

Dear Hugo Treffner Gymnasium family.

A week ago, a ranking of Estonian gymnasiums and high schools based on average state examination scores was made available to the public.

I do not wish to judge whether the development and publication of such a ranking and full disclosure is right or wrong; whether it puts down the weaker by promoting the stronger; whether the state examination results represent the sole and the most righteous benchmark of the atmosphere that governs a school; to which extent this table demonstrates the inconsistencies in Estonian education and, therefore, the imbalance of our educational system; whether an average Estonian gymnasium has the face of a so-called elite or struggling school; whether, against the background of our northern, egalitarian social system, we should set our goals according to the lowest possible common denominator or to our ideals.

All of this forms quite a different and extremely serious subject, which Estonia should discuss.

However, this argument, which recurs year after year, brings forth the emotions, thus obstructing the elementary: schools in which the graduates equally excel in both physics and their native language, history and chemistry, social sciences and maths, and make it to the top of the ranking are both cursed and commended.

It is not the task of a gymnasium to raise a physicist or a linguist. This is the job done by a university.

A gymnasium must ensure a uniform, strong basic education, which will support a young individual in making choices based on his/her very own, personal preferences, and not circumstances. Among other things, these choices must also create the possibility for accomplished physicists to belong among the best dramatists, and vice versa, in the future.

We all know which school was on the top of the ranking, based on the average graduation grades.

However, I did not come here, for this formal opening of the academic year, to pat somebody on the shoulder and offer my congratulations.

Indeed, Hugo Treffner Gymnasium is one of the strongest schools in Estonia and obliged to be one in line with the history of your school. Only the physical and mental proximity of your school to the main building of Tartu University gives you an advantage, compared to many others.

My choice to come to Treffner Gymnasium for the opening ceremony of the academic year – which was, incidentally, made long before the ranking was published – was made because your school is among the strongest in Estonia, in relation to both teaching and learning sciences.

The shared understanding of basically all the teenagers over the world and, regrettably, some adult Estonians, who view physics and mathematics as tediously boring and difficult subjects that are not useful in real life, is not valid here.

Of course, mathematics, physics and informatics are taught in special interest classes in your school. A specific interest in these particular subjects during basic school is one of the pre-requisites for entry into Hugo Treffner Gymnasium.

However, it is regrettable that the number of students who graduate from basic schools with such a specific interest in sciences is too small in Estonia. Therefore, the number of gymnasiums that teach intensive classes of these subjects is also not very big.

This has already left an impression on Estonia's present and, regrettably, also the visible future.

I recently heard from a well-known Estonian academic that exactly 4.45 research specialists in the sphere of electronics and electro-technology match the framework of one of the main mechanisms for financing sciences in Estonia, the targeted financing.

This number is impermissibly small. What kind of Nokia are we to create in Estonia with just 4.45 electronics and electro-technology researchers? However, it is researchers who invent and implement the technologies that will be used throughout the world on a daily basis in five or ten years.

Innovative engineering sciences are all based on a strong basic knowledge of sciences, a wide scope of knowledge of other spheres, and bold and open ways of thinking, combined with the skill of seeing ideas implemented into practical and everyday life.

As the interest in sciences is rather rare both in basic school and gymnasium; as a demand for physics, mathematics, engineering and other applied sciences, comparable to so-called soft specialties, is missing in our universities, any development plan that speaks of a knowledge-based economy and competitive production, with a focus on export markets, will only represent hollow words.

Our myth of hard-working Estonians will only be a self-delusion, if we know that the productivity of an Estonian worker is three times lower than that of a German worker.

An economy that focuses on cheap sub-contracting and inexpedient utilisation of working hours cannot give us greater productivity than before and, likewise, cannot give us greater affluence.

Most certainly, we need to set priorities to develop packages for boosting our economy and for discussing a taxation system to match the new reality more effectively.

Regrettably, there will be no qualitative leap in our economic structure and efficiency of work, if the Estonian educational system fails to adopt some drastic measures, regarding the scope and quality of science curricula.

A knowledge-based economy means substantial knowledge in the sphere of mathematics,

physics, chemistry and biology. The art of sales and company management only become important once there is something to sell and manage.

Hugo Treffner Gymnasium is, as I've already mentioned, an example of doing things correctly and with good results. Here, people have not been afraid of radical changes, despite opposition and criticism.

We do know that a heated debate is taking place at the moment in educational circles and in the state administration, concerning the separation of the basic school and gymnasium levels. Here, it was done years ago.

I do hope that the progress and the model of your school will inspire administrators, teachers and students of other schools to follow in your footsteps.

Quite paradoxically, one of the limited bright aspects of the economic recession may become apparent in the sphere of education – the teaching profession is, once again, in demand, which is also shown by the toughening competition to apply for vacant teacher's jobs.

And this will allow schools to hire those who are capable of showing the real and enchanting nature of physics and mathematics, among other things, to young girls and boys.

All this will be valid, of course, on the provision that those people who set the state budget priorities have the political wisdom to avoid major cuts in the sphere of education.

In conclusion – dear *Treffnerists* – your place on the top of the ranking gives you no right to get a swelled head. These high grade averages belong to your predecessors. Therefore, I wish you persistence and diligence, which you will definitely exercise, to achieve comparable results.

Have a happy beginning of a new academic year.

Thank you.