is being carried out through the Development of Institutional Capacity of Scientific Institutions project, supported by European Structural Funds.



## FUNDING: NEW FUNDING MODELS TO MEET NEEDS IN TEACHER REMUNERATION, SYSTEM EFFICIENCY AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

Latvia was particularly affected by the 2008 financial crisis. GDP fell sharply during 2009-10, leading to a reduction in wages and family incomes by more than a third in two years. Latvia's investment in educational institutions at all levels was 4.5% of GDP in 2013, below the OECD average of 5.2% (Figure 7), although Latvia spends comparatively more on pre-primary education (0.8% of GDP, compared to the OECD average of 0.6%). Overall, the largest share of expenditure on educational institutions comes from public sources (89% in 2013, compared to the OECD average of 84%), with variations in the proportion of public funding across levels of education. A particularly high proportion of funding for pre-primary institutions comes from public sources: 94% of pre-primary students in Latvia attend publicly funded institutions (compared to the OECD average of 68%). **Annual expenditure** per student from primary through tertiary education in 2013 was USD 6 526 (well below the OECD average of USD 10 493).

**Funding of public schools** at primary and secondary level is provided by the central government and municipalities. The state ensures teachers' remuneration, while municipalities are responsible for the maintenance costs of schools. Compulsory education is free of charge, with the exception of pre-schools where parents cover the cost of school meals (with municipal subsidies for low-income families). The funding and supervision of institutions that provide vocational education programmes depend on the institution founders and are split between the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Health, municipalities and the private sector. The state is also responsible for financing the education of children with special needs, children who go to boarding schools and those who attend the school of social correction. The current funding system for primary and upper secondary education is based on a per-student funding model, also known as "money follows the student" (see Spotlight 2). Within schools, the school leader has responsibility for the use of financial and material resources, as well as remuneration of employees. Funding of private schools is the responsibility of the founders, although the state allocates funding in some cases, such as if private education institutions offer compulsory education. Almost all students in primary and secondary institutions go to publicly funded institutions. Fewer than 2% of primary and lower secondary students attend private institutions, and around 3% of upper secondary students.

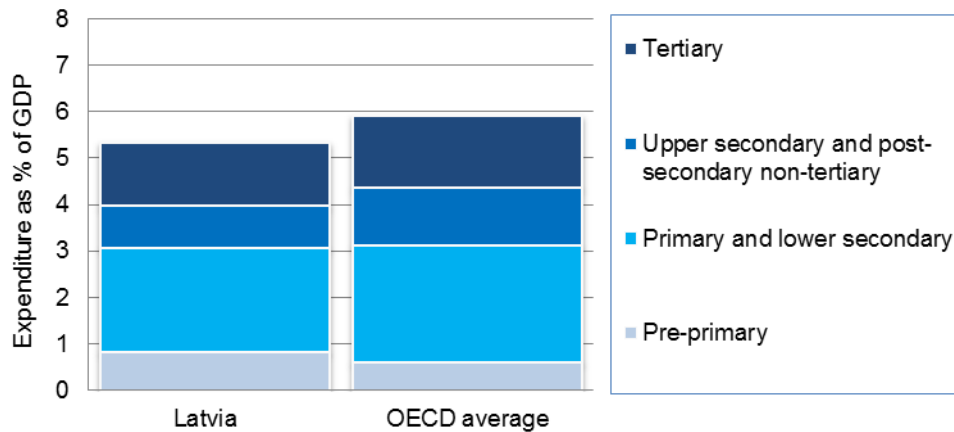
**Higher education institutions** in Latvia are funded through different sources, including state funds, student fees, EU structural funds or other sources of international funding. Some 31% of expenditure at tertiary level came from household funds in 2013 (above the OECD average of 21%). Higher education institutions can also receive donations and grants from individuals and other private entities. The number of state-funded spots is decided yearly by the MoES according to the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The decision is based on the demands of the labour market and in accordance with the long-term strategy of the Latvian economy. In the 2014/15 academic year, 40% of students were state-funded, while 60% paid tuition fees. Some areas of study, including natural sciences, ICT, engineering and mathematics, have recently been targeted for more allocation of state funds. Private higher education institutions are free to set their own tuition fees, although they can receive state funding in certain agreements with the Ministry.

**The challenge: Revising funding to meet challenges of remuneration, efficiency and demography.**

### Recent policies and practices

In 2016, local governments became responsible for providing financial support to parents whose children are between age 1.5 and the start of primary education and are not benefiting from public childcare in municipal kindergartens (this used to be the responsibility of the Latvian government). Proposed amendments to the Education Law will develop a funding system that calculates how much local governments will have to give to families in need to cover the cost of a child's place in a public or private kindergarten, if there are no spots available in municipal ECEC institutions.

To respond to the challenges of dissatisfaction with teachers' salaries, the ineffectiveness of some municipalities in distributing funds and the demographic decline, in 2016, the MoES implemented a revised model for school funding and teacher remuneration (Spotlight 2). At the tertiary level, a new funding model is planned to increase efficiency and better match labour market needs with students' skills (see Spotlight 4).

**Figure 7. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education, 2013**

Source: OECD (2016), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>.

#### Spotlight 4. New funding model for tertiary education

In 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers endorsed a new model for financing tertiary education, proposed by the World Bank, to increase its quality, internationalisation and labour market relevance. The previous model had been criticised for its sole focus on an input-oriented approach, leading to low salaries, high workloads, misalignment of teaching and research, bureaucracy and lack of incentives for institutions to diversify, consolidate and collaborate.

The new model is based on three pillars that aim to provide balance between stability, performance and innovation. This model combines stable core funding with two additional funding allocations based on performance and innovation:

- The first pillar will consist of core funding derived from a per capita funding element based on the number of study places in the institution, as well as the number of professors or academic staff. It aims to increase the funding available for research and to further align teaching and research funding.
- The second, performance-oriented pillar is based on performance indicators derived partially from national strategies and partially from institution-specific indicators related to their profile and strategic development. For this pillar, the government allocated EUR 5.5 million for 2015, EUR 6.5 million for 2016 and EUR 6.5 million for 2017.
- The third, innovation-oriented pillar will provide funding for targets set by each university or by a performance agreement, in addition to funding for research centres of excellence, accounting for research evaluation outcomes and a national strategy for research priorities. This pillar is currently supported by the European Structural and Investment funds.

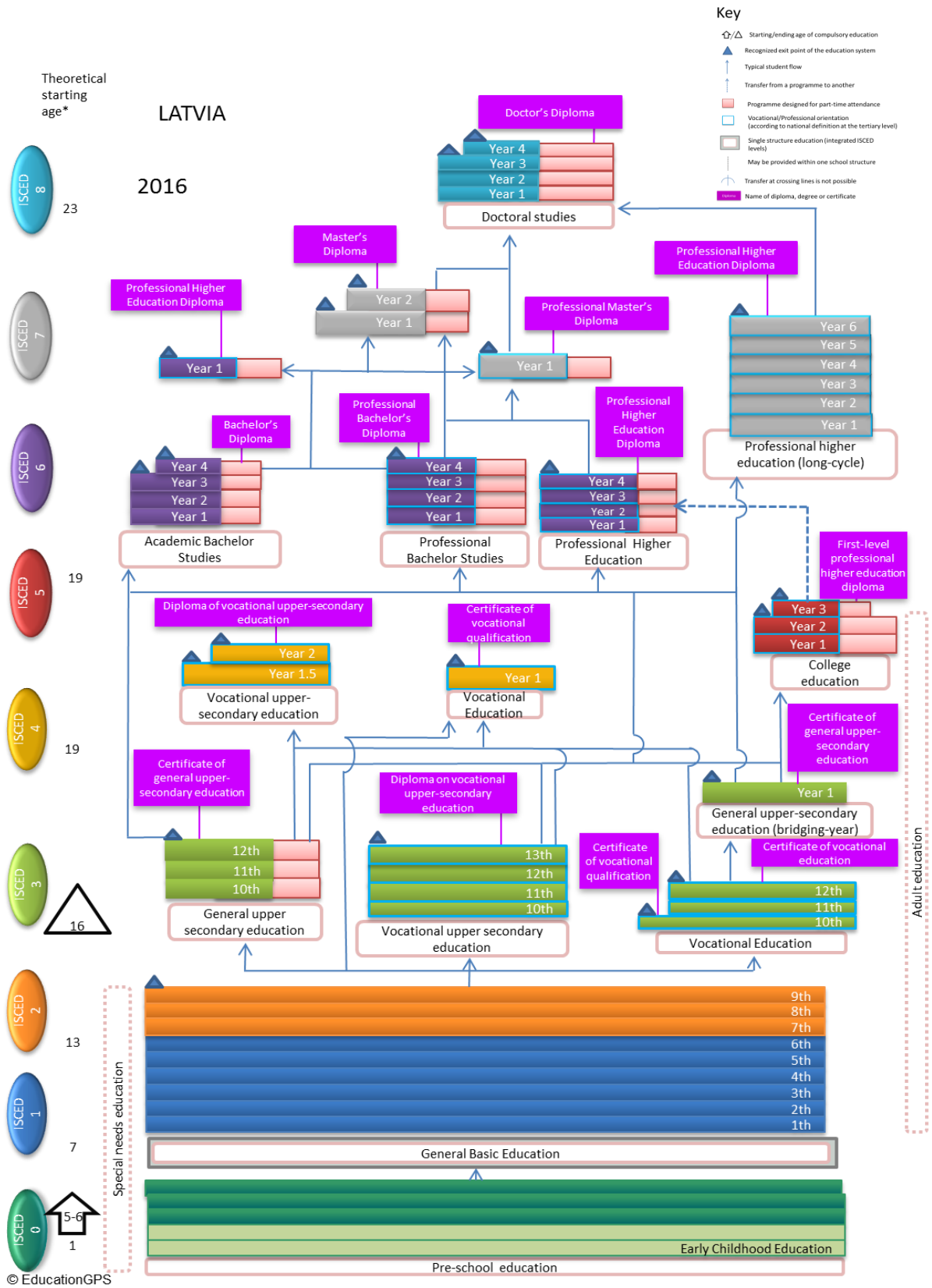
In addition, the MoES and the World Bank signed an agreement in 2016 to improve Latvia's higher education institutions' governance, university-internal funding mechanisms and academic recruitment and remuneration schemes. Through this agreement, the World Bank will:

- Develop models to strengthen HEIs' managerial and financial autonomy, financial stability, strategic specialisation and co-operation with industries.
- Provide input on policy planning and further investments for the development of internal governance of HEIs in Latvia, as well as for the development of academic staff in HEIs of Latvia.

This project will have a duration of two years (2016-2018) and its cost of USD 320 000 will be financed with support of the European Union Structural Funds.



ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF LATVIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



Source: OECD (2016), "Latvia: Overview of the education system", OECD Education GPS, <http://qpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=LVA>.



ANNEX B: STATISTICS

#	List of key indicators	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
<b>Background information</b>					
<i>Political context</i>					
1	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (from primary to tertiary), 2013 (EAG 2016)	4.1%	4.8%	3.3%	7.3%
<i>Economy</i>					
2	GDP per capita, 2014, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (OECD Factbook 2015/2016)	23 873	38 865	17 831	97 273
3	GDP growth 2014 (OECD Factbook 2015/2016)	2.1%	1.8%	-0.4%	5.2%
<i>Society</i>					
4	Population density, inhab/km <sup>2</sup> , 2014 (OECD Statistics)	m	142	3	507
5	Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population, 2010 (OECD Factbook 2014)	m	18.6%	13.1%	29.6%
6	Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population, 2013 or latest available year (OECD Factbook 2015)	m	n/a	0.3%	43.7%
<b>Education outcomes</b>					
7	Mean performance in science (PISA 2015)	490	493	416	538
8	Average three-year trend in reading performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2015) <sup>4,5</sup>	4.2	0.7	-5.2	9.2
9	Average three-year trend in mathematics performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2015) <sup>4,5</sup>	0.1	-1.0	-9.7	10.1
10	Average three-year trend in science performance across PISA assessments (PISA 2015) <sup>4,5</sup>	1.1	-1.4	-10.6	7.6
11	Enrolment rates of 3-year-olds in pre-primary education as a percentage of the population of the same age group, 2014 (EAG 2016)	86%	69%	0%	100%
12	% of 25-64 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is lower secondary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)	9%	15%	1%	33%
13	% of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is at least upper secondary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)	85%	84%	45%	98%
14	% of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is tertiary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)	40%	42%	21%	69%
15	% of 25-34 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is vocational upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)	20.7%	26.5%	4.5%	57.7%
<b>Unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds by educational attainment, 2015 (EAG 2016)</b>					
16	Below upper secondary	18.6%	17.4%	4.2%	38.0%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	9.4%	9.2%	4.1%	31.7%
	Tertiary education	6.0%	6.9%	2.5%	30.2%
<b>Students: Raising outcomes</b>					
<i>Policy lever 1: Equity and quality</i>					
17	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2015)	16	14	10	16
<b>Students performing at the highest or lowest levels in science (%) (PISA 2015)</b>					
18	Students performing below Level 2	17.2%	21.2%	8.8%	47.8%
	Students performing at Level 5 or above	3.8%	7.7%	0.1%	15.3%
<b>Variance in science performance between schools and within schools as a percentage of the OECD average variance in science performance (PISA 2015)</b>					
19	Between-schools percentage of variance	12%	30%	4%	65%
	Within-schools percentage of variance	61%	69%	33%	99%
20	% of students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2015)	5.0%	12.0%	1.1%	34.0%





#	List of key indicators	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
21	Percentage of variance in science performance in PISA test explained by ESCS (PISA 2015) <sup>4</sup>	8.7%	12.9%	4.9%	21.4%
22	Score difference in science performance in PISA between non-immigrant and immigrant students AFTER adjusting for socio-economic status (PISA 2015) <sup>4</sup>	20	31	-5	83
23	Score differences between boys and girls in science (PISA 2015) <sup>4</sup>	-11	4	-19	19
<i>Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future</i>					
<b>Adjusted mean proficiency in literacy among adults on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, 2012)</b>					
24	Among 16-65 year-olds (adjusted)	NP	270.7	249.4	293.6
	Among 16-24 year-olds (adjusted)	NP	277.9	260.2	296.7
<b>Upper secondary graduation rates in % by programme of orientation, 2013 (EAG 2016)</b>					
25	General programmes	67%	54%	20%	111%
	Pre-vocational/ vocational programmes	27%	46%	4%	96%
<b>First-time graduation rates, by tertiary ISCED level, 2013 (EAG 2016)</b>					
26	Short tertiary (2-3 years), ISCED 5	12.7%	10.6%	0.2%	26.4%
	Bachelor's or equivalent, ISCED 6	31.4%	37.8%	8.4%	60.7%
	Master's or equivalent, ISCED 7	15.2%	17.6%	3.7%	37.6%
	Doctorate or equivalent, ISCED 8	1.0%	1.7%	0.2%	3.4%
27	% of 15-29 year-olds not in education, employment or training, 2014 (EAG 2016)	13.0%	14.6%	6.2%	28.8%
<b>Institutions: Improving schools</b>					
<i>Policy lever 3: School improvement</i>					
28	Mean index of adaptive instruction in science lessons (PISA 2015)	0.18	0.01	-0.38	0.53
29	Mean index of disciplinary climate based on students' reports (PISA 2015)	-0.17	0.00	-0.27	0.83
<b>% of teachers above the age of 50 by education level, 2014 (EAG 2016)</b>					
30	Primary education	39%	30%	13%	58%
	Lower secondary education	47%	34%	7%	59%
	Upper secondary education	51%	38%	11%	69%
<b>Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions by education level, 2013 (EAG 2016)</b>					
31	Primary education	m	776	569	1 146
	Lower secondary education, general programmes	m	694	459	1 146
	Upper secondary education, general programmes	m	644	386	1 146
<b>Ratio of actual teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)</b>					
32	Primary education	m	0.81	0.56	1.08
	Lower secondary education, general programmes	m	0.85	0.56	1.23
	Upper secondary education, general programmes	m	0.89	0.58	1.23
33	Growth rate of teachers' salaries between 2005 and 2014 in lower secondary education, 2014 (EAG 2016)	m	3%	-30%	37%
34	% of lower secondary education teachers who report a "moderate" or "large" positive change on their knowledge and understanding of their main subject field(s) after they received feedback on their work at their school (TALIS 2013)	55.1%	53.5%	26.7%	86.2%



#	List of key indicators	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
<i>Policy level 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes</i>					
35	Percentage of lower secondary education principals who report that they use student performance and student evaluation results (including national/international assessments) to develop the school's educational goals and programmes (TALIS 2013)	94.4%	88.8%	58.5%	99.5%
<b>% of students whose school principals reported that assessments are used for the following purposes (PISA 2015)</b>					
36	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	59%	31%	3%	61%
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	97%	69%	26%	98%
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	83%	37%	4%	88%
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	92%	59%	14%	92%
<b>% of lower secondary education teachers reporting appraisal/feedback from the school principal on their work with this frequency (TALIS 2013)</b>					
37	Once every two years or less	18.7%	33.9%	3.2%	88.8%
	Once per year	60.5%	41.5%	9.5%	82.1%
	Twice or more per year	20.8%	24.7%	1.0%	49.6%
<b>Systems: Organising the system</b>					
<i>Policy level 5: Governance</i>					
<b>% of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2011 (EAG 2012)</b>					
38	Central or state government	m	36%	0%	87%
	Regional or sub-regional government	m	6%	0%	36%
	Local government	m	17%	0%	100%
	School government	m	41%	5%	86%
<i>Policy level 6: Funding</i>					
<b>Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2013 (EAG 2016)</b>					
39	Pre-primary education	4 854	8 070	3 172	19 233
	Primary education	5 974	8 477	2 717	17 959
	Secondary education	6 010	9 811	3 065	19 762
	Tertiary education	8 193	15 772	7 568	40 933
<b>Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2013 (EAG 2016)</b>					
40	Public sources	89.2%	84.2%	61.2%	99.0%
	All private sources	10.8%	15.8%	1.0%	38.8%
	Index of change in expenditure on educational institutions, public sources, (constant prices, 2008=100)	m	106	76	163
	Index of change in expenditure on educational institutions, all private sources, (constant prices, 2008=100)	m	116	75	212
Notes					
1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in TALIS and the Survey of Adult Skills, where they refer to participating countries.					
2. "m": included when data is not available.					
3. "NP": included if the country is not participating in the study.					
4. Statistically significant values of the indicator are shown in bold (PISA 2015 only)					
5. The average three year trend is the average change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation in PISA to PISA 2015.					
6. "n/a": included when the category is not applicable.					



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