Conditions of service for teachers are established as follows:

- the Government of the Republic – has established reduced working time of 35 hours per week for educators;
- the Ministry of Education and Research – establishes qualification requirements for teachers, the principles and procedures for attestation for preschool teachers; establishes an attestation committee and participates in its work and carries out state supervision;
- county government – participates in state supervision;
- local government / owner of school – signs an employment contract with a head teacher, determines the composition of the staff of the preschool child care institution (the minimum established by the regulation of the minister is compulsory), organises a competition to fill teacher vacancies, participates in kindergarten teacher attestation committee, may offer benefits; must ensure the methodological servicing of teachers;
- professional and vocational associations – the representatives participate in the development of regulations and the kindergarten teacher attestation committees as the partners of the ministry. Eesti Õpetajate Liit (Estonian Association of Teachers) organises awarding teaching qualifications to kindergarten and general education school teachers.

Issues concerning staff are regulated by the Pre-School Child Care Institutions Act [1], the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act [2], the Vocational Educational Institutions Act [3], the Private Schools Act [4], and the Higher Education Act [5]. According to the Education Act [6], local authorities may provide additional benefits to teachers.

The Employment Contracts Act [7] and the regulations of the Government of the Republic and the Minister of Education and Research based on the act regulate the conditions and procedures of starting and leaving work, conditions of holidays, working hours and minimal salary.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act [8] provides the occupational health and safety requirements for the workplace, the tasks of employers and employees in creating a working environment that is safe for health, the organisation of occupational health and safety at enterprise, institution and state level, the procedure for settlement of relevant disputes, and liability for non-compliance with occupational health and safety requirements. Special requirements for teachers have not been established.
Pension insurance for teachers, like that for other staff, is regulated by the State Pension Insurance Act [9].

**Planning Policy**

To allocate activity support to a university, the Minister of Education and Research shall have negotiations with the university based on its mission, objectives and functions and the forecast labour market need for specialists with higher education. Two Estonian universities have taken responsibility for the performance, quality and development of teaching in teacher training, which shall be of high quality and meet the needs of the society, by opening a required number of study places.

Information on the planning policy is given via newspapers and Internet and it is targeted mainly to graduates from secondary level education.

In the sub-register of the Estonian Education Information System schools insert data about all their teachers regarding their workload, subjects taught, level of education, continuing education and language command. The outputs of the register are available to the public through a web-based application HaridusSilm. Statistical outputs of the register are in the phase of elaboration. The register also includes an additional open module where schools can advertise their vacancies.

Pursuant to the Education Act, local authorities shall forecast the need for teachers and help educational institutions in finding employees.

**Entry to the Profession**

Persons holding a teacher's diploma have the right to compete for a teacher's position in any school that has advertised a vacant teacher's position.

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act requires teachers to have acquired at least higher education. The requirement is not applied to general teachers who have passed teacher training at a lower level earlier and to basic school subject teachers. The new basic school and upper secondary school subject teachers and class teachers entering the labour market must hold master’s degree and a teaching qualification. Therefore, those who complete teacher training curriculum in a university after 2016 also acquire a teaching qualification. Other persons pursuing teaching can prove their suitability for the profession and apply for a qualification through a professional association. Eesti Õpetajate Liit (Estonian Association of Teachers) is the organisation awarding teaching qualifications. Vocational teachers acquire their qualification from Tallinn University.

Where a foreign national wishes to be employed as a teacher in Estonia, the Ministry of Education and Research shall compare the curricula and programme completed by them with the requirements applicable in Estonia and recognise the teacher’s qualification acquired abroad.

Teachers must have high-level (C1-level) command of Estonian; teachers of non-Estonian language schools (except for teachers of Estonian as a second language) must have medium-level (B2-level) command of Estonian.
**Induction**

The precondition for commencing the induction phase is completion of a teacher training curriculum. All teachers, including preschool, special education and vocational teachers, who first start working in the teaching profession, have to pass the induction phase (excl. those who have completed a teachers’ training curriculum in parallel to working in a pedagogical position).

An inexperienced teacher passes the induction phase in his or her future workplace, completes the support programme of the induction phase for which a certificate is issued by a university, and compiles an individual development portfolio, which includes his or her activities during the first year spent in service and self-analysis. Passing the support programme of the induction phase is not connected with the institution whose curriculum of teacher training was completed; a junior teacher completes the programme of the induction phase at a teacher training institution chosen by the persons themselves.

A mentor, who is a teacher with an experience in performing supervision, work experience of at least 3 years and experience in development work, supervises an inexperienced teacher. A mentor should complete a mentor training curriculum at a university prior to taking the position or commence passing the programme in parallel to supervising a junior teacher undergoing the qualifying phase. A mentor works as a partner to an inexperienced teacher, supervises, counsels and gives regular feedback to the person. Evaluation of the professional performance of an inexperienced teacher during the induction phase and his or her conformity to the professional standard shall be given by the school management and the mentor has an advisory role in the evaluation.

In 2011, adaptation phase for vocational teachers was implemented. The adaptation phase helps a junior vocational teacher adapt to the vocational education institution and start working in the teaching profession. The adaptation phase is spent at a vocational education institution; a teacher is supported by a mentor and during the adaptation phase a junior teacher may also be engaged in studies. Universities provide training to those junior vocational teachers who come from companies to work as teachers and do not have pedagogical education. Continuing education carried out during the adaptation phase provides them with initial pedagogical skills.

Most Estonian vocational educational institutions are large state-owned vocational training centres where several junior teachers start working every year. Therefore, universities do not organise support programmes for vocational teachers. However, universities do train mentors. The adaptation phase lasts for one year and at the end of the phase, a vocational teacher should be ready to pass a vocational teacher’s qualifying examination.

**Professional Status**

Vacant positions of teachers are filled through competitions, the conditions of which are approved by the school board. Teachers work on the basis of employment contracts. The head of a school shall conclude, amend and terminate employment contracts with teachers in accordance with labour laws and other legislation regulating the employment relations of teachers. Employment contracts are concluded for an unspecified term. An employment
A written employment contract must include at least the following data:

- the names of employer and employee, personal identification or registry code, address of residence or location;
- the time of signing the contract and of commencing work;
- description of duties;
- official title, if it is of legal consequence;
- the agreed salary, including the payment from economic results and transactions, method of salary calculation, procedure of payment and the due date (payday), also the taxes and payments that the employer pays and withholds;
- other perks if they are agreed upon;
- time in which the employee carries out his or her duties (work hours);
- place of work;
- duration of holidays;
- reference to the deadline of announcement of terminating the contract, or the deadline of announcement of terminating the contract;
- rules set by the employer applying to the organisation of work;
- reference to a collective agreement if such an agreement is applied to the respective employee.

The Estonian Education Personnel Union (the teachers' trade union) recommends its members to follow the provisions of the declaration on professional ethics of the global education workers organisation Education International. In addition to the employment contract, statutes and internal procedures of a school and job descriptions regulate the work of teachers at school. These documents determine the tasks and obligations as well as the rights and responsibilities of teachers.

A collective agreement is a voluntary agreement between employees (or a union of employees) and an employer (or a union of employers) and it regulates labour relations between employees and employers. A collective agreement may also be concluded with the central or local government. A collective agreement determines the additional labour relations which are not regulated by the state or it establishes contractual norms which are more favourable as compared to the legal standards of the state. A collective agreement may determine salary conditions, working conditions, working time and holidays, suspension, amendment and termination terms of the work contract, conditions for professional, in-service and retraining and other guarantees and compensations that the parties to the agreement deem necessary.
Replacement Measures

In Estonia, there is no national institution of substitute teachers; to cover for absent teachers, schools in most cases rely on existing teaching staff. If this is not possible, teachers with a work contract of a specified term, retired teachers or also persons without the qualification of a teacher are employed. Replacing absent colleagues is not regulated by legislation. The procedures for teacher replacement may be described in a school's collective agreement and teachers' employment contracts may also include a replacement obligation.

A substitute teacher may be a teacher of a different subject, normally teach at a different level of education or come from a different school. Legislation does not regulate the length of the period during which replacement may take place. It is also not regulated how many extra hours per week compared to the normal workload a teacher can teach. The only existing restriction concerns the total number of working hours per week.

Since 2018, in some areas in Estonia, a third-sector organisation has been bringing together the schools that need substitute teachers and people who wish to work at school for short periods of time.

Supporting Measures

Possibilities have been created for teachers to continue studies and acquire an additional specialisation in higher education institutions both in formal training and continuing education on study places financed by the state. Students studying according to teacher training curricula have benefits for receiving student loan and working teachers have been given the opportunity to study according to the curricula during a longer standard period of study.

The best students may compete for a teacher training scholarship financed by the state.

A teacher’s start-up support scheme supports young teachers that have passed teacher training and who go to work in rural areas. The total amount of support is 12,782 euros and it is paid within three years.

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act enables, with a much wider scope than before, ordinary schools to create separate groups and classes for children with special educational needs to whom ordinary classes cannot offer enough help. In order to support the development of every student, the school must ensure additional pedagogical supervision outside lessons for the student who is temporarily lagging behind. The school must also provide students with the services of a special education teacher, a psychologist and a social education teacher. The listed services are also available to teachers.

The European Social Fund supports the financing of a number of projects that pilot new activities that would raise the job satisfaction of school managers, teachers and support specialists, and facilitate coping with work stress among support specialists and teachers. ESF resources are also used for financing the creation and development of teachers’ subject-related and professional networks. Methodological counselling for teachers will be provided by the competence centres to be created at the universities.

A teacher can turn to the school management for counselling or continuing education in case
of subject or teaching related problems. Also educational departments of county
governments and the Ministry of Education and Research advise teachers if needed.

The workload of teachers depends to a great extent on the class size. The upper limit of class
size is 24 students at the basic school level. An amendment to the law came into force in
December 2006, allowing the owner of a school, at the request of the head of a school and
the agreement of the school board, to establish also a class size larger than the maximum
provided by law. A larger class size may not be established in classes of students with special
needs.

As of 2018, teachers have an opportunity to apply for education grant. The purpose of the
grant is to enable education practitioners contribute to the development of education in a
broader way than what is enabled and required by their profession. The grant provides a
teacher with an opportunity to use a free semester for, for example, cooperation with a
university, professional development abroad or fixed-term employment for setting education
policies. A call is made for applications with a view to awarding the grant.

**Salaries**

The basis for determining the salaries of general education school and vocational school
teachers (monthly salary rate and additional payments) is the salary fund allocated to the
owner of the school. Support for covering teachers’ and heads’ salaries is allocated to local
authorities as a single amount.

A teacher’s working time is calculated and a teacher is remunerated on the basis of the
teacher’s position. The minimum wage for basic school and upper secondary school teachers
is agreed upon by the Minister of Education and Research and the representatives of local
government associations, private school owners and registered associations of teachers. In
the event that an agreement cannot be reached, the minimum wage will be determined by
the Government of the Republic. Since 1 January 2019, the minimum wage for a basic school
and upper secondary school teacher working full time is 1,250 euros per month. Preschool
teachers’ wage costs are covered by local government funds and for them no national
minimum wage has been determined.

The minimum salary for teachers of classes for students with special educational needs and
for teachers of state schools that require special educational conditions are somewhat higher.

**Working Time and Holidays**

According to the Employment Contracts Act, a regulation of the Government of the Republic
has established a list of positions of educationalists to which reduced working time applies.
The list also includes teachers of preschool child care institutions, general education schools,
vocational schools and hobby schools. The duration of reduced working time on these
positions is 7 hours per day or 35 hours per seven days.

Since September 2013, the limits for teaching hours have no longer been regulated at state
level; general working time applies to teachers. The position is the basis for calculating
teachers’ working time and remuneration. Teachers’ working time is divided into direct
teaching and education and other tasks under the employment contract, proceeding from the
job description and rules of work organisation or given by the employer.

The duration of annual holidays is 28 calendar days in Estonia. Teachers have the right for extended annual holidays of up to 56 calendar days. School holidays are not holidays for teachers. During school holidays, teachers participate in training, refresh their knowledge individually or are obliged to do other work according to their employment contract and job description, internal procedures of the institution and the collective agreement. Teachers' stay at school outside the teaching time (including school holidays) is established by the same documents.

Teachers are not obliged to but may work on days off upon their consent (e.g., state examinations may take place at weekends).

A head may ask a teacher to work overtime. If the teacher agrees, the increase of workload shall also be fixed in the employment contract.

In addition to regular annual holidays, teachers may take study leave, if necessary.

In order to participate in formal education, study leave for training sessions shall be granted for at least 30 calendar days in an academic year.

An employee is paid the average salary for 20 calendar days during the study leave related with participation in formal education or continuing education for the purpose of professional development.

**Promotion, Advancement**

From January 2014, attestation of teachers of general education schools and vocational schools is no longer carried out. The grades established during attestation so far remain valid until the end of their period. Professional standards for teachers have been developed for several professional levels and these standards will be used to create a basis for a new teacher career model. Higher level occupational grades require that the teacher is competent in training and coaching others, and in management.

As of 2018, teachers all over the country are recognised by the award of an education prize of 10,000 Euros in the following categories: Nursery School Teacher of the Year, Basic School Subject Teacher of the Year, Upper Secondary School Teacher of the Year and Vocational Education Institution Teacher of the Year. Teachers can also apply for the Lifetime Achievement Award in Education in the amount of 65,000 Euros.

**Transfers**

A teacher may have separate employment contracts for working in different educational institutions provided that his or her workload remains within the limits established for teachers. Specialist teachers who may work in basic school, upper secondary school, vocational school and hobby school have the best opportunities for mobility. Upon fulfilling certain requirements, it is also possible for a teacher to work in a vocational school, institution of professional higher education or university.
Dismissal

According to the Employment Contracts Act, the head of a school may enforce extraordinary cancellation of an employment contract with compelling reasons deriving from the employee, which prevents the continuance of an employment relationship in the interests of both parties. Generally, a warning must precede an extraordinary cancellation of an employment contract and within a reasonable time after the appearance of circumstances causing the cancellation.

People who have been convicted under the penal code for criminal assaults against minors may not work as teachers.

Retirement and Pensions

According to the State Pension Insurance Act, persons who have attained 63–65 years of age (the retirement age depends on the birth year) and whose pension-qualifying working period earned in Estonia is at least 15 years or who have pension insurance have the right to receive an old-age pension. An old-age pension is one of the types of state pensions and is granted for life. A request for an old-age pension may be made at any time after the right to receive the pension is obtained.

The other types of state pensions are pension for incapacity for work, survivor’s pension and national pension.

The right for an early-retirement pension can be obtained not earlier than three years before attaining the pension age on the condition that the person has earned the pension-qualifying working period required. An early-retirement pension is also granted for life.

Legislative References

Education Act [10]
Preschool Child Care Institutions Act [10]
Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act [10]
Vocational Educational Institutions Act [10]
Universities Act [10]
Private Schools Act [10]
Employment Contracts Act [10]
Occupational Health and Safety Act [10]
State Pension Insurance Act [10]
Conditions of and procedure for evaluation of professional skills and professional competence of teachers [11]
Qualification requirements for teachers at preschool institutions
Minimum salary rate of basic school and upper secondary school teachers [12]

Working time of educators [12]

Procedure for application, payment and recovery of the beginner's allowance [11]

Conditions of and procedure for allocation of state education grants and awards

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