



Country Background Report Estonia

1. Background – the contrast between everyday reality and the political framework

International assessment programmes (PISA, TALIS) show that Estonia belongs to the group of states with a high degree of autonomy in educational institutions. Therefore we can indicate that a head teacher is granted significant decision-making authority and operational freedom to manage and organize the work of an educational institution. Although the state decree determines the minimum personnel, a head teacher has a right to decide on the appropriate management and organization structure. The hierarchical structure, which has prevailed in the institutions for many years, is gradually being substituted by horizontal management structure. This tendency means that more teachers are getting involved in decision-making process and they have opportunities to take the role of a leader.

Autocratic management is being substituted by democratic management; the change is in line with the general democratization process in Estonian society. The majority of the Estonian local governments are small; therefore the number of schools within the area of government is also small. On account of this, the owner of an educational institution does not direct or instruct on the content of education, which in its turn increases the role and responsibility of the head teacher in the implementation of educational activities and development of students. A school owner does not intervene in personnel selection; these tasks are accomplished by the head teacher. The rights and duties of the board of trustees (council) and teachers' council involved in the governing of school are determined by respective legislative acts.

The procedures for the functioning of the board of trustees are established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. The quality of educational institutions is not assessed, although data (indicators) on the study results are available publicly on the Internet. Educational institutions are obliged to carry out internal evaluation.

In order to provide a better picture of the working conditions of head teachers, a description of the general education system in Estonia is included below. A basic education is the minimum compulsory general education, and its completion creates preconditions for and provides the right to continue studies for the acquisition of a secondary education (in a general education upper secondary school or vocational educational institution) although the graduate may also go to work. Basic schools comprise grades 1 to 9, which are divided into three stages of study. There are three grades in general education upper secondary schools. General education schools are either administered by the local or national governments or are private educational institutions. The majority of state general education schools are schools for students with special educational needs. In cities and larger county seats, it is usual for general education schools to combine the basic school and upper secondary school stages (grades 1 to 12).

A significant factor affecting the general education system is the drastic decrease in the number of students. The decrease in the number of students by study stage has a direct impact on the school network, the public procurement for teacher training, in-service training and retraining of teachers, the entire higher education system, and in the longer term, the labour market.

2. Context

The national context

General educational policy is developed at the national level. Development strategy, plans and regulations are worked out, as are governmental benefits for students and educational personnel; the bases for remunerating pedagogical work, minimum wages, requirements for certifying pedagogical work, and qualification requirements for teachers and head teachers of educational institutions are established, and the framework requirements for teacher training are approved. Also the national curriculum is worked out at the national level. The national curriculum determines both the aims of the educational activities, national standards and assessment of the study

results. Head teachers are obliged to follow the national legislative acts.

In recent years, the most important decisions and discussions regarding educational policies have been the following:

- The decrease in the number of students has produced a wish on behalf of the government to separate basic schools from upper secondary schools, and the corresponding resolutions are being prepared. Pursuant to the amendments to the law, basic schools and upper secondary schools may function as one institution until the 2011/2012 academic years. After that basic schools and upper secondary schools will be separated (exist separately).
- The financing system for general education schools was updated in 2007 and came into force on 1 January 2008. According to the agreed principle, a grade-based financing model replaced the capitation-fee-based financing model. The goal of the amendment is to preserve small rural schools and reorganise the school network.
- The national curriculum for general education schools is being updated. The plan is to reduce subject volumes, to develop greater integration between subjects, to increase the emphasis on students acquiring general skills and on the implementation of knowledge, as well as to broaden the options for the schools and students. The national curriculum describes the required competencies by the stages of study.

The regional/local context

At the county level, the governors, who have the obligation to exercise state supervision of educational institutions, participate in the management of the educational system (through the education department of the county government). At the behest of the Minister, the county educational departments conduct thematic supervision. Also the county educational department is obliged upon request to provide counselling to schools.

Local governments (municipalities) have the principal responsibility for the availability of general education (from pre-school education to upper secondary education).

Local governments have to prepare and implement the education development plans for their administrative area; establish, reorganise and close municipal educational institutions; guarantee the management and financing of municipal educational institutions; appoint and release from offices the head teachers of educational institutions subordinated to them etc. To create the conditions necessary for the municipals schools to operate successfully, the rural municipality or city government establishes a board of trustees, which is responsible for coordinating the activity of the schoolteachers, local government council, parents, graduates and school support organisations at the school and the creation of better conditions to assist in this activity.

At the school level, the head teacher is responsible for the delivery of teaching and learning and quality of outcomes of school. Management structure is set by school (head teacher with school management board). Schools with a number of students over 101 have the right to appoint a deputy head with a 0.5 position. In schools with more than 201 students a deputy head can have a 1.0 position. Nevertheless, school owners can always increase the number of positions if they have more resources available. Deputy heads are more focused on the teaching and learning process.

In very small schools (with the number of students less than 69), the head teacher has to teach at least 5 lessons per week.

The head teacher compiles the detailed budget in cooperation with the school management board; the total budget depends on the number of students at school. Also head teachers decide on how to develop human resources at schools. As a rule, internal courses for personnel are arranged in the school. However, sometimes teachers look themselves for courses and ask head teachers for the permission to take part in these courses. Pursuant to law, schools have to carry out self-evaluation which engages the evaluation of the main processes (teaching and learning, personnel development, management etc) and outcomes. Quality assurance is arranged by head teachers and his/her management board. Visiting lessons is not compulsory for a head teacher, but normally the deputy head visits the lessons.

3. Concepts and practices of school leadership

Conceptual framework

The school is managed by the head teacher in cooperation with the teacher's council and board of trustees. Head teachers are responsible for the operation and development of the educational institution as well as the lawful and rational use of monetary resources. The teachers and school head teachers are not civil servants.

The conditions for teachers' service are determined as follows:

- The Government of the Republic establishes working hours;
- The Ministry of Education and Research establishes the qualification requirements for teachers, including the head teachers of educational institutions and their deputies, as well as the procedure for certifying teachers.

Head teachers' duties and rights

The hiring of teachers is decided by the head teacher in cooperation with the personnel of the educational institution. Vacant teachers' positions are filled by way of competition, the conditions for which are worked out by the school and approved by the school's board of trustees. An employment contract with the teacher is concluded, suspended, amended and terminated by the head teacher. The employment contract is concluded for an unspecified term. The head teacher decides on the use of the monetary resources allocated to the educational institution by the administration of the educational institution.

The school's teachers' council

The task of the school's teachers' council is to resolve the school's schooling and education issues. The members of the teachers' council comprise the teachers; the chairman is the head teacher and the vice-chairman is the deputy head for teaching and education. As a rule, the head teacher leads the work of the school's teachers' council.

The school board

The school board of trustees is a standing body, which is responsible for supporting the activity of the school and making proposals to the executive body of the local government regarding issues related to the school. The school board of trustees comprises parents, teachers, the local government, graduates and representatives of organisations that support the school. Students of upper secondary schools may be elected to the school board of trustees. The head teacher is obligated to report his activities to the board of trustees.

The school's students' council

Students can participate in the management of education institutions through their student councils. The student council represents the student body. The tasks and election procedures for the student council are specified by the student council's statutes, which are approved by the school's board of trustees and confirmed by the head teacher. He uses information provided by schools students' council in order to improve the work of educational institution.

The focus on teaching and learning

The standards for basic education and general secondary education are established by the national curriculum for basic and upper secondary schools, which is confirmed by the Government of the Republic. The national curriculum comprises a general part, subject syllabi and consistent topics, whereas the general part includes the structure of the school study programme and the bases for its compilation. Based on the national curriculum, each school compiles its own study programme, which allows the school to make its own decisions, for example, regarding the teaching of elective subjects and the in-depth teaching of some compulsory subjects. The programmes for elective subjects and courses are compiled by the school. Head teachers and deputy heads are the ones to lead the process of the study programmes' development, ensuring that for this purpose respective development groups are formed and the process is managed.

As of 2006, conducting internal assessments is compulsory in general education schools. The internal assessment criteria (leadership and management, personnel management, cooperation with interest groups, resource

management, the schooling-education process; results related to students, personnel, interest groups and the indicators of the educational institution) are established by a regulation of the Minister. Every three years, the educational institution must compile an internal assessment report that includes an analysis of its activities based on the prescribed criteria, the objectives established for the educational institution, and provides an assessment of its activities. The internal assessment report helps the school to evaluate its performance; it also provides input for the planning of the school's activities.

Many schools have developed "assessment teams" to carry out the internal assessments. Positive feedback has been received from the schools that have conducted internal assessments and used state advisers. The head teacher is responsible for the implementation of the internal assessment.

The government supported the introduction of the internal assessment culture in education institutions through the "Koolikatsuja 2006+" project financed by the European Social Fund. In the course of the project, training was provided for the teams and advisers at educational institutions, and supportive materials for conducting internal assessment were published.

Conducting internal assessments is closely related to using the results of personnel and student evaluations to improve the performance of the educational institutions. Although conducting personnel evaluations is not compulsory for head teachers (it is also not compulsory for the owners of school to conduct evaluations of head teachers), many educational institutions conduct evaluations. Many school owners have felt it important to be interested in the development of their subordinate units, including head teachers, and therefore conduct evaluations of head teachers. The basis for the teacher and head teacher evaluations is the teacher's/head teacher's self-analysis.

As of 2006, it is compulsory for educational institutions to carry out evaluations of students at least once a year, in which the student and his/her parent participate. In the schools where evaluations are systematically conducted, and the

results discussed and used for improvement, the cooperation with parents is more effective.

After accession to the European Union, the opportunities for international cooperation by the schools in the Comenius programmes have increased. Educational institutions have made active use of this opportunity; when carrying out inter-school projects, the schools usually form a team that cooperates to implement the project's objectives.

Nationally, many teachers have joined to form subject-related associations, such as the Estonian Association of Primary School Teachers, Estonian Association of Estonian Language Teachers, Estonian Association of History Teachers, etc. The goal of the societies and associations is to assemble the corresponding teachers, to improve their professional and specialised competencies, exchange experiences, etc. Cooperation takes the form of seminars and conferences, and compendiums are published both electronically and in printed form. The associations' websites publish news about the field of study, teachers' good teaching experiences and provides other necessary information about events in the corresponding subject field.

Teachers' personal development and career opportunities are supported by the certification of teachers, whereby the teacher's performance and conformity is assessed according to the requirements for the corresponding grade. Teachers are assigned the grade of junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher or teacher-methodologist, while educators and hobby instructors are assigned the grade of junior teacher, teacher or senior teacher. The grade of senior teacher and teacher-methodologist are assigned for five years.

Restructuring and re-culturing school organisations

Pursuant to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the head teacher is responsible for staffing the school, based on the minimum staff requirements established by the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research. Based on the minimum staffing requirements, jobs (e.g. deputy head for schooling and education, deputy head for economics, etc.) depend on the number of students at the school. For example, the position

of deputy head for schooling and education is implemented as a part-time (0.5) job in schools with 101-200 students. Schools with 201 or more students have a full-time deputy head for schooling and education. The school owner has the right to implement a larger than minimum staff, on the basis of the head teacher's application. The tasks and obligations, rights and responsibilities of the personnel are determined by the statutes and internal work rules, job descriptions and employment contracts. Although school statutes are approved and amended by the rural municipality or city council and the state school statutes are approved by the Minister of Education and Research, the contents of the statutes, including the organisational structure, are worked out by the educational institution. The structure of the educational institution also depends on the size of the institution. Usually, the head teacher is assisted by a deputy head for schooling and education and a deputy head for economic affairs.

Internally, the majority of schools have created subject sections/departments/chairs that comprise the teachers of one subject or subject field. The goal of such in-house teachers' associations is to develop subject-related cooperation and exchange good experiences.

In 2006, when the government's supervisory role was significantly reduced, the schools' decision-making freedom increased, as did their obligation to essentially manage the activities of their institution, including analysing the quality and performance of their activities. The head teacher has a leading role in the respective process. Transferring the assessment of educational institutions to the institutional level requires changes in the mentality of the personnel as well as supplementary knowledge about the factors affecting organisational development and the enrolled student body, as well as self-analysis skills at the staff members and organisational level.

Establishing and negotiating the direction of school development

One of the internal assessment criteria established by the government is cooperation. The school analyses its cooperation activities with the local government (school owner), board of trustees, and partners outside the school from the planning, involvement and assessment aspects.

Based on the supportive materials developed in cooperation between educational institutions and educational officials, the key activities to be analysed by schools when planning cooperation include:

- Determining and involving interest groups;
- Ascertaining important partners and ascertaining the expectations of interest groups;
- Determining the needs and forms of cooperation;
- Involving the development of principles in decision-making;
- Working out the principles for media communications and compiling the corresponding plans;
- Finding cooperation partners to help compile projects that support the educational institution's basic processes and the organisation of the study process.

The following activities are recommended in order to involve interest groups in analysis and assessment:

- Involving interest groups in the everyday work and developmental activities of the educational institution;
- Implementing various forms of cooperation and planning cooperation;
- Disclosing cooperation and planning this disclosure;
- Informing the interest groups and partners associated with the educational institution of the activities of the educational institution.

The following activities are recommended in order to assess cooperation with interest groups:

- Collecting feedback and assessing cooperation in education institutions;
- Conducting a satisfaction survey and using the received information;
- Using the information (claims, proposals, complaints, etc.) received from various interest groups;
- Receiving feedback from partners;
- Correcting cooperation plans based on collected information.

Cooperation varies from one school to another, depending on the value judgements of the head teacher and other personnel, knowledge about the impact of cooperation and cooperation skills. Pursuant to legislation, cooperation with the boards of trustees and student councils is necessary. The school can choose other partners. Some schools are characterised by very close and effective cooperation with their graduates, museums, churches, etc.

System leadership and cooperation in networks

Since the first half of the 1990s, when the in-service training programme for head teachers called the Transformation of School Leaders was started up with the support of George Soros, the schools have been gradually moving toward systematic leadership (so-called Original School movement). The concept of systematic leadership is not yet widespread in educational institutions, although there are schools that have implemented systematic leadership in management. The role of a leader has been very rarely taken by head teachers.

The non-profit Estonian Association of Head Teachers (EAHT) was founded in 1990. The goal of the EAHT is to assist school in organising Estonian educational life, increase their professional expertise, protect their rights, and communicate on an international level. At the national level, the EASD management has been involved, for instance, in preparing education-related legislation and development plans. A national conference is organised every year, which during the last two years has focused on improving the quality of management. The corresponding sub-associations exist in most of the counties. The level of activity varies from county to county although the activities of the head teacher associations definitely support education-centred leadership.

Examples of good experiences

There are several good examples of head teachers' good cooperation and joint undertakings.

The Estonian non-profit Association of Head Teachers (EAHT) has the sub-associations in the counties. Some of them (Tartu, Pärnu etc) are very active and arrange numerous study days in

Estonia and abroad. These associations have also made proposals to the Ministry of Education and Research for amending legislation.

Some of the Estonian schools are located in former manor houses, i.e. the "manor schools". They have founded an association that cooperates closely. These are schools that on the one hand, carry out joint activities that focus on Estonian history, including cultural traditions, while also dealing jointly with daily work problems in order to find better solutions and propagate good experience. Joint projects have been initiated within the framework of the association, for instance, the national "Forgotten Manors" project. Joint events and discussions about current educational problems have also been organised.

4. Recruiting head teachers and the attractiveness of the position

Recruitment

Qualification requirements for head teachers of educational institutions are established by a regulation of the Minister of Education, which the school owner must take into account when recruiting head teachers. The qualification requirements for the head teacher of kindergarten-primary schools, basic schools and upper secondary schools are the following:

- Higher education in pedagogy and at least three years of teaching experience, and completion of 240 hours of management training or
- Other higher education and at least five years of teaching experience, possession of at least the grade of teacher, and completion of 240 hours of management training or;
- Higher education and at least 3 years of experience in managing an equivalent organisation, and in the case of basic school and upper secondary school head teachers, completion of a 240-hour teaching course and 160 hours of school management training.

Two head teachers' competency models were developed in 2008 with the support of the European Social Fund. The following five basic competencies were highlighted in the

competency models developed by the Ministry of Education and Research project:

- Trustworthiness (dignity of the head teacher, setting high objectives, observance of the law);
- Orientation in community life (seeing educational life as integral to the society, orientation in economics and the labour market);
- Focusing on the schooling and education process (setting priorities for the schooling and education process, focusing on student development, supporting teacher development);
- Guaranteeing a functioning organisation (creating a team, delegating and motivating, guaranteeing the performance of the organisation);
- Self-development

In the competency model developed by Tallinn University, the specialised, core and base competencies were differentiated. The core competencies include conceptual and holistic thinking, understanding of social development and familiarity with pedagogical philosophy. The following were named as base competencies:

- functioning and performance;
- communications and cooperation;
- self-management and personal effectiveness;
- systematic thinking and integrated perception;
- intellectual competencies (ethics, honesty, trustworthiness).

There are plans to create officially certified competency models based on the aforementioned competency models, which would include 21st century challenges for school management (IT-related competency, systematic leadership, learning community, etc.) and would assist head teachers in self-assessment. The model would also serve as base material for preparing study programmes for head teacher training and supporting school owners in recruiting head teachers.

Head teachers are chosen by public competition. Depending on the institution and ownership relations, the announcers of the competition and selection procedure vary. A competition for the position of head teacher is announced by the

school owner (usually a local government), who also determines the competencies of the presumptive head teacher. For municipal educational institutions, it is the rural municipality or city government that decides; for state educational institutions it is the minister. In the case of a municipal institution, the employment contract with the head teacher is concluded, suspended, amended or terminated by the mayor of the rural municipality or city and by the Minister in the case of state educational institution.

Attractiveness of the position of head teacher

We do not experience any lack of candidates for vacant school head teachers' positions. On the one hand, the position of a head teacher is attractive because of the salary. The owner of school decides on the size of the head teacher's salary. In the larger cities, it is the custom that the head teacher's salary is about 60 to 100 percent higher than a teacher's salary, in some local governments even somewhat more. However, in small rural municipalities, where the schools are smaller, the difference between head teachers' and teachers' salaries is not as large. On the other hand, the head teacher is granted significant decision-making authority for the development of organization, therefore the position of head teacher is attractive for candidates.

Until now head teachers have had fixed-term contracts (5 years). As of May 2009, head teacher will have contracts without a fixed term, which should make the position of head teacher more attractive, since this will provide a sense of security to the head teacher.

Reserve of head teacher, basic and in-service training in the public administration

The majority of head teachers are also teachers. Therefore their training includes teacher education as well as management training. Teachers are educated at the higher education level. The uniform requirements for the education of teachers in the country, regardless of the type of educational institution and legal status of the educational institution, are established by the framework requirements for teacher training which determine the general and specialised

requirements for teacher training, the trial year for junior teachers, and teachers' work-related in-service training. The upper education schools compile their curricula based on the framework requirements. The training of class teachers, basic school subject teachers, upper secondary school subject teachers and special education teachers takes place at the second stage of higher education; the volume of teacher training totals 200 CP. The teacher training curriculum includes at least 40 CP of specialised lectures, with 10 weeks of practice teaching.

The Adult Education Act was passed in 1993, pursuant to which 3% of the salary fund of teachers receiving salaries from the state budget should be used to cover workers' training costs. The employer (head teacher) must give the worker study leave to participate in work-related training for at least 14 calendar days, while maintaining the average salary during the time determined by mutual agreement. As of 2000, work-related training is compulsory for teachers. Every teacher is obliged to complete at least 160 hours of in-service training during five years.

The completion of management training is a qualification requirement for head teachers. Large-scale management training, which is a condition (240 and 160 hours) for starting work, is conducted by the in-service training departments of higher education schools (University of Tartu and Tallinn University). The subsequent in-service management training of head teachers is not regulated by legislation. If they wish, head teachers can acquire master's degrees in the field of school management at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu.

Based on the training programme of the University of Tartu, the content of the 240-hour management training for head teachers is as following:

- The basic school process – child development
- Education and educational policy in Estonia and in the international context
- Management
- Strategic thinking
- Organisational culture
- Fundamentals of personnel work

Support for head teachers

School teachers and head teachers can ask for advice from the county governments' education and culture departments. Larger local governments also have departments that are responsible for advising schools in education and management-related issues.

When the internal assessment of educational institutions was made compulsory, a governmental advisory system was also implemented that is executed by the National Examination and Qualification Centre. The tasks of the provider of consultations (hereinafter the adviser) are the following:

- to analyse the internal assessment of the educational institution;
- to provide feedback on the internal assessment to the head teacher and school owner of the educational institution;
- to advise the head teacher and owner of the educational institution regarding internal
- assessment.

The advisers are active head teachers, their deputies or educational officials that have received the relevant preparation. The educational institution has the right to choose an adviser from a provided list of advisers (chosen by competition and having received the relevant preparation).

5. Challenges and fields of innovation in school management and evaluation-based management

In connection with the term of the employment contract for head teachers becoming unlimited, the government regulations regarding the requirements for head teachers, including requirements for self-education, have become very important upon assuming and while holding the position.

The further improvement of the competency model for head teachers is planned with the goal of developing the model into an estimable basis for developing study programmes for the training of head teachers and deputy heads in their self-assessment. Although internal assessment became compulsory for educational institutions in 2006, the development of an organisational

assessment culture has become a long-term process that requires both skill and expertise from its leader.

One of the new developmental trends is to pay attention to the leadership skills of middle-level management and their training. The topic of teachers as leaders in the classroom is also receiving attention in teacher training.

Since great changes are being planned for Basic Schools, the Upper Secondary Schools Act and the national curriculum, as well as the school network, this poses a challenge for leaders in understanding the changes and managing the changes that are taking place in the organisation.

Appendix

Legislation

- Estonian Education Act.
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=13000135>
- Conditions and procedures for advising schools and pre-school children's institutions related to self-assessment issues. Approved by the Minister of Education and Research by regulation no. 23 on 4 August 2006
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?replstring=33&dyn=12851808&id=1056208>
- Approval of minimum staffing for kindergarten-primary schools, primary schools, basic schools and upper secondary schools. Approved by the Minister of Education and Research by regulation no 48 on 15 September 1999 (RTL 1999, 131, 1823) came into force on 27 September 1999.
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?replstring=33&dyn=12957808&id=238473>
- Conditions and procedure for the certification of teachers. Approved by the Minister of Education and Research by regulation no 69 on 2 October 2002 (RTL 2002, 115, 1649), came into force on 14 October 2002.
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=13089589>
- Qualification requirements for teachers. Approved on 26.08.2002 by regulation no. 65 (RTL 2002, 96, 1486), came into force on 7 September 2002
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=13082084>
- Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act.
<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=12957808>

Reference materials

- Legal, political and economic bases for managing educational institutions (HTM reg. no. 726), <http://www.ht.ut.ee/289420>
- Kast, S., Kond, M. *Tallinna haridusametuste hindamine ja tunnustamine*. Tallinn Department of Education, 2008.
- Competency model for the head teachers of educational institutions and the in-service training plan based thereon <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?048356>
- *Internal assessment of educational institutions*. Materials that were prepared in the course of the pilot project of the Ministry of Education and Research and the ESF entitled "Koolikatsuja 2006+" for the support of the internal assessment of educational institutions. Tartu, 2008. <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?045133>
- Overview of the Estonian educational system. <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/ByCountryResults?countryCode=EE>