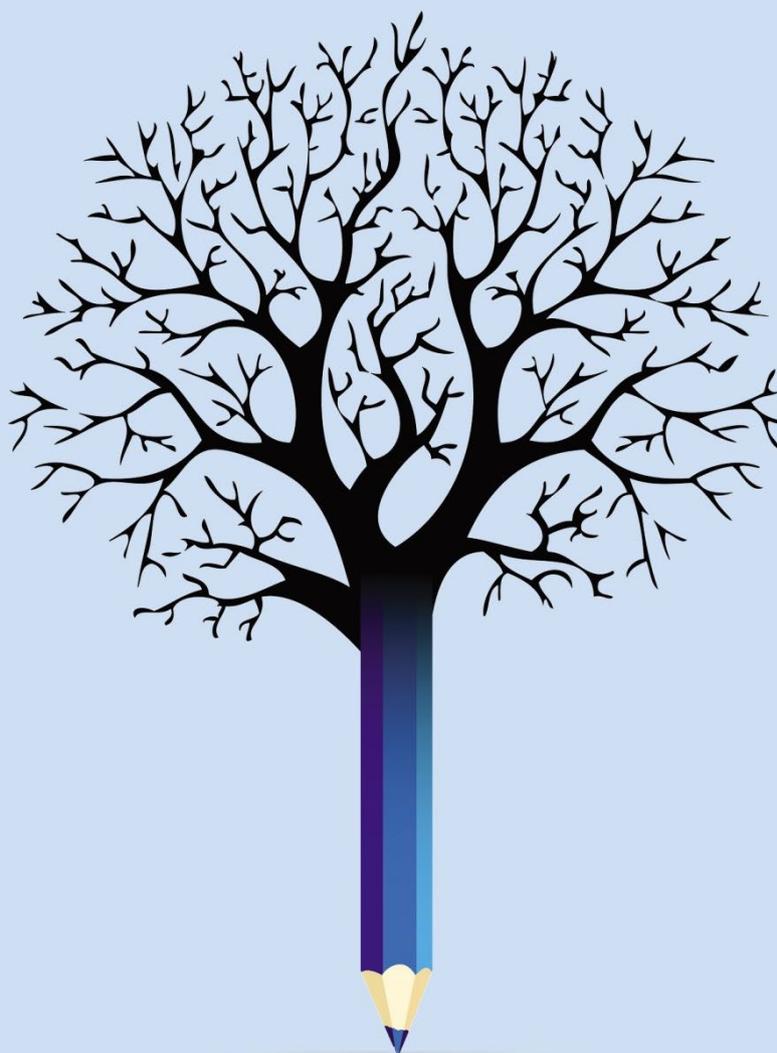




EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK IN **LATVIA**



EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK

This **policy profile on education** in Latvia is part of the *Education Policy Outlook* series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the OECD's substantial comparative and sectorial policy knowledge base, the series offers a comparative outlook on education policy. This country policy profile is an update of the [first policy profile of Latvia](#) (2017) and provides: analysis of the educational context, strengths, challenges and policies; analysis of international trends; and insight into policies and reforms on selected topics. It is an opportunity to take stock of progress and where the education system stands today from the perspective of the OECD through synthetic, evidence-based and comparable analysis.

In addition to country-specific profiles, the series also includes a recurring publication. The first volume, [Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen](#), was released in 2015. The second volume, [Education Policy Outlook 2018: Putting Student Learning at the Centre](#) was released in 2018. Its complement, [Education Policy Outlook 2019: Working Together to Help Students Achieve their Potential](#) was released during autumn 2019. Designed for **policy makers, analysts and practitioners** who seek information and analysis of education policy taking into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of a country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future;
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment;
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Some country policy profiles contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues. They are meant to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results and may be relevant for other countries.

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Sources: Subject to country participation, this country policy profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the annual publication *Education at a Glance*, and refers to country and thematic studies such as OECD work on early childhood education and care, teachers, school leadership, evaluation and assessment for improving school outcomes, equity and quality in education, governing complex education systems, school resources, vocational education and training, and tertiary education. This profile also draws on information in the OECD Education Policy Outlook National Survey for Comparative Policy Analysis completed in 2016 by the Government of Latvia, as well as information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science between 2018 and 2020 as part of the Education Policy Outlook's activities with countries.

Most of the figures quoted in the different sections refer to Annex B, which presents a table of the main indicators for the sources used throughout the country policy profile. Hyperlinks to the reference publications are included throughout the text for ease of reading, and also in the References and further reading section, which lists both OECD and non-OECD sources.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (www.oecd.org/edu) and its web pages on the Education Policy Outlook (www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm).

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, some information is provided about initial responses.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Highlights.....	3
Equity and quality	
Students in rural areas face multiple challenges.....	9
Preparing students for the future	
VET and higher education require stronger alignment with labour market needs	11
School improvement	
High rates of participation in professional development among teachers and school leaders	14
Evaluation and assessment	
Efforts to monitor system quality, with a need to strengthen the focus on continuous improvement	16
Governance	
Complex structures inhibit efficiency and equity	18
Funding	
Despite declining student numbers, per-student spending remains relatively low	21
Annex A: Structure of Latvia's education system.....	23
Annex B: Statistics	24
References and further reading.....	27
Notes	32
Figures	
Figure 1. Trends and comparative performance of 15-year-olds in reading, PISA 2018.....	5
Figure 2. Evolution of secondary and tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-olds, 2000-18	5
Figure 3. Selected equity and quality indicators for Latvia, PISA 2018	10
Figure 4. Percentage of 18-24 year-olds in education and not in education, by employment status, 2018	12
Figure 5. The learning environment according to students, PISA 2018.....	15
Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students, PISA 2015.....	17
Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government for public lower secondary schools (2017).....	19
Figure 8. Annual expenditure per student (2016) and recent trends, by level of education	22
Spotlights	
Spotlight 1. The Latvian education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic	4
Spotlight 2. Key policies, challenges and previous OECD recommendations for Latvia	6
Spotlight 3. The European Union perspective.....	8
Spotlight 4. Modernising Latvia's vocational education and training (VET) system.....	13
Spotlight 5. Major reforms in the financing and governance of tertiary education	20

HIGHLIGHTS

Note: Most of the content in this profile was written before the COVID-19 outbreak. As such, this document offers insight into pre-existing conditions that may influence the system's responsiveness in the context of the crisis and help inform longer-term efforts to strengthen resilience. Spotlight 1 summarises Latvia's initial responses to the crisis. Its structure is based on work by the Education Policy Outlook in 2020 to support countries in these efforts.

Latvia's educational context

Students: Latvia's students achieved above the OECD average in mathematics, around the OECD average in science, and below the OECD average in reading in PISA¹ 2018. Unlike in many other OECD countries, student performance in Latvia did not vary substantially according to socio-economic status. This may be partly due to certain system-level practices in place in Latvia that can favour equity, such as low grade repetition and limited between- and within-school ability grouping. Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has grown considerably since 2008, now exceeding the OECD average for those over the age of three. Educational attainment among adults is also growing more quickly than elsewhere.

Institutions: Students and teachers in Latvia view the classroom environment positively: according to students' reports in PISA 2018, the disciplinary climate is more positive than on average across the OECD and, in TALIS 2018, teachers reported being able to dedicate more class time to teaching and learning than in most other OECD countries. Latvian school leaders have comparatively high qualification levels and both leaders and teachers report regularly engaging in professional development, although the latter do not always perceive this to be impactful. Latvia continues to strengthen evaluation and assessment: system-level evaluation architecture is in place, including dedicated institutions and national standardised assessments. Also, internal and external school evaluation occur more regularly than on average across the OECD.

System: Latvia's education system is highly decentralised towards schools and municipalities: in 2017, schools had responsibility for 64% of educational decisions compared to 34% on average across the OECD. Furthermore, school autonomy regarding teachers' salaries and curriculum decisions has increased since 2016 as a result of various reforms. Municipal authorities also play an important role in education governance, particularly in the provision of ECEC. In addition, the local level is important in financing education: combining intergovernmental transfers and locally-raised funds, municipalities are responsible for distributing three-quarters of public funds for school education and 90% for ECEC.

Key policy issues

In each of the three main PISA domains, Latvia had a comparatively small share of high performers and there are equity concerns for students in rural² schools, who have lower-than-average educational outcomes and attainment. Despite considerable advances within vocational and educational training since 2009, the sector continues to have relatively low participation rates and work-based learning is underutilised. There is also evidence of an imbalance between the skills developed in upper secondary and tertiary education and labour market demand, calling for further efforts to ensure labour market relevance and quality career guidance. Latvia's cohort of educators is ageing, making attracting younger adults to teaching a priority. There is an opportunity to strengthen the teaching career structure, ensuring that accountability mechanisms and professional development are tied to improvement, as well as financial incentives. Efficiency gains could be made within basic and secondary general education through efforts to rationalise the school network. Latvia also needs to address an imbalance between the functions and responsibilities of local government, and their limited financial autonomy and capacity to raise revenue.

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19 (see Spotlight 1)

Initial evidence suggests that pre-existing resources in the education system facilitated areas of Latvia's first response to the pandemic. Latvia adapted structures and resources already in place for recent policy work to address new challenges: students identified as part of the Tackling early school leaving project (2017) were provided with extra targeted support for distance learning and wellbeing, and aspects of the ongoing curriculum reform were accelerated as new material produced for distance education included more innovative digital content. As Latvia works to balance short-term responsiveness with longer-term strategic aims and resilience, the crisis has brought specific challenges that must be addressed. With the increased pressure on educators to adapt to new circumstances and compensate for students' lost learning, as schools reopen, ensuring adequate support and professional development for teachers and school leaders will be critical for a cohort already reporting lower job satisfaction than their peers across the OECD. The measures introduced during the school closures to provide spaces for professional discussion, opportunities to contribute resources and feedback channels are good starting points that should be continued and strengthened.

Spotlight 1. The Latvian education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic. Education systems across the world have felt the force of the crisis as confinement measures triggered widespread closures of education institutions. On 12 March 2020, Latvia [announced the closure](#) of all educational institutions from 14 March 2020. At school level, general and vocational education institutions remained closed for the academic year. In light of the work of the **Education Policy Outlook** in 2020 in the context of this pandemic, this spotlight offers an insight into system readiness and immediate responses across five key areas.

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** To support online education, the pre-existing platforms [e-klase](#), [uzdevumi.lv](#) and [skola 2030](#) provided key information, teaching resources and professional development. Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) established a [series of webinars](#) to support teachers and issued [guidelines for distance learning](#). To complement digital provision, Latvia launched [Your Class](#), daily educational programmes broadcast on national television and online. Initially for younger students, provision was extended to all students across compulsory and upper secondary education. The material was developed by over 70 teachers with support from a voluntary parents' group. In both higher and vocational education, distance learning was provided in a more decentralised way, each institution taking responsibility for provision. State examinations at the end of lower secondary education were cancelled, with an optional Latvian language examination for those in minority education. State examinations at upper secondary level were postponed and the number of mandatory exams reduced. In vocational and higher education, wherever possible, examinations would be conducted remotely.
2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student:** During closures, the State Inspectorate for Children's Rights hosted a telephone hotline and online chatbot providing psychological support to children. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) collated various websites, tools and services promoting children's wellbeing.
3. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** As schools closed, MoES conducted a rapid survey to establish the number of children without access to a device or the internet. In partnership with two private companies, the MoES then donated over 5 000 smart devices in the first week of closures. The MoES, in collaboration with municipalities, also provided free school meals for disadvantaged children. Through the [Tackling early school leaving project](#) (2017) students considered to be at risk of dropping out received remote counselling. Staff at special education institutions provided distance learning, established telephone consultations with parents and, where necessary, supported a child at home.
4. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** Preschools provided childcare to some on-duty workers (around 6-7% of children in Latvia). Latvia pursued several public-private initiatives with the educational technology and telecommunications sectors to find innovative solutions to remote learning.
5. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** [Guidelines for student assessment during distance learning](#) were published, promoting formative assessment approaches and recommending measures to support summative assessment. The MoES, in partnership with [Edurio](#), regularly surveyed a range of stakeholders for feedback on the implementation of distance learning and key decisions. These had high response rates and provided valuable information that was then integrated into guidelines and memoranda. As closures were announced, the Union of Local Governments of Latvia convened school and local government representatives for an online discussion about the best possible solutions.

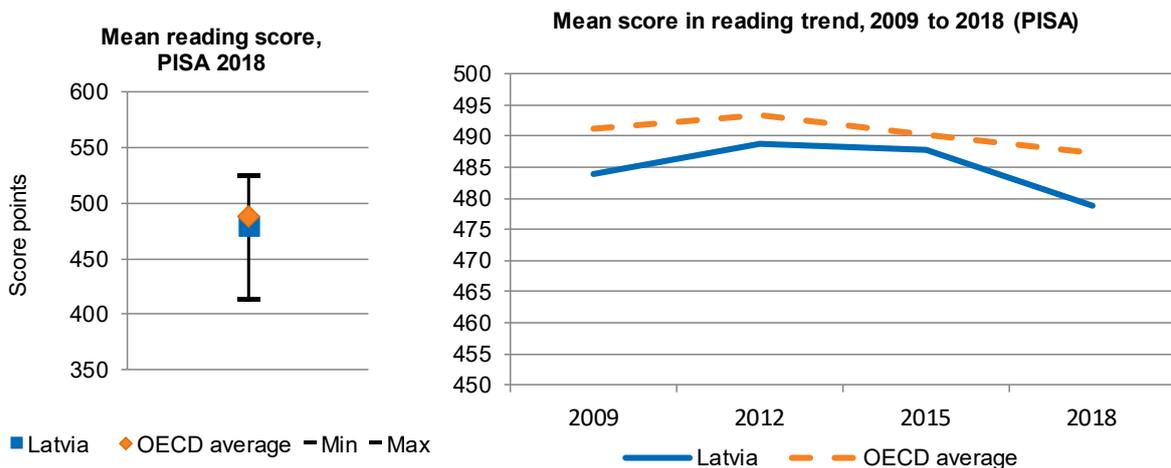
Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)		Latvia	Average	Min	Max
<i>Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)</i>					
1	Index of self-efficacy	-0.19	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2	Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	91.2%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
<i>Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)</i>					
3	Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	22.6%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4	Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	85.3%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 11 May 2020**.

KEY TRENDS IN PERFORMANCE AND ATTAINMENT

In PISA 2018, Latvia's 15-year-olds performed below average in reading, with a mean score of 479, compared to an OECD average of 487. Across PISA cycles, the trend in Latvia's mean performance in reading shows no significant improvement or decline since first participation in 2000. In the shorter term, however, Latvia's performance has fallen by an average of 9 score points per three-year cycle since 2009.

Figure 1. Trends and comparative performance of 15-year-olds in reading, PISA 2018

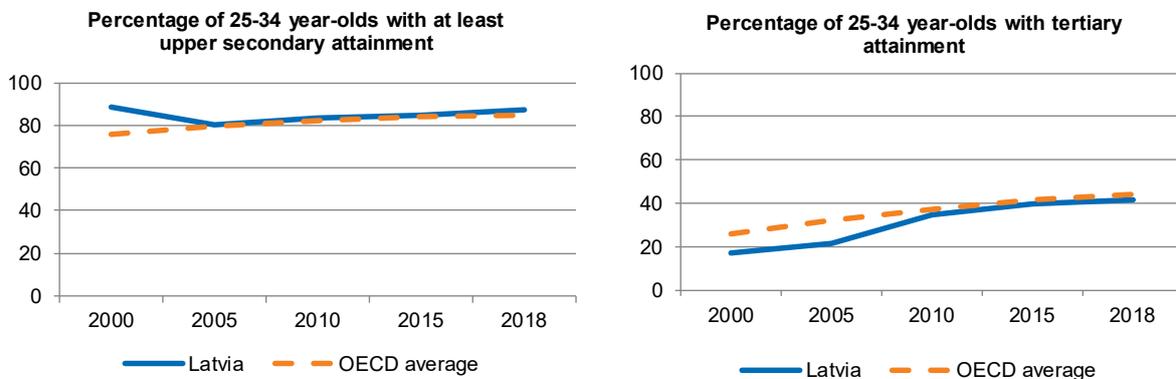


Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.

Source: OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>.

Latvia's young adults have comparatively high levels of educational attainment. Among 25-34 year-olds, 87% had at least an upper secondary qualification in 2018, compared to an OECD average of 85%. Furthermore, although Latvia's share of tertiary graduates among 25-34 year-olds was slightly lower than the OECD average, at 42% compared to 44%, it had increased by 13 percentage points since 2008 compared to an average increase of 9 percentage points. However, Latvia faces important gender disparities in terms of attainment. Young men are more likely than young women to lack an upper secondary qualification, with a 7-point difference, compared to 4 points on average across the OECD. At tertiary level, the gender distribution is one of the most uneven in the OECD: 30% of 25-34 year-old men had a tertiary qualification in 2018, compared to 54% of women. Furthermore, between 2008 and 2018, the share of young female graduates from higher education grew three times as much as the share of male graduates.

Figure 2. Evolution of secondary and tertiary attainment among 25-34 year-olds, 2000-18



Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>.

Spotlight 2. Key policies, challenges and previous OECD recommendations for Latvia

Main policies from Latvia included in this country policy profile

Key challenges identified and recommendations previously provided by the OECD to Latvia

STUDENTS

- New Pre-School Education Guidelines (2018)
- Amendment to the procedures for state examinations (2017)
- Amendment to the Education Law – Latvian as the sole language of instruction (2018)
- New criteria for Special Education Development Centres (2016)
- Amendment to the Education Law – defining the special educational needs that must be catered for in mainstream education (2018)
- Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (2014-2018)
- Programme to improve the professional competences of employed people (2017-2022)
- Tackling early school leaving project (2017-2022)
- Efforts to increase the number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates (2019)
- Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships (2015)
- Regulations on the organisation and implementation of work-based learning (2016)
- Testing new approaches to training vocational education and training (VET) and workplace tutors for work-based learning project (2017)
- Guidelines for the Optimisation of the Network of Vocational Education Institutions, 2010-2015 (2010)
- Vocational Education Competence Centres (2013)

Key challenges identified [2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020]: In 2016, the OECD identified access challenges to ECEC for children in rural areas and Riga. The OECD had previously noted differences in outcomes between rural and urban schools and in educational opportunities for students with special needs or those at risk of social exclusion. Furthermore, the OECD identified the timely re-engagement of NEETs as a challenge, noting that underdeveloped links between VET institutions and employers inhibit transitions to work. In 2016, the OECD found that work-based learning continued to have little coverage and, in 2019, provision remained low, partly due to low capacity among employers. Also in 2019, the OECD noted low participation in adult learning among older workers and those with low skills, as well as supply shortages in both general and digital skills.

Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD previously recommended that Latvia continue expanding ECEC with a particular focus on children under three and those in rural areas. Extending compulsory ECEC to four-year-olds and introducing means-tested financial support to facilitate access have also been recommended. In VET, the OECD called for improving information sharing among schools, municipalities and employment services, strengthening apprenticeships and introducing graduate tracking to raise completion rates. The OECD recommended more targeted but complementary strategies to meet the learning needs of all students, as well as expanding and better targeting financial support for students from low-income households to enter VET or tertiary education. To encourage lifelong learning, the OECD advised Latvia to better communicate the offer and ensure the portability of skills. In 2020, the OECD recommended strengthening career guidance in both the VET and tertiary sectors.

INSTITUTIONS

- Education Development Guidelines, 2014-2020 (2014)
- Advisory Council for the Reform of Teacher Education (2017)
- Performance-based funding measures for initial teacher education providers (2018)
- New regulations to embed competency-based curricula in initial teacher education (2018)
- Regulations on Necessary Teacher Education and Professional Qualifications, and Procedure for the Improvement of Professional Competences (2014, updated 2018)
- Update of the Teacher Standards (2018)
- Supporting Education Studies project (2011-2015)
- Participation in International Education Studies project (2016-2023)
- Education quality monitoring system project (2018-2022)
- Regulation on the procedure for evaluating educational institutions, the accreditation of educational programmes and the evaluation of leadership (2016)
- Update to school leader appraisal (2016)
- Evaluations for pre-school leaders (2018)

Key challenges identified [2016, 2020]: The OECD has previously found that professional development and standards, and responsibility structures for ECEC practitioners require greater attention. Also, the OECD recognised a need to build capacity to improve the teaching workforce through raising the attractiveness of teaching careers and boosting motivation. The OECD also noted low capacity among institutional leaders to successfully manage staff. Despite efforts to improve monitoring and evaluation, the OECD identified considerable scope to enhance the quality of data collected at ECEC level and to improve synergies between evaluation and assessment components across the system. Most recently, the OECD has identified a need to build an integrated monitoring and information system for skills and to raise the quality of adult learning.

Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD previously recommended a more strategic approach to human resource development in ECEC. The OECD also recommended that Latvia develop the improvement-focused component of school evaluation and that, at ECEC level in particular, the capacity of providers to conduct effective internal evaluation be improved. More recently, the OECD has recommended ensuring alignment of school and system evaluation with curricular reform to foster policy coherence. The OECD has also suggested Latvia invest more

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Register of Students and Graduates (2017) 	<p>in the evaluation and assessment capacity of Ministry staff and develop a well-resourced research programme that is multi-disciplinary, comprehensive and prioritises equity challenges. Finally, the OECD recommended developing a comprehensive dataset for lifelong learning including information on participation, expenditure, outcomes and opportunities. The OECD also advised Latvia to build the government's capacity for evidence-based policy making.</p>
SYSTEM	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reform of VET curricula (2008-2020) ▪ Sectoral Expert Committees (2011) ▪ Quality Agenda for Higher Education (AIKA, 2015) ▪ AIKA granted member status of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) (2018) ▪ Revised concept of higher education quality monitoring (2016) ▪ Skola 2030 curriculum reform (2016-2023) ▪ Pilot project for a new competency-based curriculum (2016-2018) ▪ SchoolMap geospatial planning tool (2017) ▪ Quality criteria for service delivery in general secondary education institutions (2018) ▪ Implementation Plan on Adult Education Provision and its Governance Model 2016-2020 (2016) ▪ Adult Education Governance Council (2017) ▪ New model of higher education financing (2015) ▪ Regulation to support better governance in higher education (2018) ▪ Strengthening academic staff in HEIs in strategic specialisation areas programme (2018) ▪ Programme to reduce fragmentation of study programmes and strengthen resource sharing (2018) ▪ New Study and Student Loan System (2019) ▪ Financial support to private pre-school (2013-2015) ▪ Revised teacher remuneration scheme (2016) ▪ Further increases to teacher salaries (2018) 	<p>Key challenges identified [2015b, 2016, 2019, 2020]: In 2015, the OECD noted introducing efficiency-enhancing reforms for VET and tertiary education as a challenge requiring far-reaching intervention. Fragmented and complex governance structures were identified within the tertiary, VET and adult learning sectors. The OECD also called for greater responsiveness in the tertiary sector to changing skills demand. Additionally, as decentralisation measures have been introduced, the OECD has reported that some municipalities face a lack of capacity and resources that particularly affect ECEC provision. The OECD has also highlighted a need to better balance greater institutional autonomy with improved public accountability. The OECD previously reported that relatively low levels of public expenditure risk inadequate funding to achieve desired outcomes. Also, the OECD found that Latvia's school funding model does not take students' socio-economic background sufficiently into account. In 2019, the OECD reported that relatively low public spending for research and development slowed scientific progress. Most recently, the OECD has identified a need to increase, target and share investment in lifelong learning.</p> <p>Summary of previous related OECD recommendations: The OECD previously recommended that Latvia seek out long-term efficiency gains including rationalising tertiary governance, merging municipalities, introducing more outcomes-based funding for tertiary education and VET, and introducing funding for schools and municipalities that takes socio-economic background into account. Recently, the OECD has recommended defining transparent qualitative and quantitative criteria to support the rationalisation of the school network. The OECD previously suggested that Latvia reconsider the distribution of responsibilities for the implementation of the lifelong learning strategy in order to improve strategic co-ordination and collaboration. Finally, the OECD has recommended developing a cross-sectoral funding agreement for lifelong learning with performance-based elements.</p>
<p>Note: The information on key challenges and recommendations contained in this spotlight draws from a desk-based compilation of previous OECD publications (subject to country participation). The spotlight is intended for exploratory purposes to promote policy dialogue and should not be considered an evaluation of the country's progress on these recommendations. Causality should not be inferred: while some actions taken by a country could correspond to previous OECD recommendations, the OECD acknowledges the value of internal and other external dynamics to promote change in education systems.</p>	
<p>Main sources: 2015a, 2017, 2019: <i>The Economic Surveys of Latvia</i>; 2015b: <i>Investing in Youth: Latvia</i>; 2016: <i>Education in Latvia</i>; 2020: <i>Skills Strategy Latvia: Assessment and Recommendations</i>.</p>	

Spotlight 3. The European Union perspective:

Latvia's education and training system and the Europe 2020 Strategy

In the European Union's growth and employment strategy, [Europe 2020](#), education and training is recognised as a key policy area in contributing to Europe's economic growth and social inclusion. The European Union set a twofold target in education by 2020: reducing the rates of early school leaving below 10% and reaching at least 40% of 30-34 year-olds completing tertiary or equivalent education. Countries set their own related national targets. The Europe 2020 goals are monitored through the European Union's yearly assessment of the main economic and growth issues.

The [European Semester Country Report 2020](#) identified a number of key issues for Latvia in education and training:

- School education in Latvia produces good results in terms of proficiency in basic skills, while urban schools outperform rural schools on average. Urban schools performed better than rural schools in PISA 2018, with a difference of 52 score points in reading (roughly equivalent to 1 year of schooling). The system is rather equitable, with students' socio-economic background exerting a relatively limited influence on learning achievement in reading. The performance difference between the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged students was 65 score points, as compared to the EU average of 95.
- As the number of school children decreases, the consolidation of Latvia's large and inefficient school network is a priority for the government. Streamlining of the school network has been planned from 2017 by setting the minimum criteria for the quality and the number of students per class in general upper secondary education institutions. This has also been linked with changes to teachers' pay and reform of the education content.
-
- Renewing the teaching workforce is a challenge, as young graduates are not attracted to the profession and teacher shortages are becoming apparent, especially in science and mathematics. Low statutory salaries and long working hours contribute to making teaching unattractive and reforms have not yet resulted in the desired improvements. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, out of approximately 1 000 education graduates per year, currently only about 350-400 actually start working as teachers. The Ministry has updated regulations on the financing of higher education institutions to ensure they receive performance-based funding according to how many of their education graduates enter the teaching profession.
-
- The share of young adults with tertiary education increased in 2019 compared to the previous year, and remains above the EU average. Some 45.7% of 30-34 year-olds had a tertiary qualification in 2019, up from 42.7% in 2018. The increase was more pronounced for men (from 31% to 35%), but the gender gap remains significant (22 percentage points). Graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics represented 20% of all graduates in 2018, well below the EU average of 26%.
- In higher education, new measures are planned in order to reduce fragmentation and develop higher quality study programmes, with support from EU funds. Overall, available research funding in the country is still low, and the amount of performance-based funding for higher education institutions remains limited.
- Despite the ongoing reform efforts, participation in vocational education and training (VET) remains low, with less than 40% of students opting for it in 2018 compared to 48% on average across the EU. Labour market outcomes for VET students have improved, but the employment rate of recent VET graduates remains well below average at 65.6% compared to an EU average of 79.5% in 2019.

In May 2020, the Council of the European Union proposed the following [country-specific recommendation to Latvia](#), with regard to education and training: "mitigate the employment impact of the crisis, including through flexible working arrangements, active labour market measures and skills". Subject to its endorsement, this recommendation will be formally adopted in July 2020.

EQUITY AND QUALITY: STUDENTS IN RURAL AREAS FACE MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

Latvia combined better-than-average **PISA equity indicators** with below-average reading performance. In PISA 2018, however, students in Latvia performed above the OECD average in mathematics and close-to-average in science. Furthermore, compared to most OECD countries, Latvia has relatively small shares of low performers (below the Level 2 baseline) in science and mathematics. Although Latvia's long-term mean performance across PISA cycles is unchanged, in PISA 2018 its share of low performers increased in reading (since 2009), and decreased in mathematics (since 2003). Nevertheless, the share of high performers (Level 5 or above) in each subject remained smaller than on average across the OECD, and particularly so in reading and science where it was less than half, despite a small increase of 1.9 percentage points in reading since 2009. In terms of equity, socio-economic status explained 7% of the variance in reading scores, one of the lowest impacts among OECD countries and compared to 12% on average. Latvian girls outperformed boys by 33 points, which was similar to the average difference of 30 points and a large reduction since 2009, but this was due to a decline in girls' performance. Compared to girls, a higher share of boys performed below Level 2, with a difference of 13.7 percentage points in PISA 2018; the OECD average difference was 10.2 percentage points. The gender gap for high performers was smaller, with a difference of 2.5 percentage points in favour of girls, compared to an OECD average of 3.3 points.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies can increase the equity of education systems. In Latvia, all children have a legal entitlement to access pre-primary education (*Pirmskolas izglītības programmas*) from 1.5 years old. Nevertheless, children typically enrol at 3 years old: in 2017, 90% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in ECEC in Latvia compared to an OECD average of 79%. Participation in pre-school programmes is compulsory for 5- and 6-year-olds and enrolment is near universal, either within ECEC or general education settings, after which children transition to primary education. Enrolments have increased considerably across the age range. Between 2005 and 2017, participation of 3-5 year-olds in ECEC grew by 16 percentage points to 93%, compared to an OECD average growth of 11 percentage points to 87%. Participation has also increased among children under the age of 3, from 17% in 2005 to 29% in 2017, although this remains below the OECD average of 36%. Specific ECEC programmes exist for certain minority language groups and for children with special educational needs.

According to OECD evidence, some **system-level policies** can favour equity, such as a longer period of compulsory education, delayed tracking, limited school choice, academic inclusiveness and low grade repetition. In Latvia, education is compulsory between the ages of 5 and 16. Students are tracked into different educational pathways at 16 years old, which is the most common age among OECD countries. There is limited school choice in Latvia: students are assigned to schools based on residence, but can choose to enrol in other schools, subject to availability. Selective admission criteria may not apply, except entrance tests for the small number of lower secondary gymnasias. This appears conducive to mixed-ability school populations: in PISA 2018, Latvia had an index of academic inclusion of 77%, which was above the OECD average of 71%. The academic sorting of students within schools is also relatively infrequent: in PISA 2015, 81% of 15-year-olds in Latvia were in schools whose principals reported that ability grouping does not exist for any subjects compared to 54% on average. Grade repetition is also less frequent than on average and has been in decline: between 2009 and 2015, the share of students who had repeated a grade fell by 15 percentage points, one of the largest decreases in the OECD. The [OECD](#) (2016) reported that this is due, in part, to improved support for students with learning difficulties. There may be some informal school grouping by socio-economic status, as Latvia had an isolation index for disadvantaged students of 0.22, compared to 0.17 on average; this is perhaps reflective of broader geographical challenges.

Despite several favourable system-level practices, equity concerns regarding **students in rural schools** exist in Latvia. As reported in the previous [country policy profile](#) (2017), emigration and urbanisation have contributed to geographic inequalities in educational access, engagement and quality. Urban students in Latvia outperformed their rural peers by 48 points in science in PISA 2015, the equivalent of more than 1.5 years of schooling. Also, Latvia's share of resilient students – those with disadvantaged backgrounds but high academic performance – was smaller in rural schools and rural students were more than three times as likely to repeat a grade. Growing up, there are long-term consequences too: adults in rural areas are twice as likely not to hold an upper secondary qualification and less likely to participate in, or even feel motivated about, adult learning. The [OECD](#) (2019) recently reported complex causes for these inequities including structural challenges such as demographic change and socio-economic distribution, as well as educational challenges such as school size, and teacher salaries and quality.

Key strengths and challenges in equity and quality (pre-crisis analysis)	
Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning outcomes in Latvia vary less by socio-economic status than on average across the OECD. Participation in ECEC has grown considerably and is now above the OECD average for all age groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Latvia has a comparatively low share of high performers in each of the PISA disciplines. On average, students in rural schools have lower educational outcomes than those in urban ones.

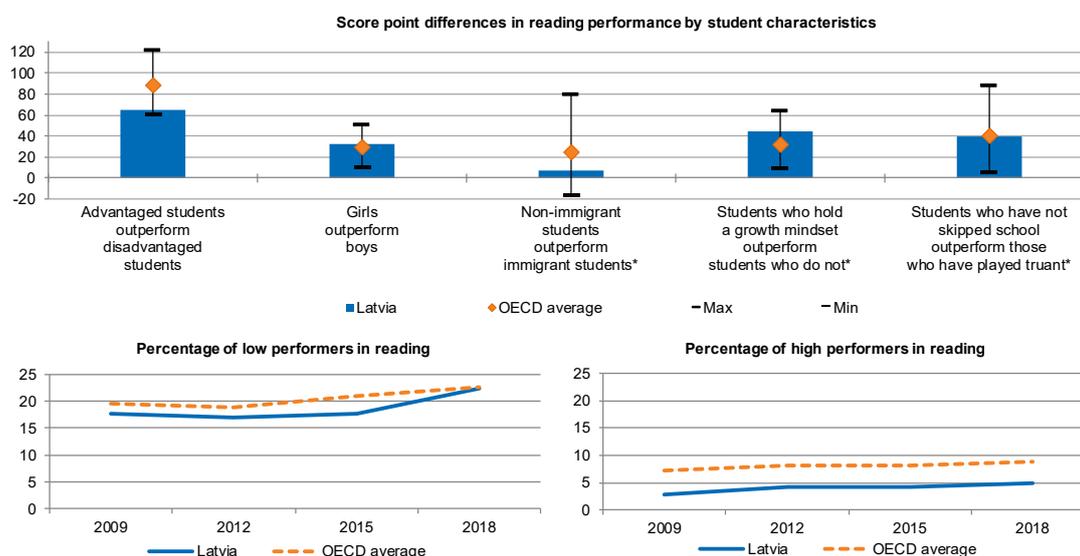
Recent policies and practices

New [national pre-school education guidelines](#) (2018) define the objectives and tasks of the curriculum for ECEC, as well as expected learning outcomes, principles of assessment and organisational features. They stress the importance of developing Latvian language skills, as well as emphasising various transversal competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, entrepreneurialism, self-directed learning, civic participation and digital skills. They came into force in 2019, following online public consultation, seminars with key stakeholders and opinion leaders, and a pilot project. To support implementation, a capacity-building conference for 600 pre-school teachers included workshops, discussion groups and insights from pilot schools.

Historically, Latvia provided public education in seven minority languages. From 2017, informed by the [Language Situation in Latvia: 2010-2015 report](#), Latvian is gradually becoming the principal language of instruction. From 2017, all centralised examinations must be administered in Latvian. An [amendment to the Education Law](#) (2018) made Latvian the principal language of instruction at upper secondary level (from 2021/22) and ruled that at least 50% of the curriculum must be taught in Latvian in primary school, and 80% at lower secondary level. Minority students continue to have the opportunity to study their language, literature and culture through their mother tongue. During the gradual implementation, with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF), Latvia will allocate EUR 3.3 million to improving teachers' Latvian language skills: this will include training seminars, camps and conferences, an online learning application and a digital self-assessment tool, aiming to reach over 5 000 teachers. The reform aims primarily to ensure equal access to quality education for all and secondly to increase the participation of ethnic minority students in VET, where Latvian is the principal language of instruction, and higher education, where programmes are in Latvian or other official languages of the EU.

Latvia is working to make education more inclusive for students with special education needs (SEN). In 2016, [criteria for schools to become special education development centres](#) were updated to emphasise their role in early diagnosis, practical support for integration and publishing monitoring data. As of 2018, 12 centres were each supporting at least 50 teachers and 50 students with SEN. An [amendment to the general Education Law](#) (2018) required that students with certain SEN such as learning, speech or physical development disorders, be educated in mainstream education. In 2019, Latvia updated [regulations regarding the support requirements](#) for students with SEN in mainstream education. In 2018/19, 59% of students with SEN were in mainstream schools compared to 47% in 2013/14. The practice of creating separate classes for students with SEN in mainstream schools has also decreased but persists: of the 59% in mainstream education in 2018/19, 18% were in special education classes. The [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#) (2020) suggests that despite political will for inclusion, attitudes of individual parents, learners and educators are not always aligned.

Figure 3. Selected equity and quality indicators for Latvia, PISA 2018



Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values; [*] Score point difference after accounting for students' socio-economic status and language spoken at home.

Sources: OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>; OECD (2019), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en>; OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION REQUIRE STRONGER ALIGNMENT WITH LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

The capacity of a country to effectively develop **skills and labour market perspectives** can play an important role in the educational decisions of the population. Higher qualifications offer Latvians some advantages in terms of employment opportunities. In 2018, 89% of 25-64 year-olds with tertiary education were in employment. This is 13 percentage points above the rate for adults with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, compared to an average advantage of 9 points among OECD countries. Unemployment rates for 25-34 year-olds with upper secondary education or post-secondary non-tertiary education were higher in Latvia than on average across the OECD, in 2018: 9.5% of all those with this level of education were unemployed, compared to the OECD average of 7.3%. The same year, NEET rates (those not in employment, education or training) among 18-24 year-olds were below average (12.2% compared to 14.3%), but, among 24-29 year-olds specifically, the positive impact of higher educational attainment on NEET rates was not as strong in Latvia as elsewhere in the OECD.

Upper secondary education in Latvia has broad coverage despite not being compulsory. Some 88% of 25-64 year-olds had at least this level of attainment in 2018, compared to an OECD average of 83%. Latvians have a choice of three upper secondary pathways: a three-year general programme leading to a certificate of general upper secondary education; a four-year vocational programme leading to a diploma; and a three-year vocational programme leading to a certificate of vocational education. Graduates of the first two have direct access to tertiary studies, but graduates of the third must complete a one-year bridging course. However, despite employment benefits offered by higher education attainment, the share of early leavers from education appears to be growing: in 2017, 4.3% of the upper secondary aged population were out of school compared to 3% in 2005. Furthermore, in 2018, young men (25-34 year-olds) were more likely than women to lack an upper secondary qualification by 7 percentage points, compared to an average difference of 4 points.

Vocational education and training (VET) can ease entry into the labour market, yet, across the OECD, many VET programmes make insufficient use of workplace training. In Latvia, the share of the population aged 25-34 with vocational upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary level attainment was below average in 2017, at 18% compared to 24%. Most students in Latvia choose to follow a general programme: only 39% of upper secondary students were enrolled in VET in 2017, which was below the OECD average of 43%. The government aimed to equalise participation by 2020 but, according to national data reported by the [OECD](#) (2019), there was only a very slight increase in this share by 2018. This raises concerns for the future: in 2018, [national labour market analyses](#) warned of imbalances in labour supply and demand due to a shortage of vocational specialists and a surplus of generalists. Government forecasts predict that, by 2025, medium-skilled vocational occupations will face the highest need in the labour market. The nature of VET programmes in Latvia could better prepare graduates for employment: VET is largely school-based, in separate institutions, with practical components constituting at least 25% of the curriculum. Partly as a result of this school-centredness, the [OECD](#) (2016) previously reported that work-based learning and apprenticeships are underutilised. At the same time, vocational students spend less time on general subjects as students in general education despite sitting the same final examinations; this may inhibit access to higher education. Since 2008, VET reforms have aimed to address these and other challenges (see Spotlight 3).

Higher education in Latvia follows the three-cycle Bologna process and takes place within 54 higher education institutions (HEIs). There are three types of HEIs: public universities (*universitāte*) and non-university tertiary institutions (*augstskola*), both offering academic and professional programmes to doctoral level; and colleges (*kolēdža*), offering short-cycle professional programmes. A smaller-than-average share of young adults in Latvia attain a tertiary qualification but this is growing considerably (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, Latvia has the largest gender gap in tertiary educational attainment among OECD countries, and it is widest for younger generations. The [OECD](#) (2019) has reported shortages of tertiary-educated workers in Latvia for high-skilled jobs, particularly in fields such as engineering, technology, management and health and social welfare. Confronting such shortages may be challenging: in PISA 2018, only 30% of high-achieving 15-year-olds in Latvia reported expecting to complete tertiary education, and, at current rates, around 7% will do so abroad and 10% of graduates will work outside Latvia after graduation. Beyond higher education, participation rates for adult education are similar to the OECD average, but men are less likely to participate, as are low-skilled and older adults.

Key strengths and challenges (pre-crisis analysis)	
Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A relatively large share of the adult population is qualified to upper secondary level or beyond. ▪ Tertiary education offers Latvians important employability advantages. ▪ Tertiary attainment levels are growing quickly among younger adults, particularly women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing the relatively low participation rates in VET to ensure future skills demands are met. ▪ Narrowing the growing gap between male and female educational attainment. ▪ Ensuring sufficient supply of highly-skilled graduates for high-demand professions.

Recent policies and practices

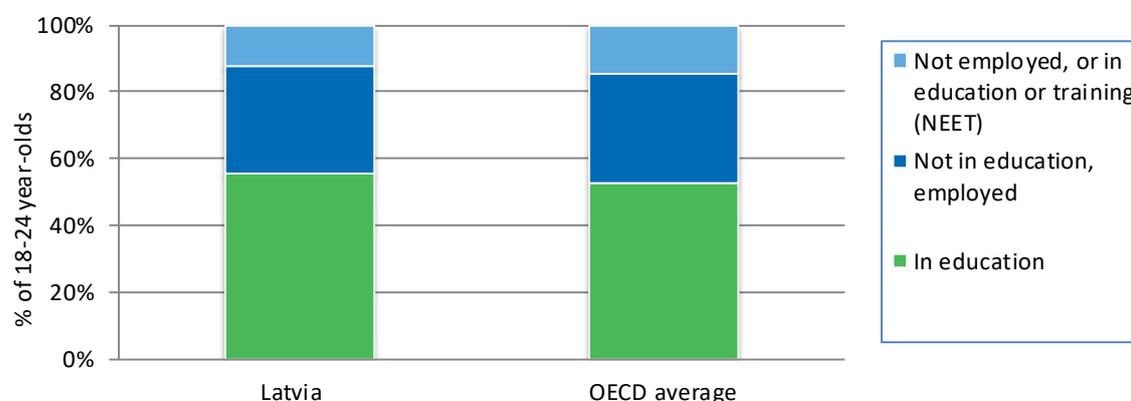
In 2013, Latvia launched the [Youth Guarantee \(YG\) Implementation Plan](#) (2014-18), focusing on early intervention, outreach and free training for 15-24 year-olds in over 90 different careers. Initiatives included improved counselling and guidance through the State Employment Agency (SEA), short VET programmes (1-1.5 years) offering qualifications in 68 professions through the State Education Development Agency, and skills development for socially at-risk youth through the KNOW and DO project. From 2014-16, all 15-29 year-olds registered as unemployed with the SEA (111 000) received support, 58% found employment and around 25% did so within four months. The [European Commission](#) (EC) (2020) found that the YG helped to reduce the NEET rate by 0.9 percentage points per year since 2010, to reach 10.3% in 2017, below the EU average of 10.9%.

The [programme to improve the professional competences of employed people](#) (2017-22) targets those over 25 years old, particularly the low-skilled, and those over 45 who are already in employment and would benefit from upskilling. The offer includes vocational continuous education programmes, vocational professional development, non-formal education and modular VET, as well as recognition of professional competences gained through informal education, and career counselling. An [interim evaluation of the implementation of the Education Development Guidelines](#) stated that more than 38 000 participants will receive support; in 2018, the first cycle catered for 3 695 people on 193 programmes and career services are now available in all SEA branches. The [OECD](#) (2019) reported that adult learning participation increased quickly, but remained comparatively low, particularly among the low-skilled, and that scope and quality vary between municipalities.

The National Development Plan and the Education Development Guidelines (2014-20) both clearly state Latvia's commitment to reducing the number of early school leavers. In cooperation with the ESF, the [Tackling early school leaving project](#) (2017-22) aims to implement preventive and interventional measures targeting students in general education (Grades 5-12) and vocational education (Years 1-4). Measures cover three levels: financial and consultative support for individual students; teaching and learning support for providers and institutions; and better identification of vulnerable groups with improved quality assurance at system level. By 2022, it is envisaged that systematic support will be available in 665 educational institutions. By early 2019, the project had already supported more than 16 000 students across 400 educational institutions. According to Latvia's [national progress report](#) (2018) to the EU, the share of early school leavers among 18-24 year-olds declined from 10%, in 2016, to 8.6% in 2017. However, among boys, the share remained high at 12%. The [EC](#) (2019) also emphasised that early school-leaving disproportionately affects students in rural schools. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the project adapted to deliver continued targeted support (see Spotlight 1).

Latvia has made several efforts to increase the number of graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). In line with medium and long-term labour market forecasts, in 2019, 41% of the state-funded free study places in tertiary institutions were allocated to STEM fields. Additionally, the new tertiary financing model (see Spotlight 4) allocates additional funding to universities that increase STEM enrolments. The [OECD](#) (2019) reported that the share of STEM graduates remained around 20% between 2015 and 2017, which still falls short of the 2020 target of 27%. Nevertheless, against a context of falling student and graduate numbers (see "Funding"), progress has been made: national data indicate that between 2010 and 2018, the share of STEM graduates increased by 6 percentage points, while that of social science graduates decreased by 18 percentage points. The [OECD](#) (2019) recommended addressing the shortage of women in STEM and tackling the persistent focus among private tertiary institutions on social sciences, business, and law.

Figure 4. Percentage of 18-24 year-olds in education and not in education, by employment status, 2018



Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>.

Spotlight 4. Modernising Latvia's vocational education and training (VET) system

In 2009, Latvia embarked on a comprehensive reform to improve the attractiveness, quality and labour-market relevance of VET. The reform aims to achieve equal participation in general and vocational upper secondary programmes by 2020 and to overcome a traditionally divided upper secondary system and school-based vocational provision, which go against the lessons of international best practice.

Through the reform of vocational education curricula (2008-20), Latvia is moving from a subject-based vocational offer to outcomes-based, modular learning. To this end, Latvia has been developing a sectoral qualifications system, establishing professional standards and aligning level descriptors with the European Qualifications Framework. Sectoral Expert Committees (SECs, 2011; see "Governance"), play a critical role in developing new programmes, offering skills assessments and coordinating working groups with teachers and industry specialists to evaluate labour market relevance. By 2018, 15 Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks had been formally approved making them legally effective for the development of VET curricula. Although progress was initially slow, by the end of 2019, all 242 occupational standards will have updated content; 104 of 241 modular programmes still require development. Latvia now expects to finish the process by the end of 2021.

Latvia has also been strengthening the role of work-based learning (WBL). Efforts began in 2013 with a joint Erasmus+ project with the EU, Estonia and Lithuania to develop and promote apprenticeships and WBL. In Latvia, a WBL pilot programme was launched with the participation of six vocational schools covering 148 students and 29 companies. Coverage grew to 500 students and 200 companies the following year. In 2015, the three Baltic administrations signed the [Baltic Alliance for Apprenticeships](#) (BAFA) committing to raising the status and attractiveness of VET and encouraging regional approaches to VET implementation, with a particular emphasis on WBL. Based on this and the pilot, Latvia adopted [regulations on the organisation and implementation of work-based learning](#) (2016), providing a legal framework for WBL and institutional mechanisms for co-ordination and implementation. The regulations stipulate that all students engaged in WBL must receive payment and all WBL trainers must have both pedagogical and professional competence. Following this, in 2017, Latvia published guidelines on the organisation and implementation of WBL to support stakeholders to run WBL programmes. A new Baltic initiative, [Testing new approaches to training VET and workplace tutors for work-based learning](#) (2017) will develop a common competence profile of WBL trainers and pilot tandem training innovations. According to the [EC](#) (2019), in 2017/18, some 1 000 students in Latvia were enrolled in WBL programmes and over 4 000 in work practice. A total of 18 professional education institutions now offer WBL at secondary and tertiary level and 230 vocational programmes covering 85 professional qualifications have embedded WBL components.

As with the general school network (see "Governance"), a fall in student numbers and a desire for greater efficiency have led to the restructuring of the vocational school network. In 2010, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the [Guidelines for the Optimisation of the Network of Vocational Education Institutions 2010-15](#) aiming to almost halve the number of vocational schools under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Reorganisation was guided by three principles: accessibility, collaboration and efficiency. Additionally, vocational schools with over 500 students meeting certain quality requirements could become [Vocational Education Competence Centres \(VECCs\)](#). The VECCs act as regional hubs for VET and receive 10% additional funding. Those vocational schools with fewer than 300 students were either merged with general education institutions under municipal authority, or merged with VECCs. During 2010-17, the number of VET schools under the MoES' responsibility fell from 60 to 21, surpassing targets. By 2019, there were 22 certified VECCs in operation. Since 2016, all vocational institutions have established collegial advisory bodies, which support strategic governance through facilitating the alignment of the programme offer and labour market demands.

In 2019, the [OECD](#) (2019) reported that Latvia had made important progress in the area of VET, commending the involvement of social partners in the curriculum updates via the SECs and the increased participation in WBL programmes. However, ensuring efficiency and sustainability in VET funding so that good practices can continue is critical work for the MoES. The implementation of modular programmes has also proved challenging; giving VECCs a stronger leadership role in their region for coordinating VET programmes may help this. Finally, although student numbers in WBL programmes have increased, they remain low and are concentrated in certain sectors. Latvia's many small enterprises may lack capacity to offer WBL, so promoting joint training opportunities could be a solution. More recently, the [OECD](#) (2019) emphasised that Latvia's efforts to achieve parity of esteem between general and vocational tracks will take longer as this type of mindset change takes time.

The [EC](#) (2019) recently reported that although enrolments in VET are growing, they remain low. Work-based learning is now more commonplace and this may be having a positive impact on the employability of VET graduates, which has also increased in recent years. In an [interim evaluation](#) (2019) of the implementation of the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020, the government identified further priority actions for the VET sector including strengthening VECCs; ensuring the quality, competitiveness and sustainability of VET; improving WBL; strengthening VET's role in preventing early school leaving; and developing career guidance.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: HIGH RATES OF PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Developing positive **learning environments** for students, which enable school leaders and teachers to succeed, is critical in raising achievement in schools. A higher share of students in Latvia reported positive views of the learning environment than on average across the OECD, with an index of disciplinary climate of 0.14 compared to an OECD average of 0.04. This corresponds with perceptions collected by TALIS 2018, where Latvian teachers reported discipline-related challenges in the classroom at a lower frequency than on average across the OECD. Teachers also reported dedicating around 85% of class time to teaching and learning, one of the highest shares among OECD countries. At the same time, student perceptions of sense of belonging deteriorated more in Latvia than on average across the OECD, as measured by PISA between 2015 and 2018. In PISA 2018, 15-year-olds' views suggest a lower level of student engagement with the school community in Latvia than almost anywhere in the OECD, with an index of sense of belonging of -0.26 compared to 0.00 on average. Student truancy was also high: 29% of 15-year-olds in Latvia reported skipping at least one day of school in the two weeks prior to the PISA test, compared to 21% on average.

Attracting, retaining and developing good-quality **school leaders** is key in improving the quality of learning environments and promoting effective school leadership. School leaders in Latvia are responsible, among other things, for all operational aspects of schools, the management of human, financial and material resources, hiring staff and implementing curriculum and regulations. There is no specific qualification for school leaders in Latvia, but the majority (87%) have a master's level qualification. They must also undertake 36 hours of professional development every three years. In TALIS 2018, 94% of Latvian school leaders reported receiving some kind of instructional leadership training, compared to 83% on average; this is a 9 percentage-point increase in participation since 2013. Indeed, according to principals' self-reports in PISA 2015, Latvia's index of instructional leadership was well above average at 0.22.

A strong supply of highly-qualified and engaged **teachers** is vital in every education system. Latvia has two main paths for becoming a teacher: a four-year bachelor's degree (the most common), or a three-year bachelor's degree, with two years of additional study in a professional Masters programme. In TALIS 2018, 85% of teachers had completed formal initial teacher preparation which covered content, pedagogy and classroom practice in some or all subjects taught, compared to an OECD average of 79% and Latvian teachers reported feeling consistently better prepared than their OECD counterparts. However, formal induction activities for teachers in new schools and mentoring are accessible in Latvia at around half the average rate. Like principals, once hired, teachers must do at least 36 hours of professional development every three years; this is a requirement for accessing performance-based pay (see "Funding"). In TALIS 2018, 99% of Latvian teachers reported having participated in professional development in the 12 months prior to the survey. However, only 89% of teachers felt it had a positive impact; the [OECD](#) (2019) recently reported that, according to key stakeholders, access to professional development is unequal and can come at personal financial cost.

Working conditions for educators in Latvia combine small class sizes with high teaching hours and low salaries. In lower secondary education in 2017, there were 16 students per class in Latvia on average, compared with 23 across the OECD. In 2018, annual net teaching hours for general programmes were among the highest in the OECD at 1 020 hours³ in primary and lower secondary, compared to averages of 783 and 709 hours. In the same year, statutory starting salaries for teachers and principals were among the lowest in the OECD and considerably so for ECEC teaching staff. However, there have been important reforms to teacher remuneration (see "Funding"); in 2016, statutory salaries for teachers with 15 years of experience were 43% higher than in 2005. Despite these efforts, professional morale appears low. In TALIS 2018, 65% of teachers in Latvia said that if they could choose again, they would still become a teacher and only 23% felt the profession was valued in society compared to respective OECD averages of 76% and 26%. The [EC](#) (2019) reported national data indicating that only around one-third of education graduates enter teaching. The profession is ageing in Latvia: in 2017, 46% of teachers were over 50 years old, compared to an OECD average of 36%. As this older cohort of teachers moves towards retirement, improving attractiveness of the profession will be key.

Key strengths and challenges in school improvement (pre-crisis analysis)	
Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence suggests classroom environments in Latvia are conducive to teaching and learning. Teachers and school leaders have high qualification levels and regularly participate in professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding formal support for teachers in their roles in schools through mentoring and induction. Ensuring that professional development for educators is both impactful and accessible for all. Making teaching a more attractive profession.

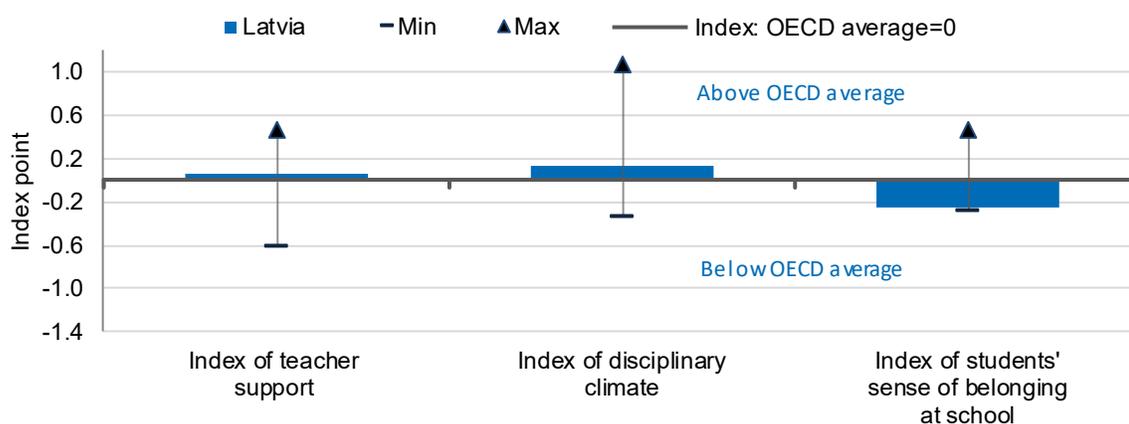
Recent policies and practices

The [Education Development Guidelines 2014-20](#) (see “Governance”) incorporate several planned actions to enhance teachers’ professional competencies. These include: 1) developing capacity for the new competency-based curriculum and inclusive education (see “Governance”); 2) improving the professional skills of vocational education teachers and trainers and their cooperation with employers; 3) developing competence among administrative, pedagogical and academic staff in vocational and higher education, including for the use of information and communication technology (ICT); and 4) promoting international co-operation between teachers. For the second line of action, 35 internship programmes have been established enabling 339 VET teachers and trainers to engage in work placements between 2017 and 2019. A further 21 such programmes took place in other EU countries to encourage international cooperation. By the end of 2019, nearly 4 000 administrative, pedagogical and academic staff had taken part in seminars and trainings through the third strand of action.

Latvia has also been reforming initial teacher education (ITE). The MoES established an Advisory Council for the Reform of Teacher Education (2017), which includes Ministry representatives, as well as those of the National Cultural Centre, the Student Union, the Mission Possible Foundation and the National Centre for Education. In 2017, the Riga Teacher Training and Education Management Academy merged with the University of Latvia creating an estimated saving of EUR 6 million for 2018-22 to be reinvested in improving ITE. The government approved [performance-based funding measures for ITE providers](#) (2018) rewarding those whose graduates enter the profession in a timely fashion, thus encouraging the better selection and ongoing support of student-teachers. A competency-based curriculum for ITE programmes was introduced and, as part of a project supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), Latvia aims to have 23 new ITE programmes in place by 2023. These include a Masters programme designed to develop change agents for schools and a one-year study track with a heavy school-based component helping prospective teachers transition from other study programmes or professions. The latter is due to launch in 2020/21 with 100 participants. A [government regulation](#) (2018) called for teacher training providers to submit development plans aligned with the work of the Advisory Council including measures for the development, accreditation and better management of ITE programmes.

Latvia adopted the [Regulations on Necessary Teacher Education and Professional Qualifications, and Procedure for the Improvement of Professional Competences](#) (2014) determining the education requirements and acquisition procedures for teachers. According to the Regulations, all teachers and school leaders must participate in 36 hours of professional development every three years. Vocational teachers without pedagogical qualifications must also complete a 72-hour pedagogical course in a higher education institution (HEI), since reduced to 32 hours for those with a smaller training load. To improve alignment with the new competence-based approach to curriculum, in 2018, the government approved [updated regulations](#) following consultation with teachers’ representatives, the education boards and school and HEI leaders. Additionally, an inter-institutional working group including teachers’ representatives, academics, education quality experts, practitioners and curricular experts developed a new [Teacher Standard](#) (2018), emphasising personalised learning, inclusiveness and teacher collaboration.

Figure 5. The learning environment according to students, PISA 2018



Note: “Min”/“Max” refer to OECD countries with the lowest / highest values.

Source: OECD (2020), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT: EFFORTS TO MONITOR SYSTEM QUALITY, WITH A NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE FOCUS ON CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Defining strategies for evaluation and assessment is an important step towards improving student outcomes and developing a better and more equitable school system. **System evaluation** can provide evidence to help decision makers craft informed policies and increase the transparency of education system outcomes. The State Education Quality Service (SEQS, 2009) carries out system evaluation in Latvia alongside its wider portfolio of work supporting educational institutions to implement reforms. Latvia also established the State Education Information System (SEIS, 2009) to collect, generate, and store information on education institutions, programmes and staff, from ECEC to upper secondary education. Students in Latvia take state exams in Grades 9 and 12, and diagnostic assessments are carried out in Grades 3, 6 and 8-11 in order to assess students' competencies. The exams have a dual role of awarding students certificates of completion and supporting system-level monitoring. However, the [OECD](#) (2016) reported that a number of weaknesses exist in the SEIS which limit its usefulness for policy making and that MoES' capacity for policy analysis and monitoring progress requires strengthening.

School evaluation in Latvia is composed of external and internal evaluation. SEQS is responsible for the legal accreditation of schools and the licensing of education programmes. It also appoints key stakeholders, experts and school leaders to teams responsible for conducting external school evaluation on a six-year cycle. Evidence considered during this process includes the school's self-evaluation report, classroom observations, school policy documentation and surveys. Schools are graded and the final report is partially published. As of 2002, schools have been required to complete a self-evaluation process, producing an internal, development-focused evaluation report, which is made available to the public. Since 2015, the self-evaluation must be updated annually to renew the whole set of data in a three-year period. Based on this legislation, according to principals' reports in PISA 2015, all students in Latvia attend schools which conduct self-evaluation, compared to an OECD average of 93%, and 96% are in schools which receive external evaluations compared to the OECD average of 75%. Since 2013, the SEQS has been developing common quality assessment indicators for VET, aligned with the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) framework.

According to OECD evidence, **teacher appraisal** can strengthen professionalism and performance, provided it emphasises developmental evaluation and facilitates progression across a career. In Latvia, the Assessment System of Teacher Performance (ASTP, 2009), introduced voluntary appraisal as a requirement for accessing financial bonuses (see "Funding"). The current system, implemented gradually since 2017, integrates both external and internal evaluation components: teachers submit an application and annual self-assessments, then commission experts conduct classroom observations. Schools play an important role in the overall evaluation and in deciding the financial rewards. This occurs over a three-year, voluntary cycle, but engagement appears to be high. Levels of teacher appraisal in TALIS 2018 were above average in Latvia: 85% of Latvia teachers had principals who reported formally appraising their teachers at least once a year compared to 63% on average. Additionally, in PISA 2015, 83% of Latvian 15-year-olds were in schools whose principal reported that standardised tests are used to make judgements about teachers' effectiveness, compared to 37% on average. School leaders are assessed at least once every six years and results inform decisions about salary allowances; this process is organised by SEQS.

Strong **student assessment** practices can generate valuable data to inform and shape effective initiatives for educational improvement. At school level, Latvian teachers are responsible for assessing student progress. The National Standards of Compulsory Education prescribe various assessment practices including self- and peer-evaluation, teacher evaluation and state examination. They also highlight the importance of continuous assessment through formative and summative approaches. However, some evidence suggests that practices remain summative and judgement-focused: in 2015, the share of 15-year-olds whose principal reported that standardised tests are used to make decisions on students' promotion or retention, at 59%, was nearly twice the OECD average. Between 2013 and 2018, the share of Latvian teachers reporting a need for professional development related to student assessment increased by 10 percentage points, the largest increase among participating countries. Nevertheless, in PISA 2018, students in Latvia reported a higher-than-average perception of teacher feedback on their learning with an index value of 0.10 compared to an OECD average of 0.01.

Key strengths and challenges in evaluation and assessment (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Latvia has made numerous efforts to strengthen the institutions and structures in place for educational evaluation and assessment. School evaluation and teacher appraisal happen more frequently in Latvia than elsewhere in the OECD. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening capacity for the effective use of evaluation and assessment data to inform systemic improvement. Emphasising the improvement-focus of classroom and school level student assessment practices.

Recent policies and practices

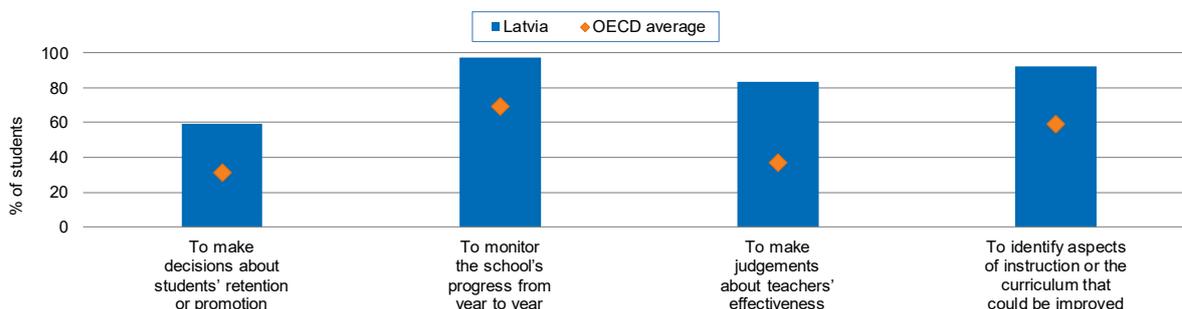
Latvia, with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF), has expanded its involvement in international education research programmes. The State Education Development Agency (SEDA) and the University of Latvia implemented the Supporting education studies (2011-15) project to ensure Latvia's participation in the OECD's PISA and TALIS, and the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub studies. Results have informed policy planning and analysis, as well as assessing education quality, both within Latvia and compared to other countries. A follow-up project, [Participation in international education studies](#) (2016-23), aims to consolidate this and expand participation to include the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, the Survey on the Careers of Doctorate Holders, the Indicators of Education Systems programme, the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) and a study on the governance of higher education institutions with the World Bank.

Also with ESF support, Latvia is working to develop national studies to inform an integrated and streamlined [education-quality monitoring system](#) (2018-22). The aim is to establish a range of indicators including statistical information, comparative education research, system-level student outcomes, institutional performance, programme accreditation and staff appraisal. Planned measures include: developing a description of the monitoring system and designing and validating prototypes of quality monitoring tools; establishing a national research programme in education with in-depth analyses of the different challenges facing education; and, conducting strategic communication and training to educate, inform and strengthen the analytical capacity of education experts in the MoES and other stakeholders. As of mid-2019, the MoES had approved the implementation plan and had held consultations with a wide range of stakeholders to formulate a conceptual framework. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Latvia worked to adapt and mobilise monitoring mechanisms in the education sector in order to gain rapid insights into needs and experiences at various levels across the system (see Spotlight 1).

[Regulation No. 831](#) (2016) on the procedure for evaluating educational institutions, the accreditation of educational programmes and the evaluation of school leadership harmonises quality processes for general and vocational education. Following this, a new streamlined framework based on 4 key areas with 12 criteria is currently in development, along with an early warning system for issues in school functioning; this is planned for adoption during the second half of 2020 and will then be implemented gradually. The procedure for school leader appraisal has been updated to better align with the new professional standards (2016). New criteria include the fulfilment of goals and objectives, relationships with staff, student safety, support for students with special educational needs and staff professional development. School leaders are now evaluated via the accreditation procedures for their institution every six years, and by the school founder (usually the municipality) every two years. As of 2018, pre-school leaders are also evaluated in an effort to promote development-oriented activity, a sense of responsibility for education quality and to provide national-level recommendations for improving the role.

The [Register of Students and Graduates](#) (2017) has been introduced as a new component of the SEIS' work, centralising individual-level data on tertiary students and, from 2019, de-personified data on graduate employment and wages. The register aims to support quality monitoring in the tertiary sector and promote evidence-informed decision making among students. The first analyses, based on data from 2017, will be published in the first half of 2020. Similarly, Latvia is also developing a centralised tracking data system for graduates of upper secondary VET programmes; the regulatory framework is due for finalisation by the end of 2020.

Figure 6. Percentage of students in schools where the principal reported assessments of students in national modal grade for 15-year-olds, PISA 2015



Source: OECD (2016), *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.

GOVERNANCE: COMPLEX STRUCTURES INHIBIT EFFICIENCY AND EQUITY

In Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for policy development, implementation and supervision, and sets standards from ECEC to higher education. Branch ministries, like the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Welfare, supervise and finance some vocational institutions and the Ministry of Economics is responsible for innovation policy. The MoES is responsible for around three-quarters of tertiary students; the remaining quarter attend institutions overseen by six other ministries. The [Education Development Guidelines 2014-20](#) help steer policy decisions; an [interim review](#) (2018) stated a need to strengthen co-ordination mechanisms between processes and actors within education governance. Subordinate agencies supporting the MoES include:

- The [National Centre for Education](#) (NCE, 2009) develops curricula and examinations from ECEC through to upper secondary general and vocational programmes, as well as professional development for teachers.
- The [State Education Quality Service](#) (2009) inspects public and private institutions from primary to tertiary.
- The [State Education Development Agency](#) (2012) oversees policy implementation.
- The [Latvian Council of Science](#) (1991) and [Latvian Academy of Sciences](#) fulfil advisory and representative roles regarding research and development (R&D) issues. The Council also funds R&D projects.
- The [Employment Council](#) (2016), composed of the Ministers of Economics, Education and Science, and Welfare, is a non-formal platform for inter-sectoral cooperation to address skills imbalances.
- [Sectoral Expert Councils](#) (2011) support the assessment of skills supply and demand and inform education and training content. The 12 councils comprise ministerial, employer and employee representatives.

Latvia's key education **stakeholders** include the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Sectoral Expert Councils, the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (the largest professional association for teachers), the Association of Latvian Education Managers, the Rectors' Council (for leaders of HEIs) and the sector committees of the Latvian Employers' Confederation. Despite a well-established culture of involving stakeholders in decision-making, the [OECD](#) (2019) has reported that the quality and impact of this engagement is often limited. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, Latvia conducted regular surveys to gain insight into the experiences of various stakeholders within the education system (see Spotlight 1).

Education in Latvia is highly decentralised. The Boards of Education of Latvia's 119 municipalities are responsible for provision from ECEC to upper secondary, and oversee non-formal education for adults and children. However, municipalities vary in size, socio-economic composition and capacity, which can lead to imbalances. Furthermore, due to demographic change and migration, there are many more schools in Latvia than required, putting pressure on municipalities to streamline services. The government has been working to rationalise the school network but progress is slow (see "Recent policies and practices"). Latvia's planned Administrative Territorial Reform, which will reduce the number of municipalities to 36 by 2021, could support this endeavour; the [OECD](#) (2019) has also signalled it as an opportunity to allow for new interaction models between sub-national actors.

Schooling decisions in Latvia are largely made by schools or municipalities although consistently against frameworks set at the central level. Latvian schools have high autonomy in managing human resources, assuming full responsibility for the hiring, dismissal and working conditions of teachers; remuneration is shared across multiple levels. In 2017, schools in Latvia assumed responsibility for 64% of educational decisions compared to an OECD average of 34%. Conversely, central-level bodies were responsible for only 18%, compared to 24% on average (see Figure 7). Latvian schools have management boards, with staff, student, parent and local administrator representatives. The boards support development-planning, organise social activities and manage donations.

Latvia's **higher education** institutions (HEIs) have substantial autonomy, including responsibility for determining internal structures and codes of conduct, academic programmes, pay for academic staff (in accordance with [legal minimum standards](#) [2016]), tuition fees, staff hiring and dismissal, and funding distribution. The Constitutional Meeting, the Senate and the Rector are the main administrative bodies overseeing an HEI's work. They are elected according to procedures determined in each HEI's statute. Given such autonomy, recent reforms have aimed to increase institutional capacity in order to strengthen governance across the tertiary system (see Spotlight 4).

Key strengths and challenges in governance (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High levels of school autonomy aim to place the locus of decision making close to students. ▪ A range of actors are involved in decision making at both the local and national levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhancing public accountability mechanisms and national steering to guarantee equitable outcomes within a highly decentralised context. ▪ Ensuring coherence within the VET and tertiary sectors, despite the range of governance actors.

Recent policies and practices

With OECD support, Latvia has embarked on a [National Skills Strategy](#) project (2018) to develop new Education and Skills Development Guidelines 2021-27. The diagnostic phase identified four priorities for future policy planning: strengthening students' skills; promoting lifelong learning; reducing skills imbalances; and strengthening skills governance. Subsequent policy recommendations highlight four important themes: build capacity to improve teaching; ensure sustainable funding for adult learning; create incentives to retain and attract skilled workers; and monitoring and building capacity for coherent skills policies. The action phase focuses on developing the conceptual framework and target indicators of the new Education and Skills Strategy planned for approval by the end of 2020.

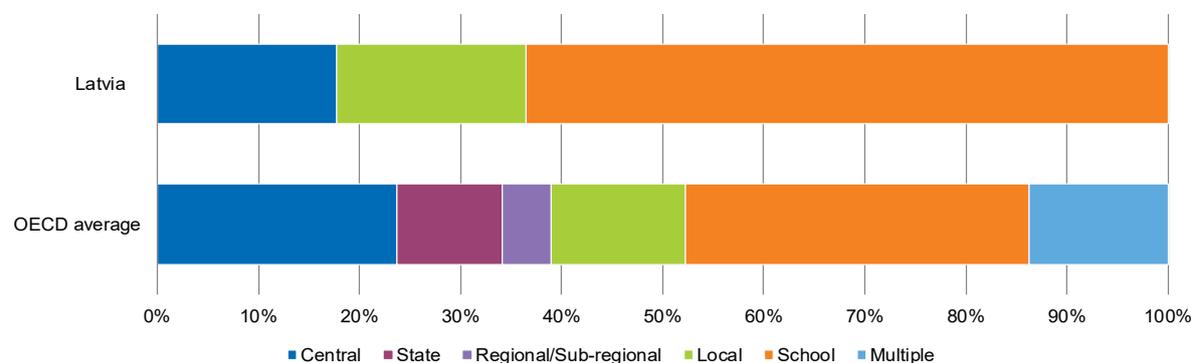
In 2015, to strengthen quality assurance in higher education, responsibility for institutional accreditation and licensing passed to the Academic Information Centre (AIC). In 2016, AIC revised the concept of tertiary quality monitoring and piloted new accreditation processes for 12 HEIs; as of 2018, an e-platform facilitates accreditation and licensing. AIC established the Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA), which, from 2018, is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In the next cycle (2020-23) all programmes will be accredited on European standards.

Through [Skola 2030](#) (2016-23), Latvia is introducing a competence-based, outcomes-focused curriculum spanning 7 fields of study, 6 skill areas (including critical thinking, self-directed learning and digital) and 12 values (including diligence and solidarity). A pilot (2017-20) with 100 schools informs professional development programmes, curriculum models, case study toolkits and pedagogical tools aiming to reach over 13 000 educators. The NCE also offers professional development, reaching 1 650 educators by the end of 2018. Latvia allocated extra funding to train 2 450 further teachers, including 50 future trainers, and deployed new regional consultants and professional development experts. The reform gives schools greater autonomy to assign curriculum and lesson time, aiming to foster greater collaboration. Phased implementation will conclude in 2022/23. To support this work, the [OECD](#) (2019) recommended reviewing teacher-selection, and the link between professional development and appraisal. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic accelerated aspects of the reform by calling for more innovative digital content. In some cases, this was developed through stakeholder collaboration (see Spotlight 1).

Latvia has been reforming the school network in light of demographic change. In 2009, municipalities gained autonomy to implement locally-administered consolidation plans, although the [OECD](#) (2016) reported that several resisted closing or merging secondary schools. In support, an online geospatial planning platform ([School Map](#), 2017) models the optimal school network. In 2018, Latvia approved regulations, developed by an inter-institutional working group, specifying maximum and minimum student numbers per class at secondary level from 2020. If a school does not comply, state funding will decrease. The [interim review](#) (2014-17) of the Education Development Guidelines, noted the slow pace of change and the challenge this poses to the teacher remuneration scheme (see "Funding"). The [OECD](#) (2019) recommended developing transparent criteria to better inform school consolidation.

The [Implementation Plan on Adult Education Provision and its Governance Model 2016-20](#) aims to increase adult learning. Priorities include: developing a unified, sustainable system; sharing policies and responsibilities across sectors; and ensuring high-quality provision for all. To oversee implementation, clarify responsibilities and improve stakeholder collaboration, the Adult Education Governance Council (2017) was established, bringing together representatives from ministries, municipalities, the private sector, educational institutions and NGOs.

Figure 7. Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government for public lower secondary schools (2017)



Note: This figure considers four domains of decision-making: 1) Organisation of instruction; 2) Personnel management; 3) Planning and structures, and; 4) Resources.

Source: OECD (2018), *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/eaq-2018-en>.

Spotlight 5. Major reforms in the financing and governance of tertiary education

Since 2013, the World Bank has supported Latvia to strengthen the governance and funding of higher education. In particular, this collaboration aims to improve the financial stability of the higher education system, strengthen the managerial and financial autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs), encourage strategic specialisation within the sector, and develop cooperation with industry. The collaboration spanned two advisory projects over five years.

The first project (2013-14), focused on the development of a performance-based funding model. Latvia's previous higher education funding model had been criticised for its sole focus on inputs, leading to low salaries, high workloads, misalignment of teaching and research, bureaucracy and a lack of incentives for institutions to diversify, innovate and collaborate. The [new higher education financing model](#) (2015) as proposed by the World Bank intends to provide more balance to the higher education system by focusing on three funding pillars:

- A core funding pillar based on both the number of academic staff and study places within an institution, in an effort to increase funding for research and further align teaching and research funding.
- A performance-oriented pillar based on performance indicators derived partly from national strategies and partly from institution-specific indicators related to an institution's profile and strategic development plan.
- An innovation-oriented pillar, which provides funding for targets set by each university or by performance agreements, as well as allocating funding for research centres of excellence.

The second project (2016-18) included two phases focused on improving funding mechanisms and governance within HEIs, and strengthening academic careers. Following completion, a third phase was agreed to build capacity among stakeholders in order to make the changes more sustainable. This included peer-learning workshops on internal funding, governance and academic careers. Based on experts' recommendations made during the second project, Latvia developed three more higher-education focused programmes with the ESF, operating from 2018-23.

Latvia passed [regulations endorsing HEIs' applications to the ESF for support with better governance](#) (2018) aiming to improve the curricular content of tertiary programmes through stronger governance and managerial skills for staff. By 2023, 20 HEIs should have received support for projects related to strategic development and results management. The [strengthening academic staff in HEIs in strategic specialisation areas](#) programme will fund six HEIs to improve the skills of teaching staff, and attract new staff from the national pool of doctoral graduates and foreign academics. The programme to [reduce fragmentation of study programmes and strengthen resource sharing](#) aims to develop a new set of internationally competitive study programmes with EQAR accreditation (see "Governance"). By 2023, the aim is to have closed 220 programmes and opened 11 new joint doctoral programmes, 31 new teacher training programmes (see "School Improvement") and 62 other new programmes.

In 2017, the [World Bank](#) reported that all HEIs had either already begun to adjust to the new requirements of the revised funding model or were on their way to doing so. Additionally, internal funding models had become more transparent. Ongoing challenges included the lack of a stable funding stream for research available to all HEIs and the risks posed by instability in core funding if allocation mechanisms for study places change at the system level. The report recommended improving alignment between funding models and institutional objectives. For governance, the report noted that all institutions had developed strategy documents and selected implementation instruments; some had already begun to streamline internal governance structures and processes. Finally, the report identified a collaborative and "democratic culture" within HEIs' governance structures but noted imbalance between the responsibility of leaders and that of collegial bodies, which could pose threats to strategic development.

More recently, the [OECD](#) (2019) identified other areas in which the governance of HEIs could be improved. Latvia is one of the few OECD countries where external stakeholders are not included in HEIs' governance boards. Rather, traditional collegial governance structures can hold back the ability of Latvian HEIs to respond swiftly and strategically to changing economic and societal needs. Furthermore, while the new financing system rewards universities which engage in collaborative research with firms, this requires a significant culture change within HEIs which could take time. The [EC](#) (2019) emphasised that the second and third funding pillars are limited and may not sufficiently incentivise HEIs to streamline their offer as they compete for students. As such, dedicating more resources to research and innovation and ensuring the capacity of AIC to guarantee quality will be critical.

Going forward, Latvia is addressing some of these concerns. The MoES has proposed financing priorities under the second and third pillars of the funding model. Specifically, in 2018, the [government reported](#) that further planned efforts include implementing a more results-oriented higher education funding model with new components which take into account the quality of education and student outcomes. The Cabinet of Ministers approved [amendments to the Law on Higher Education](#) (2020) which envisage a new typology of HEIs and introduce internal governing councils consisting of both external and internal stakeholders, which promote the strategic development and further differentiate between academic and strategic governance structures.

FUNDING: DESPITE DECLINING STUDENT NUMBERS, PER-STUDENT SPENDING REMAINS RELATIVELY LOW

Latvia's **overall expenditure on education** has fallen significantly following the 2008 economic crisis. In 2016, Latvia's expenditure on primary to tertiary education as a share of gross domestic product (GDP), at 4.2%, was below the OECD average share of 5%. Despite investment in areas such as teacher remuneration in recent years, this represented a 6% decrease on 2010 values. Nevertheless, declining student numbers have translated into larger-than-average increases in per-student funding across the same period. The increase was most significant for primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education at 23%, compared to a 12% increase in tertiary education. However, expenditure per student in Latvia remains comparatively low across all levels of education: it is just over half of the OECD average at tertiary level, two-thirds at pre-primary and secondary levels, and three-quarters at primary level.

The share of privately sourced funds for education is small in Latvia, and has been decreasing, unlike the broader OECD trend. Within ECEC, only 8.5% of children are enrolled in private institutions in Latvia compared to an OECD average of 34.7%; this is one of the smallest shares in the OECD despite a growth in private provision since the extension of legal entitlement to ECEC in 2011 (see "Equity and Quality"). In basic education, around 99% of Latvian children attend public, tuition-free schools. At tertiary level, the share of public expenditure falls slightly below the OECD average at 65.3% with the largest share of private funding coming from households due to tuition fees. The total share of private expenditure on educational institutions from primary to tertiary education decreased by 2.4 percentage points between 2010 and 2016 compared to an OECD average increase of 2.5 percentage points. At the same time, public expenditure on education increased by 5.8 percentage points in Latvia, compared to a decrease of 2.6 percentage points at OECD average. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, public-private initiatives played an important role in the Latvia's educational response (see Spotlight 1); there may be scope to develop such partnerships further in the future, particularly in the area of digital innovation for education.

In Latvia, funding for **primary and secondary schools** is shared between the national government and municipalities. Local governments provide just over one-third of initial public funds for primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary institutions, compared to an OECD average of 25%. Following intergovernmental transfers, municipalities distribute three-quarters of public funds for education at this level. Central funds cover teaching salaries, study material and partial meal provision in the lower years; locally-raised funds cover non-teaching salaries, capital investment and maintenance. Municipalities may supplement certain aspects of school funding with locally-raised funds, and can apply to international funds. Since 2009, central funding follows a per-student model that uses teacher workload and salary budget calculations to determine allocations. In PISA 2018, the share of students in schools whose principals reported that shortages in educational material and teachers hinder instruction was similar to average. For **ECEC**, and particularly prior to the compulsory starting age, Latvia's municipalities are the source of over 90% of funds, after transfers, compared to an OECD average of 34%. However, increased enrolment in ECEC has not been matched by investment: overall expenditure on ECEC in 2016 accounted for 0.8% of Latvia's GDP, the same share as in 2012. Municipalities play a small role in financing VET, which is more reliant on central and international funds. The [OECD](#) (2015) raised concerns about the imbalance between the functions and responsibilities of local government and their limited financial autonomy and capacity to raise revenue.

Public expenditure on **higher education** in Latvia is relatively low, accounting for 0.9% of GDP in 2016 (excluding R&D), compared to 1.1% on average across the OECD. Developments in tertiary spending have not mirrored those in national wealth. Between 2010 and 2016, Latvia's GDP grew by 21% while expenditure on tertiary institutions as a percentage of GDP fell by 24%. However, this coincided with declining student numbers: according to [national data reported to the EU](#) (2018), the number of tertiary students in Latvia has fallen by 38% since its maximum in 2005/06. Latvia operates a dual system of tertiary-student financing: those with highest academic performance study free-of-charge (around 40% of students), while others pay tuition fees set by HEIs. Among the three-quarters of tertiary students enrolled in public, or government-dependent private institutions only around one-third pay fees at an average annual amount of USD 4 291 at bachelor's level. Fees are higher for international students and doctoral candidates. A student loan system is in place: the average annual loan in 2017/18 was USD 2 407, but only 5% of domestic students benefitted. Latvia introduced a new [Study and Student Loan Scheme](#) (2019) aiming to facilitate access to loans by reducing the administrative burden and providing greater choice for students.

Key strengths and challenges of funding education system (pre-crisis analysis)

Key strengths	Key challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Per-student spending is increasing across all education levels. Latvia relies considerably less on private sources of funding for ECEC than elsewhere in the OECD. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that municipal responsibility for school and ECEC funding does not inhibit equity. Addressing imbalance between the responsibilities of local government and their limited autonomy and capacity to raise revenue.

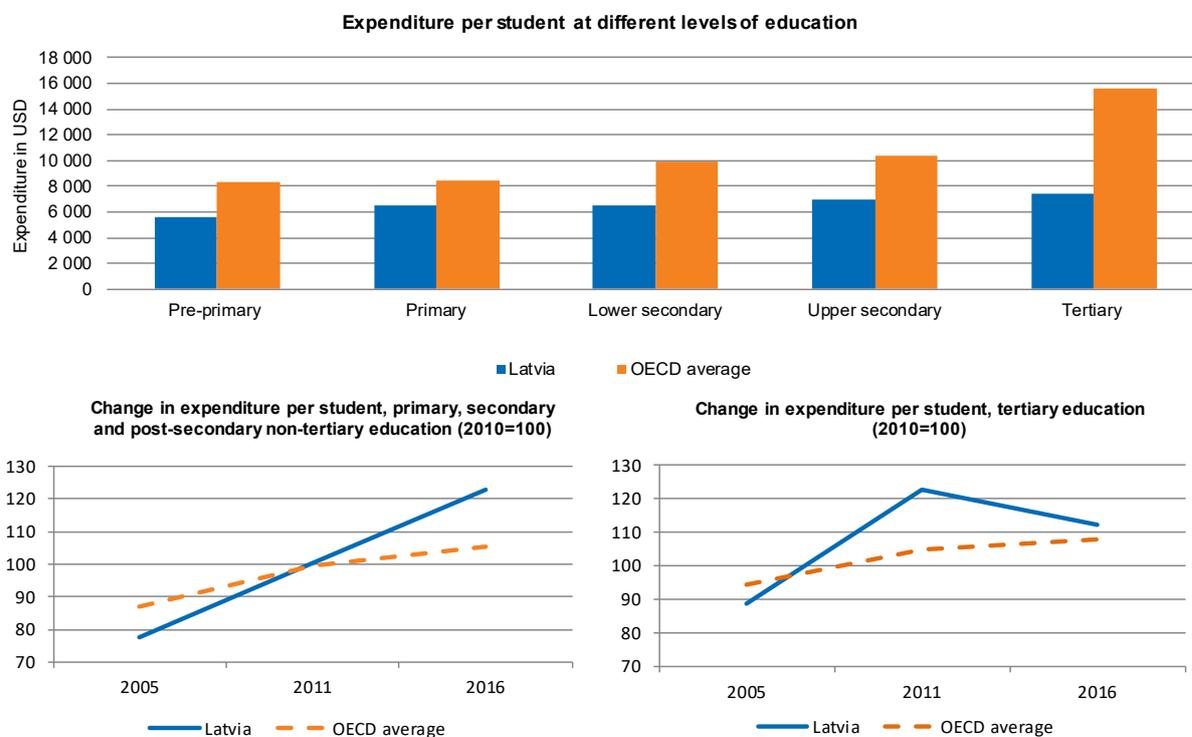
Recent policies and practices

From 2013 to 2015, the government granted financial support to private pre-school institutions and childcare providers to give municipalities time to meet the requirements of the extension of legal entitlement to ECEC (2011). However, capacity needs had not been met by the end of 2015 and the financial support continued. In 2016, municipalities and the private sector collaborated to open several child development and play centres, and local governments assumed responsibility for providing financial aid to parents with children from 1.5 years old unable to enrol in public childcare due to lack of space. Since 2016, the costs to municipalities for this have been calculated via a [single method](#) in order to improve transparency and consistency. [National data reported to the EU](#) (2018) show that, in 2017, municipalities provided EUR 212 per month, on average, for each child between the ages of 1.5 and 4 years old unable to access state-provided ECEC, and EUR 155 per month for those aged 5 or 6 years old.

In 2016, Latvia approved a [revised teacher remuneration scheme](#) from pre-primary to upper secondary education. This is part of a new funding model that aims to recognise the additional workload of teachers outside instruction hours and is based on a 30-hour work-week schedule in contrast to the previous model based on a 21-hour teaching workload. The scheme increased teachers' minimum statutory salaries from EUR 420 per month in 2013 to EUR 710 per month in 2018. The government maintained performance-related bonuses and school principals can also offer extra salary bonuses; in total these can reach up to 50% of a teachers' basic pay. In 2018, Latvia approved [further increases to teachers' salaries](#) up to a statutory minimum of EUR 900 per month by 2022. Accordingly, the government has scheduled considerable annual budget investments reaching EUR 111.1 million in 2022. However, the [OECD](#) (2014) previously highlighted the need to complement salary increases with a rationalisation of the school network and an increase in teacher-student ratios in order to make such changes sustainable. Additionally, the [OECD](#) (2016) recommended introducing greater differentiation in the salaries and functions of education professionals. Furthermore, the [EC](#) (2019) raised concerns that the bonus system can lead to teachers taking on many more teaching hours, with advantages varying considerably by school type and location.

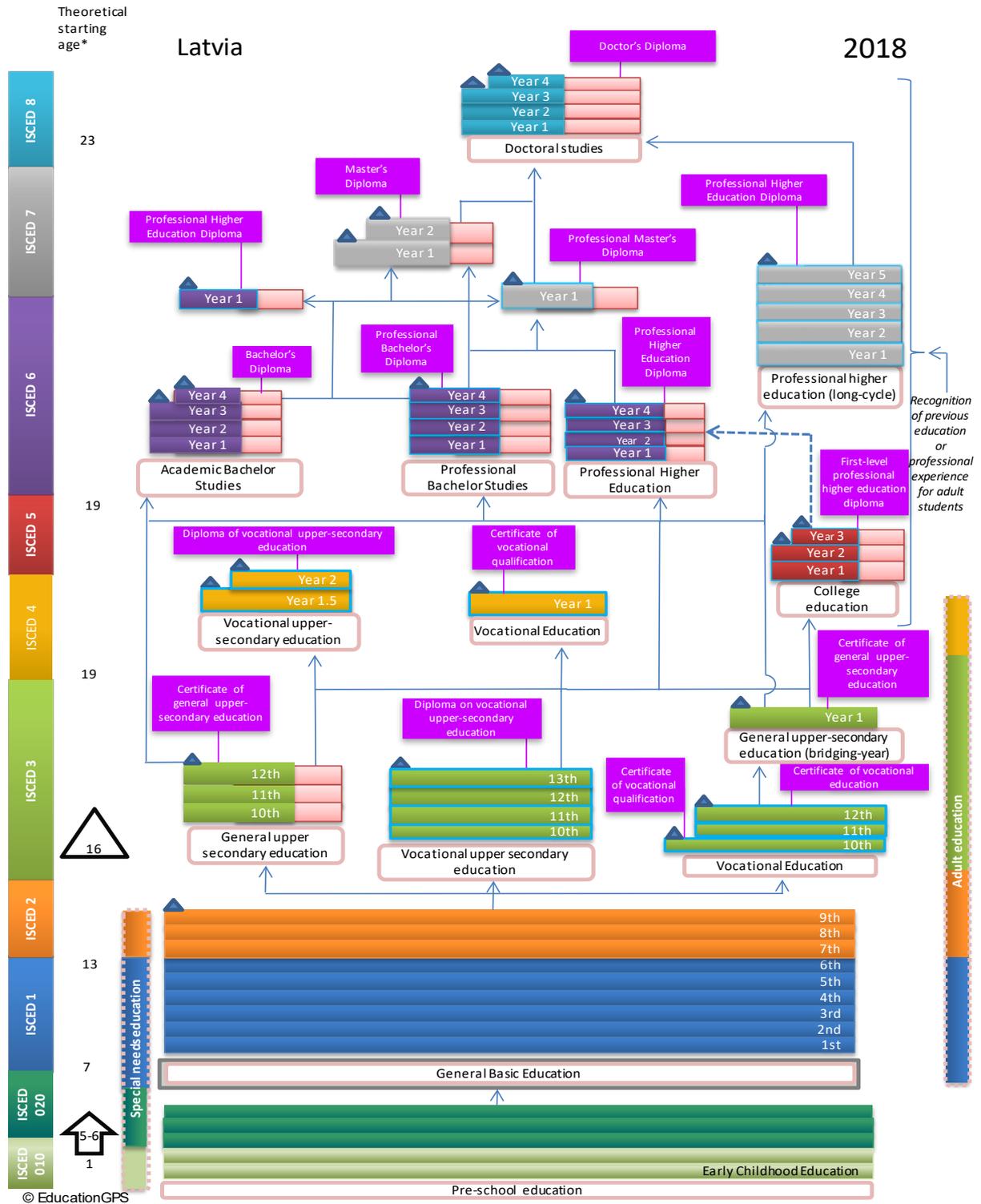
In an ongoing effort to improve support for children with special educational needs, as of 2016, the MoES piloted a revised school funding model that allocates additional funds for students with special needs resulting in increased funding for special education institutions and better remuneration for special education teachers. From 2016/17, rather than per-student funding, allocations to special education institutions are calculated according to the teaching requirements of each programme. A classification system has been developed to align types of needs with the models of education, healthcare and social service that can be offered to children with those needs.

Figure 8. Annual expenditure per student (2016) and recent trends, by level of education



Source: OECD (2019), *Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f8d7880d-en>.

ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF LATVIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM



Note: The key for the interpretation of this table is available at the source link below.
Source: OECD (2019), Latvia: Overview of the Education System, *OECD Education GPS*, http://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/LVA/LVA_2011_EN.pdf.

ANNEX B: STATISTICS

#	List of key indicators ^{1,2,3}	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
Background information					
<i>Economy</i>					
1	GDP per capita, 2016, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs (OECD Statistics)	25 879	42 441	14 276	107 775
2	GDP growth, 2016 (OECD Statistics)	2.1%	1.8%	0.6%	6.6%
<i>Society</i>					
3	Population density, inhab/km ² , 2017 (OECD Statistics)	31	37	3	517
4	Population aged less than 15 as a percentage of total population, 2018 (OECD Data)	15.8%	17.0%	12.2%	28.4%
5	Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population, 2018 or the most recent available year (OECD Data)	12.7%	14.4%	0.8%	47.6%
Education outcomes					
6	Mean performance in reading (PISA 2018)	479	487	412	523
Average three-year trend in performance across PISA assessments, by domain (PISA 2018)^{4,5}					
7	Reading performance	2.3	0.4	-4.9	7.1
	Mathematics performance	1.7	-0.6	-9.1	6.4
	Science performance	-0.8	-1.9	-10.7	6.4
8	Enrolment rates of 3-year-olds in early childhood education and care, 2017 (EAG 2019)	89.5%	79.3%	2.4%	100%
9	Percentage of 25-64 year-olds whose highest level of attainment is lower secondary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	8.8%	14.4%	0.8%	39.9%
Educational attainment of the population aged 25-34 by type of attainment, 2018 or latest available					
10	At least upper secondary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	87.3%	85.4%	50.1%	97.8%
	Tertiary education, 2018 (EAG 2019)	41.6%	44.3%	23.4%	69.6%
	Vocational upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education (EAG database, 2017 or latest available year)	17.6%	24.0%	1.9%	51.9%
Unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds by educational attainment, 2018 (EAG 2019)					
11	Below upper secondary	18.6%	13.7%	3.0%	37.3%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	9.5%	7.3%	2.5%	25.1%
	Tertiary education	4.5%	5.5%	1.7%	23.2%
Students: Raising outcomes					
<i>Policy lever 1: Equity and quality</i>					
12	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2018)	16	14	10	16
Students performing at the highest or lowest levels in reading (%) (PISA 2018)					
13	Students performing below Level 2	22.4%	22.6%	11.1%	49.9%
	Students performing at Level 5 or above	4.8%	8.7%	0.8%	15.0%
14	Percentage of students in schools where students are grouped by ability into different classes for all subjects, PISA 2015	5.4%	7.8%	0.0%	56.1%
15	Percentage of students whose parents reported that the schooling available in their area includes two or more other schools, PISA 2015	m	36.8%	20.4%	56.9%

#	List of key indicators ^{1,2,3}	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
16	Percentage of students reporting that they have repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary schools (PISA 2015)	5.0%	11.3%	0.0%	42.6%
17	Percentage of variance in reading performance in PISA test explained by ESCS (PISA 2018) ⁴	7.2%	12.0%	6.2%	19.1%
18	Score difference in reading performance in PISA between non-immigrant and immigrant students AFTER adjusting for socio-economic status (PISA 2018) ⁴	-7	-24	-80	16
19	Score difference between girls and boys in reading (PISA 2018) ⁴	33	30	10	52
<i>Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future</i>					
20	Mean proficiency in literacy among adults aged 16-64 on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012)	NP	267.7	220.1	296.2
21	Difference in literacy scores between younger (25-34) and older (55-65) adults AFTER accounting for age, gender, education, immigrant and language background and parents' educational attainment (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012).	NP	15.6	-8.3	37.6
Share of students in upper secondary education in 2017 following:					
22	General programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	61.4%	58.1%	27.6%	100.0%
	Vocational programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	38.6%	43.1%	9.0%	72.4%
	Combined school and work-based programmes (OECD Stat - INES 2020)	38.6%	18.3%	1.0%	58.0%
23	First-time graduation rates from tertiary education, 2017 (Below the age of 30, excluding mobile students / OECD Stat - INES 2020)	33.9%	36.6%	10.1%	49.9%
24	Percentage of 18-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training, 2018 (EAG 2019)	12.2%	14.3%	5.9%	29.8%
Institutions: Improving schools					
<i>Policy lever 3: School improvement</i>					
The Learning Environment - PISA 2018					
25	Mean index of teacher support in language-of-instruction lessons	0.05	0.01	-0.61	0.47
	Mean index of disciplinary climate	0.14	0.04	-0.34	1.07
	Mean index of students' sense of belonging	-0.26	0.00	-0.28	0.46
26	Percentage of teachers in lower secondary education aged 50 years old or more, 2017 (EAG 2019)	49.9%	37.0%	6.3%	54.2%
Number of teaching hours per year in public institutions by education level, 2018 (EAG 2019)⁷					
27	Primary education	1020	783	561	1063
	Lower secondary education, general programmes	1020	709	481	1063
28	Ratio of actual teachers' salaries to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education, lower secondary education, general programmes, 2016 (EAG 2019)	1.40	0.88	0.64	1.40
29	Proportion of teachers who believe the teaching profession is valued in society (TALIS 2018)	23.3%	25.8%	4.5%	67.0%
30	Proportion of teachers who would become a teacher again if they could choose (TALIS 2018)	65.4%	75.6%	54.9%	92.2%

#	List of key indicators ^{1,2,3}	Latvia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
<i>Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment to improve student outcomes</i>					
31	Percentage of students in schools where the following arrangements aimed at quality assurance and improvement at school are used (PISA 2015):				
	Internal/Self-evaluation	100.0%	93.2%	74.8%	100.0%
	External evaluation	95.9%	74.6%	20.8%	97.4%
32	Percentage of students whose school principals reported that standardised tests are used for the following purposes (PISA 2015):				
	To make decisions about students' retention or promotion	59.4%	31.3%	3.4%	60.6%
	To monitor the school's progress from year to year	97.0%	69.4%	26.2%	97.7%
	To make judgements about teachers' effectiveness	83.2%	37.0%	4.4%	87.5%
	To identify aspects of instruction or the curriculum that could be improved	92.4%	58.9%	14.1%	92.4%
33	Percentage of lower secondary teachers whose principals report conducting formal appraisal of their teachers at least once per year (TALIS 2018)	85.4%	63.5%	16.2%	98.1%
Systems: Organising the system					
<i>Policy lever 5: Governance</i>					
34	Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2017 (EAG 2018)				
	Central	17.7%	23.8%	0.0%	83.3%
	State	a	10.3%	0.0%	62.5%
	Regional/Sub-regional	a	4.9%	0.0%	33.3%
	Local	18.8%	13.3%	0.0%	71.9%
	School	63.5%	34.0%	0.0%	91.7%
	Multiple levels	0.0%	13.8%	0.0%	100.0%
<i>Policy lever 6: Funding</i>					
35	Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (from primary to tertiary), 2016 (EAG 2019)	4.2%	5.0%	0.0%	6.5%
36	Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2016 (EAG 2019)				
	Pre-primary education	5 574	8 349	1 579	17 533
	Primary education	6 453	8 470	2 961	17 913
	Lower secondary education	6 504	9 884	2 561	21 739
	Upper secondary education	7 006	10 368	3 001	21 231
	Tertiary education	7 449	15 556	5 787	48 407
37	Relative proportions of public and private expenditure on educational institutions, 2016 (EAG 2019)				
	Public sources	89.1%	82.7%	62.7%	97.6%
	All private sources (includes international sources)	10.9%	17.4%	2.4%	37.3%
38	Change in the share of expenditure on educational institutions, EAG 2019 (Percentage-point difference between 2010 and 2016, primary to tertiary education)				
	Public sources	5.8	-2.7	-9.8	6.3
	All private sources	-2.4	2.5	-6.3	7.0
Notes					
1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD countries except in the Survey of Adult Skills, where they refer to participating countries. For indicators 6, 13 and 17-19 the average value refers to the arithmetic mean across all OECD member countries (and Colombia), excluding Spain. For indicator 5, the average value refers to the arithmetic mean across all OECD member countries (except Japan, Korea and Poland) as calculated by the Education Policy Outlook.					
2. "m": included when data is not available.					
3. "NP": included if the country is not participating in the study.					
4. Statistically significant values of the indicator are shown in bold (PISA only).					
5. The average three year trend is the average change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation in PISA to PISA 2018.					
6. "a": included when the category is not applicable.					
7. For Latvia, this refers to typical teaching time (teaching time required from most teachers when no specific circumstances apply to teachers).					

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NOTES

¹ On 25 May 2018, the OECD Council invited Colombia to become a Member. While Colombia is included in the OECD averages reported in this publication for data from Education at a Glance, the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Teaching and Learning International Survey, at the time of preparation of these OECD datasets, Colombia was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of Colombia's instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

² Throughout this profile, the terms “rural students” and “rural schools” refer to students or schools based in areas with less than 3 000 inhabitants, as defined in PISA.

³ For Latvia, this refers to typical teaching time (teaching time required from most teachers when no specific circumstances apply to teachers).

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