

Latvia

Demographics for Latvia

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| Population: | 2,290,237 (July 2005 est.) |
| GDP (by PPP method): | US\$26.53 billion |
| Currency (inc code): | Latvian Lat (LVL) |
| Language(s): | Latvian (official), Russian, Lithuanian and others |
| Internet country code: | .lv |

Primary and secondary education

Figure 1 shows the structure of the Latvian education system.

Pre-school education exists for children up to the age of seven, but is compulsory to prepare five- and six-year-old children for the acquisition of basic education[1].

Basic education is also compulsory and it starts in the calendar year when a child turns seven. Anyone, without any age limits, has the right to acquire secondary education programmes, if he/she has a certificate attesting basic education. There are four general secondary education programme directions: comprehensive; humanities and social sciences; mathematics, natural sciences and technology; and professionally-oriented ones. The compulsory general secondary education programme content is determined by the state general secondary education standard[1].

Secondary education

There are two types of secondary education programmes: general secondary and vocational secondary education and training programmes. When admitting students to the secondary level education, schools are free to hold entrance examinations according to the basic education standard, except in

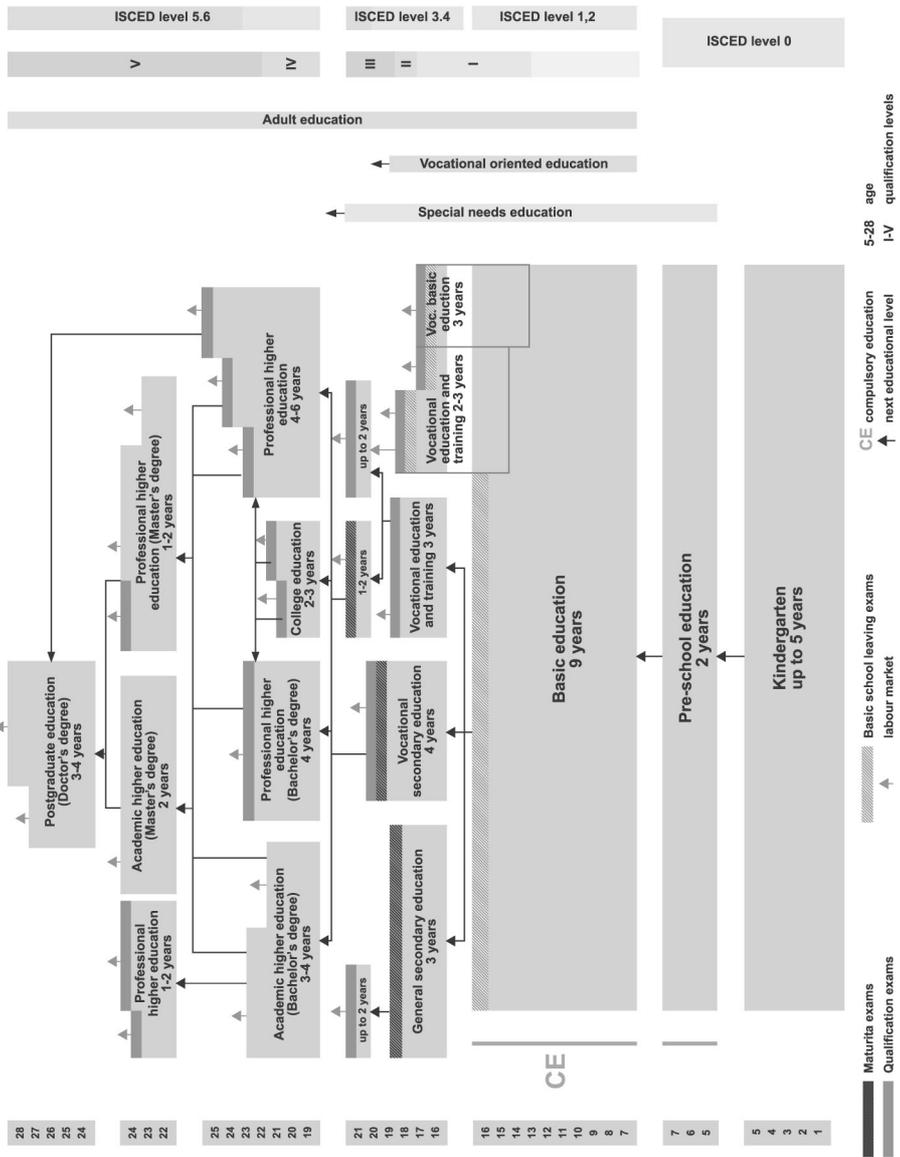


Figure 1. The Education System in Latvia

those subjects for which students have already received a Certificate of Basic Education[1].

The compulsory curriculum of three-year general secondary schools is determined by the National Standard in the following profiles:

- general comprehensive;
- humanities/social sciences;
- mathematics/natural science/technical; and
- vocational/professional (arts, music, business, sports).

All educational programmes must contain eight compulsory and three-six selected subjects depending on the profile.

On graduation students have to take at least five centralized national examinations, the content and procedure of which are determined by the Ministry of Education and Science and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. A Certificate of Secondary Education is awarded to all students, who have received a positive assessment in all subjects within their chosen profile and in national examinations; and a certificate of the passed centralized exams with their scores, which provides the right to continue education in any higher-level education programme. If the student has not received an evaluation in one or more subjects or passed a national examination, he/she receives a school report[1].

Vocation-oriented education

Vocation-oriented education in arts and music is voluntary and provides for a person's individual educational needs and wishes[1].

Higher education

The structure of higher education in Latvia is also explained in Figure 1. The state education standard is provided by Cabinet regulations. Latvia's integration into the European Union sets special tasks also for the field of education. The Latvian education system should provide compliance of education with increasing education quality requirements and with competition on an international level. The living standard of Latvian society and the state development in the future depend on the effectiveness and quality of education, on the readiness of society for professional work and free competition in the European common economic space.

There are four universities and a number of other higher education institutions in Latvia. The main split between university and non-university higher education is between the programmes rather than between the institutions, since the law allows academic and professional programmes to be organised within the same institution. All universities and 17 other institutions are state-run. In addition, there are a number of private institutions, of which

ten are state-recognized. There are 22 colleges in Latvia. All the recognized institutions enjoy autonomy. Recognition of higher education institutions and programmes is based on quality assessment, which is carried out as self-assessment followed by an evaluation visit with the participation of foreign experts. Higher education institutions confer academic degrees and professional higher education qualifications.

Academic higher education programmes are based on fundamental and/or applied science; they usually comprise a thesis at the end of each stage and lead to a Bachelor's degree and Master's degree. Duration of Bachelor's programmes may be three or four years at different institutions. The three to four-year Bachelor's degree is considered as a complete academic qualification. Master's degree is awarded after the second stage of academic education and requires at least five years of university studies[1].

The Law on Higher Education Institutions and the Law on Vocational Education and Training stipulate a two-level professional higher education: the first level of professional higher education or college education (two-three years) leading to professional qualification Level 4 (*diplooms par pirmā līmeņa profesionālo augstāko izglītību*), and second-level professional higher education leading to qualification level 5 (two-three years). Having mastered a programme of professional higher education, students are awarded a professional qualification or a professional Bachelor's degree that can be followed by a further one-two years of professional Master's studies. The Master's degree (*Magistrs*) of higher professional education is awarded if the total duration of studies is at least five years.

There can be the so-called "short" second level professional higher education study programmes (one-two years), where a qualification is obtained on the basis of the previously acquired first-level professional higher education or academic Bachelor's degree. In total the duration of professional qualification Level 5 study programmes is not less than four years after secondary education and not less than two years after college education.

Postgraduate education

Master's degree or the equivalent (graduates of five-six year professional higher education programmes in Law and Medicine can continue education at postgraduate level directly) is required for admission to doctoral studies (PhD). Doctoral studies last three-four years full-time. They include advanced studies of the subject in a relevant study programme (or an equivalent amount of independent research while working at a university, research institution, etc.) and scientific research towards a doctoral thesis. Publications in internationally quoted scientific journals are required before public defence of the doctoral thesis as an integral part of a study programme. The Council of Science appoints the Promotion Council and sets the procedures for the award of Doctor's degrees[1].

Adult education includes all types of formal, non-formal and informal education including further and personal interest education, professional upgrading and in-service training. It is provided to satisfy needs in lifelong education, which support personal development and competitiveness in the labour market regardless of a person's age and previous education. Access is regulated by examinations, by ranking of secondary diplomas or by interview, or a combination of these methods. Institutions can define which of the elective secondary education courses have to be taken by the applicant to enter a particular programme[1].

The Ministry of Education and Science is a governing body. It is responsible for long-term planning of higher education, as well as for assessment, organization and administration and funds allocation:

Accreditation

The Ministry of Education and Science is in charge of educational and scientific institutions accreditation in Latvia:

- The accreditation of higher educational establishments shall involve assessment of the study programme and of the academic staff and the basis for studies.
- On receiving positive evaluation and on condition that the stipulations of the Law on Higher Educational Establishments are met, the applicant shall have the right to award nationally recognised documents certifying that higher education has been obtained.
- Before accreditation a higher educational establishment founded by a legal entity shall receive a licence from the Minister of Education and Science. A higher educational establishment shall be nominated for accreditation within two years from the date of receipt of the licence.
- The sequence for accreditation of national higher educational establishments and their study programmes shall be according to a suggestion from the Minister of Education and Science.
- The decision on accreditation of a higher educational establishment shall be adopted by the Council of Higher Education and approved by the Minister of Education and Science.
- The evaluation of a higher educational establishment and of the study programmes necessary for its accreditation in accordance with the Law on Higher Educational Establishments shall be organised by the Ministry of Education and Science, which shall procure independent expertise for the higher educational establishment, organise self-assessment of the higher educational establishment and summarise the information required for the accreditation of the higher educational establishment[1].

Structure of business and management education

In Latvia 44 percent of students are studying economics and business, ten universities offer study programmes in economics and business, and more than a half of university graduates work in economics and business (data from the Council of Higher Education, 1998).

The business and management education cycles are from September until June. Some institutions provide cycles from January to December. It is possible to obtain undergraduate diplomas, Bachelor diplomas, Master diplomas, MBA, Executive MBA and joint Doctoral studies in business and management in Latvia. There are 20 higher educational institutions which provide Bachelor degrees. These programmes are four years long. There are 12 higher education institutions, which provide Master's programmes. These programmes usually are two years long (Figure 2).

The most essential requirement for current business education in Latvia is to develop programmes that foster entrepreneurship and self-employment. This problem has to be targeted via interconnection of theoretical vocational courses with the current best practice of entrepreneurship. Business study programmes and modules have to incorporate more elements of entrepreneurship. Also in order to acquire a professional Bachelor degree, work placement is considered an important part of study programmes.

In Latvia there are several business management- and entrepreneurship-related modules and academic/professional degrees. The undergraduate (Bachelor's degree) programmes are in Business Administration or Business Studies, and Economics. Master's degree programmes are developed in Business Administration (MBA), Economics, European Studies, Human Resource Management, International Relations (Economics), International Relations (Law) and Public Administration. Higher education institutions also

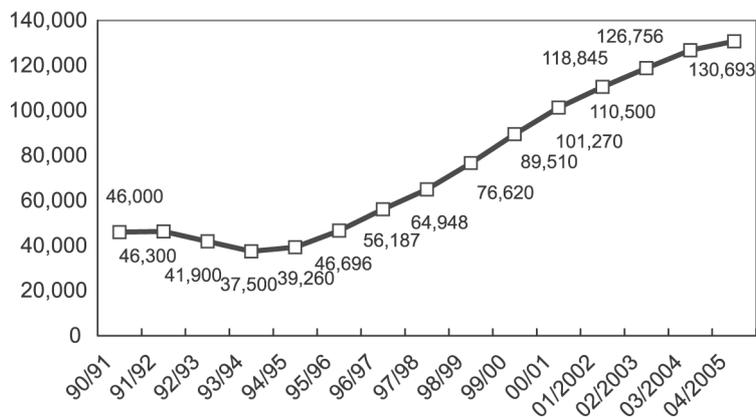


Figure 2. Student dynamics in Latvia during the period 1990/1991-2004/2005

offer higher professional education study programmes, as follows: ten semesters of full-time studies (equivalent of Bachelor's degree) – Economist (Accounting, Analysis, Auditing) and Economist (Financial Management); two semesters of full-time studies after completed academic studies – Bank Economist, Economist (Accountant), Economist (Tax-economist) and International Economical Relations.

As part of their studies, students have to choose different modules. There are compulsory modules, elective modules and placements. The higher professional education programmes have to insure that graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to be employed by European and Latvian employers.

The state accreditation for Business and Management programmes is provided by Ministry of Education and Science. There are common accreditation standards for all higher education studies programmes (see above for further details).

Apart from national accreditation, it is possible to obtain accreditation from: Central and Eastern European Management Development Association (CEEMAN), The European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), and AACSB International:

- Estimated number of institutions with undergraduate business degree programs: 20.
- Estimated number of institutions with business Master's degree programs: 12.
- Estimated number of institutions with business doctorate degree programs: 2.

Most important issues facing business schools in the country

Since Latvia entered the European Union (EU) the competition for the programmes of Business and Management studies has increased because the borders are open for studying in 25 member states of the EU. Therefore programmes aimed at the local market must meet quality requirements not only in Latvia but also in the European education and business market.

One of the most important issues facing business education in Latvia is faculty. There are not enough faculty members able to provide up to date management education. Young graduates are not willing to join the teaching profession and would rather go into business after graduation. The number of doctoral students is also rather low, which means that there is no regular source of young faculty.

Currently there are such issues as a high rate of inflation and unemployment in Latvia. At the same time a lot of young people have to cover living and studying expenses themselves. It limits opportunities for people to join

Business and Management programmes which are very expensive studies compared with other study areas.

It is vital for business to ensure that there is a connection between business students, faculty and companies. Owing to the strong competition in Latvian and European markets, Business and Management studies require more placements and research projects, so that students can get work experience while still studying. Higher education institutions have to ensure that placements are found and research projects are carried out to high quality standards.

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Note

1. Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia web site.