



ESTONIA

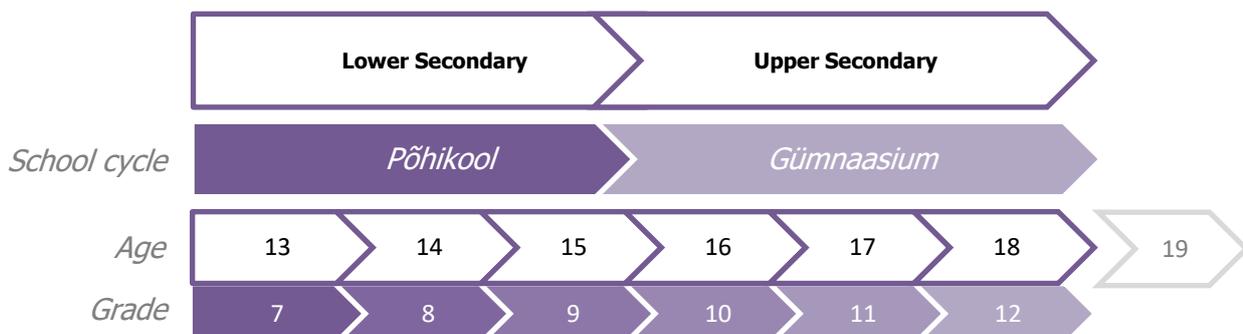
INFOPACK - RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

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The information below gives an overview of procedures¹ for the recognition of learning periods abroad in general secondary school. It can be consulted by pupils, as well as their families and teachers, who are or plan to be involved in long-term individual pupil mobility programmes abroad. Please note that this general overview does not include details on different programme types (which may be run by governmental agencies, civil society organisations, private companies or schools themselves) and such information can be obtained directly with the provider of the respective mobility programme.

GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM



¹ Based on data gathered in February 2021.

Education is compulsory until 16 years of age. Schools determine their curriculum composed of compulsory and elective subjects based on the requirements of the National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools². The curriculum is based on credits: one [unit] of credit is the equivalent of 35 hours work by pupils; pupils need 96 credits (courses) in order to finish school.

Graduation and Certification

At the end of upper secondary education pupils take end-of-school examinations which consist of three elements: an examination given by the school, the submission and presentation of a study or practical work, and the State examination organised at national level. The latter includes three compulsory exams (Estonian language, Maths and a Foreign language). Those who are successful in the exams are awarded the State Examination Certificate, and afterwards receive the Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate from their school, upon decision of the teachers' council³.

Together, both official papers the School Leaving Certificate and the State Examination Certificate provide access to higher education. However, universities often organise separate entrance exams.

For more information on the structure and features of the different national education systems in Europe please see the Eurydice overview: National Education Systems | Eurydice (europa.eu).

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS GOING ABROAD FROM ESTONIA

Age and grade

Pupils can enrol in long-term exchange programmes between the ages of 14 and 19 years old. However, the majority of them go on exchange when they are 16-18 years old (during the 1st and 2nd year of general upper secondary school). They can also go abroad during the last year (grade 12).

Registration in the sending school

It is up to the school administration to grant you permission to interrupt school attendance and enrol in an individual pupil mobility programme. The general approach is to keep you registered in the sending school: you are marked as an 'exchange pupil abroad' in the national education information system (EHIS).

Funding for the sending school

As you remain registered in the sending school, the school will continue to receive funding from the State for you.

²Republic of Estonia, National Curricula 2014: <https://www.hm.ee/en/national-curricula-2014>. The curricula are developed mainly by the Foundation Innove, an education competence centre created by the Ministry of Education and Research

³Assessment in upper secondary education – Estonia, Eurydice: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/assessment-general-upper-secondary-education-14_en

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RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD

The following information addresses learning periods abroad lasting either up to 6 months, or a full school year. According to the analysis conducted, there is no information available on recognition procedures for periods abroad of more than 6 months and shorter than a full school year, or of any duration shorter than a full school year and finishing after the end of the school year in Estonia. In fact, mobility programmes foreseeing these timings and durations are not usually offered. The same procedures are applied, irrespective of which country the learning period is spent in (EU or non-EU).

Please note that in the case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership⁴ (e.g. Erasmus+) the learning agreement between sending and host school can be used as a tool for recognition, although there is no evidence that it can be successful for the recognition of a full school year abroad.

Periods of between 2 and 6 months

If your stay abroad is for between 2 and 6 months, you will be re-integrated in your class on return and finish the school year with your peers. You do not need to bring any document from the host school. As none of your studies abroad will be recognised on your return, you will need to take all the courses you have missed, but this does depend on the school. Some schools are considering whether to include the option of spending a period of between 2 and 6 months abroad in the school curriculum, and are working on guidelines to recognise some credits hence helping you to continue your studies without having to retake the courses you have attended abroad.

A full school year

If you stay abroad for a full school year, you will need to fulfil the requirements of the school curriculum. The school principal is not restricted in how they recognise the outcomes of the learning period abroad, however, as there are no guidelines on how to do this, most of the time there is no recognition. If the school principal accepts the courses taken abroad, this is done through matching the courses taken with the courses foreseen by the school because there is a required set of courses you must pass in order to receive the school leaving certificate.

If you go on exchange in 3rd grade, you will have no option but to repeat the year and then take the end-of-school examination.

Possibility to take an exam on the whole curriculum to be admitted to the next school year

You can take the end-of-the-year exam in the summer on your return and be admitted to the next grade. However, this is not a recognition procedure and it could be extremely challenging for you to study abroad and simultaneously take subjects for your sending school. Only a few pupils per year – the best performing ones – decide to go through this procedure in order not to repeat the year.

⁴ within a school-to-school partnership, learning outcomes are usually recognised based on a learning agreement developed between the schools concerned.

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS HOSTED IN ESTONIA

Registration in the host school

As a hosted pupil, you will receive an identification number which allows you to be registered in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) and to be enrolled in the school like other pupils. You are usually placed in classes based on your age. If you wish to have your studies recognised, you will be placed in a class based on your academic level. Technically, you can be hosted in 12th grade, but this is unusual as 12th graders start their exams in mid or end of April, and you would therefore have a shorter school year.

Funding for the host school

The school receives funding for hosted pupils as they are enrolled in the same way as Estonian students.

Certification for hosted pupils

There is no legislative framework for your certification, hence schools decide autonomously how to certify your learning. However, if you need to be evaluated and receive marks in order to have your learning period abroad recognised in your home country, class teachers are informed and will support you in this process.

Possibility of graduating in the host country during the exchange

If you wish to complete your upper secondary education studies in Estonia, you need to take all the necessary courses (i.e. 96) to be able to take the School Leaving Certificate and the State examination. Therefore, this practice is very unusual.

TESTIMONIAL

Mari from Estonia: a full school year in Germany

"Without the exchange I wouldn't be the person I am today."

As most students, I went on exchange to learn a new language and discover a new world. At first, I kept comparing my new reality with the one back home and this made integrating difficult. As soon as I accepted those differences, I was more open towards my host family and new friends.

The preparation courses and seminars, at home and after my arrival, were very helpful. We addressed all major topics – intercultural, linguistic, social and school-related – and the notes I took during the meetings turned out to be valuable.

There were many funny moments during the exchange, mostly related to language mistakes in German. For example, instead of asking if I could use the bathroom, I asked if I could go inside the toilet bowl. People always found that funny.

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No recognition = an additional year of school

Unfortunately, most schools in my country do not recognise the exchange year, so I had to repeat the year upon my return. I continued from where I left off, and it was easy also because I had already studied some topics in my exchange year. The only difficult part was learning a foreign language foreseen in my study plan and that I had not practised for a year.

I came back from the exchange a different person, more open-minded, more confident and more aware of what I wanted. The keys to a successful experience are leaving with an open mind, without expectations and open to communication. Extraordinary things happen when you step out of your comfort zone. And if you cannot be an exchange student, host one!

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