

# **WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

## **Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Vision and Action**

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### **Estonia**

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Estonia

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**Speech of Mr Mait Klaassen  
Estonian Minister of Education**

Director-General,  
Mr President,  
Your Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my talk today on Higher Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I would like to look briefly at three different areas, which indicate the possible development of education and its position in society in the next century.

These areas are:

Educational Heritage  
Educational Society  
Educational Business

In higher education, Estonia follows the European Region's education model. We have managed to adopt this model. Within the framework of this education model, the future of higher education is talked of using the following key words: **Massification, diversification, privatization.**

Higher education cannot be handled separately from the education system as a whole. Education is an entity – starting in kindergarten, young people are prepared, at each step, for the next step. Higher education is based on general education.

There is a growing opinion that the share of school education in the total education system will be gradually diminishing. Therefore, the education system is much wider than that determined by the state education standards. The school system has always been relatively inert, but if we manage to break away from this, and reform schools (including universities) into mobile institutions responding to the demands of the age, the next millennium will most likely bring libraries without books and classrooms without teachers.

Going back to the three areas I mentioned at the start, let us look firstly at **Educational Heritage.**

Everything which we comprehend today as culture is actually based on learning.

Estonian school history began in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1632, our first university opened its doors, and the same century saw the beginning of school instruction in the Estonian language. Education provides freedom and self-awareness to a nation. Education – and being educated – have helped Estonians to preserve their language and culture, despite hundreds of years of foreign domination. Reminding people of this relationship will make the community more positive towards education.

Speaking of an **Educational Society**, the second of my three areas of interest, I would like to draw attention to the increase in society of young people with higher education. The main reason for this is the transformation of society into a high technology society. Estonia has chosen as its development path the construction of an Information Society.

This is characterized by the Tiger Leap programme, which is aimed at the computerization of the school network and its connection into Internet.

Today, basic and secondary education is no longer sufficient to acquire professional skills. Higher education must become more specialized – responding to society's needs.

My third and final area is **Educational Business**.

In Estonia today, almost one-third of higher education is based on private capital. Lifelong learning, including distance education and adult education, is becoming more and more important. Generally, such study is not financed by the state, but is in the format of an Open University and is paid for by the individual or the company.

The free movement of persons and workers will also increase student mobility. This in turn places higher demands on education quality and assessment. Thanks to education cooperation programmes, including ERASMUS, the number of foreign students will grow in the near future.

Free movement will change education into more of a business. Today, we talk of the tourism business. In the next century we will definitely be talking more about educational business. Even now in some countries, the mobility of international students has created a multimillion-dollar business.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you that Educational Heritage, Educational Society and Educational Business actually form a whole, where the parts are inter-dependent. The aim should be to preserve the cultural – and educational – heritage of the nation, and then, using this, to build an educational and democratic society.

Finally, UNESCO proclaimed the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Song and dance festivals are very much a tradition for Estonia. In July 2000, we are organizing a song and dance festival in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia and up to 10.000 dancers are participating. We hope that this event may be included in the programme of the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

Thank you for your attention.