

FACTSHEET

Estonia

Secondary education

In Estonia secondary education is not compulsory. It is divided into general (*üldkeskharidus* or *gümnaasiumiharidus*) and vocational secondary education (*kutsekeskharidus*). General secondary education is determined by the national curriculum (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava*, *Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava*), vocational secondary education is determined by the vocational education standard (*Kutseharidusstandard*) and the national vocational curricula for certain professions. There are two main options after completing basic school: a general secondary school (*gümnaasium*) or a vocational education institution (*kutseõppeasutus*).

The state encourages acquisition of secondary education by determining the required number of student places. In the division of study places between secondary schools and vocational education institutions, the state considers regional priorities and interests. Approximately two thirds of the basic school graduates continue their studies towards general secondary education.

The Law on Basic and Secondary Schools, adopted in September 1993, establishes *gümnaasium* (Grades 10-12) as the main structural unit of secondary education, replacing the former secondary school (*keskkool*). A secondary school, as an institution, may also include a basic school (Grades 1-9).

Education in state or municipal general secondary schools is free of charge.

National curriculum

The requirements concerning secondary education, i.e. the educational standards, are established in the Government approved national curriculum. The national curriculum determines the study objectives, the duration of studies, the relationship of the state curriculum to the school curriculum, a list of compulsory courses, including the number of lessons and their contents, the options and conditions for the selection of courses, as well as the requirements for students in terms of different study periods and graduation.

The national curriculum for basic and secondary education (2002) gave schools more freedom in choosing the direction of studies, made it possible to consider the students' interests and abilities, and decreased the study load. It emphasised the need for the integration of different courses and putting knowledge into practice, and stressed the importance of competence as the basis of life-long learning. It also coordinated the development of an external evaluation system.

It is possible to intensify the treatment of compulsory courses by adding topics or by offering courses to be chosen by students. The number of alternative courses is determined by the national curriculum, but the school, taking into consideration the students' interests and the existing opportunities, develops their content. Within the scope of alternative courses, a secondary school may offer initial vocational training in cooperation with vocational schools.

The new national curriculum (*Gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava*) gives more importance to achieving the goals, competence and subject integration set in the curriculum. The study load

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has been reduced, the learning outcomes have been expressed more clearly and there is more freedom of choice for the students.

A school year includes no less than 175 days (35 weeks) of study.

Graduation

The period of study at general secondary school is three years (Grades 10 – 12). Since 2014 graduation students have to take the school examination (*koolieksam*), three state examinations (*riigieksamid*) and complete student's research or practical work. School examination and student's research paper or practical work are organised by the school.

The state examination in the Estonian language (*eesti keel*) or Estonian as a second language (*eesti keel teise keelena*), mathematics (*matemaatika*) and foreign language (*võõrkeel*) are compulsory for all secondary school leavers.

In mathematics, the state examination can be chosen between the narrow mathematics and broad (extensive) mathematics. In the case of the foreign language examination student has a choice between German, English, French, or Russian language examinations. State examination of foreign language may be replaced by an internationally recognised language test on the conditions established by the Minister of Education and Research.

Until 31.07.2012 administration of state examinations were the responsibility of the State Examination and Qualification Centre (*Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus*). From August 2012 to 2020 state examinations were administered by the Foundation Innove (*Sihtasutus Innove*) and since August 2020 by The Education and Youth Board (*Haridus- ja Noorteamet* or *Harno*).

After finishing general or vocational secondary education, a graduate can continue studies at higher education institution or at vocational school by a post-secondary vocational programme.

Secondary education graduate may also enter the labour market.