UN Special Rapporteur on right to education
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Subject: Questionnaire on norms and standards for quality of education by special rapporteur on the right to education

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter concerning norms and standards for quality of education, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia would like to present the completed questionnaire on norms and standards for quality of education in Latvia.

Yours sincerely,

Lauma Stīka
Acting State Secretary

Enclosure: Questionnaire on norms and standards for quality of education by special rapporteur on the right to education (7 pages)
Questionnaire on norms and standards for quality of education by special rapporteur on the right to education

1. National laws, regulations and policies establishing norms and standards for quality of education in Latvia

According to the Law on Education (accepted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia on 29th October, 1998) education system in Latvia is administered at three levels – national, municipal and institutional – each of them performing according to its competence.

The competence of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) includes responsibility for the strategy in ensuring the accessibility and quality of education, but several institutions under the supervision of MoES have responsibility for the quality of education.

In 2009 as the result of structural reforms two institutions subordinated to MoES were established: National Centre for Education and State Service of Education Quality.

The functions of these institutions include those related to the quality of education.

National Centre for Education ensures the elaboration of the study content (except higher education) and support materials complying with basic, secondary and vocational education standards; ensures the assessment of students’ competences by providing state centralized examinations in general education and developing the content of vocational education state examinations; coordinates teachers’ professional developments and support system for students with special needs.

The functions of State Service of Education Quality include:

- maintaining registers in the field of education (decrees on registering establishments and registration; register of teaching and academic staff; registers of licensed education programmes, accredited education institutions and programmes; register of research institutions);
- licensing of education programmes, i.e. conformity assessment of education programmes (except non-formal, informal and higher education), granting the right to deliver them, preparing licences;
- performing teachers’ accreditation, who carry out private practice (conformity assessment of the applications submitted by private persons, meetings and decisions of the certificate awarding commission, preparing and register of certificates);
- organizing quality assessment – of education institutions (except pre-school, higher education institutions and colleges) and education programmes (except pre-school, professional development, professionally orientated education, non-formal and professional higher education), as well as ensuring accreditation process of examination centres;
- performing monitoring of the implementation of accreditation recommendations, and analysis of education institutions’ functioning;
- ensuring and coordinating validation of professional competence obtained outside formal education system by conferring the rights to an accredited education institution or examination centre to validate professional competence obtained outside formal education.

Raising quality of education and ensuring the control over it are also mentioned as implementation directions of Guidelines for Education Development 2007–2013, which include raising effectiveness of the pedagogical process, improving the evaluation system of the content and achievements, developing educational and
methodological materials, improving the system of teachers’ education and professional development, improving the evaluation system for quality of education.

2. Applicable norms and standards and minimal requirements (primary and secondary schools):

a) School infrastructure
Article No 17 of the Law on Education states that every municipality is obliged to provide a possibility to acquire basic education in the school closest to the dwelling-place for the children living in its administrative territory. Parents (guardians) must enrol their children at the age of seven in the school of their choice. The procedure is as follows: parents (guardians) notify the school that they want their child to attend. The founder sets the time and order of signing up for compulsory education. Freedom of educational choice exists at all levels of education. Parents are free to choose a school for the child, but everyone has right to attend the school closest to his place of living. Institutions that provide basic educational programmes may not organize admission tests. However, gymnasiums and state gymnasiuims may do it when enrolling pupils in the 7th, 8th and 9th grade. In this case an authorization from the founder is necessary, and the admission test may not exceed the requirements defined in the national standards. In public sector schools the education is free of charge.

b) Class size and pupil-teacher ratio
An average student and teacher load ratio (2010/2011 school year) in regions is not less than 8:1, in cities – 10,2:1. Average class size (2010/2011 school year) is 18,4 students; in regions – 15,6; in cities – 22,6.

c) Teacher qualification
Article No 48 of the Law on Education states that a person has a right to work as a teacher if he has pedagogical education or is acquiring pedagogical education that corresponds to professional qualification requirements set by the Cabinet of Ministers.
According to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 347 “Requirements on teachers’ education and professional qualification” (accepted on 3rd October, 2000) a necessary education for teachers can be obtained in 1st level professional higher education programmes, 2nd level professional higher education programmes or academic higher education programmes.
In Latvia, internship at school is a compulsory part of initial training of the teachers.

d) Working conditions for teachers and their professional development
In Latvia, teachers do not have a civil servant status. They are contracted on a permanent basis. Teachers’ contracts are based on the general employment legislation, agreed with labour unions. The definition of professional standards in terms of teaching content and methodology (knowledge, skills and competences that teachers are expected to acquire and apply in their work) is stated in the legislation and in schools’ own regulations.
Teachers are responsible for their work, its methods and results. According to the article No 51 of the Law on Education the general responsibilities of teachers are as follows:
• to participate creatively and responsively in the implementation of the relevant education programs;
• to form the attitude of the student towards himself, others, work, culture, society and the state; to raise fair persons – Latvian patriots;
• to respect the norms of professional ethics;
• to develop professional competence;
• to respect the rights of student;
• to cooperate with student’s family in the field of education;
• to participate in development of education process in education institution.

Article No 52 of the Law on Education states that teachers have right to receive annual state-guaranteed 8-week holiday, informative and material support for implementation of education programmes, as well as society support. According to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 431 “Requirements on teachers’ professional qualification’s development” (accepted on 7th June, 2011) teacher is responsible for development of his professional qualification and must acquire professional development programmes – not less than 36 hours altogether during three years. Development of professional qualification includes programmes that are approved by MoES.

Self-development and experience modules (seminars, conferences, adult non-formal education programmes) can be evaluated as a part of professional development. Teacher plans the development of his professional qualification together with the director of education institution, where he is employed.

e) School curricula content and pedagogical materials

In Latvia curricula content is determined by the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 715 „Regulation on the State General Secondary Education Standard and the General Education Subjects’ Standards” (accepted on 2nd September, 2008) and the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 1027 „Regulation on the State Basic Education Standard and the Basic Education Subjects’ Standards” (accepted on 19th December, 2006).

Above mentioned Regulations include main goals and objectives, education content, principles of evaluation of acquired education, as well as education subjects’ standards.

Methodological materials are developed in accordance with education standards. In 2010 lecturers of the University of Latvia after the subscription of MoES created methodical material “Development and Evaluation of the Content of Textbooks in Accordance with the State Education Standards”.

Basic education subjects’ standards and general education subjects’ standards, content of general education subjects’ programmes, as well as methodical material “Development and Evaluation of the Content of Textbooks in Accordance with the State Education Standards” are available (in Latvian only) on the website of National Centre for Education – www.visc.gov.lv

f) Teaching-learning processes

According to the article No 4 of the Law on Education preparation of 5-year-old children for basic education is compulsory, as well as acquiring basic education till the age of 18. These rights are state-guaranteed and free of charge.

Apart from the state financed education institutions, there are also private schools and private higher education institutions in Latvia. Instructions are given overall in Latvian. Latvia also has state-financed ethnic minority schools or classes where the
courses are presented in Belorussian, Estonian, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Polish, Roma, Russian and Ukrainian. MoES has drawn up four-models’ bilingual education curricula for primary schools that differ from each other in terms of the proportion of classes to be taught in the minority language and Latvian or bilingual. National minority schools can opt for one of these curricula or prepare their own. Minority secondary schools have been given 40% of the total number of subjects in the national minority language and free choice is given to the minority schools in determining the subjects which should be taught in the official state language.

The standards are common for majority and minority schools. Many aspects of education for diversity are integrated into variety of all school subjects: for example, human rights education; intercultural/multicultural education, inter-religious education, anti-racism education, tolerance education, civic education, education combating anti-Semitism, ethnic/cultural minorities, and gender equality.

More than 90% of students attend state schools. School year lasts 36 weeks (except examination periods) – from the 1st of September till the end of May.

Pre-school education (ISCED level 0)
Since 1st of September 2002 the pre-school education became compulsory for five and six years old children. The objective of pre-school education is to foster the general development of children and to prepare them for entering the primary stage of basic education. Pre-school education has been considered as a comprehensive first stage of general education and all the children should complete it by the age of 7.

Basic education (ISCED level 1–2)
9-year single-structured basic comprehensive education in Latvia begins when the child turns seven years old and lasts till the age of 16. In some cases the acquisition of basic education may last till the age of 18.

The vast majority of young people after completing basic school continue their studies in secondary education: in 2010/2011 school year 64.76% of the basic school leavers went to general secondary schools and 35.24% chose general vocational education.

Special needs education
The structure of special education is very similar to the structure of the mainstream education. Special needs education provides opportunities for persons with special needs to attain general knowledge and skills with a strong emphasis on their applicability, thus facilitating social inclusion.

Vocational oriented education
Vocational oriented education in arts and music is voluntary and is provided to satisfy person’s individual educational needs and wishes.

Secondary education (ISCED level 3)
There are two types of secondary education programmes in Latvia: general secondary education programmes and vocational secondary education programmes. When the schools organize the admitting procedure to enrol the students to the secondary level of education, they are free to hold the entrance examinations, except the examinations in those subjects where the students have already received a Centralized Examination Certificate.

General secondary education
General secondary schools provide general education and continue the socialization function of the basic schools.

The compulsory curriculum of the 3-years general secondary schools is determined by the National Standard in the following profiles: (1) general comprehensive, (2) humanities / social sciences, (3) mathematics / natural science / technical competences, (4) vocational / professional (arts, music, business, sports).
Schools can offer some optional subjects that take up no more than 10–15% of the total curriculum. Students may also choose some courses of compulsory subject area. General secondary education programmes, irrespective of the profile, may be combined with national minority education programmes by including the lessons in the minority languages and specific subjects related to the ethnic heritage and social integration.

Vocational education and training
The goal of vocational education and training for young people is to continue the teaching function of basic schools while granting a qualification. The Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 211 “Regulation on the State Vocational Secondary Education Standard” (accepted on 27th June, 2000) determines the contents of vocational education programmes. The majority of vocational schools in Latvia provide 3- and 4-years vocational education and training programmes at secondary level and only some programmes are designed for basic vocational and training purposes.

g) School management, including students’ and parents’ participation
Heads of education institutions are designated as follows:

- **Manager** – pre-school education institutions.
- **Director/Principal** – primary, secondary schools, colleges, career guidance, non-formal education institutions.
- **Rector** – higher education institutions.

The head of the education institution must be a person with relevant education and the necessary professional qualifications. The head of general primary of general secondary education institution must be a person with higher pedagogical education or higher and pedagogical education, or a person with higher education, who is acquiring pedagogical education.

According to the Article 30 of the Law on Education the head of education institution:

- is responsible for the operation of education institution, observance of laws and regulations, as well as the rational use of intellectual, financial and material resources;
- makes decisions on use of intellectual, financial and material resources;
- determines the salary of the employees (not less that the minimum stated by the Cabinet of Ministers);
- is responsible for establishment of school’s self-government (School Council);
- is responsible for provision of school’s access to library and information services.

According to the Article 31 of the Law on Education education institution’s self-government (School Council) is created as a collegiate institution. Primary and secondary education institutions’ self-government consists of founder, students, and their parents and representative employees of certain education institution. It determines proposals for the development of education institution, provides cooperation with the parents, and submits proposals to the head of the institution on the organization budget allocation and implementation of education programs.

In Latvia parent associations are a usual component of school life. The parents’ committees still function in many places today, sometimes parallel to the School Council.
h) Methods to evaluate students' performance and assess learning outcomes
To evaluate students' performance tests are organized in education institutions, including centralized examinations. According to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 335 “Regulation on centralized examinations’ content and procedure” (accepted on 6th April, 2010) the procedure of centralized examinations is provided by the National Centre for Education in cooperation with municipalities and education institutions.
To evaluate different aspects of education – for example, minority schools, civic attitude, education content, pre-school education – research is provided by MoES in cooperation with partners.
To ensure international assessment Latvia participates in OECD PISA research. With the support of European Union’s Structural funds Latvia will participate in OECD PISA 2012, OECD PISA 2015, OECD TALIS 2013, and ASEM LLL Hub studies. All these assessment instruments are used in evaluation of national education policy and development of further actions.

3. Institutional mechanisms used to collect and process information and to assess adherence to norms and standards established to ensure quality of education.
To ensure the improvement of vocational education quality assessment system, since 2010 the State Service of Education Quality joined the working group of European quality assurance in vocational education and training.
Till 2010 two national education quality assessment systems existed – for general and vocational education, which was an obstacle for forming a comprehensive view on the education quality in Latvia. In order for the state to be able to guarantee not only the existence and accessibility of education system, but also the acquisition of qualitative, comparable education complying with contemporary requirements, to avoid threats of education fragmentation by regions, when education offer (contents, quality) in one municipality significantly differs from the education offer in the other municipality, a unified accreditation system for the whole country was developed both in general and vocational education, based upon unified assessment criteria and united system of self-assessment providing data for the analysis and elaboration of education policy.
On 14th September 2010, the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No 852 “Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education institutions and examination centres” was adopted, unifying the accreditation of both general and vocational education. This Regulation stipulates a unified accreditation procedure and clearly defines quality requirements in general and vocational education, which is for education programmes at the European Qualifications Framework levels 1–4.
A unified education quality assessment system ensures the use of a unified quality assessment methodology, assessing seven operational fields of education institution or examination centre: education content, teaching and learning, students’ achievements, student support, institution’s environment, resources, performance organization, management and development planning. The assessment of these fields, dividing them more specifically, is based on 19 criteria for education institutions and 12 criteria for examination centres across four levels (insufficient, sufficient, good and very good).
Internal and external assessment is performed during the accreditation process. The internal assessment is performed by the education institution while preparing its self-assessment report, which is a mandatory precondition for the accreditation of
institutions and programmes. The accreditation procedure in an institution is initiated on the basis of the self-assessment report.

Accreditation of education institutions and programmes, which is an important element of development of educational environment and self-improvement, is based upon the report provided by an expert commission and its recommendations to the accreditation commission on granting or denying accreditation. The expert commission consists of representatives from various institutions. It is arranged by the State Service of Education Quality and it is independent from the particular education institution. Representatives of MoES, the National Centre for Education or the State Service of Education Quality, education specialists of municipalities, representatives of other institutions including representatives of other ministries, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, employers, craftsmen and trade unions, as well as representatives of education institutions, except those from the institution undergoing accreditation, can be included in expert commission. Vocational education accreditation expert commissions always include the representatives of the respective supervising institutions, as well as sectoral associations, companies, employers’ representatives delegated by the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, ensuring their regular and mandatory participation.

4. Other relevant initiatives and development aiming to promote quality in education.

In 2009 the elaboration of a monitoring system for accredited institutions was started. During this process it is planned to follow the implementation of the accreditation experts' recommendations.

To ensure public confidence and trust in education process, quality transparency and clarity, education institutions publish their self-assessment reports and the State Service of Education Quality publishes the accreditation experts’ reports on their websites. Information on all accredited education institutions and programmes is available in the State Education Information System database (https://www.viis.lv).

To assess and to improve the quality of accreditation process, the accredited education institutions provide a feedback on the work of accreditation experts.

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