

Educational reform in Latvia

Until the mid-1990s, as legacy of the Soviet period, two different school systems - Russian and Latvian - existed in Latvia, each with its own curriculum. With the promulgation of new language laws, and the need to speak Latvian becoming an integral part of life, in both the state and private sectors, it became necessary to create an education system capable of providing equal opportunity in the labour and education markets for graduates from both Latvian and minority schools.

State financed secondary education in Latvia is available in Latvian and eight minority languages - Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Roma and Belorussian. Education in state financed universities is provided in Latvian, while a number of private educational institutions have language(s) of instruction other than Latvian.

In the school year 2004/2005, 724 schools in Latvia had Latvian as the sole language of instruction, 155 schools had Russian (implementing a Russian-Latvian bilingual education programme), and in 108 schools the language of instruction is both Latvian and Russian (bilingual education programme; these are schools where there are both Latvian and minority classes). In 4 schools instruction is given in Polish, 1 in Ukrainian, and 1 in Belorussian. In one Estonian, one Hebrew and one Lithuanian school some subjects are taught in the minority language. In two schools Romany is taught as an optional subject.

In all, there are 300,667 students registered for the school year 2004/2005, 214,855 of them having Latvian as the language of instruction.

The *Law on Education* was adopted in 1998 and determined that education reform would begin in 2004. The transition period was 6 years. Reform in minority education curricula with an increased Latvian language component was implemented in September 2004. This meant that in grades 10–12 of state and municipal general education institutions, the number of subjects taught in Latvian would increase from three to five. 40% of

the total number of subjects are still being taught in the minority language. This increase is phased in, beginning with grade 10 in 2004, followed by grade 11 in 2005 and grade 12 in 2006. Primary schools will continue to offer a bilingual curriculum after 2006.

The Ministry of Education and Science and the National Agency for Latvian Language Training (NALLT) have specified the means by which the reform is to be introduced in minority schools and distributed informative brochures for parents and students on the increased use of Latvian in minority secondary school curricula. The NALLT runs seminars and conferences on the issue, offers training for teachers to teach in two languages and prepares and publishes appropriate teaching materials. The NALLT has ensured that all minority secondary school teachers are provided teacher training courses free of charge.

Teachers receive bonus payments for teaching in Latvian and bilingually. These bonuses increase regularly: with LVL 808,368 (~ EUR 1,283,123) allocated for this purpose in 2002 and a further LVL 888,364 (~ EUR 1,410,100) in 2003, in 2004 LVL 1,220,598 (~ EUR 1,794,998), in 2005 the anticipated amount of bonuses is LVL 1,403,680 (~ EUR 2,034,319).