



GOVERNMENT  
PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS,  
EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT

**Keynote Speech**  
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**Minister of Education**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you today in my function as Minister of Education of the Principality of Liechtenstein. 2019 is a very special year for Liechtenstein. We are celebrating our country's 300th anniversary. It was in the year 1719 that Emperor Karl VI elevated the County of Vaduz and the Dominion of Schellenberg to the status of an Imperial Principality. Liechtenstein has been an independent country with unchanged state borders ever since. The history of our Princely House is also closely linked to the history of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. I am therefore particularly pleased to be here today.

With a territorial surface area of just 160 km<sup>2</sup>, located geographically between Austria and Switzerland, Liechtenstein is the sixth smallest state in the world. Liechtenstein has a broadly diversified economy and numerous small and medium-sized enterprises. Whereby the financial services sector is by no means the strongest part of the economy. The industrial and manufacturing sector makes the biggest contribution to gross output at 43 percent, followed by the services sector at 27 percent. Financial services come in third place at 23 percent. Our country has around 38,000 inhabitants, and approximately the same number of positions of employment. Because we have considerably more jobs than the size of the population of working age, our economy is heavily dependent on international commuters. Our unemployment rate is below 2 percent. Since Liechtenstein has no natural resources, education is to all intents and purposes the sole resource. Our economy is very heavily dependent on highly qualified workers.

To turn now to our education system, I would like briefly to inform you, Ladies and Gentlemen, about the basic structure of the Liechtenstein school system. Our children begin with kindergarten at the age of 4. While this is voluntary, almost 100 percent of children attend kindergar-ten. The kindergarten has been greatly strengthened in recent years. Educational requirements for the kindergarten teachers have been raised and the new school curriculum, which I will talk about later, was extended to include the kindergarten. Liechtenstein therefore relies heavily on early intervention.

After two years at kindergarten and spend five years there. This is the first compulsory school level of the Liechtenstein school system.

Another expression of the importance of early intervention in our country is the fact that we start English classes in the first grade of primary school. Pupils are six years old at this time. Teaching materials for the 1st to 5th grade have been developed by the “Liechtenstein Languages” project. And these teaching materials are used to provide very successful, playful lessons. With the result that children are already relatively proficient English speakers by the time they reach 5th grade. The lessons and teaching materials developed by Liechtenstein Languages are to be introduced at the Scio schools in the Czech Republic as part of a pilot project, which is something I am very pleased about.

Following primary school, the children switch to secondary level one for a further four years. A distinction is made between three types of school. The remit of the first type is primarily to promote the practical abilities of pupils. The second type has the task of providing extended and in-depth education, preparing students for vocational training and further studies. The remit of

grammar school is to educate pupils in scientific spirit to think and to judge independently, to introduce them to academic methodology and to prepare them for university studies. The final school grades of all three school types also serve to clarify occupational wishes and aptitude.

A particular characteristic is the permeability between the individual school types. If pupils demonstrate appropriate performance, children at secondary level one are able to switch from one type of school to another.

Compulsory schooling lasts 9 years and ends after secondary level one. If kindergarten, which is an integral part of our school system and which practically all children attend, is included, our pupils spend 11 years in the school system.

Following compulsory schooling, young people are essentially able to pursue one of two educational paths: The academic and the vocational path. In the case of the academic path, pupils attend the upper grammar school for a further three years and prepare themselves for university studies during this time. Apprentices complete dual vocational training on the vocational training path. This is known as dual because the theoretical part of the training takes place in school and the practical part at the training firm. For this purpose, trainees seek an apprenticeship in a training firm. A valid apprenticeship contract is required to attend a vocational school. Depending on the particular apprenticeship, trainees attend vocational school up to two days a week. For the remainder of the time the trainees work in the firm and gain practical experience. In return, trainees earn apprenticeship pay from the firm. The apprenticeship takes up to four years to complete.

The dual vocational training system provides the next generation of skilled workers and managers and enables young people to enter the world of work. Around two-thirds of school leavers in Liechtenstein consistently choose dual vocational training. Liechtenstein's economic success and low unemployment are largely due to the dual vocational training system. A further testimony to the quality of our dual vocational training system and our workplace are the achievements of our small country at the international world championships, WorldSkills. Liechtenstein has taken part in this since 1968, during which it has won gold 17 times, silver 13 times and bronze 20 times.

Due to the outstanding importance of dual vocational training for our country, politicians are strongly committed to promoting this. As Minister of Education, I am particularly keen to ensure that academic and vocational paths enjoy equal status. This is also reflected by the National Qualifications Framework of the Principality of Liechtenstein, which demonstrates that all eight levels can be reached on the academic as well as on the higher vocational path. In the Liechtenstein education system, vocational education and training is thus assigned to secondary level II and tertiary level. In order for people in Liechtenstein to aspire to this higher level of vocational training, we have only recently strengthened it by boosting the subsidies available.

Another measure that supports the equal status of both paths is permeability. Nobody should find themselves stuck on a particular path. University studies can be pursued on the vocational training path and vice versa. In our case, the bridge between the vocational and the academic path is the vocational baccalaureate school. Those who have completed dual vocational training can obtain the higher education entrance qualification via the vocational

baccalaureate school. The full-time course takes one year to complete, while the part-time course takes two years.

On account of its small size, Liechtenstein is dependent on cooperation with its neighbouring states Switzerland and Austria in the vocational school and university fields. This cooperation is enshrined in a number of international treaties. Liechtenstein does not have any vocational schools of its own. For this reason, students from Liechtenstein attend Swiss vocational schools.

In the university field, while Liechtenstein does have one state university and two private universities, it can by no means cover all necessary faculties with these, however. For this reason, around 70 percent of students from Liechtenstein study in Switzerland and around 20 percent in Austria. Only 7.5 percent study in Liechtenstein itself. The remainder pursue studies in a number of other countries. Conversely, the majority of students at the universities in Liechtenstein do not come from Liechtenstein either. As an EEA member, Liechtenstein is part of the European Higher Education Area. So you see, Ladies and Gentlemen, the student mobility is an important matter for Liechtenstein.

Dear Guests, I hope I have provided you with a brief introduction to Liechtenstein's educational system. I now wish, as announced, to explore the current challenges facing Liechtenstein's educational system. I hope you will excuse me if I limit myself to the topics of "digitisation, sustainability and migration", due to time constraints.

Allow me to begin with digitisation. Liechtenstein focuses strongly on this megatrend. Digitisation is increasing the intensity of knowledge. This means politics and business need to focus more strongly on research and development capabilities. As far as education is concerned, this means students need to acquire new skills and qualifications to meet the demands of more knowledge-intensive and rapidly changing labour markets. These also include social skills and emotional intelligence.

The new Liechtenstein curriculum places particular emphasis on the use of digital media. An important goal of the “media and IT” module is the responsible application and consideration of the opportunities and risks presented by the use of new media. In addition, we are keen to teach application and IT skills. Of course, this also requires a state-of-the-art infrastructure.

By the time the introductory phase of the new Liechtenstein curriculum has been completed, all primary school pupils will be equipped with personal tablets and secondary school pupils with personal notebooks. And schools are being provided with blanket wireless coverage.

When it comes to the use of digital media, teachers and teaching methods play a central role. For this reason we invest not just in IT structures but also in people, because the project also includes an extensive further training programme.

In combination with innovation, improved technologies also create a positive environment for greater sustainability, for example by increasing the production of renewable energy supplies. Which leads me to the second challenge, namely sustainability.

On 25 September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the UN's 2030 Development Agenda at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It has the title "Transformation of our world: Agenda 2030 for sustainable development" and is universal in character, in example it applies to every UN state and consequently also to Liechtenstein. The 17 goals of Agenda 2030 cover practically all areas relevant to sustainable development.

It is therefore no coincidence that education for sustainable development represents a guiding principle in the new curriculum. This is not a new subject, but instead a focus that serves as orientation for all disciplines and is therefore represented in the curriculum in an interdisciplinary manner.

Just a few days ago, we were able to launch two projects that on the one hand help schools implement education for sustainable development, and on the other hand also include vocational training in the process. Both projects aim to empower children and the young to play active roles in analysing and evaluating development processes with ecological, economic and socio-cultural aspects, to address sustainability criteria in their own lives and to initiate sustainable development processes jointly with others. This means pupils and trainees have the opportunity to make active contributions to sustainability through their own projects. On a broader scale, these projects therefore also support implementation of the sustainability goals of the UN's Agenda 2030.



Ladies and Gentlemen, I am now coming to the third challenge: migration. As the OECD report “Education, Trends, Future 2019” so impressively described, the number of international migrants rose between 1990 and 2017 from 153 million to reach 258 million. Which constitutes an increase of 69 percent! This raises the question of how education systems can support people from different backgrounds, languages and cultures. We are firmly convinced that language is the key to good integration. For this reason, a special course for refugees has been developed in our country, likewise by “Liechtenstein Languages”, applying a new learning method. This language course aims to support refugees in their particular life situations. They are provided with information to help them settle in, combined with the necessary knowledge of German. They learn basic terminology and linguistic expressions in these subject areas, which they can then apply in simple sentences. This is designed to make it easier for refugees to acclimatise and also provides them with basic knowledge of important customs in their new environment.

In the interim, courses of this project are being provided with numerous cooperation partners in all German-speaking countries. The learning method developed in Liechtenstein enables us, as a small country, to make an active contribution to the European migration issue.

This, Ladies and Gentlemen, were just three of the biggest challenges. We live in an age of great upheaval and rapid change. For this reason, it is important for our country that we rethink our education strategy. Our Ministry for Education is therefore currently working on a new and modern education strategy for Liechtenstein. Together with various stakeholders, the basic foundations for this strategy were laid in the summer of the current year. We

were able to ascertain in this conjunction that the starting position in Liechtenstein in the field of education is very good. For example, we have a high level of education, good infrastructure and favourable financial conditions. The small size of our country means, of course, that we benefit from short decision-making channels.

If we look to the future, however, this is not enough. We need to boost skills in the so-called STEM subjects (sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics) as well as in the field of digitisation. We need to strengthen early childhood education and care, increase political education and financial skills, improve education monitoring, promote foreign languages and prepare people already in working life for future challenges.

To ensure that all these important points are not forgotten, the corner-stones for a successful future are set out in our education strategy. This, for example, details the basic approach to control and determines the degree of autonomy of the educational institutions. The strategy also answers questions such as “How is the professionalism of teachers supported?” or “How is the quality of educational institutions measured?”

To safeguard quality in schools, next year the Ministry for Education will for the first time also be preparing an education report. Thereafter, this will be published every four years. This report will summarise and scientifically interpret all available data and identify existing data shortfalls. It is only by this means that we will be able to maintain and improve quality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are all very well aware that great challenges lie ahead. At the same time, however, there are also numerous opportunities. And when I look at this Festival, I am impressed by the momentum in your country. I shall return home with a wealth of inspirations. I also hope the insight into our education system has been of interest to you.

I thank you for your attention, and also wish you an inspiring day with many fascinating conversations!

Thank you very much!