In the current century, the initial training of all Estonian teachers has been carried out at the higher education level and generally in universities. Since the higher education reform in 2002 based on the Bologna process when primarily the 3+2 curricula were launched, subject and class teachers of general education schools have been trained at the Master’s level; preschool teachers and vocational teachers at the level of Bachelor’s study. In evaluation of the quality of initial teacher training, in addition to general higher education regulations also the framework requirements for teacher training, [1] adopted by the Government of the Republic in 2000, are taken as basis, establishing uniform requirements for teachers’ training irrespective of the type and legal status of an educational institution.

The framework requirements for teacher training regulate the training of teachers of preschool child care institutions, class teachers of basic schools, specialist teachers and special education teachers of basic schools and upper secondary schools, teachers of vocational educational institutions and teachers of professional higher education schools and universities.

Teacher training includes the following components:

- general education studies;
- study related to a specific subject(s) or a specialty;
- professional studies;
- a final thesis or examination of the relevant higher education level that includes pedagogical research.

In addition to initial training, the teacher training framework requirements also regulate organisation of the induction phase and continuing education.

Professional standards form the conceptual basis for teacher training. Updating of the professional standards for teachers' in 2012 and these are now on the four described level, which gives a possibility to use standards also for planning not only the initial training and the induction phase but also the professional development of the teacher.

New standards for vocational teachers were approved in September 2014.

In the current academic year, the updating of the professional standard for teachers commences.

Institutions, Levels and Models of Training

According to the higher education standard, the estimation of the volume of study foreseen in a curriculum is carried out in credit points of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) from 1 September 2009. One credit point corresponds to 26 hours of study. The volume of an academic year is 60 credit points, i.e. 1,560 hours of study. The standard period of the curriculum of vocational
teachers is 180 credit points (three years). Studies are carried out in the first cycle of higher education (professional higher education or Bachelor’s study).

Pursuant to the teacher training framework requirements, teacher training curricula shall include vocational training to the extent of at least 60 credit points and work practice at school shall count for at least 15 of these.

The initial training of teachers of preschool child care institutions is generally carried out in the first cycle of higher education but universities also offer Master’s curricula for training of preschool education specialists. At the first level of higher education the volume of the curriculum of preschool child care institutions teachers is 180 credit points and in Master’s studies 120 credit points. A person who has completed Master’s study is prepared also, for example, to teach children with special needs, to provide colleagues with professional counselling and to manage preschool child care institutions.

Generalist teachers, specialist teachers of basic schools and upper secondary schools, teachers of general education subjects in vocational schools and special education teachers are trained in the second cycle of higher education, the total volume of teachers’ training being 300 credit points. Generalist teachers are trained according to the integrated curricula of Bachelor’s and Master’s study (5 years, concurrent model), other teachers are trained according to the consecutive model of three-year Bachelor’s studies followed by the two-year Master’s studies.

Students graduating from teacher training must, since the academic year 2003/2004, undergo the induction phase.

**Admission Requirements**

For the commencement of teacher training, the pre-conditions for the beginning of studies in a corresponding higher education level are applied: the pre-condition for the commencement of teacher training is acquired secondary education or a foreign qualification equal thereto.

An additional pre-condition for the commencement of teacher training is passing teacher professional aptitude tests. Uniform formats for professional aptitude tests and uniform criteria for evaluating professional aptitude have not been established. Students are admitted to teachers' training in universities on the basis of merit, which is calculated taking into account the average grades of a student candidate in a previous study period and the results of the professional aptitude test. Professional aptitude is assessed on the basis of an essay written by a student and on the basis of discussion or teamwork.

The admission threshold, i.e. the results required for admission, depends on the relation between the number of candidates and the number of student places available and on the level of the student candidates.

**Curriculum, Level of Specialisation and Learning Outcomes**

Teacher training curricula of higher education institutions are based on the Universities Act and two regulations of the Government of the Republic: The Standard of Higher Education and The Framework Requirements for Teacher Training.

According to the higher education standard, the objectives and learning outcomes of higher education curricula must correspond to the requirements and tendencies of international legislation governing the respective profession and if a professional standard exists, take account of the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described in it. Competencies described in the
professional standards for teachers, special education teachers and vocational teachers are taken as starting points in the development of teachers' training curricula.

The professional standard for teachers was first approved by the Education vocational council in 2005 and the professional standard for vocational teachers in 2006. The new standard that forms the basis for initial training was approved in May 2013, and higher education schools brought their curricula into line with the standard by the academic year 2015/2016.

**Professional standard** is a document that describes a job and provides a list of skills, knowledge and attitudes, i.e. competence requirements necessary for successful performance of work.

The **professional standard for teachers** specifies six compulsory competencies:

1. planning of learning and teaching;
2. developing teaching environment;
3. supporting learning and development;
4. reflection and professional development;
5. counselling and mentoring;
6. development, creation and research.

Level 7 and 8 of the professional standard for teachers specify the following optional competencies:

1. management;
2. mentoring and training of teachers.

Each competency has been described through activity indicators.

There are 11 competencies related to the job described through activity indicators.

Professional standards for preschool child care institution teacher’s is at the sixth professional level. The structure of this standard is similar to that of teachers and is based on the specifics of the job of the teacher of preschool child care institution.

The main activity of a **special education teacher** is supporting and directing students with special educational needs in cooperation with other specialists. The standard at the seventh professional level that forms the basis for the special education curriculum was finished in 2013 and it includes seven compulsory competencies.

The compulsory competencies include:

1. noticing, investigating and evaluating the special educational needs of a learner;
2. planning teaching activities;
3. developing learning environment;
4. teaching;
5. reflection and professional development;
6. special education counselling and mentorship;
7. participation in development, creation and research.

Optional competencies include:

1. staff management;
2. teacher training in the field of special education.
There are 10 competencies included in the profession of a special education teacher and these have been worded in a way similar to those included in the profession of a teacher.

A vocational teacher teaches speciality subjects in a vocational school and the requirements for his or her training and qualifications are lower than the requirements for teachers of general education subjects. The professional standard for vocational teachers adopted in September 2004 differentiates between three levels of qualifications for vocational teachers. A vocational teacher teaching only practical vocational skills and instructing practical lessons is not required to have obtained higher education.

The professional standards of vocational teachers describe, in addition to general knowledge and skills, also the seven competencies necessary for performing required tasks:

1. planning the process of study;
2. forming the environment of study;
3. supporting learning and the development of learners;
4. reflexion and individual professional development;
5. developing specialty studies;
6. promoting the image of vocational training;
7. developing organisational culture.

The vocational teacher level 7 includes also “supporting colleagues” as an additional compulsory competence.

The professional standard of vocational teachers includes four optional competencies:

1. organising practical training;
2. management and leadership;
3. performing adult continuing education;
4. supporting learners with special educational needs in the process of study.

The vocational teacher level 6 includes also “supporting colleagues” as an additional optional competence.

The professional standards for teachers have been developed in the framework of the Estonian vocational system providing description of levels which comply with those specified in the European qualification framework

**Teacher Educators**

The framework requirements for teacher training establish special requirements for teachers of higher education institutions who provide instruction in didactics: a professional or subject-related teaching experience of at least three years in an educational institution of the corresponding educational level and teaching a specific subject or professional studies to the extent of at least 100 academic hours in an educational institution of the corresponding educational level every three years.

One of the tasks of the competence centres to be created at Tallinn University and the University of Tartu is providing courses in higher educational institution didactics, development of which is based on respective research and development.
Qualifications, Evaluation, Certificates

Teacher training ends under the conditions and pursuant to the procedures established for the completion of the corresponding higher education level. Graduates from teacher training are awarded a diploma certifying completion of the teacher training curriculum together with an academic transcript or report card.

Teacher training studies of an additional subject or profession end under the conditions and pursuant to the procedures established for the completion of the part of the corresponding teacher training curriculum. Graduates are awarded a diploma certifying the completion of teacher training studies of an additional subject or profession together with an academic transcript or report card.

Alternative Training Pathways

Alternative training pathways are being developed, financed by the European Social Fund.

In the process of development of flexible teacher training models, initiative has been taken by a private programme Youth to School in the course of which a school-based teacher training curriculum has been developed in cooperation with universities.

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