



FOREIGN INVESTORS  
COUNCIL IN LATVIA

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## Position Paper on Higher Education Policy

### 1. Executive Summary

FICIL has indicated during the last years perceived flaws in the situation within the Educational sector in Latvia, namely: the mismatch between educational infrastructure and demand, the emigration of talent, the atomization of resources, the lack of advancement in the quality of higher education and research.

The government has initiated reforms in most of the areas highlighted in previous years and FICIL praises its efforts and outcomes in actions undertaken since the last HC like completion of the salary model reform and steps towards the consolidation of the schools' network.

The most fundamental concern for the investors remains the same – the availability of labour in Latvia, consequently also long-term goals have not changed:

1. Leverage the quality level from good to excellent across the system.
2. Focus in the introduction of competency-based education in all levels.
3. Equal opportunities in the context of the optimization of school network and concentration of resources.

To achieve the goals mentioned above FICIL proposes to start a new stage of the modernization of the Latvian education system using a task force which is created uniting the best experts in change and education. We also invite Latvian leaders to seek the definition of a vision for the whole educational system which would have important practical consequences at the time of driving the needed changes and improvements.

### 2. Recommendations

#### 1. Internationalisation

- 1.1. Internationalisation should be addressed considering the long-term strategy of the country. In this sense, more special funding programs could be foreseen for attraction of outstanding international students and faculty.
- 1.2. Collect and distribute information, which would allow the creation of objective, comprehensive and precise rankings of Latvian schools and HEIs.
- 1.3. Review of the language requirements and election process for elected positions in

higher educational institutions in order to facilitate their internationalization.

## **2. Inter-cooperation**

- 2.1.Reinforce the role of Advisory Boards in HEIs in order to facilitate accountability and provide strategic relevance.
- 2.2.Undertake an action plan for reforming of HEIs and the so-called “HEIs Law (Augstskolu Likums)” considering the findings of the current audit of the State Audit Office and the need to make good use of the last available program of EU structural funds.
- 2.3.Motivate HEIs to develop more flexible management procedures for professional programs’ design, execution and upgrade in order to facilitate the interaction with the labour market. Universities should be requested to facilitate the creation of ecosystems of exchange and cooperation between science and business departments. Recent initiatives as the “RTU Design Factory” and “Demola Latvia”, though still incipient, should be recipients of investment and attention.
- 2.4.Revisit accreditation/licensing and allocation/amount of financial support systems with the objectives of encouraging inter-institutional cooperation, properly financing the study programs, enhancing cooperation with business and encouraging academic excellence. An option would be strict/lengthy accreditation procedures for academic state-funded programs and more flexible/fast-track licensing procedures for professional programs.
- 2.5.In preparation towards the launching of the new accreditation process, undertake an objective analysis of the future trends in the labor market in cooperation with business representatives.
- 2.6.Encourage cooperation between basic and middle education institutions and HEIs in order to support teachers’ integration of new technologies.

## **3. Individualisation**

- 3.1.Run an independent and comprehensive assessment on retention and completion in all levels of the educational system.
- 3.2.Support the increase of the enrolment of pupils in professional schools facilitating the integration of the educational process with the job market and offering career advisory services to parents and pupils in the 9<sup>th</sup> form.
- 3.3.Introduce 21st century competences’ development modules as mandatory component in high schools, vocational schools and baccalaureate programs in order to foster the development of soft and leadership competences. Provide proper training for teachers in charge of the implementation in each school of the outcomes of the competency-based education project.
- 3.4.Establish a special funding position for top potential Latvian faculty, researchers, students and pupils, and support them with individual assistance from experts and leading faculty.

### **3. Rationale for our recommendations**

1. Future demographics of Latvia show that the declining of the number of inhabitants will continue, which will affect further the education system (less interested students and teaching staff). We see a close connection between internationalization of the higher education and international competitiveness. The facilitation of the openness of the higher education for the international society and the exchange of know-how should be set as priority of the higher education development. The quality of the higher education is tightly linked to the qualification and scientific activities of the academic personnel, which, due to the lack of appropriate funding system, keeps decreasing. In this sense, the basis for the election of HEI's staff should be completely independent of the command of Latvian language.
2. Latvian Higher Education System is too fragmented, which can be seen in the progressive disproportion each year between fewer students and greater number of universities and study programs. The HEI's fragmentation leads to fragmentation of resources, undeveloped resource sharing and duplicated study programs with unclearly defined study objectives and results. The accreditation system of HEIs programmes is not perceived currently as a guarantee of quality by prospective students and employers. HEIs are providing professional and academic programs with similar governance and accreditation procedures. Academic and professional education requires different style and structures for managing and assuring quality. There is a disproportion between the supply of study programs in universities/colleges and the demand of labour market.
3. Students in high schools are not motivated to finish their studies and get the degree further. About 30% of high school graduates do not continue studies in the universities, but the demand for low qualified workforce is decreasing. There is a mismatch between employers' needs and expectations from employees and the content in schools and universities. Content, which is provided by schools and universities, is not changing and moving towards competence based content as fast as 21st century employers and companies would expect. High-potential young researchers are leaving the country looking for better research opportunities and standards of living. This situation is partly produced by the limited resources allocated to research (below EU level) and the fragmentation and excessive bureaucracy in the distribution of these resources.