

Today the President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, presented the 2014 Educational Awards to Kadri Leppoja, a music teacher at Miina Härma Gymnasium; Väino Ratassepp, a long-time chemistry teacher at Tallinn Music High School, and Galina Trofimova, the head of technology and a mining industry teacher at Ida-Virumaa Vocational Education Centre. The Physical Sciences Award went to Indrek Peil, a physics teacher at Saaremaa Ühisgümnaasium (Saaremaa Common Gymnasium).

"You have shown that we can have a good school and a good education anywhere, be it Saaremaa, Ida-Viru county, Tartu county or Tallinn. All over Estonia," said President Ilves when handing over the awards.

"Fate has made us think a lot about school, teachers and the spiritual environment surrounding young people in recent days," admitted the Head of State in his address, emphasising that today's school – and society in general – must find the means to help those who are struggling, who are alone, who have a problem.

According to President Ilves, all of us – parents, teachers, representatives in power and, of course, the President – must think of how to avoid tragedies in the future like the one that happened in Viljandi. "How can we best create and maintain a friendly and trusting atmosphere in schools and communities? What is the best way for us to protect both our children and teachers, and to protect and treat the mental health of our society in general?" he added.

Väino Ratassepp, who spoke on behalf of the laureates, said that presenting educational awards and acknowledging teachers in the process sets an example for the education system in general. "I want to thank the President for this acknowledgment," told Ratassepp, who also wished luck and success to his laureate colleagues, adding: "Let us hug each other more often."

All the laureates received 3,500 euros of award money, which was financed by **Danske Bank**. According to the CEO of Danske Bank, Aivar Rehe, society should offer more acknowledgment to the supporters and promoters of education, as they play a huge role in shaping the worldview of our offspring. "We are sincerely pleased to present monetary awards every autumn on behalf of Danske Bank to the promoters of education who clearly put more effort than expected into their work," added Rehe.

The Physical Sciences Award, which is worth 3,900 euros, is funded by **Skype Estonia**. The CEO of Skype Estonia, Andrus Järg, said that they are extremely pleased to give this year's Physical Science Award to Indrek Peil, who has brought together scientists and students in his work in Saaremaa Common Gymnasium, taken a creative approach to teaching physics and inspired his students. "Awakening curiosity and excitement combined with cultivating consistency in learning physical sciences has a powerful influence, and we do really hope that in the coming decades we will meet women and men among the future research specialists who built the foundation for their achievements by doing practical or research work either at Mini Science Days in Saaremaa or in science camps initiated by Indrek," told Järg.

**Kadri Leppoja** has worked as a music teacher at Miina Härma Gymnasium, Tartu, since 1976 and is a committed pedagogue-methodologist and choir conductor. She conducts four school choirs; apart from school choirs, Leppoja also works with Tartu Youth Choir and has worked for several years with the Estonian School Students' Mixed Choir. The choirs that she conducts have repeatedly achieved high rankings and won awards at numerous competitions both in Estonia and abroad. Ms Leppoja's choir singers have taken part in various musical stage plays, and they have been invited to perform at various national events, including the Fathers' Day concert ceremony in Estonia. All the choirs of Miina Härma Gymnasium have taken part in both local and national song celebrations. Kadri Leppoja was also the general conductor of the girls' and women's choir at the General Student's Song Celebration in 2007 and 2009.

**Väino Ratassepp** is an active pedagogue and chemistry teacher with extensive experience who retired last year, having worked as a chemistry teacher in Tallinn Music High School, Tallinn School of Communication, Tallinn Polytechnic School and Tallinn Construction School. He has taken part in preparing chemistry study programmes for basic schools and gymnasiums, and he has published numerous articles on chemistry, chemistry work and exercise books for schools of general education, and 12 chemistry textbooks. Ratassepp has stocked the chemistry labs of several schools and taught teachers of chemistry, and he also initiated the tradition of holding conferences for Estonian chemistry teachers. Schools have used chemistry study literature that has been co-authored by him for over 30 years.

**Galina Trofimova**, the head of technology and a mining industry teacher at Ida-Virumaa Vocational Education Centre, has developed and added to the popularity within the vocational education sphere of specialities that can only be found in Ida-Viru county – mining work, operator of chemical processes, industrial technology. Thanks to her entrepreneurial mind, laboratories fitted with unique high-tech equipment have been established for teaching chemistry and technological processes. Trofimova has worked tirelessly to develop and supplement study programmes for energetics as well as the mining and chemistry industries.

She has initiated the involvement of local enterprises in the development of professional standards and study programmes, and this is largely now why vocational education can be now offered that matches the available job positions.

**Indrek Peil** is a physics teacher and pedagogue-methodologist at Saaremaa Common Gymnasium. He graduated from Department of Physics of University of Tartu (1982) and has worked at Saaremaa Common Gymnasium since 1988. In 2012, Peil was elected the Teacher of the Year in Saare county. He has published several pedagogical articles about supervising research works by students and two physics textbooks. Peil initiated and still organises a national students' conference, Mini Science Days in Saaremaa and has contributed considerably to the popularisation of physical sciences among grade 6-12 students. At the initiative of Peil, students and teachers of Saaremaa Common Gymnasium have taken part and still participate in several national and international projects; he has organised science camps for students to help them become engaged in impractical science, brought together scientists and students, and taken a highly creative approach to teaching physics and inspiring students.

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