



Non-formal and formal learning integration practices in Estonia

Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning (REFORM/SC2021/066)

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1. Introduction

Learning can take place anywhere. It is a fact that everyone has experienced, whether consciously or not. Skills required for getting on in life are acquired both in and outside school.

The learner's development and ability to get on in life is at the centre of the contemporary concept of learning.² Coping in contemporary society requires subject-based and professional competencies, as well as general competencies. However, the place and method of acquiring competencies is gradually becoming less important, because the required competencies can be obtained in basic education, upper secondary education, vocational education and training and higher education (i.e. through formal learning), but also in hobby education and hobby activities or as part of youth work (i.e. through non-formal learning).

To date, non-formal and formal learning have been distinguished from each other in both the language used by education and youth work professionals³, but also in the daily work and the strategies used in both fields. Non-formal learning usually refers to purposeful but voluntary learning which can take place in various settings on the basis of a specific study programme. Formal learning is characterised by qualification requirements established by the state for teachers and tutors, but also by the structured and institutional nature of learning.⁴ Formal learning is often known in Estonian as *tasemeõpe* (degree studies) or *kooliõpe* (school learning).

Better integration of non-formal learning and formal learning supports the view that every person's learning journey forms one whole and all forms of learning are important.⁵ This topic is receiving increasingly more attention in the development of the education sector: integration of non-formal and formal education is one of the key activities under the Estonia 2035 Development Strategy.⁶

The strategy sets out the abundance and availability of learning opportunities and smooth and flexible mobility between different levels and types of education as its objective. To this end, the strategy's action plan includes plans for taking into account in formal education the knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education, the diversification of learning environments in cooperation with local governments, and the development of youth work and hobby education opportunities.⁷ The strategy also proposes the creation of regional education centres in order to offer new learning forms and opportunities to integrate general education, vocational education and training, higher education and non-formal learning, including youth work, and to facilitate transitions.

2 The Ministry of Education and Research, Tallinn University and the University of Tartu (2017). *The Approach to Learning and How It is Changing. Explanation of Objective 1 of Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*. Paide, Tallinn, Tartu. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/har_min_broshyyr_12lk_eng_veebi.pdf.

3 Põlda, H., Reinsalu, R., Karu, K. (2021). "Nonformal learning in practitioners' language use." *The Yearbook of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society*. 10.3176/esa66.10.

4 Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). *Education Strategy 2021–2035*. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_kinnitaud_vv_eng.pdf.

5 UNESCO. (2020). *Embracing a culture of lifelong learning: Contribution to the futures of education initiative*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374112>.

6 Estonia 2035 Development Strategy (2021). Available at: <https://valitsus.ee/en/estonia-2035-development-strategy/strategy/strategic-goals>.

7 Government of the Republic. (2021). *Estonia 2035. Action Plan of the Government of the Republic* (29 April 2021). Available at: <https://valitsus.ee/strateegia-eeesti-2035-arengukavad-ja-planeering/strateegia/materjalid>.

The Education Strategy 2021-2035 also emphasises the need to create a comprehensive solution for recognising non-formal and informal learning⁸ in formal learning to a greater degree in order to recognise the knowledge obtained in various settings in completing degree studies curricula.⁹ Development of young people's talents and strengths and interpreting, valuing, considering and recognising competencies obtained through youth work, including hobby education, in formal learning are also the priority activities under the Youth Field Development Plan 2021-2035¹⁰.

Integration of non-formal and formal learning is not an entirely new concept in Estonia. There are already many regions and schools where cooperation between hobby schools, youth centres, and other educational institutions and organisations is part of daily school life. However, to date, there has been no common understanding of how to achieve better integration. Therefore, schools and local governments have had to find ways of implementing it themselves.

The purpose of the project, "Supporting young people to succeed – Building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning", which was launched in autumn 2021 is to develop a solution for integrating non-formal and formal learning in Estonian general and vocational education, taking into account the local context and the needs of stakeholders, but also international practices. Based on the project's objectives, the focus is primarily on young people aged 7-19 in basic and secondary education (including secondary vocational education).

This report includes the results of the first stage of this project. The main objective of the first stage was to identify current practices in Estonian schools to integrate non-formal and formal learning, the strengths and weaknesses of the situation, and the views of integration stakeholders on how to make recognition of non-formal learning a daily practice in all schools.

The analysis includes a review of the current organisation of the integration of non-formal and formal learning and the related problems. It gathers the theoretical starting points of integration and the results of previous studies to provide an overview of the legal standards and regulations of the fields as well as an analysis of students' participation in hobby education and youth work. The empirical part of the report features an analysis of the practices of educational institutions in integrating non-formal learning and the needs, expectations, and problems of actors in its wider implementation.

The project particularly focuses on recognising the learning outcomes of non-formal learning in the completion of school curricula. Considering schools' practices, the report also addresses other integration possibilities. Readers of the report are advised to bear in mind that the most common integration practices of non-formal and formal learning in Estonian schools are:

- 1) completing an elective basic school subject or an elective upper secondary school course outside the school;

8 The Education Strategy 2021-2035 defines informal learning, from the learner's point of view, as both intentional and unintentional learning that takes place in everyday situations. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_kinnitaud_vv_eng.pdf.

9 Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). *Education Strategy 2021–2035*. Available at:

https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_kinnitaud_vv_eng.pdf

10 Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). *Youth Field Development Plan 2021-2035*. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/noortevaldkonna_arengukava_2021-2035_kinnitaud_12.08.2035.pdf



- 2) performing mandatory creative work required at the third school stage¹¹ in settings outside of school;
- 3) recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of the compulsory school curriculum; and
- 4) implementing the compulsory school curriculum in non-formal learning settings.

¹¹ The third school stage includes basic school grades 7-9.

2. Study objective and research questions

2.1. Study objective

The starting point of the project are the problems identified by the European Commission and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, one proposed solution to which is more systematic integration of non-formal learning with formal learning. The crux of the problem is the possible underuse of human resources on the labour market causing an increase of health and social security expenses and a decrease in the competitiveness of the economy together with economic slowdown. This is largely due to the fact that young people cannot rely on competencies developed through non-formal learning upon entering working life and their human capital remains insufficient or invisible.¹²

A summary of the problems described in the project's terms of reference is given on Figure 1.

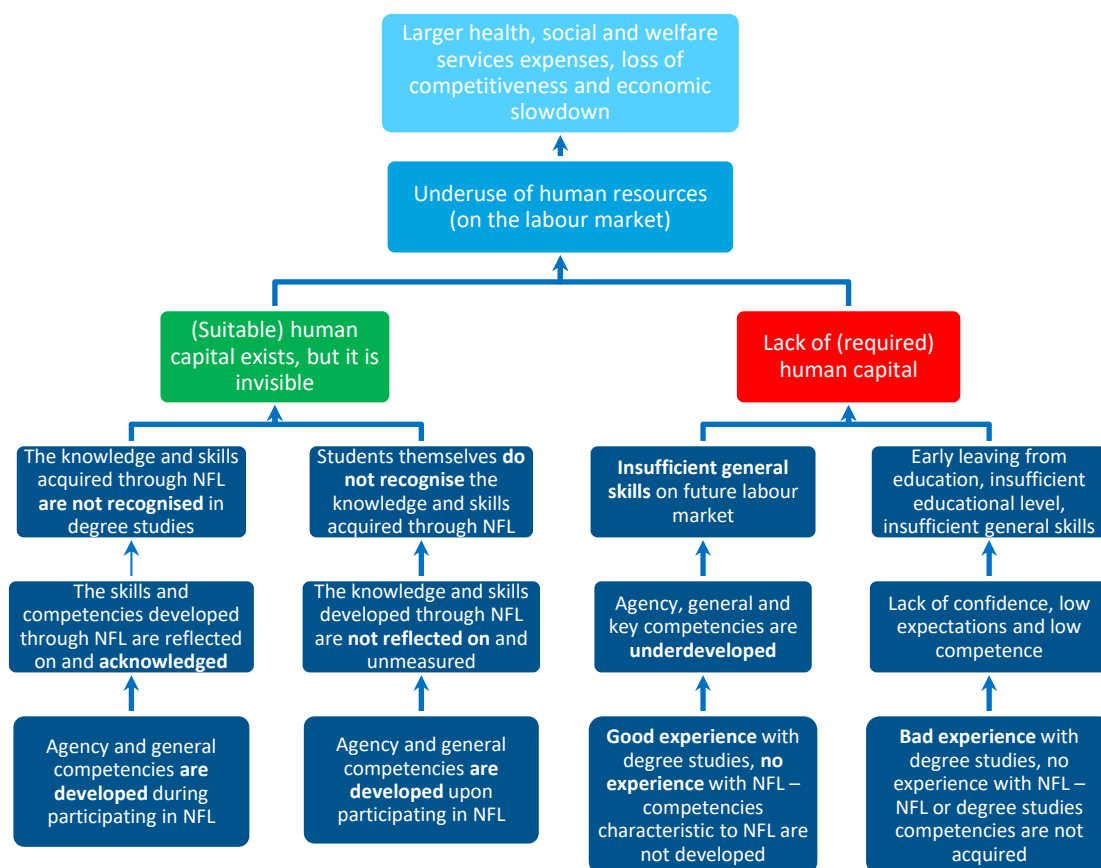


Figure 1. Overview of problems tackled by the non-formal and formal education integration project¹³

¹² Source: European Commission. (2021). Request for service. Title: Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning, (REFORM/SC2021/066)

¹³ Source: European Commission. (2021). Request for service. Title: Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning, (REFORM/SC2021/066) - authors' analysis.

Note: NFL – non-formal learning.

This view indicates that one source of the problem is the **unequal participation** in non-formal learning: those who participate in non-formal learning in addition to formal learning gain knowledge, skills, and experiences that those who only participate in formal learning do not obtain. Therefore, participants in non-formal learning develop a qualitatively different human capital and their experiences provide them with a different attitude towards learning outside formal learning even as an adult.

Failure to participate in non-formal learning is particularly concerning for those young people who have reported unpleasant experiences with formal learning – in this case, non-formal learning cannot offer them an empowering alternative. Improving the accessibility of non-formal learning and reducing factors preventing participation is a key challenge.

Another source of the problem is the fact that the **skills and knowledge developed through non-formal learning** (incl. general skills and agency)¹⁴ **go unnoticed** by the learner themselves or **are not recognised** in formal learning and in the labour market. If the human capital acquired by a participant in non-formal learning goes unacknowledged, it may reduce their readiness and ability to compete on the labour market and make decisions in other spheres of their life.

The prerequisite for acknowledging the knowledge acquired through non-formal learning is the learner's reflection on the non-formal learning process. This would enable the knowledge gained through non-formal learning to be taken into account in the context of formal learning even if the education institution does not have assessment mechanisms as such.

One possible solution for the two types of aforementioned problems is to better integrate non-formal and formal learning, so as to improve young people's access to non-formal learning and increase participation rates, while ensuring that the competencies acquired through non-formal learning are acknowledged and recognised in society.

2.2. Research questions

In order to determine the current situation regarding the integration of non-formal and formal learning, answers to the following **research questions** were sought.

1) Why is the integration of non-formal and formal learning necessary according to relevant stakeholders?

- What kind of problems in the Estonian educational system would better integration of non-formal and formal learning help to solve? What are the current approaches to integration and how are those links viewed?
- How does better integration of non-formal and formal learning contribute to the recognition of learning taking place in different places and forms throughout the course of life?
- What type of benefits does this bring to various target groups?

14 Agency as the ability to act and take responsibility; for more information on agency, see e.g. Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, I., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri = Estonian Journal of Education*. 60-87. 10.12697/eha.2021.9.1.03.



2) How are non-formal and formal learning currently being integrated in Estonian schools?

- What kind of access do students currently have to non-formal learning?
- How is the integration assessed in the legislation regulating the field? What is the participant's feedback to laws related to integration (incl. the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and the Vocational Educational Institutions Act)?
- How is the integration currently funded?
- What are the current non-formal and formal learning integration practices in Estonian schools and what are good examples thereof?

3) What to stakeholders perceive as necessary for the integration of non-formal and formal learning?

- What are the actors' views on the necessity and feasibility of integration?
- What are the current obstacles to integration, including legal, organisational, financial, and attitudinal?
- What should be done to overcome these obstacles?
- What are the prerequisites for achieving successful integration as an objective?

3. Research methods

In order to answer the research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis were used. Secondary data, i.e., publicly available documents, studies, and quantitative data were used for information on the theoretical framework for integration and to analyse the current situation. Interviews with relevant actors in the field were also conducted to learn their opinions and attitudes to integration.

3.1. Literature analysis

The purpose of literature analysis was to obtain an overview of the aspects highlighted by previous studies/analyses conducted in Estonia on the integration of non-formal and formal learning. To this end, a keyword search was used to get an overview of the thematic analyses related to the field and the conclusions were synthesised.

3.2. Document analysis

The purpose of document analysis was to clarify how laws and regulations regulate the integration of non-formal and formal learning. Laws and regulations concerning both basic, general secondary education, vocational education, and non-formal education were examined.

Additionally, document analysis was used to analyse current best practices. To this end, the Nopik website¹⁵ of the Education and Youth Board was used as well as the materials available on the websites of educational institutions, including the curricula of schools for general education.

3.3. Registry data analysis

To analyse students' participation in basic school hobby groups and extracurricular education, the data from the Estonian Education Information System (hereinafter referred to as EHIS) were used. To obtain an overview of the regional availability of youth work, the data of the Statistics Estonia's youth monitoring dashboard were used.

3.4. Interview analysis

A significant part of the study was made up by interviews with experts and actors in the field on the objectives, organisation, and possibilities of integration. Focus groups were also used to collect feedback.

The interviews with experts were conducted with educational researchers, policy makers, representatives of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, and the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities.

The focus group interviews were conducted with the direct target groups of the integration, i.e., students, teachers, school leaders, providers of hobby education, and youth workers. The focus group interviews with students, teachers and school leaders in formal learning settings included actors from both general and vocational education.

¹⁵ See <https://nopik.entk.ee/>

A total of 47 people participated, including interviews with nine experts and focus groups with 38 participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of interviewees

Interview type	Target group	Number of interview participants
Interviews with experts	■ Educationalists	3
	■ Policymakers and policy implementers from the Ministry of Education and Research and the Education and Youth Board	4
	■ Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities	1
	■ Representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities	1
Focus group interviews	■ Students (Group 1)	6
	■ Students (Group 2)	4
	■ Teachers (Group 1)	6
	■ Teachers (Group 2)	5
	■ School leaders	6
	■ Providers of hobby education	6
	■ Youth workers	5

4. Theoretical foundations of the integration of formal and non-formal learning

4.1. Learner-centred integration model

Participation in different types of learning and better integration of non-formal and formal learning contributes to the development of competencies needed for succeeding on the labour market and in society. The project's objective emphasises the lifelong learning approach and places importance on the recognition of non-formal learning in working life.

Based on theoretical perspectives, this approach needs to be expanded and place the learner at the center of the project. With **a learner-centered approach**¹⁶, young people are not seen as objects of educational policy (specifically the integration of non-formal and formal learning)¹⁷, future members of society who need to be shaped, but rather as independent subjects with agency.¹⁸

Serving as the starting point of the study, the learner-centred integration model of non-formal and formal learning offers a multi-level approach to process of (not) participating in learning.¹⁹ (see Figure 2).

The learner's background (e.g., family, gender, age, and place of residence) and development of an individual learning pathway, which is supported by the **cooperation** of formal learning teachers and non-formal learning instructors, is important at the level of the learner (micro level). Alongside the development of various competencies, the **development of the learner's abilities, supporting motivation, and creating learning opportunities adapted to personal learning outcomes are also important.**²⁰

Due to various obstacles (such as participation fees, distance from place of residence, lack of time, negative attitudes towards studying), not all young people have equal access to non-formal learning.²¹ Therefore, in a learner-centered model, it is necessary to overcome participation barriers, which can be supported by teachers and instructors at the meso level (educational institutions), as well as by the

16 The Ministry of Education and Research also highlights the lack of application of learner-centredness and a lifelong approach as a shortcoming. See the Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). *Education Strategy 2021–2035*. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_kinnitaud_vv_eng.pdf.

17 Taru, M., Pilve, E., Kaasik, P. (2015). *Noorsootöö Eestis: 19. sajandi keskpaigast kuni 21. sajandi esimese kümnendi lõpuni: ajalooline ülevaade*. Tallinn: Estonian Youth Work Centre.

18 See also Rämmer, A., Kivimäe, A., Žuravljova, M., Kötsi, K. (2021). *Noortekeskse lähenemise teoreetiline alus: taust, kontseptsioon ja selle kõlapind Eestis* [Theoretical concept of a youth-centered approach in the context of open youth work: a research report]. The University of Tartu; Põlta, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 9(1), 60–87; Smith, N. C. (2017). *Students perceptions of learner agency: A phenomenographic inquiry in to the lived learning experiences of high school students*. A Dissertation. The College of Professional Studies. Boston.

19 See e.g. Saar, E., Ure, O. B., Holford, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Lifelong Learning in Europe: National Patterns and Challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

20 Williamson, H. (2018). *Effective interventions for unemployed young people: social innovation or paradigm shift? / Facing trajectories from school to work: towards a capability-friendly youth policy in Europe*. *European Journal of Social Work*, 21(4), 628–629, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1434255

21 To learn more about the barriers to participation of young adults, see e.g. Boeren, E. Mackie, A., Riddell, S. (2019). *Barriers to and enablers of participation in different types of provision by young low-qualified adults*. Horizon 2020 ENLIVEN project WP2 Report (D2.2).

government and local authorities at the macro level, using policy measures, legal frameworks, and resources for this purpose.

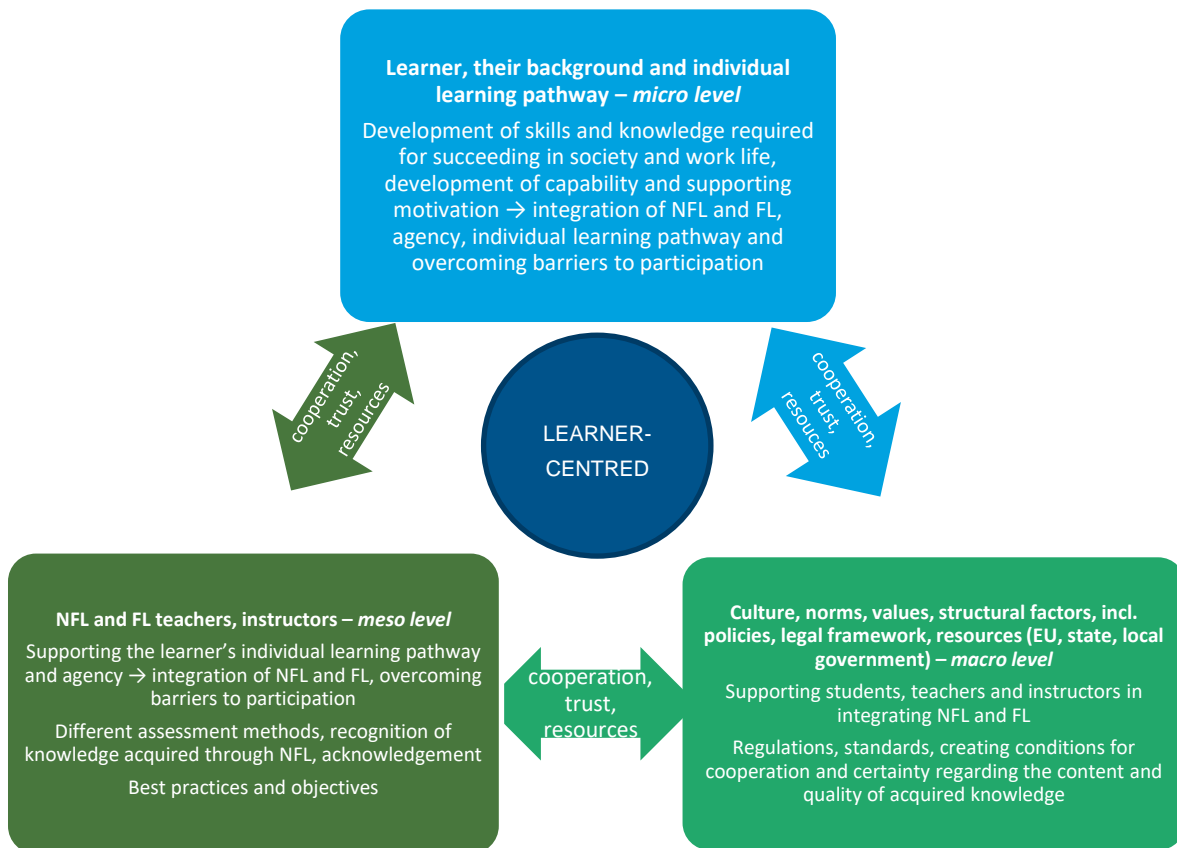


Figure 2. Learner-centred integration model of non-formal and formal learning

Note: NFE – non-formal learning, FE – formal learning

To account for and recognize what is learned in non-formal education in both formal education and the job market, a balance needs to be found between different assessment methods. Many definitions of assessment are more characteristic of formal education, where the focus is on the teacher's activities, and learning concludes with the testing and assessment of outcomes.²² In contrast, in non-formal education, the subject of assessment is primarily the learner themselves, and assessment is part of the learning process, where the learner evaluates their own results and personal development (reflection). Such assessment is much more resource-intensive (in terms of time, money, knowledge, skills, motivation, regulation, etc.) and may not always be applicable in the standardized environment of formal education.

Formal learning is also moving towards **assessment that supports learning**. To implement this, it is important that **the state and the local government support the creation of conditions for cooperation and a sense of certainty in the content and quality of different types of learning**.

22 Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education, 9(1), 60–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2021.9.1.03>



In conclusion, this project is based on the understanding that **policies to integrate non-formal and formal learning need to include learner-centredness and institutional cooperation** if they are to contribute to better and more systematic integration. These aspects are a prerequisite for removing barriers to participation. In order to achieve better integration between non-formal and formal education from a learner-centered perspective, one must also consider the influence of broader macro-level factors such as culture, norms, values, and structural factors (such as the structure of the education system and the labor market) as they shape the actions and interrelationships of actors at all three levels.

A comprehensive analysis of the study's theoretical starting points is given in Annex 1.



4.2. Non-formal learning in Estonia

One possible challenge in integrating non-formal and formal education is the fact that the field of meanings associated with *non-formal learning* is diverse in Estonia, yet this diversity is often unconscious²³. An important role is attributed to non-formal learning in the society; however, its necessity and fulfilment is also differently understood by stakeholders.²⁴

Based on the call for tenders and the terminology most frequently used in policy documents and among practitioners, an overview of the working terminology and the related links is provided in Figure 3, and determines the limits of this project. The definitions of terms related to the fields of non-formal and formal learning and the conflicts between them have been explained in Annex 2.

23 Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., Põlda, H. (2019). "Mitteformaalõppe tähenduse konstrueerimine poliitikadokumentides" [Construction of meaning of 'non-formal learning' in policy documents]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 7(1), 50–75.

24 Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 9(1), 60–87.

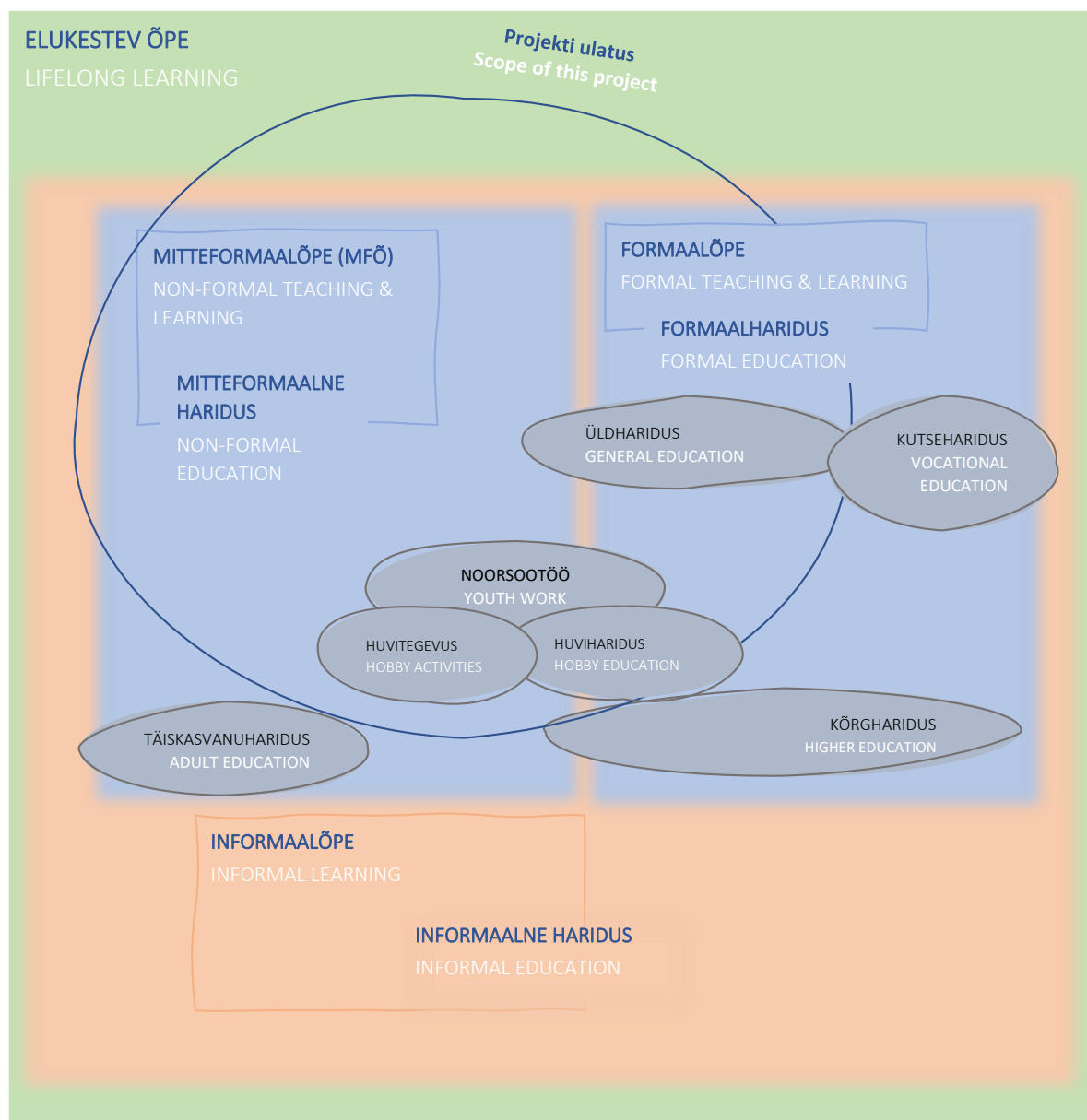


Figure 3. A framework describing the relationships between various terms used at the project's system level

Source: Authors' analysis. Developed on the basis of UNESCO (2020), *Education Strategy 2021–2035* (2021), Saar *et al.* (2014), Cedefop (2014) and the *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (2014).

4.3. Non-formal learning in previous studies

The conclusions of studies previously conducted in Estonia also point out that the understanding of the term *non-formal learning* needs to be harmonised or at least defined as a whole and that there are different approaches to the relationship between non-formal and formal learning. The separation of different types of learning is not justified,²⁵ thus indicating the need for better integration between different types of learning.

A comprehensive overview of the results of previous studies is presented in Annex 3.

In general, based on the literature analysed, there are different approaches to the use of the term *non-formal learning* and content thereof (see Table 4 in Annex 3). In the broadest terms, the following approaches can be distinguished: a) system level, b) descriptive level, and c) function-based (i.e. task-based) approaches to non-formal learning.

Upon determining the links between non-formal and formal learning, three types of links were generally identified: links that differentiate, links that highlight similarities, and links that point to cooperation (opportunities). These are as follows:

- 1. On the basis of the differentiating (contrasting) approach**, non-formal learning takes place above all outside formal learning or at least outside the formal learning curricula. Non-formal, formal, and informal learning are easily distinguishable and independent of one another, but together they form an individual learning path. Non-formal learning provides additional value to formal learning or serves as its clear alternative.
- 2. According to the approach highlighting similarities**, one task of both non-formal and formal learning is to offer a change from family influence and support talented people to develop their talents. Opportunities for practicing hobbies have been created in all formal learning institutions.
- 3. Based on the approach that points to cooperation (opportunities)**, there is a need to create a system for recognising the knowledge gained through non-formal learning in formal learning. Bringing forth the competences developed throughout the lifespan with the support of non-formal learning allows learners to complete education at a certain level or enter the workforce.

Previous studies have highlighted several problems within both non-formal and formal learning and also problems that would be amplified upon integration. Problems with formal and non-formal learning include:

- **Formal learning:** difficulties with implementing the contemporary concept of learning²⁶ and a lack of diversity of learning opportunities.
- **Non-formal learning:** characterised by individuality, learner-centredness and satisfaction, but it may be only seemingly voluntary. It is difficult to follow the learner's interest or spark their interest.

25 Põlda, H., Karu, K., Reinsalu, R. (2021). "Metaphors we learn by: practitioners' conceptions of the meaning of nonformal learning in Estonian context". *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (1-16). Available at: <https://rela.ep.liu.se/article/view/3682>

²⁶ The Ministry of Education and Research, Tallinn University and the University of Tartu (2017). *The Approach to Learning and How It is Changing. Explanation of Objective 1 of Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*. Paide, Tallinn, Tartu. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/har_min_broshyyr_12lk_eng_veebi.pdf.

■ **Obstacles to participating in non-formal**

learning: lack of interest and time, accessibility, no consideration of a person's life cycle in organisation of or participating in studies (e.g., young people do not continue practicing the same hobby as an adult or develop an understanding that it is unimportant or less valuable in adult life, e.g., aside work and private life).

The literature review also identified problems that emerge or are amplified after integration is achieved. The following issues were highlighted:

- There is a lack of data on the knowledge and skills obtained through non-formal learning, as well as an absence of a comprehensive national overview of terminology and a common understanding.
- There are also problems related to the insufficient implementation of the **accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL)**, e.g., it is difficult to assess knowledge obtained through non-formal learning, which results in a weak link with working life and labour market.
- Cooperation problems have been identified. Even if non-formal, formal and informal learning are integrated, they are still at times being contrasted (oppose one another) and there may be a lack of trust between their representatives.

These aspects should be taken into account upon building and assessing the integration system. Sources of the issues should be addressed systematically in order to understand the way in which circumstances related to the state level, the community level, or a specific learning context or learner can pose problems.

Here it is worth relying on the theoretical approaches serving as a basis for the learner-centred approach (see the overview in Annex 1), which help to interpret what goes on in the system and the interaction between actors in the system. In order to shape and apply the resources of all actors in the best way possible and remove the barriers to building mutual cooperation and trust, the views of both the individual learner and the instructors and teachers supporting their learning in both non-formal and formal learning, as well as the values, norms and laws on the state level must be considered and addressed simultaneously. The problems that occur in the integration process and the solutions must be addressed at all three levels and solutions must also be sought and offered at every level.

The literature analysis revealed substantial conclusions also about the problem definition of this project.

Firstly, future employability-focused metrics may not be the best or only argument to evaluate the success of integrating non-formal and formal education. Secondly, non-formal learning (as well as formal learning) has other internal meanings and values beyond shaping employability. Taking these into account, such as ensuring social participation, developing individual agency, and enabling more meaningful life experiences through all three aspects, is inherently valuable.

While it is important for a learner equipped with such "tools" to become more efficient in the workplace, it is also necessary to associate learning with positive emotions. This creates meaningful social participation, increases self-confidence, and supports the development of a lifelong learning mindset within society.

This in turn improves individuals ability to cope better when meaningful experiences cannot be prioritised in the field of work. Not all jobs enable a meaningful perspective on working life and career and there is an increasing need for self-realisation opportunities outside paid employment. Participation in non-formal learning creates a good opportunity for this and individuals should be encouraged to develop a habit of participation. This indicates that the objective of integrating non-formal and formal



learning should extend beyond the focus of readiness for labour market to encompass other efficiency factors at the community and society levels.

5. Legal framework for integration of non-formal learning

Aspects related to integration of non-formal learning are regulated in the main laws on general and vocational education. The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act stipulates the basis for organisation of education in general education schools.²⁷ The national curricula of basic schools and upper secondary schools describe the core values of basic and general secondary education, the teaching and educational goals of basic schools and upper secondary schools, the competencies to be acquired as a result of teaching, and the learning outcomes of subjects, assessment criteria, etc..^{28 29}

Vocational education is organised on the basis of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act.³⁰ The content of vocational secondary education is regulated by the Vocational Education Standard³¹ and the national curricula.

The most important pieces of legislation that regulates the area of non-formal education are the Youth Work Act³², the Hobby Schools Act³³ and the Hobby Education Standard³⁴, the Private Schools Act,³⁵ and the Adult Education Act.³⁶

5.1. Formal education

General education

The Estonian education system is characterised by the **high autonomy** of schools and their employees. Legislation sets the general framework in which schools and teachers have a lot of freedom to decide how to organise study activities and achieve the competencies, teaching and educational goals, and learning outcomes set in the national curriculum.

In basic and secondary school, it is possible to recognise non-formal learning upon completing the school's curriculum in two ways: participation in non-formal learning is either recognised 1) upon achieving the learning outcomes of subjects or courses, or 2) as part of elective subjects.

Recognition of non-formal learning in achievement of learning outcomes of subjects or courses

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act³⁷ grants the school the right to consider a student's extracurricular studies or activities if it is related to the achievement of the learning outcomes defined in the curriculum.

27 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7.

28 National Curriculum for Basic Schools. RT I, 12.04.2022, 10.

29 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11.

30 Vocational Educational Institutions Act. RT I, 16.06.2020, 8.

31 Vocational Education Standard RT I, 17.04.2019, 6.

32 Youth Work Act. RT I, 16.06.2020, 1.

33 Hobby Schools Act RT I, 04.07.2017, 36.

34 Standard of Hobby Education. RTL 2007, 27, 474.

35 Private Schools Act. RT I, 19.03.2019, 85.

36 Adult Education Act. RT I, 19.03.2019, 93.

37 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7.

“By an agreement between the head of school or a teacher authorised by the head of school and a student or, where a student has limited active legal capacity, a parent, the school may consider studies or activities falling outside the school’s curriculum, including studies in another general education school, as part of the teaching carried out by the school, provided that it allows the student to achieve the learning outcomes specified in the school curriculum or in the student’s individual curriculum” (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, subsection 17 (4)).

Thus, the key issue is **the extent to which school curricula allow and support this integration**. A school can determine in its curriculum the conditions on which the knowledge and skills acquired outside the school are considered as well as the basis for refusal to consider these. Several schools have established such rules.³⁸ This approach makes it possible, for example, to consider the knowledge and skills acquired in music school or sports school in the completion of the music or physical education curriculum.

Taking non-formal learning into account as an elective subject or course

A student’s participation in non-formal learning can be considered by basic schools within the scope of elective subjects and by upper secondary schools within the scope of elective courses. This allows the school to consider the student’s extracurricular activities, such as participation in a drama group, the science school of a university or an e-course, whose objectives fit in with the school curriculum.

The laws regulating basic schools, upper secondary schools and vocational education (incl. the national curricula) do not include the concept of an **optional course**.³⁹ If it existed, it would allow the student to set up a part of their curriculum themselves based on their interests. This would also enable the student’s school to recognise both subjects completed in another educational institution and participation in hobby education, hobby activities or youth work, or completing a continuing training course (including e-courses).

Elective subjects in basic school

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act stipulates the student’s weekly study load by subject. Schools have been given the right to determine in the curriculum how a certain number of weekly lessons is used in each stage of study (eight lessons per week in stage I, ten lessons per week in stage II and four lessons per week in stage III), but the school is not obligated to use these lessons to offer elective subjects.

The options for adaptation of the curriculum in schools where the language of instruction is Russian or English are more limited, as the additional lessons provided by the national curriculum must be used for teaching the Estonian language. In basic schools where the language of instruction is not Estonian, the curriculum of the school

38 See e.g. Subclauses 3.11-3.17 of the general part of Tartu Kivilinna School curriculum. Available at: https://kivilinn.tartu.ee/sites/default/files/u2/TKiK_%C3%B5ppekava%20%C3%BCldosa.pdf; clause 4.2 of Viimsi School curriculum. Available at: https://viimsi.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Viimsi_Kooli_oppekava_2020.pdf.

39 In this context, an optional course means a subject or a course chosen freely within the limits of volume prescribed in the curriculum, on whose completion the student can decide themselves. The student can choose optional courses also from another educational institution, i.e. complete it through non-formal learning.

may determine the use of two weekly lessons in stage I (Grades 1-3), one weekly lesson in stage II (Grades 4-6) and one weekly lesson in stage III (Grades 7-9).⁴⁰

However, a basic school may, under certain conditions and with the consent of the board of trustees, change the list of compulsory subjects and recurrent topics of the national curriculum of the basic school and the division of lessons. However, it must be kept in mind that the students must achieve the general competencies, learning outcomes, and teaching and educational objectives set in the national curriculum by the end of the stage of study. These differences are described in the school's curriculum and the parents of students must be informed about them.⁴¹ This provision also gives schools, where the language of instruction is Russian, the option to increase the volume of elective subjects, but these schools still have fewer options for making choices in their curriculum.

Elective courses in upper secondary school

In upper secondary schools, the school and the students have considerably more freedom to shape the content of the curriculum. According to the National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools, they must offer at least 11 elective courses, which take into account the specific features of the school and the region. Said elective courses may include the elective courses described in the national upper secondary school curriculum as well as the elective courses arising from the school's curriculum. An elective course must be organised if at least 12 students want to take the course⁴².

The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools favours the planning and offering of elective courses in cooperation with other schools using, among others, Estonian and international networks and information technology solutions. This means that other educational institutions and organisations may also offer elective courses to students.

Similarly to the National Curriculum for Basic Schools, the National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools allows for a flexible approach. For example, a school may link subject courses to each other (including compulsory and elective courses) for the use of integrated subject and language learning, carrying out vocational training and considering the specific features of the region or the school. A school may also change the list of compulsory subjects and recurrent topics in the national curriculum and the lesson division. A school may do this with the consent of the board of trustees and keeping in mind that the achievement of the learning outcomes of the national upper secondary school curriculum must be ensured.⁴³

Other options for integrating non-formal studies in basic schools and upper secondary schools

In the third stage of basic school, students are obliged to prepare a piece of creative work that proceeds from recurrent topics or integrated subjects, which may be a survey, project, work of art or similar.⁴⁴ The detailed organisation of creative work,

40 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7, subsection 25 (2).

41 National Curriculum for Basic Schools. RT I, 12.04.2022, 10, subsection 15 (5).

42 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11, subsection 15 (6).

43 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11, subsection 15 (10).

44 National Curriculum for Basic Schools. RT I, 12.04.2022, 10, subsection 15 (8).

including its supervision, is described in the school curriculum. Supervising creative work is one opportunity for the school to cooperate with non-formal learning providers.

In upper secondary schools, students are required to prepare a student research project or practical assignment⁴⁵ and experts from outside the school, e.g., from universities and other institutions and organisations related to the research topic may be involved in instruction.

The approach to the study environment of basic schools and upper secondary schools in national curricula is very broad. It is important that it supports the development of students into independent and active learners, carries the core values of the curriculum and the spirit of one's own school, and maintains and develops local and school community traditions. Studies may be organised outside the school premises as well, including in the schoolyard, nature, museums, archives, environmental education centres, companies and institutions, and in virtual study environments.^{46,47}

Qualification requirements of teachers

Teachers at basic schools and upper secondary schools must have a Master's degree or a corresponding qualification and teacher's qualifications. The qualification requirements for teachers of elective subjects in basic schools or elective courses in upper secondary schools are somewhat lower – higher education and pedagogical competencies are enough.⁴⁸ The educational competencies of teachers are described in the professional standard for teachers.

The compliance of a teacher with qualification requirements is assessed by the head of the school.

Assessment

According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, the knowledge, skills and experience of students are assessed on a five-point scale where the grade "5" means "very good," "4" means "good," "3" means "satisfactory," "2" means "poor" and "1" means "weak".⁴⁹ At stages I and II of the basic school, verbal assessments without any numerical equivalent may be used upon assessment of students.

The National Curriculum for Basic Schools allows the school to use a different assessment system in the school instead of the five-point system. The letter system on a scale of A–F, non-differentiated assessment (passed/failed), and giving verbal descriptive feedback are used in general education schools in addition to numerical assessment. There are also some schools where numerical assessment is based on a seven- or ten-point system.⁵⁰

45 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11, subsection 11 (3¹).

46 National Curriculum for Basic Schools. RT I, 12.04.2022, 10, subsection 6 (5).

47 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11, subsection 7 (6).

48 Qualification Requirements for Heads of School, Head Teachers, Teachers and Support Specialists. RT I, 03.11.2021, 4, subsections 3 (1)-(2).

49 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7, subsection 29 (2).

50 Aksen, M., Jürimäe, M., Nõmmela, K., Saarsen, K., Sillak, S., Eskor, J., Vool, E., Urmann, H. (2018). *Uuring: Eesti üldhariduskoolides kasutatavad erinevad hindamissüsteemid*. Tartu: University of Tartu. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/uuringud/hindamine_lopparuanne_15.okt_loplik.pdf.



The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools only permits a numerical assessment system but it does not have to be a five-point system.⁵¹

When a student leaves school, the marks achieved in the basic school leaving certificate and the upper secondary school leaving certificate are converted into the five-point system.

Funding

The state contributes to the covering of the labour, continuing training, study literature, and school meal costs of the teachers and heads of municipal schools.⁵² The support is calculated on the basis of the number of students in a school. Other costs related to the running a school are covered from the local government budget.

The costs of state schools are fully covered by the state budget.

In the case of private schools, the state supports covering the labour costs of teachers and heads of schools, continuing training, study literature, and school meals from the state budget (as in the case of municipal schools). Operating costs are covered by the manager, and private schools have the right to establish tuition fees to cover them.

Vocational education

The options of vocational schools for recognising the knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal learning are more flexible than those of basic schools and upper secondary schools. Vocational education curricula are output-based, i.e., achieving the learning outcomes established in the curriculum is important.

APEL, i.e., accreditation of prior and experiential learning, is applied in vocational education. According to the Vocational Education Standard, its objective is to value a person's knowledge and skills, irrespective of the manner in which they were acquired and to increase people's educational and professional mobility and broaden the possibilities for lifelong learning.⁵³

The implementation of APEL allows vocational schools to consider the knowledge and skills previously acquired in formal learning, non-formal learning, work experience, everyday activities and learning in free time in compliance with admission conditions or fulfilment of the curriculum.⁵⁴

Elective modules generally make up 15-30% of the volume of the curriculum in vocational education and they are specified in the school's curriculum. Elective modules determine the learning outcomes that support and expand professional skills or support the acquisition of key competencies. Students have the right to choose elective modules as specified in the school's rules for organisation of studies, and elective modules may thereby be selected from the other curricula offered by the same school or the curricula of other educational institutions.⁵⁵

51 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11, subsection 17 (1).

52 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7, subsection 82 (3).

53 Vocational Education Standard RT I, 17.04.2019, 6, section 28.

54 Ibid.

55 Vocational Education Standard RT I, 17.04.2019, 6, subsection 8 (7).



Qualification requirements of vocational teachers

The minimum requirements for working as a vocational teacher are at least secondary education and professional experience or a qualification in the field taught.⁵⁶ The number of teachers who correspond to the lowest level of the professional standard of vocational education teachers (vocational teacher, level 5) must not exceed 20%.⁵⁷

Assessment

Differentiated and non-differentiated assessment is used in vocational education. The numeric assessment scale of 2-5 is used in the case of differentiated assessment. The scale of passed/failed is used in the case of non-differentiated assessment.⁵⁸

Funding

Vocational education is financed from the state budget through the budget of the Ministry of Education and Research. The operating support allocated to schools covers the costs of teaching, support services, and school management.

5.2. Non-formal education

Non-formal education in Estonia primarily includes youth work, hobby education and hobbies, and continuing training. Regulations related to hobby education, youth councils, and youth camps is the most detailed.

Hobby education and hobby activities

Hobby education is offered by municipal and private hobby schools. The activities of a hobby school are based on a curriculum, which must be drawn up for each of the subjects taught in the school. The curricula of a hobby school are registered in the EHIS and categorised according to subject areas – sport, technology, nature, general culture including ethnic schools, music, and art.

The manager of a hobby school registers students in the EHIS, and every year they update the system with any amendments made in the curricula of hobbies, new curriculums added, or a notice on the closure of a current curriculum.

The number of students in sports schools by disciplines and the details of coaches are entered in the sports register.⁵⁹

A person is deemed to have graduated from a hobby school after completion of the study programme of the corresponding hobby. Graduation from a hobby school is certified by a graduation document which sets forth the time of study at the hobby school and a list of subjects completed.

There are no formal requirements for offering hobby activities. According to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, hobby activities are activities supporting the completion of a school curriculum or other extracurricular activities taking place in

⁵⁶ Vocational teacher, level 5 professional standard. Professional standard. Available at: <https://www.kutseregister.ee/ctrl/en/Standardid/vaata/10822280>.

⁵⁷ Vocational Educational Institutions Act. RT I, 16.06.2020, 8, subsection 39 (3).

⁵⁸ The uniform assessment system used in vocational education, basis for assessment of achievement of learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria and descriptions of grades. RT I, 29.08.2013, 17, section 4.

⁵⁹ Statutes of the Estonian Sports Register. RT I, 14.08.2020, 6, section 8.



or organised by a school.⁶⁰ Various forms and methods of study, including hobby groups and studios, are used in hobby activities. In extracurricular activities a student has the right to use the civil engineering works, rooms, and library of their school and the teaching and learning, sports, technical, and other facilities of the school pursuant to the procedure provided for in the internal rules of the school.

Youth councils and camps

The objective of youth council is the discussion of issues concerning young people which are in the competence of the local government (rural municipality or city) and the making of proposals to the governing bodies of the local government in connection with the needs and interests of young people.⁶¹

A youth camp manager and a project camp manager offer young people the service of holidays promoting their health and development.⁶² In order to organise a camp, an activity licence must be applied for. This must include an activity plan for camp periods including a list of activities which promote the development of young people and the documents that make it possible to assess the compliance of the director and counsellors of the camp with qualification requirements.

Each year, a youth camp manager shall submit to the EHIS the number of young persons having participated in the youth camp per rural municipality or city.

Assessment

The knowledge and skills acquired in youth work, hobby education and hobby activities are not generally assessed. One exception may be the hobby schools where assessment is part of the learning process.

Qualification requirements of staff

Qualification requirements have been established for youth and project camp directors and counsellors.⁶³ There are no formal qualification requirements for an instructor of a hobby school or hobby group. It is possible to apply for the qualification of a youth worker.⁶⁴ There are currently no training options or courses for acquiring the qualification or partial qualification of a hobby school instructor. Coaches working in sports schools can apply for the qualification of a coach.

Funding

Youth work, hobby education, and hobby activities are financed by the state, local governments, and parents.

60 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7, section 40.

61 Youth Work Act. RT I, 16.06.2020, 10, section 9.

62 Youth Work Act. RT I, 16.06.2020, 10, subsections 10¹ (1)-(2).

63 Qualification requirements for the directors and counsellors of youth and project camps and the procedure for establishing compliance therewith. RT I, 06.03.2018, 4.

64 It is possible to apply for the following qualifications: youth worker, level 4; youth worker, level 6 and youth worker, level 7, and partial qualifications: camp counsellor, level 4; camp counsellor and director, level 6 and camp director, level 7. Available at: https://www.kutsereregister.ee/en/standardid/standardid_top2/.

The activities of youth associations, representative hobby associations, and the accessibility and diversity of hobby education and hobby activities are supported from the state budget.⁶⁵

Hobby schools and youth centres are often operated by the local government which finances the staff costs, maintenance of buildings, and the participation of young people in their activities from its budget.

The state allocates support to local governments for ensuring the accessibility and diversity of hobby education and hobby activities. Funds are allocated based on the total number of young people aged 7-19 in the local government; the number of children living in families with coping difficulties and disabled young people is also taken into account.

The state covers the labour costs of coaches of sports schools separately. The amount of support is determined on the basis of the total number of training hours provided for the groups by the coaches.⁶⁶

Students have both paid and free options of participating in youth work. Visiting open youth centres is free of charge, but participating in a youth camp or student work camps often entails a fee. Participation in hobby education and hobby activities also often entail fees for students.

Hobby education is subject to an income tax exemption on the basis of which parents can deduct the training expenses made during a calendar year for a child up to 18 years of age from their taxable income.⁶⁷

Continuing education

Continuing education belongs in the area of adult education, which is regulated by the Adult Education Act.⁶⁸ Continuing education takes place on the basis of a curriculum, which must stipulate, among others, the curriculum's learning outcomes, total volume of the curriculum (incl. the shares of classroom, practical, and independent work), content of studies, description of the study environment, list of teaching materials, conditions of starting and finishing studies and the documents to be issued. The learning outcomes of continuing education must be worded in a manner that makes it possible to assess the knowledge and skills of the person who passed the curriculum.

Each year by the 31 March the manager of a continuing education institution must submit its performance indicators to the EHIS for the previous calendar year (incl. the number of learners who started continuing education, number of certificates issues, the number of courses organised, etc.).

Funding

As a rule, the costs of participation in continuing education are covered by the learner. Various institutions, including educational institutions, third sector organisations, and commercial undertakings, may offer free training courses to young people.

Just like in the case of hobby education, parents can also deduct the expenses related to continuing education from their taxable income.

65 Conditions and procedure for distribution and use of support funds allocated to local governments in State Budget Act. RT I, 29.12.2021, 70.

66 Sports Act RT I, 28.02.2020, 3, section 9¹.

67 Income Tax Act RT I, 05.04.2022, 5, section 26.

68 Adult Education Act. RT I, 19.03.2019, 93.

6. Participation in non-formal learning

Participation in non-formal learning is voluntary for students. Upon planning a wider recognition of the outcomes of non-formal learning in formal learning, there is a need for clarity in terms of the size of the target group (students and providers of non-formal education) it may concern. The statistics of participation in non-formal learning are somewhat fragmented, which is why there is a need for critical assessment of indicators to be monitored. These indicators should be gathered on either the youth monitoring dashboard of Statistics Estonia or the Haridussilm educational statistics portal.⁶⁹

A more comprehensive overview of the statistical figures on participating in non-formal learning is given in Annex 4.

Every academic year, **nearly half of basic school students participate in school hobby groups**. Whereas the share of participants in hobby groups is somewhat greater in basic schools without the upper secondary school stage (Table 2), participation in school hobby groups has remained the same in the last five years.

Participation in hobby groups is not measured in the upper secondary school stage and therefore it is not known how many upper secondary school students participate in hobby groups offered by schools.

Nearly **half of basic school students** and more than a **third of upper secondary school students** participate in **hobby schools**. Participation in hobby schools has increased somewhat in basic schools and general secondary education alike over the last five years. This is partially related to the increase in the number of hobby schools, while the growth of participation may have been curbed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Participation of vocational education students in hobby activities or hobby education is not measured.

Table 2. Participation in hobby activities and hobby education 2015-2020 %

Participation of basic school students in hobby education and hobby activities	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Percentage of students attending school hobby groups (in schools with no upper secondary school stage), %	65.8	67.5	68.0	65.6	66.0	n/a
Percentage of students attending school hobby groups (schools with both basic and upper secondary school stages), %	48.5	49.1	49.2	47.8	48.7	n/a
Basic school students attending hobby schools, %	46.4	45.4	47.8	51.7	52.3	52.3
Participation of upper secondary school students in hobby education	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Participation of upper secondary school students in hobby schools, %	31.5	30.3	32.7	34.1	35.3	34.9

Source: EHIS, Haridussilm.

Note: n/a – the data are not available.

69 Haridussilm. Available at: <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee>.

According to EHIS data, the number of Estonian hobby schools registered in the EHIS has doubled between 2010-2021: in the school year 2010/2011 there were 360 hobby schools, but in the school year 2020/2021 the figure was 774. More than 80% of hobby schools are private schools. Local governments own 138 of the 774 hobby schools, i.e., 18% of all hobby schools. 74% of the curricula of hobby schools use the Estonian language as the language of instruction, 19% use Estonian and another language, and 7% other languages.⁷⁰

In terms of areas, the number of sports schools is the biggest (313; 40%), followed by other types of hobby schools (291; 38%),⁷¹ music and art schools (145; 19%) and technical, nature, creative, and hobby centres (25; 3%). More than half of students attend sports schools and just under a third attend music and art schools. Nearly 16% of all students acquiring hobby education attend hobby schools in the field of general culture, a little over 3% in the field of technology and only 1% in the field of natural sciences. Females account for 53% of hobby school students and 47% are male.⁷²

EHIS data shows that the number of youth centres in 2019 was 287, the majority of which (70%) are run by local governments. The number of youth centres per 1 000 students is the biggest in Hiiu, Lääne, Järva, Võru and Jõgeva counties and the smallest in Harju, Ida-Viru and Tartu counties.

In 2020, a little over a half of youth workers had higher education (54%) with their education level having increased compared to 2010. The number of applicants for the qualification of youth worker has also increased in recent years.⁷³

A 2020 study by Paabort⁷⁴ reports that the aspects of their competences that youth workers rate the most highly are inclusion of young people, supporting non-formal learning, sharing information, counselling young people at the primary level, and supporting the development of healthy and environmentally sustainable lifestyles. However, the inclusion of young people with special needs, supporting digital literacy and civic education, and reflecting on the non-formal learning experience and outcomes of young persons are rated lower.

The majority of young people participating in hobby education and youth work are satisfied with them, and there are no major changes over the years. Young people have the most experience with participating in hobby education, but they are more interested in participating in student work camps, and youth projects and camps. One of the prerequisites for participation in youth work is the availability of quality information about it, but young people report that information is fragmented and difficult to find.⁷⁵

The main reasons for not participating in hobby education and activities are lack of time, engagement in other hobbies, and a lack of interesting hobby education and

70 Source: Haridussilm. Available at: <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee>. Authors' calculations.

71 Hobby schools specify their subtype upon registering themselves in EHIS. Other hobby schools offer hobby education in several different fields that operate under hobby schools, but also hobby schools in the fields of dance, language, theatre, media and heritage culture.

72 Haridussilm. Available at: <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee>.

73 Mets, C., Paabort, H., Kõiv, K., Liiskmann, M. (2020). *Mapping of the current state of Estonian youth centres in 2020. Part I*. Available at: <https://ank.ee/e-varaait/eesi-noortekeskuste-hetkeseisu-kaardistus-2020/>.

74 Paabort, H. (2020). *Mapping of the current state of Estonian youth centres in 2020. Part II*. Available at: <https://ank.ee/e-varaait/eesi-noortekeskuste-hetkeseisu-kaardistus-2020-ii-osa/>.

75 Väljaots, K., Hein, T., Hiir, K., Allik, A., Adamson A-K., Kivistik, K., Käger, M., Derevski, R. (2021). *Noorsootöös osalevate noorte rahulolu noorsootöoga 2020*. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/noorsootoo_tegevuste_rahulolu_2020_lopparuanne.pdf



activity opportunities. High fees prevent 14% of
young people who have not participated in hobby education or activities from doing
so.⁷⁶

76 Ibid.

7. Integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonian schools

To promote the integration of non-formal and formal learning there is firstly a need to get an overview of educational professionals' current understanding of non-formal learning and the importance of integrating it with formal learning. Below is an overview based on interview data of their views on the integration of non-formal and formal learning both in the terms of strengths and challenges, the improvements to the education system that a more systematic integration might help to bring about, and who benefits from it and in what ways.

7.1. Approaches to integrating non-formal and formal learning

The interviews with target groups revealed that **non-formal and formal learning and integration thereof is understood and perceived differently among different target groups interviewed for this study**, as confirmed by the results of previous studies.⁷⁷ This use of this type of terminology tends to be unfamiliar among providers of hobby education and therefore they do not often acknowledge the methods already used to integrate the two learning types. However, in some general education institutions, integration is relatively regular practice and therefore attention may not be paid to integration as such. Additionally, the interviewees pointed out that the general education system lacks a **common understanding** of what integration of non-formal learning means exactly and the kind of integration that is optimal.

Two types of integration are distinguished at the system level: 1) hobby education as a service to formal learning, and 2) hobby education as part of the formal education curriculum (for more details, see the chapter "Non-formal learning in Estonia").

In the case of the first service provision type, the interviewed **hobby education providers perceive a threat to the identity of non-formal learning** and therefore **prefer to view non-formal learning as part of the education system**. At the same time, non-formal learning is understood as a voluntary activity that is based on the learner's interest or that is generating and maintaining their interest.

"The topic of integration is complicated in the sense that we ourselves are arguing within the association about the definition of integration. /.../ Some people believe that if hobby education offers a service to formal education – for example, like in Pärnu – then hobby education loses its identity in a sense in doing so and simply becomes a service provider to formal education. The best kind of integration would ensure that if a child attends a hobby school and does things there voluntarily, it could be later recognised as part of their curriculum." (Provider of hobby education)

Interviewed teachers in **formal learning** also admit that integration may be addressed differently. Their opinions reflect an approach to non-formal learning as an integral part of the education system where non-formal learning is recognised as contributing towards study outcomes in formal education as well:

"Hobby groups are part of a school day and actually support completing certain subjects and achieving certain competencies. /.../ And secondly, participation in

⁷⁷ See e.g. Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., Põlda, H. (2019). "Mitteformaalõppe tähenduse konstrueerimine poliitikadokumentides" [Construction of meaning of 'non-formal learning' in policy documents]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 7(1), 50–75 ja Põlda, H., Reinsalu, R., Karu, K. (2021). "Nonformal learning in practitioners' language use." *The Yearbook of the Estonian Mother Tongue Society*. 10.3176/esa66.10.

some hobby groups makes students exempt from release a mandatory school subject to do something else during that time.” (Teacher)

Some interviewed providers of non-formal learning and interviewed formal learning professionals describe non-formal learning via its **tasks**, e.g., describing **developing different competencies as one of its tasks**.

Providers of hobby education and youth workers highlight the fact that hobby education is not recognised systematically at the level of formal learning curricula. This prevents cooperation between different types of learning provides and also more systematic integration.

“The curriculum states that general competencies are developed through all subjects both during class and out-of-school activities. Teachers monitor and guide the development of general competencies via their cooperation and the cooperation between the school and home. But what is missing here is actually the third party: hobby education.” (Provider of hobby education)

This provider of hobby education feels that while general school curricula acknowledges the role of out-of-school activities in the development of general competencies, the latter tend to be facilitated in and out of school through the cooperation between teachers and parents – the potentially important role and voice of the hobby education provider in the development of competencies is excluded in this relationship.

Both **youth workers** and **providers of hobby education** feel that they **are not trusted by general education stakeholders**, which is why cooperation with general education school has been low to date (see more in section 7.6 below, subchapter “Hidden hierarchies of education system and mistrust in non-formal education”). Youth workers themselves value their work highly and feel that the situation related to the health crisis has increased the value of their profession in the eyes of the wider society.

On the other hand, representatives of formal learning did not mention a lack of trust in non-formal learning professionals. For formal **learning teachers and heads of school**, cooperation is not obstructed by a lack of trust, but the fact that **recognition of knowledge gained through non-formal learning as part of the curriculum has not been defined**. This in turn raises a question about responsibility – on which level should the more detailed recognition procedures of non-formal education be defined (see subchapter “Local government level”). This creates a situation where the opportunities for getting one’s non-formal learning outcomes recognised in formal education depends on the understanding and work organisation of individual subject teachers and/or the school management.

Heads of schools also highlight the need to support teachers to recognise the possible outcomes of the integration and share responsibility in developing the competencies of students.

“We must change our way of thinking and culture: we must take a step back and see again what the actual learning outcomes are. This is the question of supporting teachers, so that they would have the courage to do that. Teachers, I don’t know, are either insecure or perhaps it is a question of culture. Where are we coming from? We do not have to decide everything or take responsibility. This is also the responsibility of the child, the student, the hobby school and the family. Here it is very important to support teachers: other kinds of cooperative skills, that I could trust the other school, trust that I alone am not responsible.” (Head of school)

Teachers' **somewhat contrasting approaches**

to non-formal and formal learning are illustrated by a description, according to which non-formal learning is characterised by **flexibility** unlike following a curriculum in formal learning. Teachers see integration as an opportunity to increase the flexibility of formal learning and to bring the two learning types closer together via cooperation by increasing interest in learning and creating associations with the real world. The following quote illustrates the flexibility of non-formal learning, which comes from a lack of pressure to follow their own curriculum in full:

“Actually, I do completely different things in my hobby group [boys’ choir] than what is done in class in the same age group. /.../ Honestly, I swear that I don’t teach the things I have agreed to teach according to the curriculum with my colleagues in the Music Teachers’ Association. But I do think that the lessons I give are not meaningless.” (Teacher)

According to one vocational school teacher interviewed, the benefit of vocational education in integrating non-formal and formal learning is the **competence-based approach**, in which case the method and place of acquiring a competence is unimportant. On the basis of this approach, the learning process can be organised very flexibly. In Estonian vocational schools, students are already supported in recognising their learning in different contexts:

“There is a great move [in vocational schools] towards flexibility; entrepreneurship studies play a great part in this, allowing [the student] to do anything within two or three months, incorporating all their interests, the real world, different goals, different methods of action – all of this is eventually meet in a unified moderated or coached activity.” (Vocational school teacher)

Even though some interviewees contrasted the different types of and perceived differences in learning settings, teachers emphasised the different values of non-formal and formal learning. While closer cooperation to support the integration of non-formal and formal learning may be desirable, it is important to maintain the specificities of non-formal learning, for instance, in learning methods and outcomes and assessment methods,^{78 79} as this enriches the learning experience and allows the provision of a more varied assessment on the learning process and outcomes.

Moreover, stakeholders in the non-formal education field perceive the multifaceted nature of non-formal learning and differences inside the field. For instance, youth workers found that hobby education is often treated as being meant for more privileged or outstanding students, while youth work offers opportunities for everyone, even those whose learning outcomes are relatively poor or who display risk behaviour:

“While schools tend to – at least in my experience – include you in [international non-formal learning] projects as a prize (you did something well, you are hard-working, I’ll take you on a trip), then youth centres have the opportunity to include the young people who perhaps do not stand out for their learning outcomes or who have fewer opportunities and have more difficulty in participating in these projects. This is one major thing that youth centres can do.” (Youth worker)

78 See also Põlta, H., Karu, K., Reinsalu, R. (2021). “Metaphors we learn by: practitioners’ conceptions of the meaning of nonformal learning in Estonian context”. *European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults* (1-16). Available at: <https://rela.ep.liu.se/article/view/3682>

79 Downes, P. (2011). *A Systems Level Focus on Access to Education for Traditionally Marginalised Groups in Europe: Comparing Strategies, Policy and Practice in Twelve European Countries*. LLL2010 SP5 Comparative Report, Working Paper No. 59. Available at: http://lll2010.tlu.ee/publications/project-reports/lll2010-deliverable-28_sp5-report.pdf/view.

The interviewees see integration potential via **supporting the freedom and agency of subject teachers**, above all by **agreeing on shared responsibility** with the student and their family members. The cooperation between teachers in general education and non-formal learning facilitators is seen to be supported by **personal networks** or contacts.

“Each subject teacher sometimes has their own agreements with students or their family members and they act in good faith and with a good cause to support the student.” (Teacher)

According to the understandings of formal learning teachers, integration is supported by the **close connection between the two learning forms via work organisation**. Based on teachers’ experience, it is easier in formal learning to take into account the results of a hobby activity that takes place in a school, as it generates trust and a sense of certainty with regard to the quality of the knowledge acquired through non-formal learning.

“A bigger win is when these subject groups operate in a school. This is a very controlled system. It is free of charge, for all and uniform. In such case teachers are actually communicating with each other. We know this circle, so we can take this into account: “oh, this one did well there; we did this there”. If these come from across Estonia, from different institutions, it is somewhat more difficult to take into account.” (Teacher)

“In the rooms of our building, so that the people who instruct these [hobby groups] are available every day. We can communicate with them on a daily basis. /.../ We have that trust, because we actually know what they do there.” (Teacher)

Heads of schools emphasise the role of the school manager in the work organisation facilitating integration, who have a bigger picture and more leverage in terms of the institutions and activities offering non-formal and formal learning in their region.

7.2. Education system problems that could be solved by more systematic integration

Interviewees from various target groups consistently stressed that more systematic integration of non-formal and formal learning would help to relieve the problem of **(over)burdening students and use of time**.

From the **perspective of the student**, their study load would reduce because **duplication of similar learning content would reduce**. Recognising the competencies acquired through non-formal learning in the learning outcomes of formal learning via (partial) replacement of subjects among other things would contribute to more optimal use of time. As an example, some young people pointed out recognition of a geography hobby group as a geography subject, a handball class as a PE class and achieving a good place in a subject contest or a sports competition as part of completing a subject. Some also mentioned the activities of youth centres as part of completing the curriculum.

Referring to a reduction in duplication, **policy makers** admit that more systematic integration of non-formal and formal learning would help to **save resources** (both time and money), as some competencies and experiences required or expected in formal education can be acquired via hobby education and youth work activities. Additionally, they believe that integration would strengthen parts of the education system, including more efficient implementation of individual learning paths. This would also provide a clearer overview of what goes on in different learning settings and how the learning outcomes of different settings are recognised and assessed.

Heads of schools also see more systematic integration as an opportunity to **use resources more optimally within the education system**. Considering the large share of Estonian education spending in GDP (Gross Domestic Product), additional funding is currently nearly impossible to obtain. Heads of schools pointed out the opportunity integration might afford to use workforce and regulate workloads more optimally in addition to saving money. Better integration of non-formal and formal learning fields would alleviate issues not initially targeted with the integration, e.g., more optimal workload of non-formal education providers, who currently in some areas would like a higher workload.

“This total, 1 + 1 [non-formal and formal learning], would give a slightly different total if we viewed it more comprehensively. National statistics indicate that while in terms of education policy, we have a great lack of teachers, the statistics show that we actually do have them, but the problem is that the engagement levels and workloads are low. If we put these things together, we can use it more optimally.”
(Head of school)

Based on examples from their schools, **some school teachers** note that it is not unusual for a student to have a hobby school teacher or someone outside the circle of formal learning teachers as the supervisor of their research paper or creative work. This paves the way to an understanding that **non-formal learning instructors could be involved more systematically in supervising creative work**, because this would above all benefit students, but also the staff of both non-formal and formal education institutions via cooperation and workload sharing. Similarly, the **providers of hobby education** think that integration does not only benefit students, but also teachers due to workload sharing and the fact that they can acquire new knowledge through non-formal learning themselves.

One head of school felt strongly that **more systematic diversification of education** via integration is a key solution to current issues in the education system.

“The current need to learn everywhere, this way of thinking needs to be entrenched. This is the greater and broader future of our education. Once again, I use the term ‘seamless education’: this means ensuring a broader and more comprehensive education rather than building educational towers.” (Head of school)

Conversations with general education **heads of schools and teachers** highlighted that systematic integration and cooperation with neighbouring educational institutions contributes to **optimal use of infrastructure**, allowing for savings. For instance, interviewees pointed out a situation where the recently renovated rooms of a school remain empty after the end of the school day, even though the local hobby school has no proper facilities. Similarly, the technology study tools of vocational and hobby schools remain partly unused, even though the local school does not have funds to purchase equipment required for IT or technology studies.

“Be it Ronimisministeerium [a rock climbing gym], swimming pools or an indoor skate hall, where you can provide education for a certain period of time. Here, there is a lot of room for cooperation.” (Teacher in general education)

“When a grandly renovated school building is dark after three o’clock and there is no learning happening there or when stadiums are empty in the mornings or evenings, we must consider how to use the existing resources more efficiently so that children could use what we already have more easily. This is the task of our schools.” (Head of school)

According to the representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities, shared hobby education and non-formal learning would contribute to a wider resolution of the problem of **ethnic segregation** in the Estonian education system. 16% of basic school students currently study in Russian-language schools and little over 60% of them are able to acquire Estonian skills at B1 level⁸⁰ by the end of basic school.⁸¹ Participation in Estonian-language non-formal learning would help to develop their Estonian skills and support the achievement of the objectives and learning outcomes of the curriculum. As the students of Russian-language schools do not currently communicate sufficiently closely with their Estonian-language peers, non-formal learning would help to bring young people with different backgrounds together and enable them to practice their language skills. Acquiring other knowledge and skills would be an added value:

“The greatest knowledge or skill that a Russian-language student obtains through hobby education is the Estonian language, because hobby education is the only way to speak Estonian this way and listen to your Estonian-speaking peers and teachers unless you attend an Estonian-language school.” (Representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities)

7.3. Benefits of integration of non-formal learning

The interviewees described the benefits of integration at four levels: the learner, the teacher/facilitator, the education system, and the community/region.

The interviewees most frequently named the **learner** as the main beneficiary of the integration of non-formal and formal learning. Nearly all of the representatives of the target groups interviewed were of the opinion that better integration supports a learner-centred approach, increases student’s motivation to learn and reduces their excessive burden while also providing them with more diverse competencies for getting on in life.

The interviewees emphasised the link between integration and the **learner-centred approach**, i.e., the fact that students must be supported during their educational journey and their interests and needs must be taken into account.

Educational scientists find that in the case of a learner-centred approach, there is a need to talk about learning as a process and the learning experience.⁸² However, interviewees expressed their concerns that the current emphasis in education is on results and an output-centred approach rather than on the well-being of young people.

The heads of schools interviewed conceptualised the integration of formal and non-formal learning as an innovative approach to supporting young people’s development, emphasising that non-formal learning providers’ competencies have the potential to

⁸⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions#:~:text=The%20CEFR%20organises%20language%20proficiency,can%2Ddo%20descriptors.>

⁸¹ Mägi, E., Murasov, M. (2021). *Eestikeelne ja segarühmas õpe, emakeel(t)e toetamine ja hariduse kättesaadavus*. Estonian Integration Monitoring 2020. Available at: <https://www.kul.ee/en/estonian-integration-monitoring-2020>

⁸² Eisenschmidt, E., Erss, M., Heidmets, M., Kikas, E., Poom-Valickis, K., Slabina, P., Timoštšuk, I., Vinter, K. (2017). *Õpikäsitus: teooriad, uurimused, mõõtmine. Analüütiline ülevaade*. Tallinna Ülikool, Haridusteaduste Instituut. Available at: https://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/55716/Opikasisutus_Kirjanduse_ylevaade_TLY.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

complement formal learning professionals' skillset especially in the area of supporting student well-being and development.

“/.../ if there is cooperation [between non-formal and formal learning] and it is another knowledge and it [non-formal learning] actually also involves specialists who pass on their knowledge /.../, who have tackled this field in depth and can perhaps support the approach and the child's development from a completely different perspective than subject teachers in schools.” (Head of school)

Based on the learner's interest and the related greater motivation to study and better learning outcomes, the interviews highlighted the topic of **individual learning pathways**, because their development is supported by the integration of non-formal and formal learning. This enables learners with various talents to access more personal learning opportunities but also those with special educational needs.

The interviews revealed that the activities of non-formal learning instructors may support the learner's development in a completely different way than the activities of subject teachers in schools, because they use different methods. It is assumed that learners find it more comfortable to learn through integrated learning, because it offers varied learning experiences and senses of achievements. These in turn contribute to personal development, which supports a fuller realisation of each person's potential.

According to young people interviewed, recognition of the results of non-formal learning would increase their **motivation to participate in non-formal learning** and thus **develop themselves in diverse ways**. They prefer replacement of subjects in general education with formal learning if the study outcomes match and also emphasised the value of listing non-formal learning activities on their reports as elective subjects. They believe this could optimise students' workload in order to better cope with the overall workload in general education.

One of the problems pointed out by students was that recognition of knowledge gained through non-formal learning varies in schools and some schools do not do it at all. According to young people, a lack of integration has a negative effect on motivation to learn and reduces self-development based on interests (e.g., interests in geography, religious studies, economy and society), because they have little time to practice their hobbies.

“I would very much like that [replacement of formal learning subjects], because there are enough lessons as it is. You cannot actually just take additional lessons, especially if they are not recognised on the report or anything. What is the point of taking them? But if you can replace some lessons with or add them to these, it would motivate students to choose subjects that they actually like. /.../ Our school does not [recognise it].” (Student)

“If you are good at English and you have proved it somehow by taking an exam, then I believe it is a very good opportunity to learn something else that interests you: religious studies, economy, whatever.” (Student)

Policy makers see a great potential in integration in **developing the learner's reflection skills and abilities**, which plays an important role in the development of a self-managing learner with agency.

According to the representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities, more personalised learning activities offer more **support better tailored to the learner's needs**, which makes it easier to cope with special educational needs. Regardless of whether they have a disability or not, young people's needs are overall

similar and the **talents of young people with special educational needs must also be noticed and supported.**

General education teachers also stressed the potential of non-formal learning for students with special educational needs and found that this could considerably enrich the lives of students with learning difficulties, who do not often experience a sense of achievement in current formal learning. These teachers also believed that students with special needs require a more individual approach and learners with different talents should be noticed. It is in the integration of non-formal learning where they see possibilities for supporting the development of talents.

“Speaking of SEN students, they used to be put together with students learning according to a simplified curriculum and those with different learning difficulties, but actually we need to distinguish them a bit from the others. When we speak about talent in relation to hobby education, it is good that people have noticed and started to think about ensuring that talented children – regardless of their field – receive special attention. Then perhaps we may find some ways to integrate this, their knowledge and skills in a regular school.” (Teacher)

Out-of-school learning gives the student a different learning experience compared to everyday school studies. Nearly all target groups interviewed named **learning in different settings and by different methods as well as practical acquisition and use of competencies** as a benefit of non-formal learning that would enrich formal learning. For instance, educationalists pointed at shortcomings in formal learning that are related to everyday skills, such as opening a bank account, booking a doctor’s appointment, and declaring income. One positive aspect revealed was that young people’s participation in student work camps gives them work experience that helps them to enter the labour market at a later stage.

According to students, more practical out-of-school learning helps to make theoretical subject classes more interesting and improve their ability to retain what has been learned. Therefore, integration has an important role in enriching school learning, which often seems too theoretical, with so-called real-life components. Students contrast practical skills with book smarts, finding that more flexible and varied studies prepare them better for life. In the following quote the student remarks on how real-life practical experiences during their learning career are valuable, helping to improve their confidence and readiness to deal with situations in life after they finish school:

“The book smarts we gain from school are not everything. Once we finish school and enter real life, other skills that are more practical or which we acquire outside school are at times even more important /.../ the more varied they are, the more you get the feeling that you are ready for life once you finish school, that you are not left in this classroom. This is very limited.” (Student)

Interviews with formal learning teachers included discussions of the integration of non-formal and formal learning supporting the development of young people’s **development into valuable members of society**. One teacher illustrates her belief in how cooperation can contribute to this development:

“We all work towards ensuring that we would have hard-working members of society and that they would function as a society, rather than just individuals.” (Formal learning teacher)

The representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, however, highlighted in the following quote the more general contribution of integration in the development of a young person’s world view and **the sense of community**, because

joint activities improve the focus on children and young people and demonstrates care for their well-being. The regional policy aspect must also be considered, because having a caring attitude towards young people creates the conditions which may improve the chances of young people either continuing to live in and contribute to their home region or encourage them to return there after obtaining learning or work experience elsewhere:

“The most important thing is that the child has won in any case in terms of their world view, skills, and knowledge. Secondly, all of these joint activities provide the child with a sense of community, that they are cared for and noticed. Thirdly, the thing I consider most important in terms of local governments is that it also creates the conditions for them to come back to live with us, because it is good to live here. People tend to forget this sometimes. If you open a local government development plan, then ... some years ago I analysed the development plans of local governments in terms of education and, well, ‘young people leave’. Again ‘young people leave’. The solution lies with local governments, right?” (Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities)

One head of school draws attention to the concept of a person’s natural learning. The latter they argue is promoted through the integration of non-formal and formal learning as well as the recognition of knowledge gained by non-formal learning – this helps to support a person’s natural learning as they encounter different experiences in different environments

“A human being is a whole. Nobody learns simply by sitting 45 minutes in a maths class and 45 minutes in an art class. By recognising non-formal [learning] we support a person’s natural learning.” (Head of school)

Overall, it can be said that the **learner benefits** from the integration of non-formal and formal learning through a **more individual approach** to supporting their development. This helps to provide them with a greater sense of achievement and motivate them to contribute to their diverse development, which in turn improves the likelihood of a more successful integration into society.

In the case of formal learning **teachers**, the main benefit of the integration of non-formal and formal learning is considered to be a **reduction in teaching load**, which (like in the case of students) supports more optimal use of their time and therefore also mental well-being. According to the following youth worker, integrating non-formal learning will have a positive impact on people’s mental health and contribute to optimising the use of their time:

“And what is currently very important? - supporting mental health and time. This gives you the opportunity to use your time and your energy simply to ... do more things more quickly. (Youth worker)

On the other hand, it is possible that formal learning teachers perceive integration as an **additional burden**, which creates new tasks or requires changes in the work organisation and may therefore be met with resistance;

“This naturally brings benefits to all. The benefits are there for those who bother to do it. [There are] those who don’t naturally get any benefits, because they must do additional work or reorganise their work. If you look at it this way, the more open and ready the teacher is to change their working models and work organisation, the easier it is. However, if the teacher is very conservative and only thinks about the maths exam at the end of basic school /.../ or an exam in Estonian or whatever, then it is likely that quite a number of teachers will resist it.” (Formal learning teacher)

In the above example, the teacher highlights an obstacle to realising the benefits of integration in the case where education providers are reluctant to adapt their ways of working. This demonstrates the importance of encouraging formal learning teachers' willingness to embrace integration by enhancing their understanding of the nature and range of benefits it may bring, and ensuring the necessary supports and resources are in place to help teachers adapt to an integrated system.

Diversification of studies and **acquisition of new knowledge** through non-formal learning (incl. hobby education) **also helps teachers to develop**. Thus, representatives of hobby education emphasise the focus of lifelong learning via the necessity of continuous self-improvement of teachers and instructors. They brought examples of successful instances of the integration of non-formal learning methods into the context of formal education.

"We have a teachers' development programme where people share different methods used in hobby schools and formal education and ways of integrating movement-related experiences in maths, so students could consolidate maths competencies or different general competencies. /.../ We organised such seminars with teachers of general education schools and dance teachers. (Hobby education provider)

Interviewees highlighted how umbrella organisations in a particular field, e.g., arts, could bring together both formal and non-formal education providers in order to contribute to the development of teachers' competencies.

"In terms of art schools, actually, our general education schools are very eager to participate in our various, for instance, assignment competitions or summer painting camps. Number of general education school teachers participate. /.../ Perhaps we should communicate more with local governments and gather around a table or invite these local government agents, general education schools and hobby schools to think tanks. Here, the Association of Art Schools can also act with regard to this topic." (Provider of hobby education)

According to the representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities, teachers are motivated by the development of their students. By guiding their students towards participating in hobby activities, they support their **getting on in life**, which is the best reward for every teacher for their job. If a young person can engage in activities that are useful and satisfying for them via learning, then their motivation to learn is greater, too. Better integration would also benefit **schools** in general, as it gives heads of schools the opportunity to lead the integration and stand out in the community.

According to some interviewed students, integration of non-formal and formal learning could bring various benefits to the **education system**. Students foresee a reduction in teachers' workload, because there would be fewer students in some lessons, as some students would exempt from the subject after having achieved the study outcomes in non-formal education. With fewer students in the classroom, teachers might have more time for helping students on an individual basis.

Some students were also of the opinion that more efficient integration would improve the reputation of the profession of a teacher in society, as the image of formal learning would not comprise merely teaching in front of a blackboard, but also more practical learning outside school. This change in the profession's reputation could in turn contribute to mitigating the lack of teachers by making the career pathway more attractive. Realisation of students' strengths in subject contests and sports competitions and better learning outcomes as a result of improved student well-being

would also improve the image of schools. Students also added that early identification and development of interests would help to save on education costs by reducing the number of dropouts from higher education institutions, as young people's choices of third level courses would reflect more adequately their true interests.

Providers of hobby education also noted that **integration benefits society** by introducing career opportunities and specialities to young people.

“Hobby schools or non-formal education certainly supports society in general. For instance, we pay a lot of attention to career choices, introducing the different specialities in universities, learning opportunities and the achievements of Estonian scientists. We organise training days with companies (maths in banking and an IT training day for girls and Ericsson's training day), advertising companies, their jobs, and career opportunities, and the knowledge required to work in there.” (Hobby education provider)

The educational scientists interviewed believed the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia would help to **realise everyone's potential better**, i.e., it would allow students to focus on developing one's strengths and talents and this would support everyone in finding their place in the labour market and in the society. Non-formal learning helps students to express their talents in a considerably more varied way than it is possible with just formal learning. Talent in turn is a sustainability factor for countries and nations and therefore development thereof is crucial in a country with a low population like Estonia.⁸³

“This is [the] most important [challenge], as we have around 1.3 million people. This [integration] would help to realise everyone's potential better. /.../ can learn things that interest them, things that they are good at. This way they would have a positive experience already from basic school. This means that fewer people will go to waste and more people will make it to the top in their field /.../. Some students who are not good at the basics (let's say, Estonian, maths and foreign languages) are often labelled as stupid E-F students.” (educational scientist)

7.4. Organisation of integration of non-formal learning in schools

There are a considerable number of examples of non-formal learning integration practices from Estonian schools. Based on the interviews conducted for the survey and materials publicly available online, it can be concluded that integration is used at all school levels, in most local governments, in schools of different sizes and in various subjects.

Nevertheless, integration practices in Estonian schools are uneven and often depend on the openness of each school and hobby school or youth centre and (good) mutual communication and cooperation between certain people as well as interest in joint offering opportunities for more varied learning.

Incentives for cooperation

Non-formal and formal learning actors may start cooperating for different reasons. This study identified the **four most common ways of initiating cooperation**.

83 Põlda, H. (2018). *Andekusfenomeni konstrueerimine avalikus kommunikatsioonis*. Doctoral thesis. Tallinn University, School of Humanities.

Firstly, cooperation is initiated by people **who know each other** or already have an **experience of cooperation**. If a general education school teacher, director of studies, head of extracurricular activities or another employee knows someone personally from a hobby school, youth centre or a sports school from the same region (or has worked with them previously), it is easy to contact the provider of non-formal education in the case of an idea for cooperation and invite them to discuss cooperation possibilities and distribution of roles. In such a case, cooperation remains at **the level of certain individuals**. At the same time, representatives of hobby education and school teachers gave examples where cooperation was interrupted owing to the initiator of cooperation (e.g., a school's head of extracurricular activities or youth centre instructor) leaving.

Secondly, initiating cooperation has been easier in situations where the **school teacher also works as a group instructor or a coach in a hobby school**. According to **teachers**, this makes recognition of non-formal learning as an elective subject or course the easiest, as teachers know the requirements of the curriculum and there are no problems with supervising the student or assessing their knowledge.

Thirdly, cooperation is initiated due to a **need to use specific conditions or methods for learning**. For instance, in situations where there are video or photo technology, robotics equipment, musical instruments or sound equipment available in a hobby school or a youth centre, but not in a school, students are often allowed to complete an elective subject in this field outside the school. Schools also have fewer opportunities for fitting proper labs similar to those offered by science schools operating under universities. In such cases, cooperation is often initiated by schools consciously looking for a partner that could offer the technology, equipment, and supervisors with professional knowledge required for a new field of study or elective subjects and elective courses.

The fourth factor conducive to cooperation is the **initiative and leadership of local governments**. As school managers and providers of youth work opportunities, local governments can consciously facilitate cooperation between non-formal and formal education actors. Interviews with heads of schools included examples of how local governments have planned such points of cooperation in the educational development plan (e.g., local governments have made the organisation of certain subject lessons mandatory in a hobby school in the same region). However, such practices can currently only be found in individual local governments (interviews with heads of schools and representatives of hobby education repeatedly highlighted the City and Municipality of Pärnu as an example). The strength of this approach lies in the fact that the cooperation between institutions is more systematic and varied.

Leading and organising integration of non-formal learning in schools

Based on the interviews and the instructions provided in the randomly analysed school curricula and websites, the **director of studies is responsible for organising** the recognition of knowledge obtained in a non-formal environment.

In particular, this concerns situations where a student wants to recognise knowledge obtained through non-formal learning as part of completing a mandatory curriculum or complete an elective subject or an elective course outside their school. In such cases, the student must submit an application to the school for transferring the learning outcomes, which is approved by either the director of studies, the management or a wider committee (practices differ by schools). The application for recognition of the learning must generally be submitted at the beginning of the school year or a new term or before the start of the course or activity in the case of an out-of-school activity or other form of non-formal learning. The task of the director of

studies is to advise the student on the types of out-of-school learning that can be recognised and terms and conditions thereof:

“I once again give the example of going to the pre-academy [preparatory courses for secondary school students offered by universities] and asking the director of studies whether I can register my attendance as part of my courses and once I get my certificate from the pre-academy, the courses will be recognised on my report.” (Student)

“They can get the courses accredited, but they just need to tell the director of studies that they [the interviewee’s friend] constantly practice sports and all that. The coach must then prepare a specific plan or a document that certifies their attendance and so on.” (Student)

The responsibility for organising creative work and implementation of the compulsory curriculum in a non-formal learning environment usually lies with subject teachers or form masters. The students interviewed confirmed that the support of the director of studies is necessary. As the current practices of recognising non-formal learning as part of the mandatory curriculum are scarce, to date support has been provided by the director of studies where necessary. Additionally, there is a need to determine the age from when students are able to make connections between the knowledge acquired and plan their future learning activities themselves.

Funding of integration of non-formal learning

If a provider of non-formal learning takes responsibility for teaching and instructing a student (e.g., teaches an elective subject or an elective course outside the school or supervises creative work), this work should be remunerated in accordance with their contribution. If the school itself wishes to use external resources for some subject (e.g., the rooms, technology, and other equipment belonging to a hobby school or a sports club), there may be a need to pay for their use or share the costs of purchasing or repairing.

The sources and calculation principles of the funding of different forms of general education, vocational education, and non-formal learning (e.g., hobby education, hobby activities, and youth work) are different. Therefore, there **are no flexible ways to distribute funding between fields and institutions** based on actual contributions to teaching and workload.

Local governments play a key role in organising funding, being responsible for the funding of the municipal educational institutions (incl. general education and hobby schools) in the region. In individual local governments where non-formal and formal learning are integrated systematically, the funding of activities is organised centrally at the local government level. For instance, local governments make budget allocations for covering the labour costs of hobby schools to the extent that their employees teach and instruct students of general education schools:

“/.../ the city government then allocates a certain amount to them, which is actually used to enter into a contract and for which various organisations or companies are obligated to allocate lessons for schools, for which they also remunerate their employees for their work. The same applies to hobby education. Hobby schools also pay remuneration for cooperation or lessons or cooperation projects or programmes, right, /.../ the funds allocated by the city government, which they use to pay for teachers’ work. So yeah, we have agreed that we purchase certain tools jointly. This is feasible.” (Head of school)

“In short, integration is more expensive than this kind of usual situation and we have understood that in order to facilitate this integration in local governments, there is a need to bring the three local government parties – formal education, hobby education, and the official or the head of the local government – to one table and engage in this kind of conscious activity that begins by mapping the situation and ends with comparing curricula, so as to build trust at that table.” (Provider of hobby education)

As integration practices currently mainly rely on (individual) agreements between certain people or educational institutions, agreements have been made between parties in order to overcome the described shortcomings in the case of more successful examples of integration. For instance, they use each others' rooms or settle labour costs between them in terms of giving certain lessons. However, according to the representatives of the target groups interviewed, expanding and harmonising integration practices across Estonia would require more flexible legal standards with regard to preparing curricula and funding education.

7.5. Models for integrating non-formal learning

The Education and Youth Board has gathered good examples of integrating non-formal learning on Nopik website.⁸⁴ Nopik is an online environment for youth workers, teachers, heads of schools, officials, and other interested parties, where users can add descriptions of cooperation opportunities in the fields of youth work and education. The portal includes integration examples from 13 counties. There are one or two examples from most counties, but eight from Pärnu and three from Harju County. The majority of descriptions of integration come from the field of natural and technical sciences (10), but there are also some from the fields of art, music, sports, and general culture (six from each).

Based on the interviews, it can be concluded that representatives of both non-formal and formal learning are generally aware of Nopik.

In addition to Nopik, so-called school-based references to integration can be found from the curricula and instructions for study organisation published on the websites of schools, hobby schools, and universities' advertisements for open courses and workshops. In the interviews conducted for the study, various examples were also given of the cooperation between representatives of non-formal and formal learning.

The practices used in Estonian schools can be divided into four groups based on the organisation of the cooperation between representatives of non-formal and formal learning (Figure 4). The Education and Youth Board has used a similar categorisation in the case of categorising Nopik examples.

84 Website of the Education and Youth Board with examples from 2019-2020. Available at: <https://harno.ee/veebikogumik-nopik>.

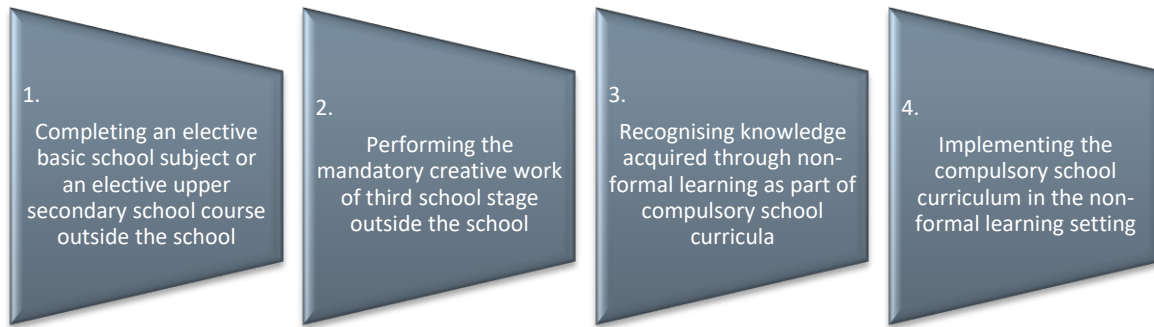


Figure 4. Non-formal and formal learning integration practices in Estonian schools

Source: Authors based on Nopik website and data collected.

Practices of the integration of non-formal and formal learning are often a mix of the four categories introduced on Figure 4 or have evolved over time from one cooperation format into another. As there is no comprehensive database of integration practices, it is complicated to assess which cooperation formats are used and in what situations.

Nevertheless, based on the interviews it can be concluded that supervising mandatory creative work of the third school stage outside the school is the most easily accepted and organised method of cooperation for the representatives of both non-formal and formal learning. Based on the interviews of professionals in the fields of hobby education and youth workers, the reason for this may lie in formal education's greater openness to cooperation. The objective of creative work is to interweave subjects, it is often assessed by using formative assessment, and creative work outside the school helps teachers to save time.

Recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of the compulsory school curriculum is estimated to be a rarer practice. This can be attributed to the fact that compulsory subjects are generally graded and there is no clear approach as to how the teacher should assess the knowledge obtained outside formal learning.

Completing an elective basic school subject or an elective upper secondary school course outside the school

The opportunities to complete an elective basic school subject or an elective upper secondary school course outside the school and organisation thereof are regulated in the school's curriculum. Based on the majority of randomly analysed curricula of general education schools, the practices of recognition of out-of-school learning as elective subjects and elective courses vary greatly across schools. The opportunity to use out-of-school learning is not left completely open. For instance, in some schools, this can only be recognised in the upper secondary school stage while in others it is only permitted in the basic school stage.

The curricula of several schools include the courses or hobby schools of specific universities, which are recognised – the selection has generally been made in accordance with the school's special branch (e.g., programming and mathematics courses at Tallinn University of Technology, if the school's special branch is sciences and/or information technology). For hobby and sports schools, curricula often include a restriction that only hobby schools with a training licence or regular and/or international sports competitions is recognised. There are also schools whose

curricula do not address opportunities of completing elective subjects or elective courses outside the school.

Interviews with students and teachers revealed that students must submit to the school a proof or a certificate on completing an out-of-school course issued by the provider of non-formal education. Several major hobby schools and universities have prepared a separate report to this end, which is sent electronically directly to the school or issued to the student. Students usually present the certificate to the school's director of studies or their subject teacher.

All of the websites of Estonia's largest universities include information about courses for basic school and upper secondary school students.

For instance, the science school operating under the University of Tartu offers courses to students from grades 7-12 in chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, information technology, social sciences, and humanities.⁸⁵

The school student's centre operating under Tallinn University of Technology also offers a wide selection of courses for students in grades 8-12 from English and Estonian to chemistry and physics.⁸⁶

In the Tallinn University Student Academy, upper secondary school and vocational school students can attend various courses, whereas different semesters focus on different specialities. Based on the continuing education certificate issued by the university, students can transfer credits during future studies. Additionally, the Student Academy courses can be recognised as an elective subject by agreement with the school (in the upper secondary school stage).⁸⁷

The Estonian University of Life Sciences offers upper secondary school students remote courses in the field of natural sciences via its School of Natural Sciences.⁸⁸

Similar field-based courses are offered to basic school and/or upper secondary school students by the Estonian Business School, the University of Tartu Viljandi Culture Academy, Tartu Health Care College, and other educational institutions.

Students explained that recognition of the courses offered to upper secondary school students by science schools as an elective subject or an elective course is standard practice. Additionally, students feel that teachers support and even encourage participating in the courses offered by institutions of higher education, share information about them in schools, and gladly recognise them:

“In our school, the director of studies and the head of school and everyone likes it when we attend different courses outside the school, particularly if they are offered by institutions of higher education, because they will also be recognised on our reports. This is actually talked about a lot in our school, particularly during the selection of elective subjects at the beginning of the school year.” (Upper secondary school student)

In addition to participating in courses offered by institutions of higher education and hobby schools with a training permit, the interviews with the representatives of all target groups revealed other examples of learning in different formats, fields, and environments also recognised as elective subjects or elective courses. Examples

85 Website of the University of Tartu Science School. Available at: <https://www.teaduskool.ut.ee/et>.

86 Website of the Tallinn University of Technology Centre for School Students. Available at: <https://taltech.ee/kooliopilaste-keskus>

87 Website of the Tallinn University Student Academy. Available at: <https://www.tlu.ee/akadeemia>.

88 Website of the Estonian University of Life Sciences' School of Natural Sciences. Available at: <https://www.emu.ee/et/sisseastujale/koolidele/loodusteaduste-kool/>

mainly included studies in a hobby school, at a provider of a hobby activity or a youth centre or studying via organising a specific event or a project.

The practice of recognising elective subjects and elective courses varies by school. The examples listed in interviews depended on the specificities of and opportunities available in each region and school and sometimes on the student's interests. Such varied and school-based opportunities for recognising non-formal learning are not generally described in more detail in school curricula:

“In our school, hobby groups organised within the school are recognised as optional courses and come in many forms. To my knowledge, out-of-school activities are not recognised in our school, but I have heard that for example [names another school not their own] recognises the hiking group I attend. They can recognise this as some course in school, but I don't think I have this opportunity [in their own school].” (Upper secondary school student)

Below is a selection of examples given during the interviews about participating in non-formal learning (in addition to the science courses and hobby school curricula described above), which are also recognised in schools as elective subjects or elective courses:

- organising a musical theatre or a theatre performance;
- organising sports events or competitions;
- participating in a hobby camp (e.g., art, handicraft, sewing or programming camp);
- organising a film or a photo exhibition (usually using the technology of a hobby school or a youth centre);
- creating a blog, a podcast or a website;
- publishing and editing the school paper;
- participating in the student council;
- participating in a subject contest, a quiz or another science or creative competition;
- participating in an international course (e.g., a summer language course abroad);
- volunteering at events (e.g., Black Nights Film Festival, Design Night, Startup Day, community-based practical training opportunities offered via the Estonian National Youth Council⁸⁹);
- participating in a band and regular performances with it;
- renovating the rooms of a youth centre by vocational school students;
- supervising hobby groups and sports training for younger children.

As one of the benefits of recognising non-formal learning, the interviewees highlighted that organising studies in a hobby school or a youth centre **enables students from several schools to participate in the same course** when there are too few people interested in a certain elective subject or an elective course in one school.

The problem is that out-of-school courses do not usually give students the opportunity to re-take tests or the course. According to the interviewees, this disadvantages students learning in a non-formal environment compared to their peers who chose to

89 Introduction of community-based practical training on the Estonian National Youth Council website. Available at: <https://enl.ee/projekt/kojukonnapraktika/>.

complete an elective subject in school, where the teacher usually gives the opportunity to improve the grade or re-take tests.

In addition to recognising elective subjects or elective courses, several schools note students' social and voluntary activities on the report (incl. as part of community-based practical training⁹⁰) in order to acknowledge their initiative and out-of-school activities. This practice is more common in the upper secondary school stage. Before the end of the school year, students must submit to the school an appropriate certificate on their social and voluntary activities. The content of the activity and hours spent on it are briefly described in the report.

Overall, based on school curricula and interview results, it can be concluded that learning in a non-formal environment is recognised in most schools as an elective subject, an elective upper secondary school course or an optional course. Still, the practices of the permitted forms of study and activities vary greatly and there is no systematic approach even in the schools in one region or of one local government:

“To date, everything that has happened at least in [name of city] has been individual, random cases with no systematic nature. This depends on the head of school, how eager they are, or how flexible they are in conducting these things.”
(Head of school)

Performing the mandatory creative work of third school stage outside school

In the third stage of basic school, students are obliged to prepare a creative work, which can be a research paper, project, work of art or similar.⁹¹ Creative work is currently one of the main ways to integrate non-formal learning in basic school, as the possibilities of offering elective subjects are more limited in basic school than in upper secondary school.

“Basic schools and upper secondary schools are very different. In upper secondary school, we indeed get elective courses, elective subjects: everything is great. I think basic schools are already very aware of this, this opportunity for creative work ... It is used to recognise all sorts of things! And everything is based on students' interest.” (Teacher)

The topic of creative work should be related to the central themes of the curriculum or integrate several subjects. Creative work can be done both individually and as a group. The subject matter of the work is chosen by the school, but students decide on the topic. Creative work organisation is described in the school's curriculum.

In this study, we analysed a selection of curricula from several local governments and general education schools of different sizes.⁹² The creative work instructions in curricula generally clearly state that students may do this outside the school, focusing on their interests by conducting a project, creating an artwork or doing something else that helps to put the knowledge acquired to date into practice.

Representatives of all of the stakeholders interviewed for this survey named out-of-school creative work as one example of integration. They were of the opinion that this

90 See more at: <https://heakodanik.ee/kogukonnapraktika/>.

91 National Curriculum for Basic Schools. RT I, 12.04.2022, 10, subsection 15 (8).

92 The curricula of 25 randomly selected general education schools were analysed. The sampled schools are located in Tallinn and Tartu and Harju, Jõgeva, Viljandi, Järva, Põlva, Valga, Saare, Lääne and Rapla Counties.

is a good and widespread practice that helps students to save time and engage in projects or activities that interest them.

The practices of recognising creative work done outside formal learning vary by schools. Some schools only recognise activities done in a certain hobby or science school. In such cases, the school and the provider of non-formal learning have often cooperated before and in some cases they may also have a cooperation agreement. In some schools creative work must be related to the hobby or sports group that the student has already attended for a long time (e.g., a project made in music or art school or as part of training). In other schools, students can freely choose the environment or field they want to conduct their creative work in:

“Grade 8 students engage in creative work like in all schools. It is left open and many of our students are supervised by their hobby school instructors and they do their creative work on the topic or in the field that they practice in hobby schools.” (Head of school)

“... modelling, creating prototypes of reusable materials. We have all of this and then fashion and circular economy. We have agreed to also use this as creative work in basic school – that is to say, those who attend these groups can do their creative work on this topic.” (Teacher)

“..... for several years now we have allowed recognition of participation in a science school as either creative work in basic school ...” (Teacher)

Engaging in creative work outside school enables students to better include additional resources required for their project. According to students, providers of non-formal learning help them with both professional knowledge and technical equipment and other material resources. This was confirmed by representatives from the field of youth work, who gave the use of youth centres' sound and recording equipment for creating a piece of music or a film as a creative work and using rooms or sports equipment for organising events or competition as examples:

“/.../ we had a young person who practiced music and we had a DJ controller in the youth centre. In [the young person's] school, the teacher was worried that they didn't have a creative project and we then came up with this idea of them recording their music in the youth centre and the school helped to turn this into a research project with written and creative parts. Actually, we have continued to do this in cooperation with schools, conducted various photo projects ... And I believe that such creative work is currently one of the first of these excellent opportunities to gain experience outside the school.” (Youth worker)

Several local governments financially support youth-initiated projects as part of preparing a participative budget, which contribute to the development of the local community and are recognised as students' creative work in schools.

Representatives of hobby education described supervising creative work and cooperation with the school where they have helped students to decide on the topic and organisation of creative work and link it with their interests in generally positive terms. Communication with the contact person in the school and well-considered assessment were considered very important:

“I helped a student with their creative work and we were constantly communicating with the director of studies [from the student's school], who had been selected to support this creative work ... and in this case they asked questions and were interested in it all the time. I went to the defence of the creative work and the supervisor was given the chance to speak. I also liked that the creative work there was not graded, but evaluated as pass/fail.” (Youth worker)

The shortcomings mentioned included situations where schools put the burden and responsibility of supervising creative work on the provider of non-formal learning (hobby group instructor, coach, etc.), which causes this person an unremunerated additional burden.

Individual cases of insufficient cooperation with schools were also described, which resulted in the instructors not knowing about the school's expectations and principles for assessing creative work and instructors were not invited to the defence of the creative work in the school to receive feedback. In such a situation it is not possible to instruct the student as expected and later both the student and the supervisor are unsatisfied with the result:

“We have great difficulties with creative work. /.../ I think I do this every year, supervise around three creative works, but it is actually not remunerated. It takes a lot of energy. And again, schools are different /.../. They want hobby school teachers to supervise creative work, but they do not let /.../ the supervisor attend the defence of the creative work in school. And the feedback is simply a vague ‘3’ or well, somehow the communication is poor.” (Representative of hobby education)

Recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of compulsory school curricula

As in the case of recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as an elective subject or an elective course, general education schools also use very different practices when recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of the compulsory curriculum.

Many schools recognise knowledge and experiences gained externally regardless of the location, size or special branches of the school.

Compared to the other cooperation opportunities of representatives of non-formal and formal learning described in this report, this practice is still less common. The representatives of hobby education and youth work interviewed believe the reason for this is the fact that schools **do not trust** the teaching quality and professionalism of the teachers in hobby schools and groups and youth centres.

Below are a selection of examples mentioned during the interviews and practices recorded in the Nopik web portal, where schools have recognised knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of the compulsory curriculum:

- going to a music school or participating in a band is recognised upon completing the subject of music;
- regular sports practice (incl. participation in competitions) is recognised upon completing PE;
- the work done as part of a youth centre's sewing group is recognised upon completing the subject of technology studies in school;
- participation in a robotics group of a private hobby school is partially recognised upon completing the subjects of physics and/or maths;
- participation in a hobby school media group is recognised partially upon completing the subjects of Estonian and/or literature in upper secondary school;
- the work done as part of a youth centre's pottery group is recognised upon completing the subject of technology studies in school;

- the handicraft items produced in a culture centre following the local handicraft traditions are recognised upon completing the subject of technology studies in school;
- regular participation in swimming classes at the school's pool is partially recognised upon completing the subject of PE;
- regular participation in the music and dance classes offered by the school's established cooperation partners is partially recognised upon completing the subjects of music and PE, respectively;
- regular participation in a heritage culture group and minority language courses is partially recognised upon completing the subjects of Estonian and/or literature.

According to the students and teachers interviewed, recognition of out-of-school activities requires prior agreements between the student, the provider of non-formal learning, and the school. Again, the practice differs across school.

In some schools, students must first submit to the school a written application together with the written confirmation of the provider of non-formal learning about the volume, content and period of their out-of-school activities. Other schools consider a prior application of the student or even an oral agreement and a written certificate issued by the hobby school teacher or coach after completing the activity as sufficient. On the basis of the interviews, it can be concluded that the form and content of these certificates is very different, depending both on the requirements of the school and the decision of the provider of non-formal learning on the information included on the certificate.

In the case of vocational education, the principles of accreditation of prior learning and work experience have been tackled for a long period of time and these are also regulated by the Vocational Education Standard⁹³.

According to one interviewee, general education needs a system for accreditation of parallel learning and work experience (PÕTA). In many cases, non-formal learning is conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the school year. This means that there are no reports that certify completion of the course, which is why schools cannot assess or recognise the knowledge already acquired by the student, but only what they are currently still learning:

“Right now there is a problem that grade 5 students must attend a drawing class, but they also participate in an art club at the same time. In order to use the APEL system, they must complete the year 5 art club to get a grade for the year 5 art class in school. At the same time, they must attend the art class at school. Here, there is a need to create a parallel grading system, so that they cannot get the credit retroactively, but both the school and the hobby school must be aware that the child wants to transfer the credits and then the hobby school teacher describes their curriculum and the activities planned for these days and then the school's art teacher reviews it and says, yes, we do it slightly differently, but they can obtain the skills there and the child no longer has to attend this art class. This very strongly requires harmonisation and a similar view of this curriculum system.”
(Policy maker)

Teachers and heads of schools also pointed out that while Studium and eKool⁹⁴ are linked to specific schools, a learner-centered approach and better integration requires these to be rebuilt around students. This would allow using the online environment to

⁹³ Vocational Education Standard RT I, 28.08.2013, 13, sections 28-30.

⁹⁴ digital school management systems used in most Estonian general education schools



display information about the formal and non-formal learning subjects, courses and other activities completed by students. This would make recognition of non-formal learning activities in schools much easier.

Implementing the compulsory school curriculum in the non-formal learning setting

The most common practice of integrating non-formal and formal learning is organising studies in a non-formal setting for completing the school's compulsory curriculum. This is also facilitated by the National Curriculum for Basic Schools which sets forth using contemporary and diverse teaching methodologies, ways and tools (incl. active learning methods, field trips and learning outdoors and in museums) in planning and conducting studies in schools.

In the case of this kind of integration, the most common activity is field trips, whose purpose is to enrich compulsory subject lessons and put the knowledge gained in the classroom into practice. For this study, the curricula of random schools from different regions were analysed.⁹⁵ The term 'field trip' is defined in all of the curricula of the analysed schools. This is sometimes done more superficially and sometimes more thoroughly, but generally, field trips are related to the learning objectives and outcomes arising from curricula. Field trips are usually organised by the school's (subject) teacher for the whole class or a certain group of students. These are generally not done at the student's own initiative or individually.

Field trips to research and educational institutions, natural science centres, nature trails, etc. related to the natural science subjects are the most common, but there are also trips related to other subjects to museums, theatres, private companies and other environments that offer workshops, lectures and other practical activities.

In non-formal learning setting, formal learning is also facilitated by the fact that research institutions, hobby schools, youth centres, museums and other institutions offer educational and learning programmes designed specifically for schools. These usually include practical out-of-school activities, field trips, lectures, etc.

The programmes offered by non-formal learning providers vary widely. Public internet searches retrieve hundreds of learning activity offers from all fields and in different formats and regions. Learning programmes are offered as one-off events, regularly and also as part of certain funding projects (e.g., via the European Social Fund or another measure). Activities are offered either to a school in a certain region, all interested parties across Estonia or to a specific target group (e.g., disabled students).

Representatives of hobby schools and youth workers interviewed also gave examples of how schools are offered learning programmes for supporting the teaching of certain subjects, which are designed for a specific age group and can be implemented outside schools.

To illustrate the wide range of options, the following provides a selection of educational and learning programme providers:

- universities offer schools the opportunity to organise a subject lesson in (or a field trip to) their rooms or laboratories;

⁹⁵ The curricula of 25 randomly selected general education schools were analysed. The sampled schools are located in Tallinn and Tartu and Harju, Jõgeva, Viljandi, Järva, Põlva, Valga, Saare, Lääne and Rapla counties.

- theatres and museums offer several opportunities for organising subject lessons in their rooms and workshops and programmes suitable for enriching the teaching of specific subjects;
- opportunities similar to the above are offered by research and entertainment centres (Science Centre AHHA, the Ice Age Centre, PROTO Invention Factory and many others);
- nature houses, botanical gardens and Tallinn Zoo offer opportunities for organising out-of-school lessons in natural science subjects, with the State Forest Management Centre's facilities and hiking trails also being suitable for this;
- more specific topics can be addressed in respective subject lessons provided by, for example, Tartu Observatory, Tallinn Television Tower and the Estonian Public Broadcasting.

Implementation of compulsory curricula outside school environment is also supported by extensive **educational programmes and projects, often provided by NGOs or the public sector**. These are usually centred around a theme/goal, e.g., anti-bullying or increasing physical activity of students. Main purpose of these is to support the integration of mandatory subjects in formal learning, but as an additional value, educational programmes also offer opportunities for formal learning outside the school environment (incl. in the rooms of hobby schools, sports schools or youth centres or under their supervision).

Such educational programmes are usually meant for all Estonian schools and each school can decide whether to join them. The programmes include study materials, instructions for practical activities, events and other activities, many of which take place outside schools. The most successful and widely known programmes, which also offer activities in a non-formal learning environment, concern sports and entrepreneurship.

One successful example of these is the “**Liikuma kutsuv kool**” educational programme that has been going on for already five years and is led by the Research Group of Physical Activity for Health operating under the University of Tartu Institute of Sport Sciences and Physiotherapy. The educational programme is aimed at schools, but youth workers and representatives of hobby education are also involved in its organisation. The schools that have joined the programme are offered instructions and resources for integrating learning methods that promote exercising (incl. outside the school) into regular learning activities based on their needs and organise PE lessons outside the usual setting. According to the programme's website, 148 schools have joined and included 40% of Estonian students in the programme.⁹⁶

Based on the interviews, discussions on how to redesign the programme to be more easily linkable to youth work while maintaining its popularity are still ongoing. This way, the programme, which is already popular among schools, can be used as a tool to improve cooperation between schools, hobby education, and youth work.

The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools includes elective courses in economics and entrepreneurship - *Majandusõpetus* (Economics) and *Ettevõtlusõpe* (Entrepreneurship).⁹⁷ In Estonian general education schools, teaching entrepreneurship and economics is not only gaining popularity year after year at the upper secondary school stage, but also in primary and basic school. In order to make

96 Website of the “Liikuma kutsuv kool” education innovation programme. Available at: <https://www.liikumakutsuvkool.ee/>.

97 National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools. RT I, 23.04.2021, 11.

these subjects more practical, nationwide educational programmes offer teachers support and instructional materials.

The largest entrepreneurship studies development plan is “**Edu ja tegu**” (Success and Action), which is aimed at the systematic development of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship studies at all levels of education and is led by the Ministry of Education and Research. The programme is mostly designed to better integrate entrepreneurship studies in the field of formal education with other subjects, but it also works as an important tool for bringing together representatives of non-formal and formal learning. The programme also offers school teachers the opportunities for organising lessons in another environment, i.e., mainly at universities and companies, but also at hobby schools and youth centres in individual cases.⁹⁸

Another example of integration is **Teeme+** science communication activity funded from the European Regional Development Fund through which schools, hobby schools, youth centres, local governments, and other institutions can apply for support. The aim of this is to popularise natural sciences and technology among children and young people aged 7-26 years and increase their interest in a career in science or engineering.⁹⁹

The cooperation of schools and sports schools is also supported by the “**Sport koolis**” (Sport in School) pilot project initiated by the Estonian Olympic committee in 2021. This aims to offer the students of participating schools the opportunity to take part in two to four extra PE lessons per week under the supervision of a professional sports coach. The project is implemented in cooperation with county sports federations.¹⁰⁰

In 2020 the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities initiated the **SENSationalSTEM** project funded from the Interreg programme, which enables young people with less advanced special needs (e.g. behavioural and psychological special needs) to obtain IT, mathematics and engineering knowledge outside schools. The project is implemented in cooperation with schools, which helps to find suitable young people and support their later integration back into regular learning.¹⁰¹

The “**Õppida saab kõikjal**” (You can Learn Anywhere) project initiated by Tartu City Government uses projects enriching studies to promote cooperation between the municipal schools in the City of Tartu and providers of non-formal education.¹⁰²

Tallin City Government has entered into cooperation agreements with the educational centres and museums in the region (e.g. the Energy Discovery Centre and the Estonian Health Museum), as a result of which the students of the municipal general education schools in Tallinn can participate in the educational programmes offered there free of charge.

Additionally, eight general education schools in Tallinn have been involved in the “**Lapsest lähtuv koolipäev**” (Child-centred School Day) project funded from the European Social Fund under the leadership of Tallinn Education Department. As part of this, schools mainly developed an all-day school model (*kogupäevakool*) designed

98 Introduction of the “Edu ja tegu” programme. Available at: <https://www.innove.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Ettev%C3%B5tlus%C3%B5ppe-programm-Edu-Tegu.pdf>.

99 Terms and conditions and procedure for granting support under Teeme+ science communication action. RT I, 05.08.2020, 12.

100 Website of the “Sport koolis” programme. Available at: <https://www.eok.ee/liikumisharrastus/sport-koolis#>

101 Website of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities. Available at: <https://www.epikoda.ee/mida-me-teeme/huvikaitse/tegevused-ja-projektid/2020/interreg-projekt-sensationalstem>.

102 Introduction of the “Õppida saab kõikjal” programme on the website of Tartu City Government. Available at: <https://tartu.ee/et/oppida-saab-koikjal>.

for first graders or primary school students, where extracurricular lessons and selected hobby activity opportunities are combined in the student's curriculum.

Based on the examples given during the interviews and public data, there are many similar examples of educational programmes of larger and smaller volumes from Estonia. Even though these educational programmes are currently mainly focused on integration of subjects and offering study materials for improving formal education, they are a good tool for broader integration of non-formal and formal learning in the future on account of the large number of schools already involved.

The main obstacle to conducting studies in a non-formal learning setting is geographical distance: the teachers and students of schools located further away from city centres have difficulties in using all of the opportunities offered;

“If we take a simple thing like different learning environments, for example, learning in museums or going to a theatre, then it takes a whole day for some. For instance, when we go to Tallinn, it takes us at least five hours [to travel to and from Tallinn] and an hour in the theatre. But when I'm closer [to the learning environment], it may take perhaps two hours. All of these things have two sides.”
(Teacher)

7.6. Obstacles to integrating non-formal learning and opportunities for overcoming them

Below is an overview of the extent to which educational actors are ready to integrate non-formal learning, the main obstacles they see to systematic integration, and what needs to be done in order to remove the obstacles and resolve the problems.

Actors' readiness to integrate non-formal learning

Actors see many benefits in integration, but according to the interviews, they lack a shared view of how ready Estonian schools are to implement integration.

There are good examples in Estonia of integrated learning (e.g. City of Pärnu as a learning centre), which are known abroad and are highlighted as models. The representatives of non-formal learning interviewed have a **positive attitude** towards the integration and are ready to contribute to it and cooperate.

At the same time, there are those who, when providing an overall assessment of general education in Estonia, found that **schools are not sufficiently ready** and parties to the integration do not understand their roles and tasks in this process. Providers of non-formal learning believe that heads of schools and teachers may perceive integration of the outcomes of non-formal learning as an **initiative forced on them**, which only generates more work for them.

Even though teachers and heads of schools named obstacles to integrating non-formal learning, no opposition to it as such emerged from the group interviews conducted for this study:

“I think that purely from the perspective of a director of studies, it's extremely important to better integrate this non-formal and formal learning, to link them and find these possible solutions. The obstacle does not lie in curricula or anything, but purely in these kinds of logistical nuances between school and home, teachers and students. There is an astonishing array of these interests.” (Head of school)

However, heads of schools admit that they **lack knowledge and skills** for implementing integration of non-formal learning. They emphasise the need for a common approach:

“Yes, we have discussed that participation in Erasmus+ projects, English, and PE ... here students attend sports classes; we also have a member of the Estonian national team; then music education and so on. But we cannot actually do it: where should we start and how? How to approach it systematically? It’s the same with teachers: we even need to explain to teachers what non-formal learning is. Let’s start with the definition, let’s analyse everything together and then look at how to actually take it into account.” (Head of school)

Additionally, heads of schools emphasised the importance of supporting teachers, so they would have the courage to implement integration more widely. Teachers must be released from the stress and fears related to their workload and responsibility in this process:

“Yes, the question of supporting teachers, so that they would have the courage to do that. Teachers, I don’t know, are either insecure or perhaps it is a question of culture. Where are we coming from? I don’t have to decide everything. I don’t have to be responsible ... It is also the responsibility of the child, the student, the hobby school, and the family. Perhaps here it is very important to support teachers: other kinds of cooperative skills, that I would trust the other school, trust that I alone am not responsible. This perhaps also gives teachers a better understanding. This kind of psychological and cultural support, perhaps training for changing this way of thinking ...” (Head of school)

The tone of focus group interviews with students was overall pessimistic with regard to the feasibility of integration. They do not see many options of how it could function fairly and usefully for all parties in the case of wider implementation, but with schools’ current financial means. At the same time, it appears that students associate integration generally with a large range of choice and more individual learning pathways in formal learning: in this context, better integration of non-formal and formal learning is a way of achieving an increase in the amount of choice, not an end in itself.

Representatives of hobby education also believe that there is a need to understand that integration of non-formal learning outcomes does not bring about savings for the education system, but **requires additional resources**:

“Formal education teachers only agree to integration /.../ if it gives them more time. Because what do teachers lack? Time. And if a hobby education teacher comes and says, hey, I can do this for you, then they agree to it. This makes it so much easier for them. But of course they do not give money away for this, like, I do not give this lesson, so deduct it from my pay. In short, integration is more expensive than this kind of usual situation.” (Representative of hobby education)

Shortcomings of integrating non-formal learning

There are several problems with and obstacles to recognising the outcomes of non-formal learning in formal learning. Earlier studies highlight cooperation problems arising from a lack of systematicity and trust (see Subchapter 4.3) and these emerged also from the interviews conducted for this study. It must also be taken into account that the availability of non-formal learning is not currently ensured uniformly and equally for students all across Estonia. At the school level, integration of non-formal learning is obstructed by school curricula and legal restrictions.

Lack of a systematic approach

Even though all schools cooperate with providers of non-formal learning and out-of-school activities are integrated into school life, recognition of non-formal learning upon completing school curricula is not a systematic and purposeful activity everywhere. There has been a **lack of clear objectives and leadership** regarding integration at the state or regional level, making it a mainly grassroots initiative in particular areas only:

“To date, everything that has happened at least in [name of city] has been these kind of individual, random cases with no systematic nature. This depends on the head of school, how eager they are to or how flexible they are in conducting these things.” (Provider of hobby education)

There is no uniform understanding of non-formal learning in formal learning. Non-formal learning is **very diverse** by nature, including hobby activities and hobby education, pre-professional hobby education, continuing training, and youth work which all differ by their objectives, content, and organisation. It is difficult to use one and the same model to integrate them with formal learning. The question of what to integrate and how, needs to be addressed systematically.

Hidden hierarchies of educational system and mistrust in non-formal learning

The efficiency of implementation of any policy is affected by the extent it complies with the values and attitudes of its target group, as this determines whether a policy change is adopted and the extent to which people are ready to implement it. The parties involved in integrating non-formal and formal learning have **different prejudices and attitudes** towards each other, which have to date prevented integration from being successful.

Providers of non-formal learning feel that they are regarded as less valuable than general education professionals, even though the same individual teacher teaches in both learning contexts:

“I can’t speak for everyone, but quite a number of general education schools do not trust hobby education or hobby schools. In a sense, they have this hierarchy where general education schools are the main, primary ones that are better and more important and then hobby education is below that, even though the teachers there have the same pedagogical high education, often work in general education schools in the morning and in hobby schools in the evening, but for some reason the work they do in hobby schools is less valuable in the eyes of these education managers.” (Provider of hobby education)

Non-formal learning professionals in turn feel that hobby education is often considered more important than other youth work activities:

“I’ve had a lot of arguments, particularly with hobby education professionals over the belief that hobby education is more important than youth work. Well, I don’t know whether we should think like this, like what is important and what is less important, who does a better job and who doesn’t. All of this is ... these arguments are pointless.” (Educationalist)

Providers of non-formal education perceive a **lack of trust** in the teachers and instructors of this type of learning and the education provided by them. A teacher mainly trusts another teacher, not a youth worker or a hobby group instructor.

Interviews with policy makers revealed the fact that integration is expected to be the most beneficial if both types of study converge towards each other. Thus, on one

hand, it is found that teachers and heads of schools should change their opinions of and attitudes towards non-formal learning, i.e. the current doubts about the value of non-formal learning should be reassessed. On the other hand, policy makers believe that non-formal learning instructors and youth workers must consider that learning outcomes must be measurable and assessable: there is a need for clear assessment criteria and methods. Educationalists emphasise that practical skills require formative and descriptive assessment.

Overall, there is a need for greater clarity with regard to the results of learning taking place in various environments. One of the main obstacles to the integration of non-formal and formal learning is grading, which may cause conflicts. The question of how to bring the assessment systems of non-formal and formal learning closer together while maintaining the specific nature of non-formal learning remains.

To date, there have been no common **quality requirements for non-formal learning** against which both students and school staff could assess the quality of education. The students interviewed stressed that recognition of non-formal learning outcomes should be based on the quality of the activity and not all non-formal learning activities are sufficient for them to be recognised upon completing curricula:

“Yes, this could be taken into account, but I don’t know any good ways of proving to the school that you have attended a hobby group and actually participated in it. /.../ Some hobby groups may be very easy. There should be some kind of supervision.” (Student)

The interview with the youth workers’ focus group revealed that they also perceive a need to make their work more purposeful, which would make its value more understandable to teachers and heads of schools:

“I feel like for the last couple of years I’ve mainly been explaining to people who are new in this field [new colleagues] that the activity must be purposeful and well-considered - somehow, it is very difficult for employees, particularly newcomers, to understand.” (Youth worker)

Additionally, youth workers emphasised that non-formal learning practitioners should themselves recognise their value in supporting young people’s development.

Unequal access of students to non-formal learning

Even though there are many providers of non-formal learning in Estonia, students are not granted uniform and equal access to the opportunities they offer. A considerable number of students do not participate in hobby education or hobby activities (see more in Chapter 6). One problem pointed out by the students interviewed was that **students must pay** for the majority of non-formal learning and if recognition thereof becomes a widespread practice, it is not clear who would pay for students’ participation in hobby groups in such case:

“Our schools are largely free of charge. If students were to attend different hobby groups, should they pay for these themselves? Would they be free of charge? “Would the school pay for it, for example? How would that work?” (Student)

As degree studies are free of charge for students in Estonia, there is a need to consider how well recognition of paid non-formal learning activities complies with this principle and how all students are ensured the opportunity to participate in non-formal learning regardless of their family’s socioeconomic situation. There should not be a situation where only the students who are able to pay for participating in non-formal learning themselves benefit from the integration of non-formal and formal learning.

In addition to the socioeconomic background of families, availability of non-formal learning opportunities depends on where students live. The opportunities of participating in hobby education and youth work activities vary by regions and students may not find an activity that interests them from their home area. Schools that are located further away from main centres have more difficulties in cooperating with non-formal learning partners in distant locations:

“It is not our worry but our downside that the larger sports and music schools are located 40-45 kilometres away and this kind of closer cooperation would be very convenient for students if the building were located a street away.” (Teacher)

Obstacles related to legal standards

According to the heads of schools and teachers interviewed, the legal system regulating the field of education recognises competencies acquired through non-formal learning. However, schools have encountered problems with fulfilling the requirements of the national curriculum, preparing the students' daily schedule and covering labour and other costs in relation to wider implementation of integration.

Hobby education lessons have been added to students' timetables in some schools that have practiced integration for a longer period of time, or where cooperation between the school and a hobby school or another provider of non-formal learning is closer. Students and parents have given positive feedback on this, as this kind of organisation of students' daily routine offer them more flexible non-formal and formal education and facilitates the integration of the two forms of learning and cooperation between teachers and instructors. This also helps students to save time in order to attend a hobby group or a sports class after school.

The Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act¹⁰³ and the regulation on health protection requirements for the daily schedule and study organisation of schools¹⁰⁴ regulate students' weekly study load but sets no direct restrictions on the duration of the school day. According to heads of schools, the current legal norms are still **too rigid** when it comes to the permitted duration of a student's school day and lessons.

If hobby education lessons are added to the school's curriculum, school days will become too long, even though it would include the non-formal learning activities that students would otherwise engage in after school. According to the experience of providers of hobby education, each individual non-formal learning lesson (for example as a hobby activity or an elective subject) should **be longer** (e.g., to develop acting, debating and other skills), but school lessons are still mostly 45 minutes long.

If non-formal learning taking place in schools would count towards completing the national general education curriculum, it would be even more complicated to draw lines between different lessons and measure the duration of school days according to the current legal norms:

“If you...include in the curricula ... hobby education lessons...then they'll say no, this can't be part of the child's day, because calculation [of the length of the school day] is based on general education and you need to follow the regulations of the Minister of social affairs regarding the child's day and duration of lessons.” (Head of school)

103 Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act RT I, 16.04.2021, 7.

104 Regulation of the Minister of Social Affairs on health protection requirements for the daily schedule and study organisation of schools. RT I, 24.04.2020, 9.

Offering of non-formal learning opportunities as elective subjects is restricted by the **small volume of elective subjects** in national general education curricula. This problem is particularly evident **in the third school stage and Russian-language schools**.

According to the heads of schools and teachers, integration would be easier if it would be mainly based on the competencies of the curricula and the subject rather than subject-related learning outcomes. Namely, out-of-school hobby groups and sports classes are also suitable for obtaining the competencies required in the curriculum if they do not directly contribute to the achievement of subject-related learning outcomes. At the same time, schools fear that such an approach may make it difficult for schools to explain why they have not taught these skills in mandatory subject lessons:

“For me, the problem currently lies in the third school stage. If we look at the curriculum and the distribution of lessons, the choice is very-very limited. Naturally, if we take a competence-based approach, it is possible [to organise studies around competences rather than number of courses] and we have chosen to do that. This is only possible until someone starts examining it in detail and reading it: “but you have not completed manual training and technology” and, for instance, when five courses or five lessons [requirement in the national curriculum] have not been completed. This requires an analysis and a change of approach.” (Head of school)

Difficulties with assessing non-formal learning outcomes

Regardless of whether participation in non-formal learning is recognised as an elective subject, as creative work in the third school stage or as part of some subject, it is difficult for the providers of non-formal learning to grade students' performance.

According to representatives of hobby education and educationalists, it is often difficult to define what the student actually learnt as a result of their participation in the learning, i.e., the outcome of learning. Youth workers have also noted in previous studies that they have difficulties with making sense of learning outcomes.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, in order to plan successful integration, there is a need to consider who should carry out the assessment and in what form the learning outcomes should be assessed.

Assessing non-formal learning outcomes as part of compulsory subjects on the basis of common grounds is most complicated, because these subjects are generally graded. As recognising non-formal learning is often built on proving students' participation according to the current practice, but the knowledge acquired is not tested, the nature of and the extent to which the student has actually achieved the learning outcomes is not clear. Therefore, recognising out-of-school learning is more common in the case of creative subjects (e.g., music and art) and PE, as these use formative or undifferentiated assessment more frequently. This problem does not exist in the case of elective subjects or elective courses, because in this case only completion of the subject is registered.

Youth workers and representatives of hobby education emphasised that creative work in the third school stage should be assessed formatively throughout. Above all, when a creative work has an external supervisor, the supervisor feels that the quality of work is also appreciated.

105 Paabort. H. (2020). Mapping of Estonian youth centres 2020, part II. Association of Estonian Open Youth Centres. Available at: https://ank.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Noortekeskuste-kaardistus_osa-2_EestiANK.pdf.

In the case of certain fields and techniques of creative work or technical fields in particular, school staff may not be able to assess the quality of student projects correctly at all. According to representatives of hobby education, undifferentiated assessment should be preferred based on the learner-centred approach, because this would reduce students' stress and turn the attention to what is learned (e.g., the experience, skill or knowledge gained).

Teachers occasionally feel pressure from parents and also instructors to completely release a student who is simultaneously engaged in in-depth hobby education from completing a school subject related to this field. This most frequently occurs in relation to PE, but also music studies. In such a case, the school requires clarity in relation to the skills that are actually acquired in hobby education or sports training. Then, it is possible to decide on the extent to which the school can take it into account.

Non-formal learning instructors and parents do not often understand that the objectives of subjects are broader than what is learned as part of one specific non-formal activity:

“In some ways, teachers feel pressure from either parents, coaches or sports clubs as if ... these gymnasts need to be released from lessons, because there is some sort of risk of an injury if they engage in other kinds of activities there. However, in such cases, teachers try to explain why it is important to participate in PE classes.”
(Teacher)

Schools often require that students submit a certificate from the provider of non-formal learning on the completion of a certain course or activity. Universities, hobby schools with training licences and other course organisers have these kind of certificates, but the more non-formal learning is (e.g., organisation of a one-off performance), the more complicated it is for the student to find someone to issue them the required certificate.

Possibilities for overcoming obstacles

The parties interviewed believe that in order to integrate non-formal and formal learning and remove the current obstacles, there is a need to make an effort and take decisions at both state and local levels.

State level

Creating and leading the implementation of a general framework for integrating non-formal learning

Different interviewed stakeholders expect the Ministry of Education and Research to lead the process of creating and implementing a general framework for the systematic integration of formal and non-formal learning.

Creating a common integration framework means defining the **principles of integration, recognition of learning outcomes, and quality criteria**. Students in particular see the need to establish a quality control mechanism for providers of non-formal learning to ensure that the knowledge gained is of sufficient quality for it to be recognised upon completing the formal curriculum.

The task of the Ministry of Education and Research is to see the bigger picture and **support and enable cooperation at a local level**. The interviews revealed that there are already many good grassroots initiatives in Estonia, but they do not have the power to change the system. Therefore, there is a need to create a central framework that would enable the benefits of integrating non-formal learning reach every school and student.

Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities believes that the state also has a major role in leading the creation of **education centres**. This means that different learning opportunities will be available to students in a more compact format and from one location in the future, requiring less time to move from one place of learning to another.

Meaningful inclusion

So far it has been difficult to get different parties to cooperate. Actors of the hobby education focus group have experienced a lack of opportunities to discuss the topic with general education professionals and help them overcome fears related to integration:

“We have been to many roundtable discussions on integration at the Ministry of Education and Research and every time you see that you once again integrate with the same people from hobby education. But if we talk about integrating with general education, then it [general education professionals] is not at the table. The fears tend to be theirs and they are much less willing than us.” (Provider of hobby education)

The policy makers interviewed perceive a clear need to include all stakeholders and maintain a constant discussion with them to find the best solutions starting from introducing the main topics and formulating solutions for them to developing implementation measures. It is understood that development of discussions requires clear and energetic leadership and management.

Expanding the possibilities for recognising non-formal learning in national curricula

The national curriculum and the school curricula prepared on the basis thereof form the study framework, which is mandatory for teachers, but they can choose the teaching methods themselves. Two proposals were made in the interviews with regard to the development of national general education curricula;

Recognition of the learning outcomes of non-formal learning would be easier if:

- 1) the **learning outcomes of school curricula** were described in a **complex and field-based manner**. Too detailed and subject-based learning outcomes are an obstacle to integration. The learning outcomes of non-formal learning must also be clearly measurable and understandable;
- 2) the **assessment criteria** for learning outcomes were clearly defined in the non-formal learning curricula. One option is to adopt a descriptive assessment system (e.g., the student has studied piano for two years or organised three events), which would be supplemented with a portfolio that provides the detailed content of these activities. It is important that this **assessment is conducted together with the learner**, so they could analyse their development and the skills they have acquired themselves. Self-assessment and analysis are difficult for young people to carry out and they need support in this.

One regulative option is to make participation in non-formal learning a **mandatory part of the curriculum**. One benefit of this approach is considered to be the fact that many young people are not aware of the opportunities they have for participating in non-formal learning; plus they do not have the curiosity or interest in seeking different opportunities. Considering the potential benefits of non-formal learning to learners, the interviewees see a need to encourage young people's participation in non-formal learning:

“I think that this is indeed too important to be left completely voluntary. Still, there are many people who do not show initiative. I don’t want to blame anyone, but it is simply complicated. /.../ And well, we do send people to conscript service, for example. I think that compared to this one [mandatory] school subject where you have to try out some sort of hobby education [chosen by the student] is certainly not much of a forcing.” (Representative of the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities)

As explained by the interviewee, non-formal learning should retain its voluntary nature – the choice of the exact activity would be up to the student – but everyone would need to choose some non-formal education activity as part of the formal education curriculum. Stakeholders did not see it reasonable to force someone to participate in a hobby education or activity that they do not like. In such a case, the student would not benefit from it and in the long term, this would cause a drop in the quality of hobby education, because the people who participate in it do not actually wish to do so. Therefore, students should have the opportunity to replace the selected activity with another.

Developing a non-formal learning register

Providers of non-formal education do not use a shared information management system for registering their activities and the participants therein.

As learning is most formalised in hobby schools, they make the most frequent use of study information systems. The Studium study information system has a separate version for hobby schools, where they can manage student lists, information on people who pay tuition fees, etc. and forward the required information straight to EHIS or the Tax and Customs Board for the income tax refund report.¹⁰⁶

Recognition of non-formal learning would be made easier by establishment of a register (education passport), which would provide schools with an overview of students and their participation in various activities. This would also help students to get a thorough overview of both non-formal and formal learning in which they participate over the course of their lifetime and they could use this information to prove their competencies:

“I think all of the groups, hobby groups and whatever should be listed for all students in EHIS or some sort of a document management system, regardless of how varied this field is, so that students could see that they have completed them. They can use it to print out information, use it in character references and present it where necessary. There could also be a short description, for example, of the main things they learned or the topics addressed in these hobby groups.” (Provider of hobby education)

“One advantage we have been aware of for a long time is the database, EHIS system recording everything [students have] done in one place, because children often do not say where they go and what they do in school. Then, they can say to the hobby school: “Yes, please register me there”, so that the portfolio would be uniform: that they attended a sports class for one year, an art school for one year, studied advanced maths for one year and then participated in a choir again ... That they would leave behind this nice path and then the decision-makers can decide what to do with it.” (Teacher)

The interview with policy makers revealed that they also see the need to combine different information systems into one single learning or education information

106 Studium’s hobby school module. Available at: <https://studium.com/huvikool/>.

infrastructure that records all learning experiences throughout the course of life. This aggregated information would help learners to get a comprehensive overview of how their skills and knowledge are gained:

“I believe that one of the starting points is an individual learning pathway. That I’m starting to get an overview of my ... Right now I [as a student] am collecting reports: a report from this school, that report. But this does not make a whole. To somehow use technology to create and show these links that if I’ve learned this thing in that school and I was released from studies there and I didn’t learn these things ... what I’ve become then. Right now it is assumed I can analyse myself and remember it. Some can do it and have learned to do it, but the majority are not able to analyse or get a bigger picture. Perhaps technology would be one thing that could help to gain this picture.” (Policy maker)

Upon creating a register, it is also worth considering its quality and supervision function. This means that the providers of non-formal learning whose activity meets the requirements established by the state can record their activities in the register:

“Perhaps this recognition could indeed be partial. /.../ in order to recognise hobby groups with state supervision. It is not possible to monitor all hobby groups /.../ so that if a hobby group instructor thinks that it is something very important and it could be recognised also in school, then it could be registered and supervised like this.” (Student)

Offering training to implementers of integration

The study revealed that heads of schools and teachers currently lack the knowledge and skills for recognising non-formal learning in studies. As teachers have a central role in the process, it is very important to train them to organise integration regarding their subject. One should start by training so-called integration experts, who would later pass on their knowledge and support implementation of integration.

In addition to training the teachers already working in schools, it is important for teacher training to support the integration of non-formal learning. Integration should become a normal and natural way for teachers to teach and learn together with their students:

“Perhaps this is not the place where we should engage in this in depth in school. For teachers, this should also be a usual and natural way of teaching and learning together with children. This could be something that institutions of higher education that offer teacher training or teacher training companies do.” (Head of school)

Local government level

Promoting cooperation at local level

Local governments have a central role in leading the integration of non-formal and formal learning as the manager and funder of the general education and hobby schools and youth centres in the region. The current experience shows that cooperation between providers of non-formal and formal learning is the smoothest in the regions where it is **strongly supported by local governments**:

“In order to facilitate this integration in local governments, there is a need to bring the three local government parties – formal education, hobby education and the official or the head of the local government – to one table and engage in this kind

of conscious activity that begins by mapping the situation and ends with comparing curricula, so as to build trust at that table.” (Provider of hobby education)

The key person in this process is the **education manager of the local government**, whose task is to maintain the network of the educational institutions in the region starting from nursery schools and ending with hobby schools and initiate joint activities. According to the representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities interviewed, such networks have already been created and if they have managed to reach a shared understanding, things have also started to move. It is also important for the education manager of the local government to be an **equal partner to the head of school** in terms of their competence.

In order to achieve cooperation, all of the actors must be **ready and willing to contribute**. In relation to upper secondary schools being brought under the Ministry of Education and Research, some regions are reluctant to cooperate with the new state gymnasiums.¹⁰⁷ Human relations are very important at a local level and one of the tasks of the education manager of the local government is bringing all of the parties to one table:

“Local governments’ initial attitude towards the state gymnasiums is quite reluctant, depending on the local government. They are now used to it, as practically all of the counties are represented: state gymnasiums are established everywhere. I believe that such an attitude (which is not found everywhere), that this [upper secondary school in the area] is the state’s business now and here’s how things are going to be ... that they are reluctant to cooperate with these future or remaining or established basic schools. This again depends largely on the head of school. /.../ human relations are what put things in their place.” (Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities)

Setting integration as a **priority** in the **local government’s development plan** also contributes to achieving the goal. Cooperation is also supported if the **local government specialists** coordinating different fields are gathered under the **same institution**. The interviews highlighted Tallinn as an example of this, where youth work organisation is one of the tasks of the Education Department.

Integration of non-formal learning can also extend beyond the borders of local governments. In such cases, different approaches by local governments may become barriers to participation of a student from another local government in non-formal learning and funding thereof. A representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities mentioned that the circular municipalities created as a result of the administrative reform do not always support children attending a hobby school in a county centre or using the youth work opportunities offered there and the municipality where they live later receives an invoice from another local government.

Therefore, the integration of non-formal learning requires **good cooperation across the borders of local governments** and a shared understanding that funding non-formal learning must be centred around the student who uses this service.

Therefore, **the education managers of local government associations** also play an important role in leading integration and holding the education network together. According to the Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, some years ago, a little more than half of the counties had hired an

¹⁰⁷ i.e., national upper secondary schools which the state is actively promoting and establishing since 2010. See: <https://www.hm.ee/en/education-research-and-youth-affairs/general-education/general-education-estonia#upper-secondary-scho>.

education manager. A good example pointed out is the Ida-Viru Entrepreneurship Centre, which includes an education cluster for training the county's teachers and organising joint events.

Creating mutual trust and proceeding from a common goal

One prerequisite of successful integration is cooperation at a people level, as this creates trust in one another's activities and encourages people to work towards a shared objective. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers and non-formal learning instructors immediately involved in integration communicate and discuss cooperation opportunities with one another:

“Perhaps the first step needn't be recognising these learning outcomes in the documents and curricula, but trust in these teachers, between people: starting by sitting down at the same table to review things like: “Hey, what do you teach in the hobby school?” and what I teach here, which parts overlap, how we recognise things, so that it would result in this kind of trust. I think this is important as a first step. Knowing that there are documents in some register is great and ultimately necessary, but these people have to actually sit down together for a moment and talk about the student.” (Provider of hobby education)

In the case of cooperation, both entry into general agreements and practical organisation of studies are necessary, including finding time to come together and preparing a timetable for the daily schedule of both teachers and students.

Activities at school level

Inclusion of students and parents

In order to expand integration, students also need to be involved, because many young people today are very knowledgeable and can provide good advice. Cooperation is also needed between parents and the school's board of trustees. In order to achieve a good result, it is important to listen to the opinions of all participants and consider them in one's work. Even though this inevitably makes the process time-consuming, it is essential for achieving a good result.

Appointing a person responsible for organising integration in school

Cooperation requires an effort and integration of non-formal learning is considered a time-consuming activity. Several focus groups found that schools should have a designated employee who leads the integration and is responsible for the related administrative tasks:

“Who is the person in a general education school who integrates non-formal and formal education? Who will bring these things together and review these data, prepare different documents where needed or retrieve things from these databases? Or who will organise this cooperation system in terms of information exchange?” (Provider of hobby education)

Reviewing and assessing certificates and reports related to non-formal learning may be very time-consuming in the case of a large school. Students think that schools should hire a separate employee for this:

“But then who controls, reviews and reads it ... Perhaps we should hire a person who deals with such a curriculum in school, because I know that the workload of the director of studies in our school is great.” (Student)

7.7. Prerequisites for integration

Based on the theoretical framework of the analysis and the information collected during the interviews, the following conditions must be met for successful integration of non-formal and formal learning (**Error! Reference source not found.**):

- actors of both non-formal and formal learning have adopted a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching;
- actors of non-formal and formal learning have a shared understanding of the nature of the integration and a framework for flexible integration has been established;
- the integration process has a clear leader/s, whose task is to support creation of trust between actors and help the actors of both non-formal and formal learning to implement integration.



Figure 5. Prerequisites for the integration of non-formal and formal learning

Learner-centred approach

One central prerequisite for integrating non-formal and formal learning is proceeding from the learner-centred view. A person is a whole and any kind of learning is important and valuable from the perspective of their course of life. The thinking that learning can happen anywhere and that this is the greater and broader future of our education, which would ultimately bring benefits to both individuals and society as whole should be increasingly promoted.

The educationalists interviewed stressed the need to consistently reconstruct the education system where some types of learning are considered more important than others, even though it is all the same from the perspective of the learner.

Learning and supervising learning should be stressed in **public discussions** and in the context of integration. This way, hobby education instructors, youth workers, museum educators, etc. would recognise themselves in this process.

Taking into account the learner and their learning helps to focus on the objective of cooperation and the whole integration process. Forgetting this makes it easy to get tangled in all kinds of organisational problems:

“I sometimes feel that the person who is being forgotten about is the child, the learner themselves. They are at the centre of this, regardless of the education institution or hobby group from whose perspective it is viewed. Sometimes it feels

like the teacher, the instructor is more important than the person with whom they wish to pass on this experience. If we were to make this clear, set a shared goal and stop hogging the blanket and develop the child's skills and knowledge together, then it would already be a great plus." (Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities)

Student-centredness also ensures that solutions are sought together for students with special educational needs or disabilities for them to be able to participate in out-of-school learning activities based on their interests.

It is crucial to define both the justification of the integration ("Why is it necessary?") and the objective ("What do we want to achieve?") as clearly and unambiguously as possible¹⁰⁸.

A learner-centred approach does not only mean considering the wider objective of the integration, but also shaping the whole process by involving learners. In several of the interviews conducted for this study, interviewees stressed the importance of involving young people themselves, but also the need to ask them how they want to learn.

Agreeing on an integration framework

In order to implement integration, actors need to have a clear and common understanding of the non-formal learning outcomes that are recognised in formal learning and how they are recognised (the model it is based on). This also means having a common understanding of non-formal learning and its objectives and tasks.

The analysis showed that Estonian schools already apply different integration models and according to the interviewees, flexibility is highly necessary in this regard. Owing to Estonia's low population density, the basic school network is quite dispersed and non-formal learning opportunities are not uniformly ensured across Estonia:

"This [recognition of out-of-school learning as elective subjects] will certainly remain a custom solution, perhaps it is somehow possible within the limits of one county ... but in terms of local governments it is certainly a custom solution, because the diversity [of non-formal learning opportunities] is not equally ensured everywhere." (Representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities)

Still, smart solutions for expanding the possibilities of non-formal learning can be developed in every region in cooperation with other schools and local governments, so that young people in the region would have more opportunities to enrich their educational path. Additionally, digital approaches have been actively developed (e.g., e-courses).

According to the representative of the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities, one opportunity that has not been used much is to gather information on the people who have recently moved to rural areas and work remotely. These may include people who can be included, for example, in expanding the opportunities of non-formal learning on site. Namely, one of the obstacles to expanding the range of hobby activities in rural areas is the lack of instructors.

108 For instance, the justification of integration could be worded as follows: out-of-school learning is valuable and needs to be recognised in formal education, as it supports people in getting on in life. Wording of the objective of integration: every child must have, starting from the first grade, the opportunity to make choices based on their interests in the learning process and to have their non-formal learning experiences recognised upon completing the national curriculum.

A flexible approach is also necessary from the perspective of very large schools (with more than 1 000 students). As these schools are afraid of a large administrative load in relation to integration of non-formal learning due to the abundance of cooperation partners, a solution needs to be found that is as optimal and easily manageable as possible.

Leadership

As implementation of non-formal learning requires cooperation of many different parties, the whole process needs a specific leader. Leadership is required at the state, local and school levels alike.

The leader's task is to consider and explain the main objective of integration, propose and implement solutions that support integration and ensure that problems hindering the implementation of integration are solved.

Successful cooperation requires mutual trust, of which there is currently a lack between non-formal and formal learning actors. Trust can be built gradually via communication. Based on the interviews, providers of non-formal learning are more enthusiastic and ready to contribute to integration than formal learning actors. As the responsibility for practical organisation of integration mainly lies with the side of formal learning, it is understandable that there is more confusion among heads of schools and teachers. They require more information about non-formal learning and clearer and more practical guidelines on how to recognise non-formal learning outcomes upon completing the curriculum.

There is a clear need to establish broader objectives and explain the need for integration under the leadership of the state level. The Ministry of Education and Research has the leverage to amend national curricula and increase the freedom of choice of schools and students therein (above all by giving a greater freedom of choice in basic school curricula), but also to regulate the non-formal learning recognition process. The state also has the power to develop a person-based register that is linked to EHIS for recognising non-formal learning. Creating a qualification system for hobby education and hobby activity instructors would increase the trust of teachers and parents in the quality of the activities.

The main objective of leadership at the county and local government level is also to facilitate trust between cooperating parties. The interviews highlighted the impact of human relations, which above all determines in smaller communities whether cooperation works or not. Formal learning teachers must trust the way a hobby school teacher or a hobby group instructor manages the studies and ensures their quality. Such topics need to be jointly discussed to reach a common understanding. Then, it is possible to continue with integration and implement the required changes in both the school's curriculum and the activities of non-formal education providers where necessary.

At the school level, directors of studies take a central role, as they manage the school's study process. Cooperation is labour-intensive, particularly at the beginning, and this must be addressed separately in every school. At the school level, integration primarily means gathering and sharing information, managing cooperation networks and entering into agreements, preparing cooperation documents, managing databases, instructing and counselling students, parents and teachers, etc.

“Whereas teachers cannot start doing it independently, because it must be properly fixed and the school's management must have a leading and supportive role. The key person here is the director of studies, who coordinates it, this



integration, and manages the curriculum in general. This must be a purposeful activity, not something that's done just for the sake of it." (Head of school)

The current education organisation has not developed a habit in teachers and students to plan the individual learning process, which is why successful integration requires development of a special support network. As teachers are the ones whose work integration immediately influences, they require support and guidelines on how to purposefully plan and implement it in relation to their subject. The students who must be guided towards individual analysis of the experiences they would like to gain in a non-formal environment and the ways it is linked to formal learning need separate instruction.



8. Summary

Appreciation and acknowledgement of the knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal learning forms a considerable part of learner-centred approach and **supporting learning in various environments throughout the course of life**.

There are several understandings of non-formal learning. The results of this study confirm the conclusions of previous studies conducted in Estonia¹⁰⁹, according to which the education system continues to lack a common understanding of non-formal learning and its integration with formal learning.

Integration of non-formal learning with formal learning is seen as beneficial for students, teachers, the education system and society as a whole, but its implementation requires acknowledgement of the risks involved.

Participation in non-formal learning supports the development of the student's general competencies, self-realisation, development of entrepreneurial thinking and agency and later success in life. Recognition of the knowledge, skills and learning experiences acquired through non-formal learning in formal learning is a necessary step in implementing the learner-centred approach to education and development of individual learning pathways.

Integration brings the most benefits to students, as recognition of non-formal learning outcomes:

- supports students' learning in both formal and non-formal education,
- fosters the development of students' general competences,
- enhances students' reflection skills,
- increases students' motivation to participate in non-formal learning,
- makes the overall learning experience more enjoyable for students,
- supports students in understanding the value of all types of learning,
- enables students to use their time more optimally,
- reduces students' workload.

A smartly planned and systematic integration of non-formal learning is **also beneficial for teachers**, as diversification of learning and acquisition of new competencies via non-formal learning (incl. hobby education) supports their professional development. Additionally, integration of non-formal learning with formal learning may reduce teacher's workload as some students complete their subject (partly) through non-formal learning.

The systematic integration of non-formal learning helps to effectively utilize the **resources and infrastructure of the education system** and supports the fulfilment of several important tasks within the education system. These tasks include recognizing and supporting students' talents, providing a pleasant learning experience for students with educational special needs, and reducing language-based segregation in education. Through all these benefits, the integration of non-formal and formal learning supports the growth of young people as members of society and the realization of their potential.

109 See e.g. Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., Põlda, H. (2019). "Mitteformaalõppe tähenduse konstrueerimine poliitikadokumentides" [Construction of meaning of 'non-formal learning' in policy documents]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 7(1), 50–75.

Risks should be taken into account - currently approximately half of the students do not participate in non-formal learning. If this situation does not change, they will miss out on the benefits of non-formal learning and its integration. Analysis of the legal framework regulating the field and national curricula revealed that the legal framework allows for the recognition of non-formal learning in both general and vocational education. The legal regulations concerning educational institutions in Estonia are sufficiently flexible, allowing for various ways to integrate non-formal learning with formal education.

Basic schools and upper secondary schools may acknowledge out-of-school learning and activities that comply with the learning outcomes defined in the curriculum of the school as part of formal learning. Schools can decide themselves on the conditions and the method for recognising non-formal learning. Estonian schools have applied several methods for implementing non-formal learning upon completing their curricula based on their preferences, local non-formal learning opportunities and initiative and readiness for cooperation. **Such flexibility should be maintained also in the future**, as this is a way of supporting the varied opportunities for schools and students to cooperate with providers of non-formal learning and main professional autonomy.

The analysis revealed **four main ways of organising the cooperation of non-formal and formal learning actors**:

- 1) completing an elective basic school subject or an elective upper secondary school course outside the school;
- 2) performing the mandatory creative work of third school stage outside school;
- 3) recognising knowledge acquired through non-formal learning as part of the compulsory school curriculum;
- 4) implementation of part of the compulsory school curriculum in non-formal learning setting.

There are many examples of schools integrating non-formal learning, but the practices vary both within and across schools. The practice mainly depends on the readiness and interest of each school and subject teacher on the one hand and the employees of each hobby school or youth centre on the other hand to offer students more varied learning opportunities via cooperation.

Recognition of out-of-school activities is mostly agreed beforehand between the student, the non-formal learning provider and the school or a specific teacher. The rules of procedure and the requirements established for schools in relation to certificates and reports may vary greatly.

Upon implementing the integration of non-formal and formal learning, the **following main shortcomings were identified at the level of the education system**:

- 1) non-systematic approach - so far, there have been no clear goals, integration frameworks, and leaders, as well as a clear distribution of responsibilities at both the national and local levels. The Ministry of Education and Research, along with its subordinate institutions, is responsible for leading the achievement of the goals set in the education strategy, as well as planning measures and resources. However, the distribution of responsibilities for organizing integration between the state and local governments needs to be defined more clearly.
- 2) hidden hierarchies within the education system and distrust towards non-formal learning - formal education is considered (primarily from the perspective of those involved) as the primary focus in the education system, while the quality of non-formal



learning is questioned due to the lack of clear quality criteria and competency requirements for instructors.;

- 3) unequal access of students to non-formal learning - approximately half of the primary school students and one-third of the high school students participate in non-formal learning. Non-formal learning opportunities are often fee-based for students, and their availability varies unevenly across different regions.
- 4) legal restrictions – the national curriculum for basic schools does not provide sufficient opportunities for the third school stage or Russian-language schools to offer students a choice;
- 5) difficulties with assessing non-formal learning outcomes – the graded assessment used in formal learning is not generally suitable for assessing non-formal learning outcomes. There are no common agreements or a framework for assessing non-formal learning outcomes and recognising them in formal learning, including on procedures and documents. Further analysis should specify the extent of the need for distinguishing learner-centred assessment at the level of implementation and creating common assessment principles at the legal level;
- 6) just like learners may have all kinds of obstacles to participating in non-formal learning (limited access and/or time or a negative attitude), the same types of obstacles can also occur for actors involved in integration of non-formal learning. Acknowledgement of these obstacles and purposeful activities for elimination thereof is very important for achieving systematic integration.

Prerequisites for more extensive integration of non-formal and formal learning are as follows:

- 1) actors in both non-formal and formal learning have adopted a **learner-centred approach** to learning, teaching and instructing;
- 2) actors in non-formal and formal learning have a **shared understanding of the objectives, possibilities and organisation of the integration** and a framework for flexible integration;
- 3) the integration process has **(a) clear leader(s) at both the state and local levels** (incl. in local governments and education institutions), whose task is to cooperate in order to **facilitate trust** between the actors and **implementation of the integration**.

In order to expand the integration and implement a systemic view, the following activities are required **at the state level**:

- 1) creating a general legal and organisational framework for integrating non-formal learning by involving parties to the integration and leading the process. This means precisely worded and a more clear understanding of non-formal learning, its objectives, tasks, organisation and quality criteria and the possibilities of integrating it with formal learning. Doing so requires maintaining the flexibility of integration possibilities and considering the specificities and regional differences of education institutions upon offering non-formal learning opportunities;
- 2) expanding the possibilities of recognising non-formal learning in national curricula, which includes reviewing the learning outcomes of the curricula and describing the principles of recognising non-formal learning outcomes;
- 3) developing a (digital) non-formal learning registry, which reflects the non-formal and formal learning experiences of every student's learning pathway. This enables learners to gather all of the information about their learning pathway in one place and education institutions to obtain an overview of their participation in non-formal learning and previous learning. In doing so, it is crucial to consider a person's rights to share and control the information related to their learning;



- 4) planning national measures for training implementers of integration and sharing best practices at different levels, including in local governments and non-formal and formal learning institutions.

Activities required at the **local government** level:

- 1) strengthening of leadership in the cooperation of regional non-formal and formal learning actors, including setting this cooperation as a priority upon implementing a contemporary concept of learning in local governments' strategy documents, appointing a leader of the process and agreeing on the pattern of cooperation between the local government leader and the persons responsible for integration in non-formal and formal learning institutions;
- 2) building trust between non-formal and formal learning actors, agreeing on a shared objective and quality criteria and proceeding therefrom in entering into organisational agreements;
- 3) supporting and monitoring systematic integration;
- 4) providing an overview of the regional infrastructure where necessary and analysing the opportunities for cross-use thereof with the objective of enriching the integration of non-formal and formal learning and making it more systematic.

Activities required at the level of **education institutions and providers of non-formal learning**:

- 1) appointing a person responsible for organising systematic integration;
- 2) leading or participating in local cooperation networks in order to empower integration and building a local regional cooperation network together with non-formal learning providers where necessary;
- 3) determining clear bases of and processes for (e.g. in the school's curriculum) acknowledging and recognising participation in non-formal learning and its learning outcomes upon completing the school's curriculum;
- 4) supporting teachers and instructors in implementing the integration;
- 5) informing the public of the purposes of the integration and involving students and parents in the integration, increasing awareness of possibilities offered by integration for shaping each student's individual learning pathway where necessary.



Annex 1. Theoretical starting points

Participation of young people in non-formal learning over the course of their life

A young person's learning experiences and individual learning pathway have an important role throughout the course of life and this is also specified in the Education Strategy 2021-2035. Entering the labour market and the first labour market experience are important, because this affects self-perception and expectations and shapes career possibilities. The cumulative effect of negative and positive experience continues throughout the course of life. If a young person does not gain a meaningful experience of working life and participation in non-formal learning does not offer balancing support in addition to the work-centred form of self-realisation, their mental health will be at risk.

Pursuant to the project's problem definition (see Chapter 3.1 "Terms of reference of the analysis"), one of the tasks of non-formal learning is to support (young people in) degree studies in order to develop a sufficient knowledge and skills. The second task is to contribute to the development of general competencies, so that the person could cope in their personal and professional life. At the same time, human capital is not sufficient to successfully compete on the labour market and find one's place – the appropriate training must also be visible to the decision makers on the labour market. Therefore, there must be a possibility to prove completing thereof also to employers and job agencies.

To date formal learning reports have served as one basis for the **employer** to reliably assess the employee's knowledge and skills acquired through studies before they commence work¹¹⁰. Based on the theory of human capital¹¹¹, education provides the skills required to better navigate the labour market or, from the perspective of the employer, information for screening candidates who are otherwise equal, provided that the education level acquired serves as a signal that proves, in addition to productivity, other characteristics that are difficult to measure, such as ability to learn and dedication¹¹². According to the theory of credentials¹¹³, a degree study diploma may also function as a symbolic value¹¹⁴ or something that gives a legitimate opportunity to restrict access to some positions with higher salary, for instance¹¹⁵.

110 Kazjulja, M., Saar, E. (2014). "Haridustaseme mõju edule tööturul" R. Eamets (ed.), *Muutuv majandus ja tööturg*, 116–132. Tallinn: Statistics Estonia.

111 Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research.

112 Stiglitz, J. E. (1975). "The theory of 'screening', education and the distribution of income." *American Economic Review*, 65, 552–578; Grubb, W. N. (1993). "Further tests of screening on education and observed ability". *Economics of Education Review*, 12, 125–136; Spence, M. (1973). "Job market signaling". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87, 355; Arkes, J. (1999). "What do educational credentials signal and why employers value credentials?" *Economics of Education Review*, 18, 133–141.

113 Collins, R. (1979). "The credential society". New York: Academic Press.

114 Bridges, W. P. (1996). "Educational credentials and the labour market: An inter-industry comparison". A. Kerckhoff (Ed.), *Generating social stratification. Toward a new research agenda*. Oxford: Westview Press, 173-199.

115 Brown, D. K. (1995). *Degrees of control: a sociology of educational expansion and occupational credentialism*. New York: Teachers College Press; Weeden, K. A. (2002). "Why Do Some Occupations Pay More than Others? Social Closure and Earnings Inequality in the United States". *American Journal of Sociology*, 108, 55-101; Bills, D. B. (2003). "Credentials, signals, and screens: Explaining the relationship between schooling and job assignment". *Review of Educational Research*, 73, 441-469.



Estonia is among the countries where the impact of the level of education on risk of unemployment and position is not great and influences salaries to a relatively small degree¹¹⁶. The experience of non-formal learning can be effective both in terms of professional knowledge and skills and the development of general competencies, but it is more difficult to convincingly prove than formal education – it is not clear how the recruiter interprets what is written in the CV under the information on training or hobbies.

Employers, but also the state usually consider training events that are directly associated with work more useful. However, in some workplaces, completing a specific training or hobby activity may provide a direct competitive advantage, allowing, for instance, to use a life style-based approach to clients and cooperation partners or a better understanding of the employer's products, services and target market. Thus, in some circumstances, experience of non-formal learning, including participation in hobby education, may be directly applicable on the labour market, not to mention development of general competencies and agency.

As it is not possible to convincingly prove non-formal learning experiences beforehand, the benefits gained therefrom are revealed during practical application of the skills and knowledge obtained. However, this may prove to be costly for the employer or they may not see the benefits. Thus, the possibility of assessing the previous experience of a future employee *ex ante* becomes an important prerequisite for ensuring that the job is an appropriate fit for the employee.

Therefore, in order to recognise non-formal learning experiences throughout the course of life, they need to be **certified** and **documented**. The employee may not always realise or foresee how to implement non-formal learning experiences in work and in such a case the applicant must explain it. To do this, they must be able to create these links themselves, which is why the way a person understands and reflects the experiences they have gained throughout life is of key importance.

Recognising non-formal learning experiences may be important when proving the fulfilment of the prerequisites for **commencing** (further) **studies** or **completing a curriculum**, e.g. instead of a course paper or an exam. Here, the key is also the person's ability to proactively describe which of their experiences may be needed and can be proved. As people have different experiences and styles of reflection, it may still **create** and **increase inequality**: some of the people with similar non-formal learning experiences emphasises the knowledge they gained through non-formal learning and notifies the relevant labour market and educational institutions thereof (e.g. the consultant at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, the employer, school representatives, lecturers and teachers). Others do not do it and must do double work upon completing the curriculum on account of that.

Therefore, it can be said that the **development of the ability to reflect** is one of the most important bases for recognition of learning taking place in different places and forms throughout the course of life. A **standardised system** of informing people of one's learning experiences and recognition thereof could offer more equal opportunities.

However, standardisation entails the risk that educational and labour market institutions take over the life-world belonging to a person's private sphere¹¹⁷, leaving no room for individual choice. The Estonian Education Information System already includes participation in degree studies, hobby schools and labour market trainings and thus, there is no possibility of hiding one's learning pathway from institutions. For instance, a learning pathway consisting of many different learning episodes may leave an impression of restlessness, lack of determination and convolutedness. At the same time, this information could come with a seal of reliability.

116 Kazjulja, M., Saar, E. (2014). "Haridustaseme mõju edule tööturul" R. Eamets (ed.), *Muutuv majandus ja tööturg*, 116–132. Tallinn: Statistics Estonia.

117 Habermas, J. (1962, English translation 1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger. Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press



There is a need to consider a person's rights to share and control the information related to their learning.

A student developing a general **readiness for life-long learning**, i.e. an attitude that enables to **value learning throughout one's own life course** and that of others, is even more important for recognising learning taking place in different places and forms throughout life. Therefore, studies can be continued or returned to throughout life and this also contributes to noticing and acknowledgement of learning. From the perspective of integrating non-formal and formal learning, it is particularly important to understand the sentiment and attitudes of **representatives of an infrastructure** that enables and recognises learning throughout their course of life, including towards different forms of non-formal learning and its possible benefits.

The **openness and personal readiness** of teachers, non-formal learning practitioners, employers and decision makers directly involved in better integration to adopt new work practices and methods in the case of targeting, assessing and recognition of learning alike forms a separate aspect. Therefore, the following dimensions need to be activated in order to recognise learning taking place in different places and forms throughout one's life course:

- 1) each learner's readiness for lifelong learning and appreciation thereof in the case of oneself and the others;
- 2) developing an reflection ability that supports understanding the learning experience;
- 3) documentability of learning experiences;
- 4) a (standardised) system of recognising learning experiences (in which the learner has agency) in terms of educational institutions, labour market institutions and the state;
- 5) positive attitudes of representatives of institutions enabling and recognising learning towards lifelong learning, including different learning methods and readiness for self-improvement.

It is also important to value learning as **meaningful during the moment it is happening** but also **in forward-looking manner**, understanding it as a part of a person's individual **learning pathway** and in the context of possible future need for recognising it – by attributing continuity to isolated learning episodes and understanding current or previous learning in the context of **future working life** (or another societal activity)

Based on this framework, the conceptual starting points of the project are **learner-centredness** and from the perspective thereof it is important to understand the **barriers to participation**, which could be overcome by better integration of formal and non-formal learning among other methods. **Assessment** of the knowledge acquired and the **cooperation and trust** between the parties are important dimensions from the perspective of increasing the **visibility of participation in non-formal learning**

Learner-centredness

One approach to theorising the efficiency and impact of policies is the so-called **policy pathway method**¹¹⁸. This focuses on the fields of different levels where policy-making and implementation occurs. Therefore, studying policy pathways in the framework of this project would enable to explain how the implementation of the policies and measures developed at

¹¹⁸ Rizvi, F., Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. London: Routledge; Cort, P. (2014). "Trailing the unpredictable pathways of European Union lifelong learning policy: methodological challenges". M. Milana and J. Holford (Eds.), *Adult education policy and the European Union: theoretical and methodological issues*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 127-140; Melo, S., Holford, J. (2015). *Policy trails as part of the Light in Europe project*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham; Maiztegui-Oñate, C., Moro, A., Solabarrieta, J., Roosalu, T., Taru, M., Rosa Santibáñez, R. (2020). *Report on successful educational programmes (based on national case studies)*. Horizon 2020 ENLIVEN project WP1 Report (D1.2). Available at: https://h2020enliven.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/enliven-d1.2_revised-feb-2020.pdf.

the European Union level and achieving the respective objectives (more systematic integration of non-formal and formal learning) happens in Estonia at the state level and subsequently at the local government level, taking into account the impact of the specific social context of each level. However, the project focuses on young learners, which means that young people are not addressed as the objects of education policy or, more precisely, the target of the integration of non-formal and formal learning¹¹⁹, i.e. future members of society, who need to be 'shaped', but as independent subjects with agency¹²⁰ (Figure 6). Additionally the focus is not on learners' shortcomings (gaps in knowledge and skills) but, based on the critical pedagogy of Freire¹²¹, their strengths.

Therefore, shaping and acquiring competencies is not sufficient for success in society, but it is also important to **develop learners' abilities, support their motivation and create possibilities that are adapted to personal learning objectives.**¹²² The Education Strategy 2021-2035 also sees the teacher increasingly as an instructor and a mentor, who supports the development of a self-managing learner.

the meso level (educational institutions) and the state and local

¹¹⁹ Taru, M., Pilve, E., Kaasik, P. (2015). *Noorsootöö Eestis. 19. sajandi keskpaigast kuni 21. sajandi esimese kümnendi lõpuni: ajalooline ülevaade*. Tallinn: Estonian Youth Work Centre. Available at: <https://entk.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Noorsootöö-Eestis.pdf>.

¹²⁰ Rämmer, A., Kivimäe, A., Žuravljova, M., Kötsi, K. (2021). *Noortekeskse lähenemise teoreetiline alus: taust, kontseptsioon ja selle kõlapind Eestis* [Theoretical concept of a youth-centered approach in the context of open youth work: a research report]. University of Tartu. Available at: https://sisu.ut.ee/sites/default/files/ntelg/files/nkl_teoreetiline_alus_final_1.pdf;

Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 9(1), 60–87; Smith, N. C. (2017). *Students perceptions of learner agency: A phenomenographic inquiry in to the lived learning experiences of high school students. A Dissertation*. The College of Professional Studies. Boston.

¹²¹ Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.

¹²² Williamson, H. (2018). "Effective interventions for unemployed young people: social innovation or paradigm shift? / Facing trajectories from school to work: towards a capability-friendly youth policy in Europe". *European Journal of Social Work*, 21:4, 628–629, DOI: 10.1080/13691457.2018.1434255

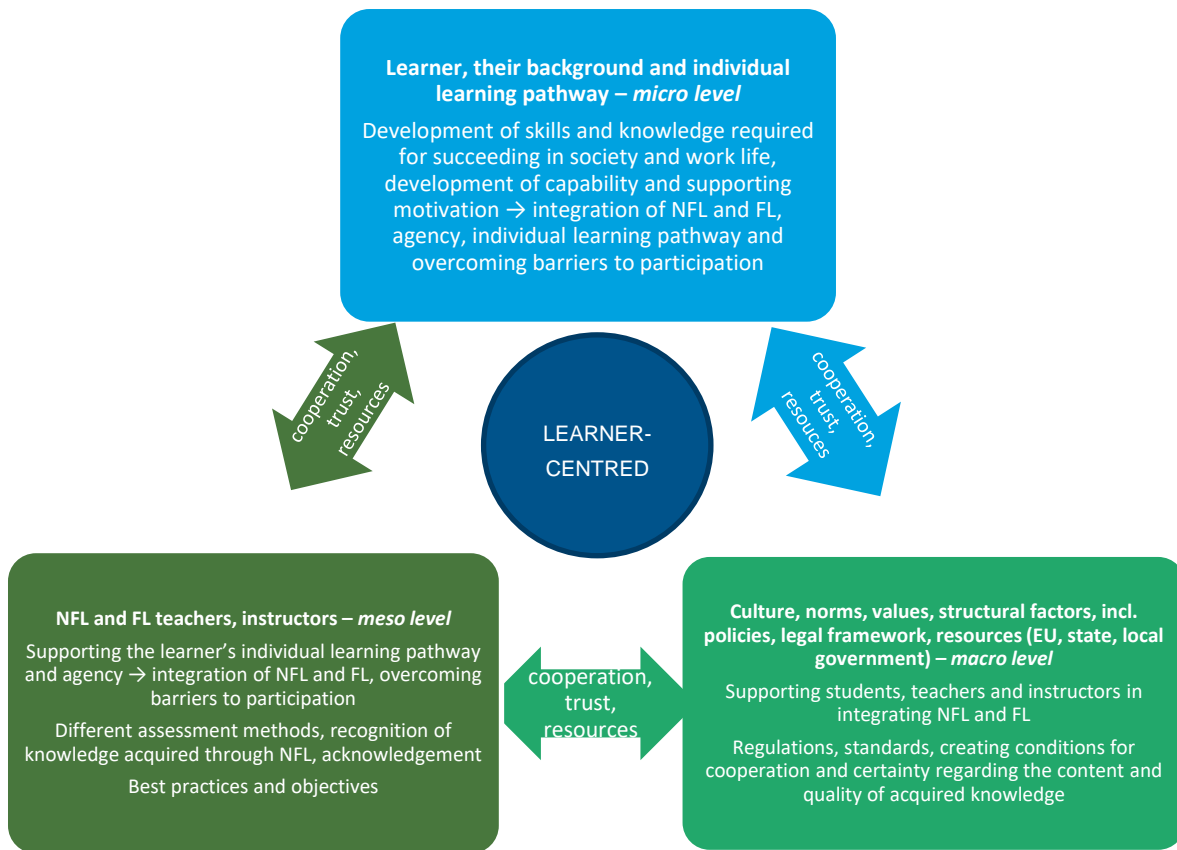


Figure 6. Learner-centred integration model of non-formal and formal learning.

Source: Report authors.

Note: FL – formal learning; NFL – non-formal learning.

Barriers to participation in non-formal learning

Not all young people have equal access to non-formal learning due to various obstacles.¹²³ Studies of barriers to participation are mostly based on Cross' triple classification¹²⁴. Like adult education analyses¹²⁵, studies of young people's access to non-formal learning have also distinguished between institutional barriers, i.e. ones that arise from the organisation of studies (cost of participation, distance from the place of residence, etc.), situational or life

¹²³ Boeren, E. Mackie, A., Riddell, S. (2019). *Barriers to and enablers of participation in different types of provision by young low-qualified adults*. Horizon 2020 ENLIVEN project WP2 Report (D2.2). Available at: https://h2020enliven.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/enliven-d2.2_v2_final.pdf

¹²⁴ Cross, K. P. (1981). *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

¹²⁵ Rubenson, K., Desjardins, R. (2009). "The Impact of Welfare State Regimes on Constraints to Participation in Adult Education: A Bounded Agency Model". *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59, 187-207; Boeren, E. (2016). *Lifelong Learning Participation in a Changing Policy Context. An Interdisciplinary Theory*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Roosmaa, E.-L., Saar, E. (2017). "Adults who do not want to participate in learning: a cross-national European analysis of their perceived barriers". *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36, 254-277; Boeren, E. Mackie, A., Riddell, S. (2019). *Barriers to and enablers of participation in different types of provision by young low-qualified adults*. Horizon 2020 ENLIVEN project WP2 Report (D2.2). Available at: https://h2020enliven.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/enliven-d2.2_v2_final.pdf



organisation-related barriers (school, work or home activities leave no time for participating in non-formal learning) and barriers related to a negative attitude towards studies.^{126[003]}

Cooperation and trust

One important factor of successful integration of non-formal and formal learning in the work of teachers and instructors is cooperation, which helps to cope with challenges and build mutual trust. Among other things, parties' cooperation in integration requires the support of state policies and regulations and guaranteeing required resources. Cooperation and cooperation-based learning support adapting to changes in education and understanding and adoption thereof¹²⁷.

Involvement of teachers and instructors of different types of studies in internal and external networks that would support coping with changes and shape and strengthen a positive assessment of their profession and work results (at the example of vocational education teachers¹²⁸) has an important role in this. Such interdisciplinary cooperation requires adherence to certain principles (e.g. positive management, training and development, supportive cooperative atmosphere) in order to ensure good functioning¹²⁹.

One of the outputs of cooperation could be a solution based on a one-stop-shop principle¹³⁰, which means a centralised (online) environment, which gathers together all of the information about non-formal learning opportunities for young people. According to recent opinions, these one-stop-shops should be user-centred and proactive, i.e. offer users (young people) solutions based on their interests and needs (no-stop shop)¹³¹. Nevertheless, the use of a one-stop-shop in navigating learning opportunities and making choices should be supported either by schools, providers of non-formal learning and/or the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (i.e. form masters, youth workers, career counsellors or Unemployment Insurance Fund case managers).

Different assessment methods

Assessment is related to study objectives, the learning process and the person with a educational philosophical approach and beliefs as a learner. Assessment is part of learning, which can be used to influence and guide changes in people's thinking, actions, self-development and behaviour.

It is found that a large share of assessment methods tend to be characteristic to formal learning, e.g. they focus on the teacher's activity and learning ends with assessment and

¹²⁶ Darkenwald, G. G., Valentine, T. (1985). "Factor structure of deterrents to public participation in adult education". *Adult Education Quarterly*, 35 (4), 177-193.

¹²⁷ Hargreaves, A. (2006). "Educational change takes ages: Life, career and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change". *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21(8), 967-983.

¹²⁸ Sirk, M., Ümarik, M., Loogma, K., Niglas, K. (2017). "Koostöö kutseõpetaja professionaalsust määrava tegurina" [Collaboration as the central factor determining vocational teachers' professionalism]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 5(2), 80–105.

¹²⁹ Nancarrow, S. A., Booth, A., Ariss, S., Smith, T., Enderby, T. and Roots, A. (2013). "Ten principles of good interdisciplinary team work". *Human Resources for Health* 19, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1478-4491-11-19>

¹³⁰ Wimmer, M. A. (2002). "A European perspective towards online one-stop government: The eGOV project". *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 1(1), 92–103

¹³¹ Scholta, H., Mertens, W., Kowalkiewicz, M., Becker, J. (2019). "From one-stop shop to no-stop shop: An e-government stage model". *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(1), 11–26; Määttä, M. (2018). *One-Stop Guidance Center (Ohjaamo) – Ready to offer multi-agency services for the young*. Jyväskylä: ELY Centre. Available at: <https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162148/OneStopGuidance.pdf?sequence=5>.

verification of the outcome¹³². Whereas in the case of non-formal learning, the assessment subject is the learner, assessment is understood as a part of learning and the learner themselves assesses the results and their personal development. The latter can also be considered a characteristic of the subject (the subject's agency)¹³³.

Valuing individuality and adhering to learner-centredness, reflection-based assessment and other understandings common among non-formal learning practitioners is, however, time consuming and requires the learner's voluntary participation, internal motivation, interest and contribution. It is clear that this may not always be achievable in the universalising environment of formal learning that is part of mandatory education, including due to the lack of various resources (incl. time, money, knowledge, skills, motivation and regulation). One must agree with the opinion that the conflict that emerges in assessment highlights how the non-formal learning environment, which favours and promotes agency supplements experiences gained from degree studies and vice versa.

At the same time, possibilities for moving towards learning-centred assessment have also been considered in formal learning. Assessment that supports learning includes varied collection of information about the learner's current level and development, analysis of this information based on objectives and use of the information, which is used to make changes in the learning process where necessary and provide motivating feedback¹³⁴. As assessment influences the learner's learning and achievements, it is increasingly important for the learner to be able to assess their learning and work themselves in order to become a life-long learner¹³⁵. Assessment may provide the learner feedback on their current learning and further development possibilities¹³⁶ and develop readiness and ability to engage in self-assessment¹³⁷.

In the context of life-long learning, it is emphasised that learning must be viewed as a process of acquisition of knowledge, participation and creation of knowledge, which is why self-assessment must be addressed systematically, triologically¹³⁸. Based on this approach, the learner has the opportunity to focus on their learning experience interactively by communicating with themselves simultaneously as both the learner and the self-assessor. Assessment that supports learning where both the teacher and the learner constantly reflect on the learning process while also acknowledging and analysing shortcomings¹³⁹ is particularly efficient.

132 Põlda, H. Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M. (2021). "Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri / Estonian Journal of Education*, 9(1), 60–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2021.9.1.03>.

133 Karu, K. (2020). *Üliõpilaste arusaamad õppimisest ülikoolis: andragoogiline vaade* [Students' comprehensions of learning at university: Andragogical view]. *Tallinn University Dissertations on Social Sciences*, 134. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press.

134 Jürimäe, M., Kärner, A., Tiisvelt, L. (2014). *Kujundav hindamine kui õppimist toetav hindamine*. Tartu: Publishing House of Estonian Universities

135 Boud, D. (2000). "Sustainable Assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society". *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22(2), 151-167. DOI: 10.1080/713695728

136 Carless, D., Joughin, G., Liu, N. (2006). *How Assessment Supports Learning: Learning-oriented Assessment in Action*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU.

137 Boud, D., Falchikov, N. (2005). "Higher Education in a changing world. Research and Development in Higher Education 28". *Proceedings of the 2005 HERDSA Annual Conference*, 34-41.

138 Hakkarainen, K. (2008). "Toward a triological approach to learning: personal reflections". *Lifelong learning in Europe*, 13, 22-29.

139 Jürimäe, M., Kärner, A., Tiisvelt, L. (2014). *Kujundav hindamine kui õppimist toetav hindamine*. Tartu: Publishing House of Estonian Universities



Triological assessment is considered one form of reflective practice, which places importance of both formal assessment criteria (learning outcomes) and non-formal assessment criteria worded by the learner themselves (bases for self-assessment). For the learner, this means greater freedom in having a say in the planning and targeting of their studies and choose the options of moving towards the objective, which also increases responsibility for their learning¹⁴⁰.

Therefore,, the research part of this project is based on the understanding that **learner-centredness upon policy making and institutional cooperation that relies on trust upon assessment based on the learner** contributes to more systematic integration and is a result thereof. These aspects are a prerequisite for eliminating barriers to participation.

140 Jürimäe, M., Kärner, A., Tiisvelt, L. (2014). *Kujundav hindamine kui õppimist toetav hindamine*. Tartu: Publishing House of Estonian Universities

Annex 2. Concept of non-formal learning

Terms used in the technical description of the project procurement

In the technical proposal of the project procurement, the Ministry of Education and Research emphasised that the definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning/education vary greatly in academic studies, strategic/policy documents and among practitioners¹⁴¹.

The following terms and definitions based on the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020¹⁴² were used in the procurement's technical specifications.

- **Formal learning** mostly takes place in a school environment and is organised on the basis of curricula. Formal learning has specific objectives and it is conducted by teachers who have been specially prepared and qualified. Learning objectives are mostly set externally, and the learning process is monitored and evaluated. Formal learning is mandatory to a certain level or age.
- **Non-formal learning** is understood as learning that takes place outside of a school and is undertaken with a certain objective to develop oneself. This can take place in very different environments (e.g. in hobby education or continuing training, but also in nature), where learning and teaching may not be the only objective. Non-formal learning has an objective in the same way as formal education, but it is voluntary. It can be carried out by professional trainers or, for example, volunteers or peers
- **Informal learning** from the learner's perspective is learning without a specific objective. It takes place in everyday situations (for example, in families, at work, during leisure time, etc.) and thus the results of informal learning are mostly not directly visible for the learner.

The call for tender specified that in the project, formal learning should be understood as basic and secondary education, including both general and secondary vocational education. Youth work should also be understood as non-formal learning. Informal learning is not included in the scope of this project.

In the technical offer, alternative definitions of the terms were provided, which are based on Cedefop (2014)¹⁴³.

“Non-formal learning is learning that is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important element of learning. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. Non-formal learning may not lead to a nationally recognised certification.”

141 See e.g. Cedefop (2014). *Terminology of European education and training policy: a selection of 130 terms*. 2nd ed. Luxembourg: Publications Office; Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., & Põlda, H. (2019). “Mitteformaalõppe tähenduse konstrueerimine poliitikadokumentides” [Construction of meaning of ‘non-formal learning’ in policy documents]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri. Estonian Journal of Education*, 7(1), 50-75. <https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2019.7.1.03>; Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., & Lepik, M. (2021). “Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes” [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts]. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri. Estonian Journal of Education*, 9(1), 60-87. <https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2021.9.1.03>.

142 Ministry of Education and Research (2014). *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020*. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/estonian_lifelong_strategy.pdf

143 Cedefop (2014). *Terminology of European education and training policy: a selection of 130 terms, second edition*. Available at: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4117_en.pdf



“Formal learning is learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (such as in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. Learners who achieve the objectives of formal learning receive a nationally acknowledged certificate.”

According to this approach, non-formal and formal learning are defined through their objectives (whether they are defined as learning or not), purposefulness based on the learner’s point of view (purposeful in both cases) and the school certificate (whether it results in a nationally recognised certificate or not).

As the terms and definitions used in policy documents and the field of education vary (sometimes interchangeably, e.g. *mitteformaalne õpe* (non-formal learning) and *mitteformaalne haridus* (non-formal education)), there is a need to explain more precisely how they are translated into Estonian and how practitioners use them in the Estonian context.

Formal education / formal learning

In Estonian context, *formal education* has been defined via institutions. Erelt et al. (2014)¹⁴⁴ specify that formal education is institutional education, which is acquired in general education, vocational education and higher education institutions. The Education Strategy 2021-2035¹⁴⁵ is focused also on the types of institutions (pre-school establishment, general education institution, vocational school and higher education institution) in the case of the definition of formal education and adds the characteristics of purposefulness and qualified staff to the definition of formal education. Based on this, the term *formal education* is used when referring to institutional systems, while *formal learning* is used when referring to the learning process – acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Non-formal education / non-formal learning

The Education Strategy 2021-2035 defines non-formal learning as purposeful, voluntary learning, based on a specific learning programme and targeting specific interest groups in different settings. It is also noted that youth work and hobby education and continuing training for adults have an important role in ensuring non-formal learning opportunities. In this project, *non-formal learning* is understood to also include flexible, varied, student-centred and universal learning methods and modes, which can be used in various learning settings, including formal education¹⁴⁶.

Informal education / informal learning

The terms *informaalne õpe* (informal learning) and *informaalne haridus* (informal education) have both been used in Estonian policy documents in the last 16 years. In the Education Strategy 2021-2035, *informal learning* is defined as both intentional and unintentional learning that takes place in everyday situations. In the previous education strategy (Lifelong

144 Erelt, T., Kadakas, M., Kala-Arvisto, U., Kraav, I., Maanso, V., Puksand, H., Tamm, E., Unt, I. (2014). *Hariduse ja kasvatuse sõnaraamat*. T. Erelt (ed.). Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus.

145 Ministry of Education and Research. (2021). *Education Strategy 2021–2035*. Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/haridusvaldkonna_arengukava_2035_kinnitaud_vv_eng.pdf.

146 Lockhart, A. S. (2016). *Non-formal and informal programs and activities that promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills in areas of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*. Global Education Monitoring Report: UNESCO.



Learning Strategy, 2005), this was however defined as any type of learning in everyday situations. The strategy specified that informal learning is not structured in terms of learning objectives, time or materials and is usually involuntary. Karu et al. (2019) explained that the Lifelong Learning Strategy (2005) describes informal education also at the level of activities, specifying it as informal training and other opportunities that create the basis for the development of a personality, creativity, talent, initiative and social responsibility. This project does not focus on informal learning as such, but we propose to use the term informal learning similarly to Cedefop (2014) and the Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035 in order to highlight the untargeted and involuntary learning that occurs in everyday situations.

Problems with terminology use

Even though Erelt et al. (2014) have encouraged the use of the Estonian term *vabaõpe* (free learning) to denote non-formal learning, the recent study by Põlda et al. (2020) on the language use of Estonian non-formal education practitioners indicated that *mitteformaalõpe* (non-formal learning) is much more common in practice and practitioners were cautious about *vabaõpe*, as this is associated with folk schools, Waldorf pedagogy and non-governmental organisations.

Similarly to *mitteformaalne õpe*, Estonian-language words have been suggested to replace *informaalne õpe* (informal learning). Still, the Estonian terms *juhuõpe* and *kogemusõpe* are not widely used. Practitioners still prefer foreign terms *non-formal learning* and *informal learning* to Estonian-language terms, because the latter may not describe the terms in sufficient detail.

The term *elukestev õpe* (lifelong learning) is also characterised by different meanings and ways of use in policy documents. Sometimes it is used to refer to learning throughout the course of life, but it is also widely used in a more narrower sense, encompassing only adult education.¹⁴⁷ Estonian policy documents also contain similar discrepancies: in the previous education strategy (Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020), *lifelong learning* was defined as the term for all kinds of lifelong learning, whereas the current education strategy does not provide an express definition, but mainly addresses it in the context of adult education.

147 Milana, M., Holford, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Adult education policy and the European Union: Theoretical and methodological perspectives*. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Annex 3. Non-formal learning in earlier studies

One prerequisite for understanding the integration of non-formal and formal learning is addressing these terms in studies and reports. If some topic is not included in public or specialist research discussions related to non-formal learning and degree studies, the actors cannot interpret or discuss it. This also makes it more complicated to organise (more systematic) integration and for actors in integration to understand one another.

In order to specify the aspects that have been highlighted in previous Estonian studies, analyses and strategic documents in relation to the integration of non-formal and formal learning, we performed a relevant literature analysis. We used keyword search to map a selection of thematic analyses, which provide input on the need of and situation regarding the integration of non-formal learning and degree studies (see the list of documents analysed in Annex 3).

Below is a description of how specific sources defined non-formal learning, addressed the links between non-formal learning and degree studies and the problems related to the integration of non-formal learning and degree studies highlighted in them. We provide a comprehensive mapping that includes all of the problem fields of the sources reviewed and analyse the type (no differences, are complementary or contradictory) and scope (in one or several important or unimportant dimensions) of differences in approaches.

In general and based on the literature analysed, there are different approaches to the use of the term *non-formal learning* and content thereof (Table 3). In the broadest terms, the following approaches can be distinguished: a) system level, b) descriptive level and c) function-based (i.e. task-based) approaches to non-formal learning.

Upon analysing the **system level**, two major semantic fields emerged:

- a) non-formal learning is **part of the education system** and one of its important tasks is to improve the availability of learning opportunities;
- b) non-formal learning is a multi-faceted **whole** in itself, which has numerous sub-types, types and sub-groups.

Two types of tasks were highlighted in relation to it being part of the education system: 1) non-formal learning can enrich learning pathways and support school learning; 2) non-formal learning makes learning and talent development more available, offering more opportunities in different forms.

By focusing on highlighting the subtypes of non-formal learning as a comprehensive system, attention was paid to the learning settings of non-formal learning or different types of specific activities, which the term *non-formal learning* may include.

The **descriptive level** describes in detail the characteristics of non-formal learning. Upon analysing the topics addressed in various sources, it was revealed that non-formal learning is above all characterised by **flexibility**, but it may still be **targeted** and intentional. Therefore, it is important to define the purposefulness (or randomness) and the flexibility of non-formal learning upon interpreting it.

When looking at the **tasks of non-formal learning** in detail, two approaches can be distinguished on the basis of the current approaches:

- a) non-formal learning supports the development of different types of general competencies, which prepares the learner **for the future**;
- b) participation in non-formal learning **immediately** ensures a(n) (more) enjoyable life.

Future- and working life-oriented accumulation of human capital is mentioned in approaches that emphasise supporting the development of general competencies in one way or another. This includes general topics of developing personality and self-development, but also development of agency (incl. entrepreneurial thinking and an active attitude) and topics related to ensuring success in work and development of cooperation skills.

Another aspect that emerged in relation to the importance of non-formal learning was the role of participation in non-formal learning in supporting life quality as an important value in itself. Thus, non-formal learning may offer better opportunities for self-realisation than formal learning or work, including by allowing people to develop their interests and talents and relieve stress. On the other hand, non-formal learning offers a change from other activities by being voluntary, exploratory and playful and carrying its unique values and principles.

Thus, it is revealed that the tasks related to the labour market and human capital are important, but not the only aspects of non-formal learning. The finding that non-formal learning amplifies the well-being of an individual as a value in itself is just as important, but this is generally not its only objective. Therefore, non-formal learning may be placed in this role, through which the participant can stay on their education path better, more efficiently and longer or achieve success at work, but the experience of non-formal learning also has an important role in shaping the person and enabling a social experience and meaningfulness.

A summary of the approaches to non-formal learning can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Approaches to non-formal learning

System level approach		
Part of the education system that improves the availability of learning opportunities	Part of a whole	Part of lifelong learning (A, N)
		Part of youth work (C, I, J)
		Comparable to continuing training, retraining or informal learning (N)
	Enriches learning pathways	Supports learning in school (E)
		Expands the learner's choices, enriches learning and supplements the opportunities for degree studies (D, E, F)
		Supports mobility between education levels and types (E, F)
	Availability	Makes learning more available (F, N)
		Allows developing the learner's talents and interests in a form that is suitable to them (J)
		Supports the talented (G)
Subtypes and settings	Different learning settings	Offers varied learning methods and settings and the opportunity to change the setting (A, B)
		Outside the school environment, extracurricular (A, D, I, J)
		At work or during leisure activities (K)
	Different types of activities	Includes: hobby education, continuing training, youth work, environmental protection, career counselling and other self-development opportunities (e.g. hobby schools, hobby groups, hobby activities, youth centres, youth organisations and youth projects (A, C, I, J, L)
Descriptive level approach		

System level approach

Flexibility and purposefulness	With a purpose	Targeted (A, D)
		Not always targeted (K)
		Intentional or not (K)
	Flexible	Mostly organised (K)
		Structured, but more flexibly than formal learning (K)
		Flexible (A)

Function-based and task-based approach

Development of general competencies (for the future)	Personality and development	Supports full development of a personality (A, E, K)	
		Supports the development of general competencies (E)	
		Supports learner's reflection (A, K)	
		The learner knows that they are learning, observes or does things in order to develop themselves (K)	
		Considers the learner's autonomy and individuality (A)	
	Agency	Supports the development of entrepreneurial thinking (E, L)	
		Supports agency (E)	
		Supports the learner's activity (A)	
	Success in work	Supports success in labour market (E, M)	
		Supports cooperation (A)	
	Immediately (more) pleasant life	Self-realisation	Opportunity for discovering and developing interests and talents (J)
			Opportunity for self-realisation (B)
			Opportunity to relieve stress (B)
		Change	Specific, unique values and principles (D)
Exploratory (A)			
Playful (A)			
Voluntary (A, L)			

Note: The alphabet code of the source of literature is provided in brackets, see the list of sources in Annex 2.

Links between non-formal and formal learning

Upon mapping the links between non-formal and formal learning, three types of links were generally identified: links that differentiate, links that highlight similarities and links that point to cooperation (opportunities) (Table 4).

I The differentiating (contrasting) approach is expressed in texts mainly in three ways:

- 1) non-formal learning takes place above all **outside** formal learning or at least outside the formal learning curricula;
- 2) non-formal learning provides degree studies with **additional value** or offers a **clear alternative** to it for obtaining knowledge and skills;
- 3) non-formal, formal and informal learning are easily distinguishable and **independent of one another**, but together they form an individual learning path.

In the case of this approach, it is decided how non-formal and formal learning differ intrinsically and emphasised that these are complementary learning methods that provide new opportunities from the perspective of both the learner's benefits and accessibility. Therefore, it must be ensured that the specific roles of each learning methods are not lost.

II The approach highlighting similarities focuses on two aspects that proceed from the learner, emphasising the similar role of non-formal and formal learning in the learner's life or their similar opportunities to participate in these ways of learning:

- opportunities for practicing hobbies have been created in **all degree study institutions**;
- one task of both non-formal and formal learning is to **offer a change** from the impact of family and **support talented people** in developing their talents.

According to this approach, the two ways of learning are connected by both similar way of ensuring accessibility via degree studies and fulfilling a similar role from the viewpoint of the learner.

III The approach pointing to cooperation (opportunities) accepts both the similarities and differences of the two ways of learning, but highlights aspects which require closer cooperation:

- there is a need to create a system for recognising the knowledge gained through non-formal learning in formal learning;
- highlighting the competencies developed with the help of non-formal learning throughout life enables the learner to obtain a certain level of education or commence work.

The three approaches place special focus on recognising the competencies developed through non-formal learning in formal learning and making them visible in the working life.

Table 4. Links between non-formal and formal learning

I Differentiating approach	
Different environment	Non-formal learning takes place outside formal learning (J, K)
	Youth work [<i>with and for young people</i>] is extracurricular , referred to as non-formal learning, formal learning (C, I, J)
Different learning types and learning experiences	Non-formal learning provides additional value to formal learning (A, D, E, M)
	Is an alternative, but also contradictory to formal learning; non-formal learning provides a change from formal learning (A, B, D, K, M, N)
	Learning is the same: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning are parts of the individual learning pathway (A, G)
	Non-formal and formal learning are independent of each other (G, M)
	Non-formal learning is between formal and informal learning, non-formal learning has characteristics of both (A)
II Approach highlighting similarities	
Setting does not differentiate	All of the schools (already) have opportunities for hobby activities (L)
Non-formal learning as an alternative	Both non-formal and formal learning are ways of escaping family influence (B)
	Supporting talented students is important at all formal learning stages and in non-formal learning (G)

III Approaches seeking cooperation opportunities

	[There is a need to create a system for] recognising the knowledge gained through non-formal learning (and informal learning) in formal learning (F, K)
Non-formal learning is an alternative to formal learning	Non-formal learning helps to ensure learning opportunities that correspond to the learner's needs and means throughout their course of life. Recognising non-formal learning allows to make competencies visible and acquire a level of education or commence work (N, K)

Different approaches to the current cooperation between non-formal and formal learning above all increase the cooperation potential. This is supported by the similarities of both types of learning from the perspective of the learner, but it is important to avoid comparing the specificities and characteristics of non-formal learning to those of formal learning upon emphasising and developing their similarities. The more we move towards standardising assessment and outcomes in order to recognise the outcomes, the greater is the risk to lose the specific benefits of non-formal learning to the learner. As achieving these has not yet been possible via the means of degree studies, the expected benefits of their better integration would not be achieved either.

Problems related to integrating non-formal and formal learning

The integration of non-formal and formal learning may be obstructed by the intrinsic problems of both systems, which may become amplified upon integration, but also the specific problems related to integration itself (Table 5).

Problems related to degree studies, to which non-formal learning could offer a solution were related to implementation of the new concept of learning and the variety of learning opportunities.

The problem of (the lack of) implementation of the new concept of learning indicates that the learner-centred approach, appreciation of talents and noticing special needs has not yet taken root in degree studies or implementation of these principles in school is so time-consuming for teachers that it is done only superficially. Here, two aspects stood out:

- even though approaches to non-formal learning indicate a new concept of learning, they are difficult to reconcile with current degree studies;
- even though non-formal learning manages to notice and support learners' individual potential, the question of how it could be done better in non-formal learning for those who do not participate in non-formal learning remains.

The problem of (a lack of) diversity of learning opportunities indicates that formal learning does not offer diverse learning opportunities in a situation where the number of learners is decreasing or is not able to ensure their quality and highlights two aspects:

- offering non-formal learning may diversify learning opportunities;
- the excessively close connection between non-formal and formal learning is also problematic, for instance, when the opportunities of non-formal learning are restricted by the resources of schools (teachers) or when it reduces the opportunities for the learner to switch the setting and the role.

Problems related to non-formal learning that arise during integration are divided into inherent ones and those related to barriers to participation.

The following problems are associated with the **nature** of non-formal learning:

- **individuality**: non-formal learning is characterised by learner-centredness, which could also mean that each learner obtains a different experience and it is difficult to target

learning, while the planned learning outcome may change in the non-formal learning process;

- **learner-centredness and learner satisfaction:** maintaining satisfaction of participants in non-formal learning may prove to be difficult if the learner feels that they cannot actually execute their ideas or share their worries outside the non-formal learning situation;
- **voluntary nature and interest:** participation in non-formal learning is not always voluntary due to various reasons, while this learning type requires the learner's contribution, interest and motivation by nature; it is important to create interest once the learner has already commenced non-formal learning.

Problems related to barriers to participation in non-formal learning:

- **lack of interest and time**, which could express both the learner's practical situation, which makes it difficult to participate in non-formal learning, and their general attitude towards other priorities and failure to perceive the benefits of non-formal learning;
- problems related to **accessibility**: price, distance and transport;
- the **lack of a lifelong learning perspective** with regard to non-formal learning and the opportunities of non-formal learning that change as a person ages bring about a decrease in the number of older young people and young adults participating in this form of learning.

New problems that occur or **amplify** in the course of the integration of non-formal and formal learning form a large separate set of problems, which can be divided into three groups.

1. **The lack of a nationwide comprehensive approach and systematic overview** in terms of both data and terminology and a substantive understanding of how general competencies can be acquired and their acquisition measured.
2. **Problems related to insufficient implementation of APEL**, including the fact that the knowledge acquired through non-formal learning is difficult and time-consuming to recognise and learners themselves cannot assess their learning experiences. This could point to the fact that non-formal learning does not meet the needs of working life or the labour market: how to describe this need and which terms to use (knowledge, skills, proficiency ...)? The description of learning (whether via activities or outcomes) may also depend on this. For instance, employers may wish to see proof of skills, not the knowledge that someone has been to school, practiced a hobby, etc.
3. **Cooperation problems** are characterised by the fact that people tend to contrast non-formal and formal learning, there is a lack of trust between actors and therefore, the potential for cooperation is underused both between themselves and with other actors, even though non-formal learning, formal learning and informal learning are increasingly perceived as integrated or converging. This reveals that such a parallel system is resource-heavy, which calls into question the expedience of the triple categorisation of the learning types in terms of political or practical need.

On the one hand, all of these problems indicate a need for a comprehensive state-level solution, while on the other hand, here the key topic is the question of creating and maintaining trust.

Table 5. Problems with integrating formal and non-formal learning

Problems related to non-formal and formal learning	
	Formal education does not offer varied, high-quality learning opportunities (to a decreasing number of learners); too close

Problems related to non-formal and formal learning

Formal learning as a problem and non-formal learning as a solution	relationship between formal and non-formal learning (e.g. they take place only in the rooms of the same school) restricts diversity and reduces the opportunity to change the setting and roles (B, N)
	The new concept of learning, learner-centredness, valuing of talents and noticing special needs has not taken root in formal learning and is time-consuming; an approach proceeding from the non-formal learning learner is difficult to align with formal learning (D, E, N)
	How could non-formal learning notice and support individual potential better? (D, G)
Problems of (problems with participating in) non-formal learning	Each learner gains a different experience: it is difficult to target, while the planned learning outcome may change in non-formal learning (E, K)
	Maintaining satisfaction of the non-formal learner, (young) learners cannot often execute their ideas, have a say in developments or share their worries (if there is no trust) (B, J)
	Non-formal learning is not always voluntary, but requires the learner's contribution (B, E)
	The reason for failure to participate in non-formal learning is the lack of interest and time (B, C, J)
	The reasons for failure to participate in non-formal learning are the price, distance and transport (B, C, J)
	Participation rate of young adults in non-formal learning is low (I)

Problems that occur upon integrating non-formal and formal learning

State support, a systematic overview	There is a lack of state support and an understanding of how to acquire general competences and so-called soft skills (M)
	There is no systematic overview of data about non-formal learning, including hobby activities (different sources provide slightly different results) (L)
	The Estonian terms <i>kooliõpe</i> (school learning) and <i>vabaõpe</i> (free learning) do not characterise formal learning and non-formal learning (D, J)
APEL	APEL has not taken root in formal learning or on the labour market, recognition in formal learning is complicated and time-consuming; non-formal learning lacks social recognition (E, F, K, M)
	The learner is not able to assess their learning experiences (K)
	Non-formal learning does not correspond to the needs of the working life (labour market), there is no cooperation (N)
Cooperation problems	Resource-intensity: formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning are integrated or converged, but the processes are running in parallel (D, M)
	Should the triple categorisation of learning types be distinguished / why? (A)
	Non-formal and formal learning are contrasted (even though they have overlapping characteristics), lack of trust between actors (B, D)
	The potential for cooperation in both non-formal and formal learning and with other actors is underused (B)

Sources of literature review

Table 6. Literature used in the analysis of previous studies and their references in the text

Authors	Year	Title	Type	Reference
Põlda, H., Karu, K., Reinsalu, R.	2021	"Metaphors we learn by: Practitioners' conceptions of the meaning of nonformal education in Estonian context"	Research article	A
Käger, M., Kivistik, K., Avdonina, K.	2021	<i>Avatud noorsootöö, huvihariduse ja huvitegevuse võimalused noorte, eelkõige tõrjutusriskis noorte, sotsiaalse kaasatuse suurendamiseks ning vajadused nende võimaluste arendamiseks</i>	Study report	B
Väljaots, K., Kivistik, K., Hein, T., Käger, M., Hiir, K., Derevski, R., Allik, A., Adamson, A.-K.	2021	<i>Noorsootöös osalevate noorte rahulolu noorsootöoga 2020</i>	Study report	C
Põlda, H., Reinsalu, R., Karu, K.	2021	"Mitteformaalõpe praktikute keelekasutuses" [Nonformal learning in practitioners' language use]	Research article	D
Põlda, H., Roosalu, T., Karu, K., Teder, L., Lepik, M.	2021	"Üldpädevuste kujundamine ja osaliste agentsus mitteformaalõppes" [Agency and development of key competences in nonformal learning contexts].	Research article	E
Ministry of Education and Research	2021	Education Strategy 2021–2035	Development plan (policy)	F
Tammets, K., Ley, T., Eisenschmidt, E., Soodla, P., Sillat, P. J., Kollom, K., Väljataga, T., Loogma, K., Sirk, M.	2021	<i>Eriolukorrast tingitud distantsõppe kogemused ja mõju Eesti üldharidussüsteemile. Vahearuanne.</i> [Experiences of distance learning due to an emergency situation and its impact on the Estonian general education system. Interim report]	Report (commissioned)	F1
Enn, Ü.	2020	<i>In distance but not apart: The case of COVID-19 crisis management in youth field in Estonia</i>	Overview report	F2
Serbak, K.	2019	"Andekad Eesti hariduses"	Article	G
Karu, K., Jõgi, L., Rannala, I.-E., Roosalu, T., Teder, L., Põlda, H.	2019	"Mitteformaalõppe tähenduse konstrueerimine poliitikadokumentides" [Construction of meaning of	Research article	H

Authors	Year	Title	Type	Reference
		'non-formal learning' in policy documents].		
Haaristo, H.-S., Räis, M. L., Kasemets, L., Kallaste, E., Aland, L., Anniste, K., Anspal, S., Haugas, S., Jaanits, J., Järve, J., Koppel, K., Lang, A., Lauri, T., Michelson, A., Murasov, M., Mägi, E., Piirimäe, K., Pöder, K., Rajaveer, K., Sandre, S.-L., Sömer, M.	2019	<i>Elukestva õppe strateegia vahehindamine</i> . [Interim evaluation of the lifelong learning strategy]	Report (commissioned)	H2
Kutsar, D., Soo, K., Mandel L.-M.	2019	"Schools for well-being? Critical discussions with schoolchildren"	Research article	H3
Johnson, M.	2019	<i>European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2018 update: Estonia</i>	Project report	H4
Espenberg, K., Kiisel, M., Saarsen, K., Jaanits, J., Rajaveer, L., Nõmmela, K., Aksel, M.	2018	<i>19–26-aastaste noorte noorsootöös osalemise motivatsioon</i> [Motivation to take part in youth work among young adults] Final study report	Study report	I
Kallip, K., Heidmets, M.	2017	"Varakult haridussüsteemist lahkumine: trendid, mõjurid ja meetmed Eestis" [Early leaving from education and training: trends, factors and measures in Estonia]	Research article	I2
Selliöv, R.	2017	<i>Osalus noorsootöös</i>	Annual analysis of the Ministry of Education and Research	J
Allaste, A.-A., Beilmann, M., Martma, L., Nugin, R., Pirk, R., Taru, M., Vihma, P.	2017	<i>Noorteseire aastaraamat 2016. Mitte- ja informaalne õppimine</i>	Article collection	K
Villenthal, A., Kaunismaa, T., Veemaa, J., Talur, P., Žuravljova, M., Varblane, U.	2016	<i>Huvihariduse ja huvitegevuse pakkujad ning noorsootöötajad kohalikes omavalitsustes</i> [Extracurricular education and activity providers and youth workers in local governments]	Study report	L
Kiilakoski, T.	2015	Youth work and non-formal learning in Europe's education landscape and the call for a shift in education. Book: Youth work and non-formal learning	Article collection (European Union material)	M



Authors	Year	Title	Type	Reference
		in Europe's education landscape.		
Ministry of Education and Research	2014	<i>Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020</i>	Strategy (policy)	N
Council of the European Union	2012	<i>Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning</i>	Council recommendation (policy)	O

Annex 4. Statistical indicators of participation in non-formal learning

The chapter provides a statistical overview of participation of young people in hobby education, hobby activities and youth work.

Hobby education and hobby activities

The EHIS contains data on the participants in the hobby groups of basic schools and students attending hobby schools.

According to the data for the last five years, approximately half of students have participated in the hobby groups of basic schools. The share of hobby group participants was larger in the schools that only have the basic school stage when compared to schools that had both the basic school and the upper secondary school stages together, in 2019 66% and 49%, respectively (Table 7). Participation in hobby groups in the upper secondary school stage is not monitored and it is not known how many hobby groups are offered in the upper secondary school stage and to what extent elective courses replace the participation in hobby groups.

52% of basic school students participated in hobby schools in 2020 and the participation by students in hobby education has increased somewhat since 2015.¹⁴⁸ Participation in hobby education decreases in upper secondary schools when compared to basic schools – only every third student attends a hobby school. However, participation of general secondary education students in hobby schools has increased somewhat in recent years: 32% in 2015 and 35% in 2020.¹⁴⁹ This is partially related to the increase in the number of hobby schools, while the growth of participation may have been curbed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Table 7. Selection of performance indicators of preschool, basic education and general secondary education, 2015-2020.

Participation of basic school students in hobby education and hobby activities	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Percentage of students attending school hobby groups (in schools with no upper secondary school stage), %	65.8	67.5	68.0	65.6	66.0	n/a
Percentage of students attending school hobby groups (schools with both basic and upper secondary school stages), %	48.5	49.1	49.2	47.8	48.7	n/a
Basic school students attending hobby schools, %	46.4	45.4	47.8	51.7	52.3	52.3
Participation of upper secondary school students in hobby education						
Upper secondary school students attending hobby schools, %	31.5	30.3	32.7	34.1	35.3	34.9

Source: EHIS, Haridussilm.

Note: n/a – the data are not available.

The number of hobby schools established in Estonia in the last ten years has increased considerably and thus, the number of operating hobby schools has grown from 360 in

¹⁴⁸ The change is particularly evident compared to 2010, when the participation rate in hobby schools was 32%. Participation in the hobby education groups of schools has changed less.

¹⁴⁹ Participation of general secondary education students in hobby schools in 2010 was 21%.

2010/11 study year to 774 in the 2020/21 study year (Figure 7).¹⁵⁰ The majority of these are private hobby schools: 637, or 85% of all hobby schools, are privately run. Local governments own 137, i.e. 18% of all hobby schools.

In terms of the language of instruction, most of the curricula are in Estonian (3,459; 74%), followed by curricula in Estonian and other languages of instruction (878; 19%) and curricula in other languages of instruction (316; 7%).

In terms of areas, the number of sports schools is the biggest (313; 40%), followed by other types of hobby schools (291; 38%), music and art schools (145; 19%) and technical, nature, creative and hobby centres (25; 3%). More than half of students attend sports schools and just under a third attend music and art schools. Nearly 16% of all students acquiring hobby education attend hobby schools in the field of general culture, a little over 3% in the field of technology and only 1% in the field of natural sciences.

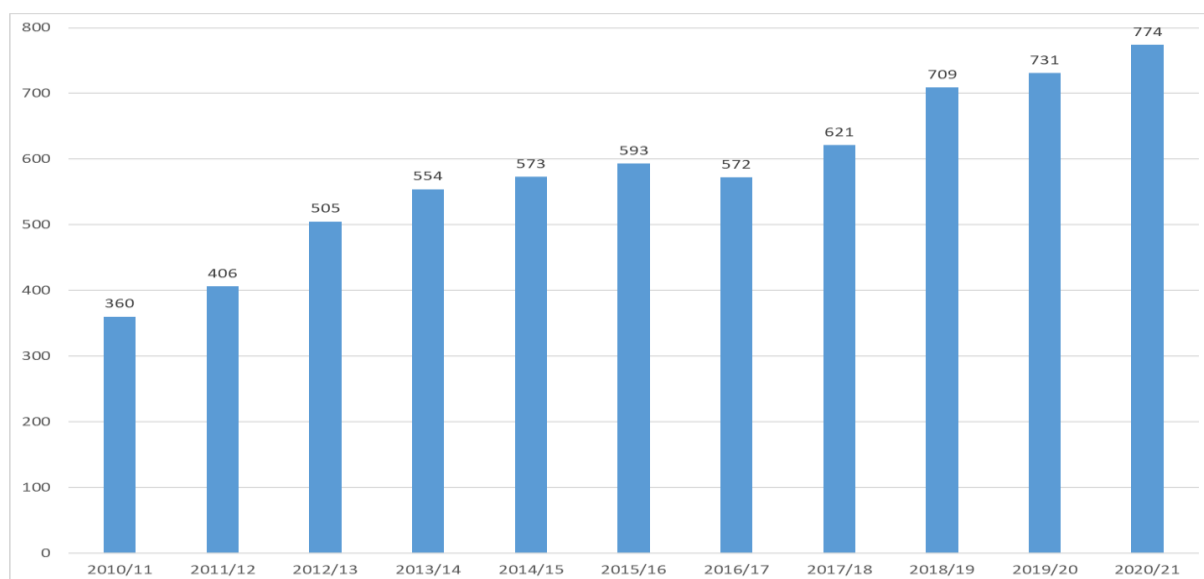


Figure 7. Number of hobby schools in Estonia in 2010/2011-2020/2021 study year.

Source: EHIS.

Note: FL – formal learning; NFL – non-formal learning.

The share of female students participating in hobby education was slightly bigger in the 2020/21 study year (53% female, 47% male). According to age groups, the share of participants is the largest among students aged 7-11 (43%), followed by students aged 12-18 (33%) and then those aged 0-6 (20%). There are few participants in hobby education in the 19+ age group. In terms of native language, 76% of hobby school students represent Estonian and 24% another language (i.e. predominantly Russian). In terms of language of instruction, the division is similar to native language division, although it can be seen that some students whose native language is not Estonian also participate in Estonian hobby education (79% Estonian, 21% other).

According to the data for the 2020/21 study year, 64% of the teachers in hobby schools are women, the majority of whom are over 30 years old (80%), and the second, larger group consists teachers aged 19-26 (13%). EHIS does not provide a detailed overview of teachers aged 30+. The division by gender has become somewhat more equal over the years, as the

150 Haridussilm. Available at: <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee/huviharidus/huvikoolide-uldandmed>, <https://www.haridussilm.ee/ee/valdkondlikud-raportid/huviharidus>.

rate of women in hobby education was higher in the 2010/11 study year (69%). The age-based distribution has changed less: Compared to the 2010/2011 school year, the 30 years old and under age group has decreased by three percentage points by 2020/2021 school year while the group aged 19-26 has increased by the same amount. The share of 27-29-year-olds has remained roughly the same.

According to positions, the employees of hobby schools are predominantly teachers or coaches, followed by hobby education specialists. There are very few vocational teachers and youth workers. In terms of areas, most teachers represent music, art and sports, followed by general culture.

Youth work

According to the youth monitoring dashboard of Statistics Estonia, there were 280 open youth centres in Estonia in 2018.¹⁵¹ Another seven youth centres were opened in 2019 (i.e. 287 in total)¹⁵². The majority of all youth centres are administered by local governments (70%) and the rest operate as NGOs or foundations.¹⁵³

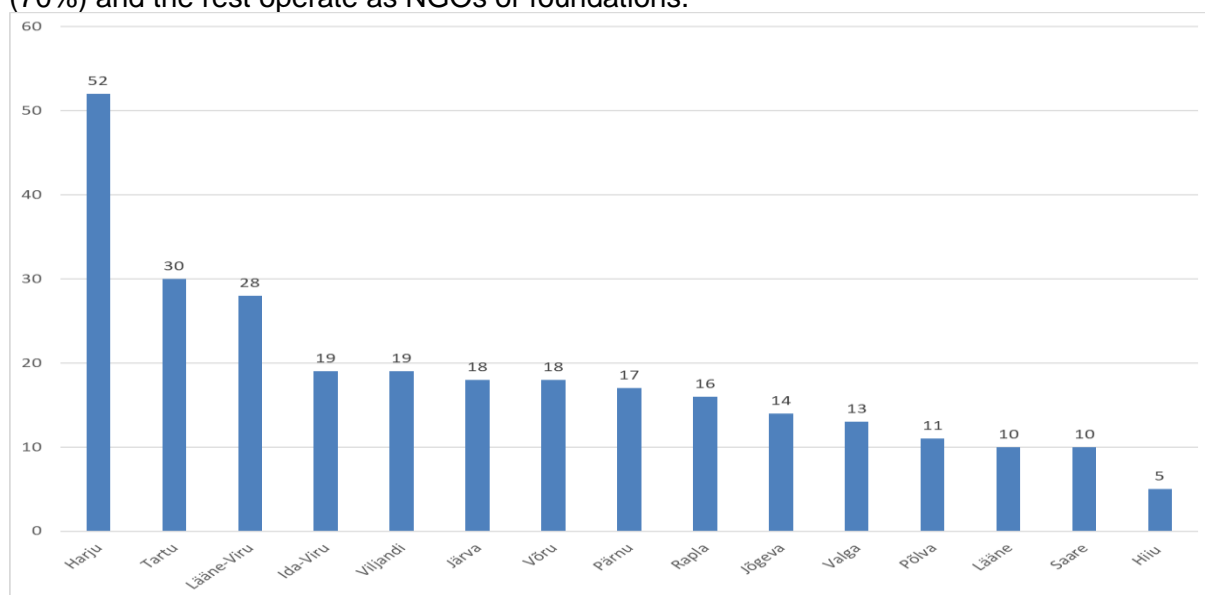


Figure 8 shows the number of youth centres by county.

151 Dashboards of Statistics Estonia. Available at <https://juhtimislaudad.stat.ee/en/youth-monitoring-6/whole-country-1>; see also the Estonian Youth Work Centre. Available at: <https://entk.ee/>; and the Education and Youth Board as of 31 March 2021. Available at: <https://harno.ee/>.

152 Mets, C., Paabort, H., Kõiv, K., Liiskmann, M. (2020). *Mapping of the current state of Estonian youth centres in 2020. Part I.* <https://ank.ee/e-varaait/eesti-noortekeskuste-hetkeseisu-kaardistus-2020/>

153 Ibid.

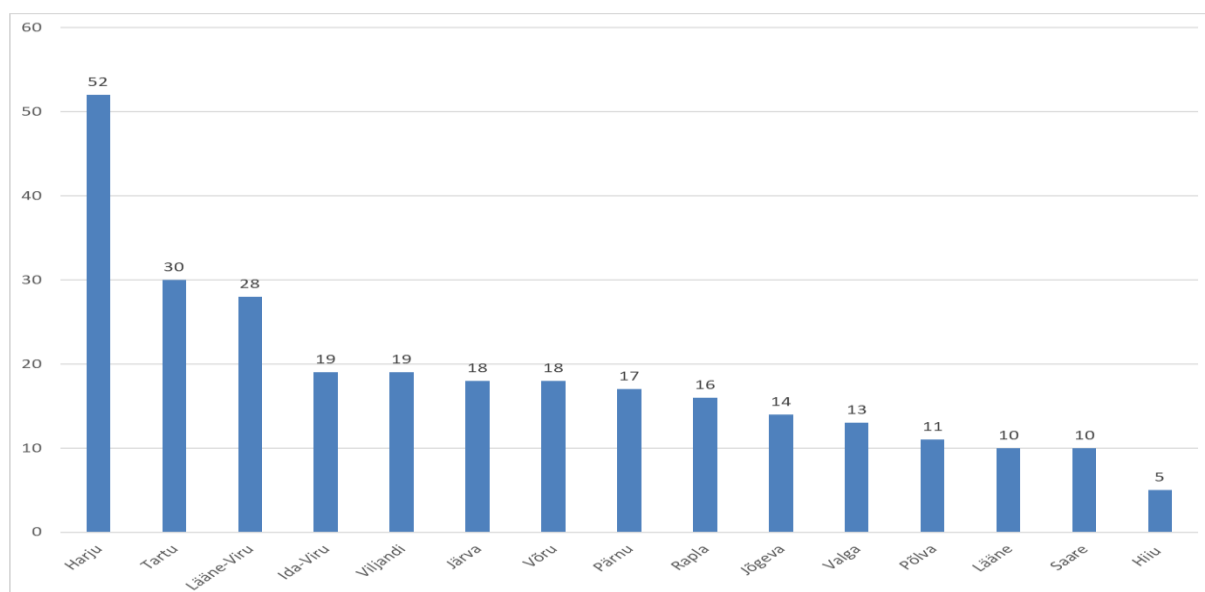


Figure 8. Number of opened youth centres in Estonia by counties in 2018.

Source: Estonian Youth Work Centre.

Note: FL – formal learning; NFL – non-formal learning.

Access to youth work is regionally different. The number of youth centres is the greatest in Harju County (52), followed by Tartu (30) and Lääne-Viru County (28). The number of youth centres is the smallest in Põlva, Lääne, Saare and Hiiu counties (from 11 to five, respectively). The number of youth centres per 1,000 students is the biggest in Hiiu, Lääne, Järva, Võru and Jõgeva counties and the smallest in Harju, Ida-Viru and Tartu counties¹⁵⁴.

The accessibility of youth centres is also described by the average distance of the nearest youth centre from a young person's home. In Estonia, this indicator is 2.9 km on average. This is the approximate distance of youth centres in Hiiu, Järva, Tartu and Valga counties. Youth centres are located the closest to young people's homes in Lääne (2.4 km) and Harju (2.2 km) counties, while the distances are the longest in Saare, Rapla and Jõgeva counties (between 5.3 and 4.4 km, respectively).

A little over a half of youth workers have higher education (54%). The education level of youth workers has increased compared to the survey of 2010, and the share of those who have acquired higher education in the field of youth work has increased above all. The aspects that youth workers rate the highest in respect of their competence are inclusion of young people, supporting non-formal learning, sharing information, counselling young people at the primary level and supporting the development of healthy and environmentally sustainable lifestyles.¹⁵⁵ However, the inclusion of young people with special needs, supporting digital literacy and civic education, and reflecting with the young person on their non-formal learning experience and outcome were rated lower.¹⁵⁶

The low number of youth workers in youth centres and their workload are reasons for concern. Thus, 23% of youth centres in Estonia do not guarantee the workload required in the minimum standard (i.e. 20 hours per week) or offer their services for up to 20 hours per

154 Ibid.

155 Paabort, H. (2020). *Mapping of the current state of Estonian youth centres in 2020. Part II.* <https://ank.ee/e-varaait/eesti-noortekeskuste-hetkeseisu-kaardistus-2020-ii-osa/>

156 Ibid.

week, because many youth centres only employ one or two youth workers.¹⁵⁷ However, the number of applicants for the qualification of youth worker has increased significantly in recent years: 151 people applied for the qualification and 657 applied for the partial qualification of youth worker in 2020, which is the highest number in the last five years (128 of the applicants received qualification certificates and 647 received partial qualification certificates). A year earlier, 89 people applied for the qualification and 513 for the partial qualification of a youth worker. A new procedure for applying for the qualification of a youth worker will enter into force as of 2021, which may also increase the number of applicants.

According to youth workers, young people most often participating in youth work are aged 7-16, followed by youngsters aged 17-19.¹⁵⁸ Fewer young people in the 20+ age group participate, although they are represented in more than a third of the youth centres in Estonia.¹⁵⁹ The services are aimed at target groups. Thus, all age groups are included in open space services (open space, projects, youth information, primary counselling), volunteering and hobby activities. Activities related to employment, international and mobile youth work, training, camps and participation councils are aimed at older young people (17+).¹⁶⁰

Satisfaction with youth work and hobby education

The vast majority of young people are satisfied or very satisfied with youth work (90%).¹⁶¹ Satisfaction is highest with hobby activities and youth camps¹⁶², followed by hobby education, youth work and youth societies or associations, and the participation or representative councils. The satisfaction of young people with various activities has become more even compared to 2017.

A reason for concern is that almost half of the young people who took part in the survey do not participate and do not want to participate in open youth work, youth work camp, participation or representative council or a youth society or association. The rate of non-participation in hobby education, hobby activities and camps is somewhat lower. However, nearly a quarter of young people not currently participating would like to take part in an activity (especially in a work camp, youth project or camp). The main reasons for not participating in hobby education, hobby activities and youth work are lack of time and other hobbies, and young people also admit that information on youth work activities is fragmented and difficult to find¹⁶³.

157 Ibid.

158 According to the Youth Work Act, people aged 7-26 can participate in youth work.

159 Paabort, H. (2020). *Mapping of the current state of Estonian youth centres in 2020. Part II.* <https://ank.ee/e-varaait/estli-noortekeskuste-hetkeseisu-kaardistus-2020-ii-osa/>

160 Ibid.

161 Väljaots, K., Hein, T., Hiir, K., Allik, A., Adamson A-K., Kivistik, K., Käger, M., Derevski, R. (2021). *Noorsootöös osalevate noorte rahulolu noorsootöoga 2020.* Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/noorsootoo_tegevuste_rahulolu_2020_lopparuanne.pdf.

162 The Education and Youth Authority coordinates the project "Healthy and Developing Holiday for Young People", which provides annual state support to approximately 30000 thousand young people aged 7–26 for staying in a youth camp. Camps usually focus on sports, collaborative activities, hiking or culture. In 2019, approximately 30,000 young people participated in camps and around 4,200 in work camps. Source: Education and Youth Board Available at: <https://harno.ee/laagrid>.

163 Väljaots, K., Hein, T., Hiir, K., Allik, A., Adamson A-K., Kivistik, K., Käger, M., Derevski, R. (2021). *Noorsootöös osalevate noorte rahulolu noorsootöoga 2020.* Available at: https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/noorsootoo_tegevuste_rahulolu_2020_lopparuanne.pdf.