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# Estonia

## VET in Europe – Country report

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**2012**

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## CHAPTER 1.

# External factors influencing VET

### 1.1. Political and socio-economic context

Estonia is a sovereign and independent democratic republic where the supreme power is vested in the people and the head of the state is the President. The government and its courts are organised in conformity with the constitution and according to the principle of a separation and balance of powers. Legislative power is vested in the Parliament (*Riigikogu*) with 101 members elected by proportional representation for four years. Executive power is vested in the Government of the Republic (*Vabariigi Valitsus*) which executes domestic and foreign policies and manages relations with other states, directs and co-ordinates the activities of government agencies, and administers the implementation of laws and legal acts. The President represents Estonia in international relations and he/she also has some controlling and co-operational functions with regard to the Parliament and the Government of the Republic. Ministries are established, pursuant to law, for the administration of the areas of government. The educational area in Estonia is managed by the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*).

In Estonia, the political context for all policies is defined by the programme of the coalition 2011-15, who started working in March 2011 and which now consists of two parties. As to education and research, the goal of the governing coalition is: 'The key for the continuance of Estonia is educated people; therefore the priority for coming years is the educational sphere. The aim is to lead Estonian education to the Nordic Countries' top level. Good education means bigger salary, better protection against unemployment and greater retirement benefit in the future. Good and accessible education is also a greater certainty for families to have children and an assurance for healthier and happier life. To build a prosperous country, merged into the Baltic Sea region, export-orientated, based on high-tech and sensed as destination for big investments, proceeding with educational rearrangements is seen as unavoidable' (Programme of the Coalition, 2011)

Promoting VET as an educational choice and increase its popularity among people is emphasized in the government programme. To achieve that, the coalition intends to: renovate/build new study bases and dormitories for all VET institutions; support the evolvement of VET institutions as local competence centres, which have a bigger role in regional development; create new

opportunities for complementary admission in VET; foster cooperation between general education and VET institutions and create possibilities for self-education for people who have finished VET and wish to continue to higher education. The quality of training is also pointed out: VET graduates must have vocational qualifications that are sufficient for labour market participation. Increasing the participation in lifelong learning (LLL) is also brought forth. The programme 'KUTSE' (described in Chapter 4), is also considered an important means in promoting dropouts to continue with studies in vocational education (Programme of the Coalition, 2011).

Estonia is divided into 15 counties, 33 towns, and 193 rural municipalities. County governments, run by governors, are the regional administration of the state. All local issues are resolved and managed by local governments, whose responsibilities include management of pre-school child care institutions, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary general schools, vocational educational institutions, libraries, community centres, museums, sports facilities, nursing homes and shelters, healthcare institutions and other local institutions in the rural municipality or town, provided they are owned by the local government.

One specific cultural feature of Estonia is its bilingual community and multicultural society. In 2011, about 69% of the population was Estonians (Statistics Estonia 2012a). The instruction in most VET institutions is in Estonian, though there are schools where the curricula is taught in Estonian and Russian or the instruction is in Russian only. One common feature is the significant improvement in the knowledge of English, and knowledge of languages is becoming more expected on the labour market.

Traditionally people tend to value upper secondary general education and higher education. During last few years VET curricula has been modernised, VET institutions have been renovated and equipped with modern technology. However, a relatively small proportion of lower secondary school graduates choose vocational education as their educational pathway (27% in 2012). That has contributed to the situation where over 31% of Estonians between 25 and 64 have no professional qualification acquired in the formal education system. According to the labour demand forecast prepared by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications in all economic sectors the need for specialists and skilled workers will increase by 2019 (Labour demand forecast, 2012).

## 1.2. Population and demographics

The area of Estonia is 45 227 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 1 339 662 in 2011. In 2011, the natural increase was negative as there was a decline in the number of

births. In external migration, both immigration and emigration increased in 2011 – 3 709 persons immigrated to and 6 214 persons emigrated from Estonia. One of the reasons for the increase in emigration was the slow recovery of the labour market from the recession and long-term unemployment, which forced people to look for jobs abroad. Table 1 gives an overview of changes in the population in 2003-11.

Table 1. **Total population (on 1<sup>st</sup> of January), 2003, 2006, 2009, 2011**

<b>geo\time</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2011</b>
EU-27	486 647 831	493 226 936	499 723 520(p)	50 3491 975(bp)
EE	1 356 045	1 344 684	1 340 415	1 339 662

(p) provisional

Description: The inhabitants of a given area on 1 January of the year in question (or, in some cases, on 31 December of the previous year). The population is based on data from the most recent census adjusted by the components of population change produced since the last census, or based on population registers

Last update: 14.9.2012

Link to data: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001>

Original label: [tps00001] – Total population; Further selection: none

Link to metadata: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/demo\\_pop\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/demo_pop_esms.htm)

General Disclaimer of the EC: [http://europa.eu/geninfo/legal\\_notices\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/geninfo/legal_notices_en.htm)

Source: Eurostat (Demographic Statistics); Date of extraction: 14.9.2012

The proportion of young people in the population continues to decrease (Table 2). Increase in the share of women with higher education giving birth to children shows the desire to attain education before having children. Five years ago the percentage of women with higher education who gave birth to a child was 31%; in 2011 the percentage was already 40%.

Table 2. **Age-specific demographic trends (baseline scenario until 2025)**

<b>Age group/year</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>
0-24	379 386	361 563	352 220	354 749
25-64	729 935	734 856	718 195	678 179
65+	230 250	238 777	253 494	270 628
Total	1 339 662	1 335 196	1 323 909	1 303 556

Source: Statistics Estonia, Eurostat

The government has an attractive bonus package for new mothers to encourage new births and counteract the impact of the ageing society. The parental benefit provides one parent with their average salary from the preceding calendar year for the time that they temporarily take off from work to care for their children (until the child becomes 1.5 years old). Any parent, adoptive parent, step-parent, guardian or foster parent who is raising a child and who is a

permanent resident of Estonia or a foreigner living in Estonia on the basis of a temporary residence permit has the right to the parental benefit.

Estonian demographic trends are similar to European tendencies. Though the negative natural increase in the 1990s has not yet affected the proportion of working-age population, its impact will appear in the coming years (Table 3).

Table 3. **Projected old-age dependency ratio, 2010-60**

<b>geotime</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2040</b>	<b>2050</b>	<b>2060</b>
EU-27	25.90	28.26	31.05	38.04	45.36	50.42	53.47
EE	25.01	26.70	29.18	34.42	38.96	47.19	55.55

Note: This indicator is defined as the projected number of persons aged 65 and over expressed as a percentage of the projected number of persons aged between 15 and 64. If we take the EU-27 countries, we will see that in 2010 the proportion will be 1 to 4, meaning 1 retired against four employed/active population; whereas in 2060, the proportion will be 2 to 2, meaning 2 retired against 2 employed/active population.

Description: Population aged 65+ divided by population aged 15-64 (projections)

Link to data: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdde511>

Eurostat original label: [tsdde511] – Projected old-age dependency ratio

Further selection: none

Link to metadata: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/proj\\_08c\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/proj_08c_esms.htm)

Disclaimer: [http://europa.eu/geninfo/legal\\_notices\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/geninfo/legal_notices_en.htm)

Date of extraction: 1905.2011; Last update: 16.5.2011

Source: Eurostat (EUROPOP2008 – Convergence scenario, national level (proj\_08c))

During recent years the number of students in vocational education has been rather stable. Under the influence of the economic crisis the number of vocational students increased in 2009 but the current number is comparable with the pre-crisis period. The slight decrease in total number of students is based on the demographic situation. On one hand the number of lower secondary school (ISCED 2A) graduates is decreasing. In addition the educational choices of lower secondary school graduates are strongly inclined towards general education. Until 2009 about 30% of lower secondary school students continued to vocational education, in 2011 the number was 27.5%. However, since 2008, the number of people in VET after upper-secondary school has increased as more students opt for a VET education after upper secondary school (Table 4).

Table 4. **VET schools and students by indicator and year**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of vocational educational institutions	67	58	48	47	45	45	43	42
Number of professional higher education institutions offering vocational education	0	4	6	6	6	6	8	8
Students total	29 915	29 013	28 651	27 381	27 239	28 363	28 012	27 046
Students in vocational education without compulsory education (ISCED 2C)	267	28	169	307	414	420	354	366
Students in upper-secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B)	18 886	18 882	18 795	18 030	17 648	17 627	16 897	15 428
Students in vocational education based on compulsory education (ISCED 3C)	0	0	208	424	505	598	581	655
Students in vocational courses after secondary education (ISCED 4B)	10 762	10 101	9 478	8 620	8 672	9 718	10 180	10 597

Source: Estonian Education Information System (EHIS), 2012

The network of vocational education institutions was mostly rearranged by 2009. Especially significant has been the reduction in the number of state-owned vocational education institutions from 58 to 30 during the past ten years. The objective was to increase the quality, accessibility and efficiency of VET institutions. Many smaller institutions have been merged into regional VET centres with a wide variety of specialties taught in one institution.

As the number of primary and lower secondary schools and VET institutions has decreased from year to year, the adjustment with demographic trends has taken place. In coming years a reorganization of upper-secondary and higher education institutions is planned.

### 1.3. **Economy and labour market indicators**

Due to the global economic crisis, which started in 2008, the situation on the Estonian labour market has changed remarkably. Employment, which had been steadily increasing since 2001, decreased rapidly in 2009 and 2010 and dropped to the level of ten years before, i.e. to the level of the previous economic crisis. In 2011 the situation on the labour market improved.

The economic activity of the population rose to the highest level of the last decade. In 2011, 696 000 persons aged 15-74 were economically active; 609 000 of them were employed and 87 000 were unemployed (Table 5).

Table 5. **Population aged 15-74 by sex and labour status 2007-11 (in thousands and as a % of total)**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Labour force	687.4	494.9	690.9	686.8	695.9
employed	655.3	656.5	595.8	570.9	609.1
unemployed	32.0	38.4	95.1	115.9	86.8
Inactive	359.0	347.9	348.0	348.0	333.8
Total	1 046.4	1 042.8	1 038.8	1 034.8	1 029.8
Labour force participation rate %	65.7	66.6	66.5	66.4	67.6
Employment rate %	62.6	63.0	57.4	55.2	59.1
Unemployment rate %	4.7	5.5	13.8	16.9	12.5

Source: Statistics Estonia, 2012

The economically inactive population numbered 334 000. The economic crisis had a significant impact on the employment and unemployment indicators, but a relatively small impact on the economic activity of the population. The labour force participation rate for the population aged 15-74, which was 65.7% in 2007, rose to 67.6% in 2011.

As the economic crisis had the greatest impact on manufacturing and construction, the share of the secondary sector in employment, which had been increasing in 2007-08, decreased from 35% to 31% during 2008-10 (Table 6). In 2011 the employment in these industries increased, meaning that the share of the secondary sector increased again and rose to 32.5%. The share of the tertiary sector, which had increased from 61% to 65% in the years 2008-10, decreased to 63% in 2011. The share of the primary sector, which decreased continuously in 2001-08 and was less than 4% in 2008, has slightly increased in the last three years (4.4% in 2011).

Table 6. **Employed persons aged 15+ by economic sector (as a % of total employment), 2008-11**

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Primary sector	3.9	4	4.2	4.4
Secondary sector	35.4	31.7	30.5	32.5
Tertiary sector	60.7	64.3	65.3	63

Source: Statistics Estonia, 2012

In 2007, the labour market indicators were at their highest. 62.6% of the people aged 15-74 were employed. The rapid economic growth of the previous years, which entailed a growing demand for labour, brought a record number of people to employment in 2007 and in the beginning of 2008. Both the employment and unemployment indicators were comparable with the levels

prevailing at the beginning of the 1990s. The economic crises changed the situation, as the employment rate which had been growing since 2001, decreased sharply and in 2010 reached the level of 55.2%. In 2011 the employment rate increased to 59.1%.

In 2011 the unemployment was the lowest of the last three years. The unemployment rate, which decreased from 14% to 4% in the years 2001-07, started to increase rapidly in 2008 and reached nearly 20% in the 1st quarter of 2010, when the number of unemployed persons was at a record high at 137 000. In 2011 the number of unemployed persons decreased to 12.5%.

Due to fewer employment possibilities, there was an increase in unemployment regardless of educational level during the economic crisis. The situation in the labour market improved in 2011; however, it was much more difficult for persons with lower education to find a job. In 2011, 26.2% of the labour force with lower secondary education were unemployed (compared to 30.9% the year before), which is over two times higher than the overall unemployment rate. The unemployment rate of persons with upper secondary or vocational education decreased significantly more (from 19.3% to 12.8%). The unemployment rate of persons with higher education, Master's or Doctor's degree was still the lowest (7.6%).

In the last three years, unemployment in Estonia has been higher than the EU average. However, according to the data of Eurostat, the average unemployment rate of the EU in 2011 remained on the level of 2010 (9.7%). At the same time, in Estonia it decreased by 4.4 percentage points – to 12.5%. Compared by age group, unemployment decreased the most among young people. In 2010, the unemployment rate of persons aged 15-24 was 33% in Estonia, being 12 percentage points higher than the EU average. In 2011, the youth unemployment rate dropped to 22% in Estonia and was only 1 percentage point higher than the EU average.

At the moment, special measures are planned to decrease youth unemployment. The goal is to lessen youth unemployment rate at least to the same level as it was before the crises.

Table 7 gives overview about employed persons by economic sector of activity in 2011 in Estonia and in EU-27.

Table 7. **Employed persons aged 15+ by economic sector of activity (in thousands and as a % of total employment), 2011**

	geo	EU-27	EE
primary sector and utilities	people	14 916	41.2
	%	6.9	6.8
manufacturing	people	34 225	121
	%	15.8	19.9
construction	people	16 061	59
	%	7.4	9.7
distribution and transport	people	57 317	165.5
	%	26.4	27.2
business and other services	people	39 400	84.7
	%	18.1	13.9
non marketed services	people	54 002	133
	%	24.9	21.8

Description: Employment persons aged 15+ by economic sector of activity (NACE rev2) in thousands and as % of total employment

Eurostat label: lfsa\_egan2-Employment by sex, age groups and economic activity (from 2008, NACE rev.2) (1000)

Link to data: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa\\_egan2&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_egan2&lang=en)

Further selections: year=2009, sex=total, age=15+, all sectors selected

Link to metadata: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/lfsq\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/lfsq_esms.htm)

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey); Extracted on: 17.9.2012; Last update: 5.9.2012

#### 1.4. Educational attainment of population

In comparison with the EU average (Table 8), the proportion of the population with low level qualifications is small (11.1%). For tertiary education, the percentage of the population aged 25-64 with higher education was higher than in most EU member states in 2011. Education has been traditionally highly valued, both in Soviet times and currently. Tertiary level education is appraised more than VET; therefore the participation rate in higher education has been high for several years.

Table 8. **Persons aged 25-64 with a given education attainment level (%)**

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)	EU-27	30.7	30.1	29.3	28.7	28.0	27.3	26.6
	EE	10.9	11.5	10.9	11.5	11.1	10.8	11.1
Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)	EU-27	46.9	47.0	47.1	47.1	46.8	46.8	46.6
	EE	55.8	55.2	55.8	54.2	53.0	53.9	52.2
First and second stage of tertiary education (levels 5 and 6)	EU-27	22.5	23.0	23.5	24.2	25.1	25.9	26.8
	EE	33.3	33.3	33.3	34.3	36.0	35.3	36.8

Description: Persons with a given education attainment level by sex and age groups (%) [edat\_lfs\_9903]

Original Eurostat table: educ\_figdp-Expenditure on education as % of GDP or public expenditure

Link to data: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

Source: Eurostat (UOE); extracted on: 25.09.2012; Last update: 8.6.2012.

However, the share of working-age population (age group 25-64) who has lower secondary or general upper secondary education and don't have any professional education (vocational or higher) is 31%. In 2011, the highest share (33.7%) of people without any professional education was among the youngest age group (25-34).

In 2011, the percentage of young people (18-24) with compulsory or lower education who did not continue their studies was 10.9% and this number has been slightly decreasing since 2007 (Table 9).

Table 9. **Early school leavers (%), 2007-11**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU-27	15.1	14.9	14.4	14.1	13.5
EE	14.4	14	13.9	11.6	10.9

Description: Percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training, Eurostat original label: lfsi\_edu\_a-Youth education, lifelong learning, early school leavers – annual data

Link to data: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsi\\_edu\\_a&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsi_edu_a&lang=en)

Further selections: indic\_em=Early school-leavers – percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training

Link to metadata: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/lfsi\\_edu\\_a\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/lfsi_edu_a_esms.htm)

INDICATORS= OBS\_FLAG; INDIC\_EM

Source: Eurostat (LFS); extracted: 25.9.2012; last update 6.6.2012

Since 2008-09 the average dropout rate of VET students has increased to 19.5% in the 2010-11 study year. The rate of dropout has been higher in post-secondary VET (ISCED 4B) (21.2% in 2011) than in upper secondary VET (17.9%). The main reasons for discontinuing the studies are students choosing an inappropriate specialty and a discrepancy between requirements and abilities (Reinhold M., 2012). In post-secondary VET the reason for discontinuing the studies is also the difficulty in keeping balance between studying and working.

The number of graduates in VET schools has increased in upper secondary VET with 9.2% and in post-secondary VET with 7% in 2011 as compared to 2010 (Table 10).

Table 10. **Graduates at ISCED level 3 and 4 by level of education, programme orientation and sex (number and %), 2007-11**

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
3 GEN Total	11 958	12 192	12 457	12 027	12 027	10 413	10 080
M (%)	40.0	40.1	39.6	40.5	40.4	40.7	41.9
F (%)	60.0	59.9	60.4	59.5	59.6	59.3	58.1
3 VOC Total	3 696	3 724	4 166	4 110	4 218	3 858	4 214
M (%)	65.0	66.0	67.0	66.1	67.2	63.6	63.4
F (%)	35.0	34.0	33.0	33.9	32.8	36.4	36.6
4 VOC Total	3 843	3 843	3 481	3 057	3 196	3 531	3 777
M (%)	39.0	30.9	33.4	32.1	34.5	35.3	39.4
F (%)	61.0	59.7	66.6	67.9	64.6	64.7	60.6

S= sex; T= total; M=males; F=females; GEN=general; VOC=vocational

Source: Statistics Estonia, 2012

The value of vocational education has risen against the background of economic recession and unemployment. Most students enrolled in vocational education in the academic year of 2011-12 were studying in the upper secondary vocational programme (57%). 39.2% of students were receiving post-secondary vocational training, 1.4% were taking vocational courses without educational requirements (most of these students lack lower secondary education) (Table 4). Traditionally there have been more males than females in vocational education. However there are differences between VET levels. In upper secondary vocational programmes 63.4% are male graduates, but in post-secondary vocational training only 39.4% are males (Estonian Education Information System – EHIS). The most preferred field of study for men is engineering trades (*tehnikaalad*). Women are mostly studying personal service (*isikuteenindus*), and business and administration (*äriindus ja haldus*) (Statistics Estonia, 2012b).

There is also a tendency that the average age of VET students is growing. The share of VET students older than 25 years was 20% in 2011 as compared to 15% in 2008 (VET statistics, 2012).

In 2001-06 the participation in lifelong learning was between 4-7%. The rate has been increasing since 2008 when different ministries started measures to provide short term training for adults (see also Chapter 2). In 2011 it was 12.0% (Table 11). The government has set the goal to reach 15% by 2015 and 20% by 2020.

Table 11. **Lifelong learning-Adult participation in education and training by sex (%)**, 2002, 2005, 2011

<b>time</b>	<b>2002</b>			<b>2005</b>			<b>2011</b>		
<b>geo</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>
EU-27	7.2	7.8	6.6	9.8	10.5	9.0	8.9	9.6	8.2
EE	5.4	6.9	3.6	5.9	7.3	4.3 (u)	12.0	14.5	9.2

(u) unreliable/uncertain data

Description: Life-long learning (adult participation in education and training) – percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey

Eurostat original label: lfsi\_edu\_a-Youth education, lifelong learning, early school leavers – annual data

Link to data: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsi\\_edu\\_a&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsi_edu_a&lang=en)

Further selections: sex=total, male, female, indicator=lifelong learning total, lifelong learning male, lifelong learning female, year =2002, 2005, 2008

Link to metadata: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/lfsi\\_edu\\_a\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/lfsi_edu_a_esms.htm)

INDICATORS=OBS\_FLAG

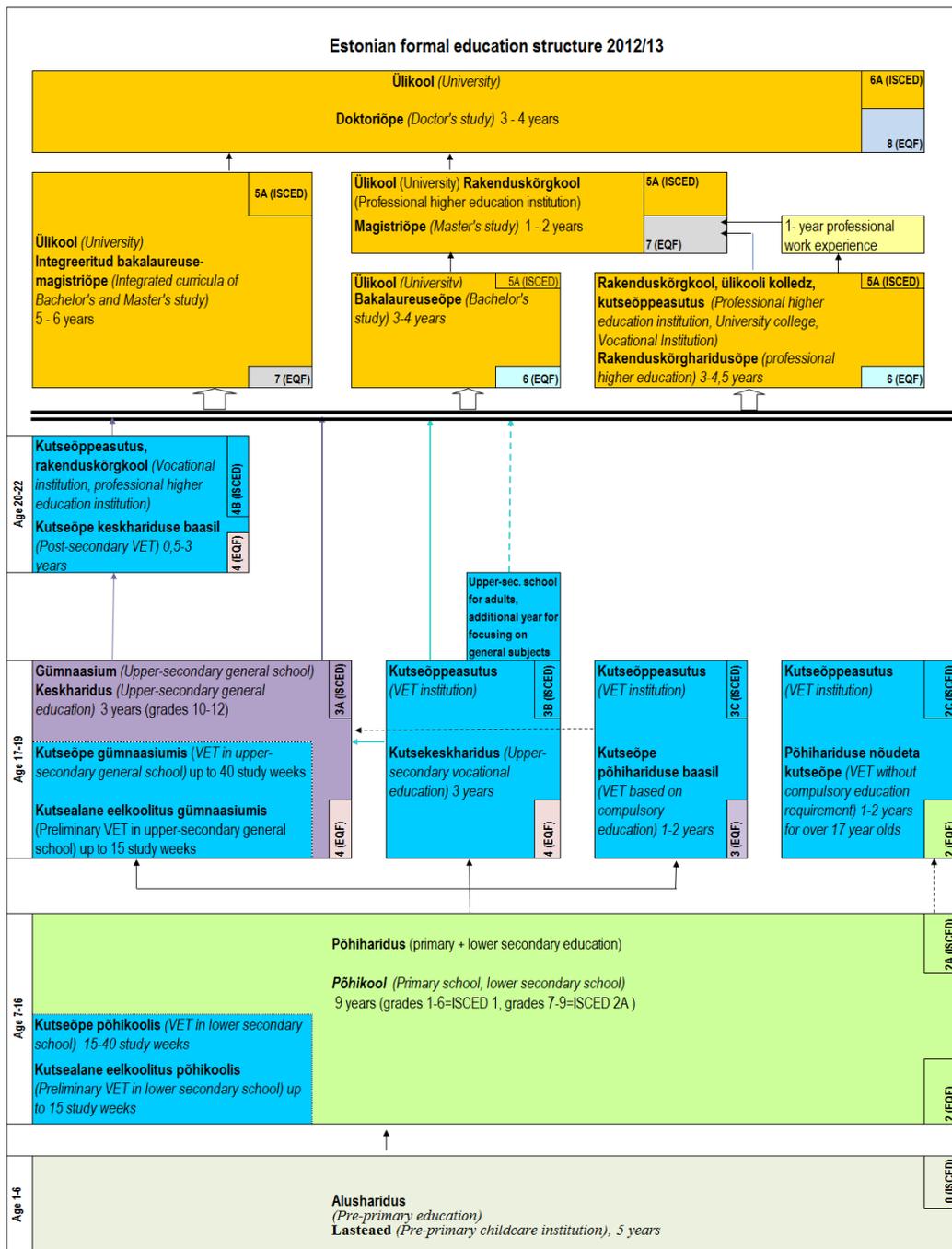
Source: Eurostat (LFS); extracted on: 24.9.2012; last update: 6.6.2012

## CHAPTER 2.

# Providing VET in a LLL perspective

## 2.1. National education and training system

Figure 1. Estonian formal education structure 2012



ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education  
EQF - European Qualifications Framework

## 2.2. Government-regulated VET provision

### 2.2.1. Governance of formal VET

At the level of legislative and administrative power, the Parliament (*Riigikogu*), the government of the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus*) and the MoER (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*) administer vocational education and training system.

The legislative framework for the education and training system originates from Parliament. The Parliament has the exclusive authority to determine the principles of the formation, functioning and development of the education system. The legal basis for VET was created in the late 1990s. There are 11 acts or regulations regulating formal VET in Estonia <sup>(1)</sup>.

The government of the Republic of Estonia decides national strategies by adopting and implementing state education development plans. It also determines unified basic cost of study places and curriculum group specific factors (coefficient), procedures to establish, reorganise and close public educational institutions and to determine remuneration principles for staff.

The MoER co-ordinates the preparation and implementation of education policies. The role of the Ministry is strategic planning, preparation of legislative acts, initiating new initiatives, and determining state commissioned education for VET. Moreover MoER administers the VET schools, e.g. establishes, reorganises and closes public educational institutions (except universities and professional higher education institutions), approves the curricula, study programmes, textbooks and teaching/study aids (except for universities); and administers public assets allocated to the education system.

Since 2012 Foundation Innove <sup>(2)</sup> is designated by the Ministry to implement the national education and language policy in the field of primary, lower and upper secondary education as well as in vocational and adult education.

One of the activities of the VET agency (*Kutsehariduse agentuur*) in Foundation Innove is the establishment of state curricula and the competence-

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<sup>(1)</sup> Vocational Education Institutions Act, Vocational Education Standard, Policies of Implementing Workplace Based Training, Private Education Institutions Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Adult Education Act, Conditions and Policies for Arranging Professional Training for Working Adults in VET institutions, Professions Act, The recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act, Study Allowances and Study Loans Act, Youth Work Act.

<sup>(2)</sup> Until the end of 2011 this function was filled by National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (NEQS) (*Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus*). In 2012 NEQC joined Foundation Innove.

based modular curricula in all the fields on which the school curricula have to be based. It also organises continuous training for VET teachers and trainers and prepares methodological materials.

Other ministries involved in VET governance are:

- (a) the ministry of social affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*) is responsible for the organising and financing of training for unemployed people as well as for people with special needs;
- (b) the ministry of culture (*Kultuuriministeerium*) is coordinating through the Integration and Migration Foundation the integration of minorities and providing them with education opportunities;
- (c) the ministry of defence (*Kaitseministeerium*) administers the Non-commissioned Officers' School of the Estonian National Defence College;
- (d) the ministry of economic affairs and communications (*Majandus- ja kommunikatsiooniministeerium*) compiles the labour force forecasts which are the basis for determining the state commissioned vocational education;
- (e) the ministry of interior affairs (*Siseministeerium*) organises training for police, rescue and prison officials and cooperates with MoER in organising VET in prisons.

The ministry of education and research also involves several advisory bodies and social partner organisations in policy development.

County and local governments have an administrative role to play in VET at local level. County governments prepare and implement education development plans for their county and coordinate the activities of municipal educational institutions.

Social partners' participation in VET is regulated by national legislation as well as by the partners' agreements with other stakeholders. At national level, social partners are represented by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Eesti Kaubandus-Tööstuskoda*), the Estonian Employers' Confederation (*Eesti Töandjate Keskkliit*) and the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions (*Eesti Ametiühingute Keskkliit*). In particular, employers play a more active and influential role through their participation in professional councils (*kutsenõukogud*), by creating professional standards for each profession (Professions Act, 2008). At local level, social partners participate in VET school boards (*Kutseõppeasutuse nõukogu*) (established under the amendments to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, in 2006), which consist of at least seven people, out of which more than one half have to be social partners (representatives of local municipalities, registered organisations and trade associations of employers and workers and labour market boards).

VET providers can be owned by central or local government or privately owned and they have a similar management form according to the Vocational Education Institutions Act. A VET school is managed by the head of the school whose function is to ensure the effective operation of the school. The head of a school (director) is responsible for the activities, development and legitimate use of financial resources of the school. The head of a VET school reports to the VET school board. In 2012, the majority of VET institutions (29) belong to the state and they are run by the Ministry of Education and Research. three of 41 VET institutions are run by municipalities, nine are private institutions. There are also eight professional higher education institutions that are providing in addition to higher education (ISCED 5A) also VET programmes at post-secondary level (ISCED 4B).

### **2.2.2. Financing formal VET**

Vocational education and training (within formal education) is mostly financed from the state budget on the basis of state commissioned education (Vocational Education Institutions Act). As there is no obligation to apply state commissioned education to all VET-programmes, a small share of privately paid VET programmes is also available. The share of private funding in upper secondary and post-secondary non tertiary VET is about 5%. Out of 27 046 students 25 579 studied on the state funded study places in 2011-12. Private VET schools may apply for state commissioned education as well. State and municipal vocational schools may also provide payable services related to the main activities of the school (formal training and professional) and use other sources of revenue (international projects funded from abroad).

The study costs of state VET schools are covered within the limits of the state-commissioned education and by the number of study places (per-capita financing). The cost of one study place is calculated from the unified basic cost of the study place and a curriculum group specific factor (coefficient). Extra factors apply for studies for persons with special educational needs' and for VET studies in prisons. This funding scheme covers VET-institutions' costs for salaries (teachers, managers and other staff), training materials and exploitation costs of all premises (heating, electricity, etc.). The cost of a study place for each budgetary year is established by the Government. Investments into equipment, premises etc. have been financed separately (mostly co-financed from EU structural funds) during the last decade.

For different VET study levels (ISCED 2C, 3C, 3B, 4B) and types (school based and workplace based, also called as apprenticeship) the same funding scheme is used. For VET in lower secondary school and upper secondary

general school (ISCED 2A, 3A), the funding comes partly from the budget of the general school and partly from the vocational school budget.

The study places within the curriculum group are approved for the next 3 years. The school has the right to decide the specific curriculum within the funded curriculum group, types of training and forms of study, as well as the number and time of admission of the new applicants. At the same time the school is obligated to fill all the state funded study places during the whole calendar year. If the school cannot admit enough students in some curricula, it can use the funding for providing additional VET courses in the same curriculum group in lower secondary or upper secondary general school (Sections 2.2.4-2.2.5). VET schools can also use the state funded study places to finance the short term adult education courses (non-formal training for adults described in Section 2.3).

The expenditures on vocational education have been growing during past few years: 16.4% in 2009 and 31% in 2010 versus prior year (Table 12). However, the main expenditures have been on the investments into modernising the premises and equipment of VET schools (40% of total expenditures). Total expenditure in VET per student without taking into account these investments, has remained on the same level since 2008.

**Table 12. Expenditure on education by educational level (million EUR)**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total general education expenditures	294.6	314.0	350.6	391.9	451.2	435.8	389.0
incl. investments	36.9	31.9	55.5	50.2	51.0	53.3	15.2
Number of students in general education	199 084	190 879	180 963	170 994	161 961	154 481	149 641
Total expenditure per student in general education	1 479.6	1 644.9	1 937.6	2 292.1	2 786.0	2 820.9	2 599.5
Total vocational education expenditures	43.0	61.3	73.0	89.1	84.6	98.5	129.0
incl. investments	3.2	13.5	19.4	21.5	4.4	25.8	51.6
Number of students in vocational education	28 183	29 915	29 013	28 651	27 381	27 239	28 363
Total expenditure per student in vocational education	1 525.5	2 047.8	2 516.6	3 111.4	3 088.8	3 614.9	4 546.6
Total higher education expenditures	98.4	101.4	111.2	160.8	172.2	182.6	171.1
incl. investments	8.6	4.4	2.4	29.0	3.8	33.4	4.0
Number of students in higher education	65 659	67 760	68 287	68 767	68 168	68 399	68 985
Total expenditure per student in higher education	1 499.2	1 495.9	1 629.0	2 337.8	2 525.9	2 669.4	2 479.9

Source: Ministry of Education and Research, 2012

### 2.2.3. Principles of curricula

National and school curricula have been developed on the principle of modules and on the basis of professional standards. Curricula ensure the acquisition of

the general and basic skills required in the modern world, and enable students to specialise within the curriculum. The new professional standards are competence-based and measure learning outcomes. These standards are approved by professional councils, which consist of representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the corresponding area of activity and the representatives of the state. The national curricula are based on these professional standards, which are renewed once every four years. Consequently, the curricula are also output-based and are renewed once every four years. Thus the formal qualifications correspond to labour market needs as much as possible.

#### 2.2.4. VET at lower secondary level

Table 13 gives an overview about main fields of study and other indicators of VET at lower secondary VET.

Table 13. VET at lower-secondary level

Name of IVET programme	Main fields of study	Corresponding ISCED level/orientation	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between school- and work-based training	Average duration of studies	Transfer to other pathways
VET and preliminary VET in lower secondary schools	Humanities and arts Engineering, manufacturing and construction Services	(VET for students in 2a)	General subjects mostly, VET subject is optional	N/A	Up to 40 weeks	3a, 3b

Source: Vocational Education Institutions Act, Vocational Education Standard, EHS

##### 2.2.4.1. Vocational education and training in lower secondary school (ISCED 2A)

The aim of vocational training in lower secondary school is to provide the students with basic vocational, professional or occupational knowledge and skills as well as basic knowledge and skills necessary for planning a career, and to develop a readiness for continued studies (Vocational Education Standard, 2006). Vocational training in lower secondary schools is provided by a VET school in cooperation with the lower secondary school. The students follow the lower secondary school curriculum and are enlisted as the students of a lower secondary school. The study is conducted according to a VET curriculum which is a shortened version of a VET school curriculum. There is no official minimum age limit, but the training usually takes place in grades 7-9, thus the students are about 13-16 years of age. The training can be carried out on the premises of either the lower secondary school or the VET institution. The volume of the

studies is usually 15-40 study weeks. The graduates receive the diploma of the lower secondary school and a certificate of the VET school, which certifies the course taken. The courses will be taken into account if the student continues in a VET school. The graduate can take a professional exam and/or enter the labour market.

In lower secondary school also preliminary vocational training (*eelkutseõpe*) can be organised. This preliminary vocational training (*kutsealane eelkoolitus põhikoolis*) is a low-volume introduction of professions and specialities that is provided for the purpose of vocational orientation in the form of elective subjects with the volume of up to 15 study weeks of study prescribed by the national curricula for lower secondary schools, the simplified national curriculum for lower secondary schools (supplementary learning curriculum) or the national coping curriculum (Vocational Education Standard, 2006). Arranging these courses does not presume cooperation between lower secondary schools and VET institutions. These courses are not funded separately by the state and are solely finance from the general school budget.

#### **2.2.5. VET at upper secondary level**

After graduating from lower secondary school a young person can continue studies at upper secondary general school (*gümnaasium*, ISCED 3A, currently chosen by 70% of students) or at a VET institution to acquire upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B, chosen by approximately 30% of students). The state and local authorities must provide upper secondary level learning opportunities for all people.

Four VET programmes can be distinguished in upper secondary vocational education:

- (a) VET and preliminary VET in upper secondary general schools (*kutseõpe gümnaasiumis*),
- (b) Upper secondary vocational education (*kutsekeskharidus*),
- (c) Vocational training based on compulsory education (*kutseõpe põhihariduse baasil*),
- (d) Vocational education and training without compulsory education requirement (*põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõpe*).

Table 14 gives an overview about main fields of study and other indicators of VET at upper secondary VET.

Table 14. VET at upper secondary level

Type of educational programme	Main fields of study	Corresponding ISCED level/orientation	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between school- and work-based training	Average duration of studies	Transfer to other pathways
VET and preliminary VET in Upper Secondary Schools	Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services	(VET for students in 3a)	Mostly general subjects	50/50% (latter 50% is usually divided into: 25% practical training and 25% practical work in enterprise)	15-40 study weeks	3b- can go directly to the 2nd year in VET school if takes 1 year of VET subjects
Upper Secondary vocational education	Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services	3b	2:1	50/50% (latter 50% is usually divided into: 25% practical training and 25% practical work in enterprise)	At least 3 years, general subjects at least 1 year.	4b, 5a (with the help of an optional year)
Vocational Training Based on compulsory Education	Social sciences, business and law Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services	3c	VET subjects only	50/50% (latter 50% is usually divided into: 25% practical training and 25% practical work in enterprise)	0,5-2 years	3a, 3b
VET without compulsory education requirement	Humanities and arts Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services	2c	Vocational subjects only	50/50% (latter 50% is usually divided into: 25% practical training and 25% practical work in enterprise)		2a

Source: Vocational Education Institutions Act, Vocational Education Standard, EHIS

#### 2.2.5.1. VET and preliminary VET in upper secondary general schools (ISCED 3A)

The aim of vocational training in general upper secondary schools (*gümnaasium*) is to provide the students with basic vocational, professional or occupational knowledge and skills as well as basic knowledge and skills necessary for planning a career, and to develop a readiness for continued studies. Vocational training in upper secondary general schools means studies through which students acquiring general upper-secondary education also acquire basic vocational, professional or occupational knowledge and skills on the basis of

vocational training curricula (Vocational Education Standard, 2006). Vocational training in upper secondary schools is organised by the VET school in cooperation with the upper secondary school. The training can be carried out in the premises of either the upper secondary school or the VET institution. The study is conducted according to a VET curriculum which is a shortened version of a VET school curriculum. There is no official minimum age limit, but the training is usually offered in grades 10-12, thus the students are about 17-19 years of age. The volume of the studies is usually 15-40 study weeks. The graduates receive the diploma of the upper secondary school and a certificate of the VET school, which certifies the course taken. A vocational school will take account of the knowledge and skills acquired in the process of vocational training at an upper secondary school if a student continues his or her studies based on the curriculum for the same vocation or profession. The graduate can take a professional exam and/or enter the labour market.

In upper secondary general school also preliminary vocational training (*eelkutseõpe*) can be organised. Preliminary vocational training is a low-volume introduction of professions and specialities that is provided for the purpose of vocational orientation in the form of elective subjects with the volume of up to 15 study weeks of study prescribed by the national curricula for upper secondary schools, the simplified national curriculum for upper secondary schools (supplementary learning curriculum) or the national coping curriculum (Vocational Education Standard, 2006). Arranging these courses does not presume cooperation between upper secondary schools and VET institutions. These courses are not funded separately by the state but are solely financed from the general school budget.

#### 2.2.5.2. *Upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B)*

Of all VET students in Estonia, 57% studied at upper secondary vocational education in 2011. The objective of upper secondary VET is to develop the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes required for independent skilled work. The curricula define minimum study duration of three years or 120 study weeks, half of which is dedicated to subjects related to the profession or area of specialisation. As stipulated by the Vocational Education Standard, school-based practical work and practical training in enterprises form 50% of studies and 40 weeks are given to general education subjects.

Practical training in enterprises is an integral part of the curricula of upper secondary VET. The training is based on a contract between a VET institution, the student and (either a public or private) enterprise. VET providers must ensure training places for students and guarantee appropriate placements in accordance

with curricula objectives. Providers are also responsible for supervising and assessing the training.

Upon graduation the person has completed, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and passed the final exam of the profession or area of specialisation. The final examination at a vocational school may be replaced by a professional qualification examination. Successful candidates receive an occupational qualification certificate.

The school issues to a person graduating from upper secondary vocational education an upper secondary VET certificate (*lõputunnistus kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta*) together with a results report in proof of concluding upper secondary vocational education.

Upper secondary vocational education differs from general education in that students are not required to take state examinations to graduate. Nevertheless state examinations are obligatory for VET students wishing to continue their studies in universities. These students have an opportunity to take an additional year (up to 35 study weeks) in subjects in which they want to pass the state exam. Students who have interrupted their upper secondary vocational studies have the right to continue in upper secondary general school. The student can transfer the grades on presentation of a study progress sheet with the approval of the teacher's council.

#### 2.2.5.3. Vocational training based on compulsory education (ISCED 3C)

The students undergoing vocational training based on compulsory education acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performing skilled work in a profession, speciality or occupation. Students in this type of VET do not acquire upper-secondary education. The studies take place at a VET school and the students are enrolled as VET students. Of all VET students 2.4% participated in this type of VET in 2011.

The volume of studies prescribed by the school curriculum is 40 to 100 weeks of study and up to 120 weeks of study under the programmes of music and performing arts. Practical work and practical training shall make up at least 50% of the volume of vocational training.

Upon graduation the person has completed, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and passed the final exam of the profession or area of specialisation. Instead a student may graduate by taking a professional exam. Successful candidates receive an occupational qualification certificate. A person graduating from vocational training based on compulsory education will be issued a VET based on compulsory education certificate (*lõputunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutseõppe läbimise kohta*) together with a results report in

proof of concluding vocational training. The further pathways for graduates are entering the labour market or acquiring upper secondary general education and then entering higher education.

#### 2.2.5.4. *Vocational education and training without compulsory education requirement (ISCED 2C)*

Vocational training without lower secondary/compulsory education requirement (*põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõpe*) is meant for persons over minimum school-leaving age (17 years) who lack lower secondary education (ISCED 2C). In Estonia, 1.4% of all VET students studied in this type of VET in 2011 (Table 4). In this type of vocational training, students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performing skilled work in a profession, speciality or occupation. No restrictions related to the level of education shall be set for persons over the minimum school-leaving age who lack lower secondary/compulsory education upon commencing such vocational training.

The volume of studies established by school curricula is 20 to 100 weeks. Practical work and practical training shall make up at least 50% of the volume of the training. Upon graduation, the person has completed, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and passed the final exam of the profession or area of specialisation. The final examination at a vocational school may be replaced by a professional qualification examination (*kutseksam*) administered by the National Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*). Successful candidates receive occupational qualification certificate (*kutsetunnistus*).

Upon graduation, the school issues a VET without compulsory education requirement certificate (*lõputunnistus põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõppe läbimise kohta*) together with a results report in proof of concluding the vocational training. The graduates may then enter the labour market. The persons in the target group may acquire lower secondary education pursuant to the general procedure, simultaneously with vocational training or after graduating from vocational training. After acquiring lower secondary education the graduates may continue their studies in upper secondary general or upper secondary vocational education.

#### 2.2.6. **Vocational education and training at post-secondary (non-tertiary) level**

After acquiring upper secondary general (ISCED 3A) education or upper secondary vocational (ISCED 3B) education, students can choose to continue their studies in post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education (ISCED 4B). The objective is to prepare workers for skilled work and students are given the

knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to perform complicated work independently. VET at post-secondary level is provided by VET schools (39 schools) as well as professional higher education institutions (8 institutions). In 2011, 39.2% of all VET students studied in VET at post-secondary level. There is no age limit for entering the VET schools at this level. The students have become older in the recent years.

Study duration is between 1-2.5 years, the volume shall be 40 to 100 weeks of study and up to 120 weeks of study under the programmes of music and performing arts. Practical work and practical training shall make up at least 50% of the volume of vocational training. Table 15 gives an overview of main fields of study and other indicators of VET at post -secondary VET.

Table 15. **VET at post-secondary (non tertiary) level**

Type of educational programme	Main fields of study	Corresponding ISCED level/ orientation	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between school- and work-based training	Average duration of studies	Transfer to other pathways
Vocational Training Based on Secondary Education	Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture health and welfare Services	4B	No general subjects	50/50% (latter 50% is usually divided into: 25% practical training and 25% practical work in enterprise)	0.5-2.5 years	5a

Source: Vocational Education Institutions Act, Vocational Education Standard, EHIS

There are 10 national curricula exclusive to the post-secondary level. These are: military management for senior officers, business, secretarial work, accounting, hairdressing, small port specialist, air traffic services, land surveying, photography and massage.

It is also possible to acquire the skills and competences as partial qualifications. For example, in construction, there are five different professional standards which can all be acquired separately. Yet, in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) there is only one professional standard and partial qualification is not possible. The VET school is responsible for creating a school curriculum for a partial qualification.

Upon graduation, the person has completed, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and passed the final exam of the profession or area of specialisation. Instead of a final examination, a student may graduate

from a school by taking a professional qualification examination. Successful candidates receive an occupational qualification certificate. The person graduating from vocational training based on upper secondary education shall be issued, by the school, a Certificate of Acquiring Vocational Secondary Education Based on Secondary Education (*Tunnistus keskhariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta*) together with a results report in proof of concluding the vocational training. After graduation the students can enter the labour market or higher education.

### 2.2.7. Apprenticeship training

In Estonia the vocational education in all levels described in Sections 2.2.4-2.2.6 can be provided either in the form of school-based or workplace based (apprenticeship) training. In 2007, a regulation was issued by the Ministry of Education and Research concerning the procedure of workplace based training (apprenticeship training). There is no age limit in the apprenticeship programme. Based on the school curriculum, the school works out an individualised curriculum for the apprentice. The programme is meant for people already working and in need of formal qualifications or persons who wish to work at the same time when acquiring a VET education. In 2011, 2.1% of all VET students participated in apprenticeship training. Table 16 gives an overview of main fields of study and other indicators of apprenticeship training.

Table 16. Apprenticeship training

Type of educational programme	Main fields of study	Corresponding ISCED level / orientation	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between school- and work-based training	Average duration of studies	Transfer to other pathways
Apprenticeship training	Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture health and welfare Services	2c, 3c, 3b, 4b	Depends on the programme	1/3 school based, 2/3 practical	Mostly 0.5-1 year	Varies

Source: Vocational Education Institutions Act, Vocational Education Standard, EHIS

The general characteristics of an apprenticeship programme are:

- (a) 1/3 of the curriculum is delivered through theoretical instruction and 2/3 through practical training in an enterprise;

- (b) apprentices sign a study and work contract and have a 4-month probation period;
- (c) apprentices receive a wage during enterprise training and a study allowance during theoretical studies in school;
- (d) study groups are small (up to eight apprentices);
- (e) the structure of study is based on an agreement between the school and the enterprise;
- (f) studies are complete after passing a professional or final examination.

The school has to evaluate the workplace before sending an apprentice there to make sure the workplace is ready to meet the objectives of the curriculum and to ensure the safety and health of the apprentice. The result of the assessment is an expert opinion, which will be annexed to the three party contract between the school, the apprentice and the workplace. The school cannot carry out apprenticeship training if the expert opinion is negative.

The apprentice has two appointed supervisors, one from the school and the other from the workplace. If the apprentice has a valid work contract, he/she does not get any extra wage for being in the programme. An apprenticeship programme is usually funded by the state according to the state funded study places scheme. In that case, the school pays the salary for the supervisor in the enterprise. There can be other arrangements to fund the programme. The law has provided that any student with special needs (especially with limited legal capacity) must have a legal guardian.

#### **2.2.8. Formal education for adults**

In Estonia the concept of the adult learner is generally not related to the age of the learner. According to Estonian legislation an adult learner is a learner whose main occupation is not studying; for instance the person can work or take care of children and study at the same time (EAEA, 2011). However, most commonly persons between 25 and 64 are considered adult learners.

Since 1993, adult education is governed by the Adult Education Act. It stipulates that every person has the right to constantly develop their knowledge and skills. It also outlines the obligations of the government and local authorities as well as employers in the coordination and implementation of adult education, including the funding of adult education from the state budget.

Other important acts and regulations that regulate vocational education and training for adults are the following:

- (a) the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, 'Conditions and Policies for arranging professional training for working adults in VET

- Institutions', that regulates the organisation of adult professional training by institutions of vocational education;
- (b) the regulation of the Minister of Education and Research, 'The Procedure for the Formation of State-Commissioned Education within the Area of Government of the Ministry of Education and Research', which legalised state-commissioned adult vocational education as a new type of state-commissioned education in 2007;
  - (c) the 'Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act' which regulates full-time and part-time study and external study at higher education level, and the organisation of training courses as well as the recognition of previous study and work experience;
  - (d) the 'Universities Act', which regulates full-time and part-time study and external study, and the organisation of training courses as well as the recognition of previous study and work experience;
  - (e) the 'Private Schools Act' regulates the establishment and operation of private schools. Following this Act, all self-employed persons and private organisations who provide education for more than 120 hours or six months per year must establish a private school (MoER, 2012).

The Adult Education Act is being renewed. With the renewal the main aim is to increase the quality of adult education. The main emphasis of the act will be on the adult's legal rights for accessing education during their lifetime.

The main objectives of adult education according to the Development Plan for Estonian Adult Education 2009-13 (*Täiskasvanuhariduse arengukava 2009-13*) are:

- (a) to provide better access for adults to both formal and non-formal learning, to increase the level of education of the population and increase the rate of 25-64-year-old participants in lifelong learning to 13.5% by 2013;
- (b) to reduce the number of people who only achieve general education and who lack professional qualifications;
- (c) to offer training in order to create better circumstances for people to acquire a level of education or qualification that is one step higher than that which they have already attained.

According to the Adult Education Act, adult education can be defined within one of three categories:

- (a) formal education (*tasemekoolitus*) in adult comprehensive schools, vocational education institutions or higher education institutions;
- (b) work-related education and training (*tööalane koolitus*);
- (c) liberal adult education (*vabahariduslik koolitus*).

In this Section formal education for adults is described as it relates to the nationally defined VET qualifications. Professional education and training and non-formal education topics are covered in Section 2.3.

Adults have the possibility to obtain general education, vocational education and higher education in the framework of formal education. There is no age limit to start studies at VET schools. Adults can participate in all VET levels described in Sections 2.2.4-2.2.6. In admission the previous academic background is not taken into account (unless it is a prerequisite for a programme), thus people with an academic background are admitted on an equal basis with all the others as they start the studies from the very beginning. Vocational schools offer adult students the possibility to acquire vocational education in the form of part-time study. In a part-time study, a student complete cumulatively less than 75% of the studies which, according to the curriculum, must be completed by the end of each academic year (Vocational Education Institutions Act, 1998).

Courses are free of charge in formal vocational education, both in state-owned and municipal VET schools. The Adult Education Act provides the right for employees to take a study leave if a written proof is presented to the employer from the educational institution (Chapter 4).

During the past four years the share of adult learners (students aged 25 and older) has increased and constituted about 20% of all VET students in 2011. Table 17 gives an overview of adult learners in different types of vocational education and training.

Table 17. **The share of VET students aged 25+ in different types of VET in 2009-12 (%)**

	2009	2010	2011	2012
vocational education without compulsory education (ISCED 2C)	54.3	27.4	39.5	43.7
vocational education based on compulsory education (ISCED 3C)	39.2	47.0	44.8	47.0
upper-secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B)	0.9	1.2	1.6	1.8
vocational courses after secondary education (ISCED 4B)	42.7	38.6	40.3	43.6
TOTAL	15.7	15.3	17.0	19.9

Source: VET statistics, Ministry of Education and Research, 2012

## 2.3. Other forms of training

### 2.3.1. Definition

According to the Adult Education Act, in addition to formal education for adults in Estonia there is also non-formal education divided into work-related training (*töölane koolitus*) and liberal adult education (*vabahariduslik koolitus*). Work-related training provides the opportunity to acquire and develop professional, occupational and/or vocational knowledge, skills and experience and the opportunity for retraining at the place of employment or at an educational institution. After completion of work-related training a certificate is issued. Liberal adult education provides the opportunity to develop personality, creativity, talents, initiative and a sense of social responsibility and to accumulate the knowledge, skills and abilities needed in life. Learning takes place in the form of courses, study circles or any other form suitable for learners.

### 2.3.2. Structure overview, target groups and funding

The coordination of adult training in Estonia is divided between three different Ministries. The MoER contributes to the general development of the adult education system and supports the development of courses, adult educators and educational institutions. MoER finances continuing education and retraining of individual persons through educational and training institutions.

Since 2007 with the resources of the European Social Fund (ESF) and state funds the MoER has applied the state funded study places scheme to provide short term training for working adults in the existing VET school and in institutions of professional higher education providing vocational education in order to raise the competitiveness and well-being of workers and to improve the quality of work. The training need is identified by a task force which consists of experts across many sectors and fields, training providers and employers.

Since 2008 MoER is financing training of work-related and lifelong learning key competences also in liberal adult education centres. The free training is available in all counties of Estonia.

The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) is responsible for the training of unemployed persons and risk groups through the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. Courses may last up to 12 months and may be provided by any licensed body approved by the MoER. In recent years the Ministry of Social Affairs has commissioned employment training from more than 100 education providers (adult education institutions, VET and higher education institutions) annually. Upon course completion, a certificate is issued and participants of some training courses may sit an examination and obtain a professional qualification.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications supports training in enterprises through the foundation Enterprise Estonia. Enterprise Estonia has a programme by which enterprises can apply for a grant for the development of knowledge and skills by providing, among other things, professional in-service training of employees and/or managers of a duration up to 6 months. The minimum amount of grant to be applied is 2 237EUR per project. Up to 50% of eligible costs incurred are reimbursed.

In the few professions regulated by law (e.g. teachers and health care workers), regular professional in-service training can be compulsory. Where this is the case, funds for training are prescribed in the annual salary fund of these employees (e.g. 3% of the annual salary fund of teachers).

Non-formal education and training can also be charged and paid for either by the participant or the employer. Participants can be exempt from income tax on the training cost if the trainer has a valid training licence, issued by the MoER in case of work-related or liberal adult education. If the employer pays for non-work-related training of the employees, the expenses are considered as a taxable fringe benefit.

In 2011 there was about 400 000 participants in adult education and 65% of them in non-formal education. 14.8% of participants paid for the training themselves. 46.6% of the training was financed by employers (Statistics Estonia, 2011c and d).

### **2.3.3. Main providers and support measures for adult learning**

Adult education is provided by state and municipal authorities, private schools which hold an education licence and other public and private organisations.

Non-formal training is mainly provided by private training centres that form a big part of the adult education sector in Estonia (altogether more than 700 institutions) but also by VET schools (41 schools), professional higher education institutions (21) and universities (7). There are more than 26 000 participants annually in 50 VET colleges and in institutions of professional higher education providing vocational education and more than 86 000 participants in institutions providing liberal adult education (~200 institutions, ~80 of them are very active) (MoER, 2012a).

Formal education institutions (VET and professional higher education institutions, universities) have started to develop quality systems based on internal and external evaluation that encompass the activities of the entire organisation and hence extend to adult training as well. The (private) training institutions that offer courses do not have a common quality system. Private organisations and self-employed persons who provide hobby courses or organise

work-related training where the instruction organised lasts longer than 120 hours or longer than 6 months in a year need an education licence from MoER.

In order to develop the quality assurance mechanisms, activities have been initiated on the national level. The internal and external evaluation system is being implemented by the Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association (ENAEA), an umbrella organisation that unites liberal adult education centres. Numerous training courses for educators have been carried out and the awarding of professional qualifications of adult educators/andragogues takes place. The Association of Estonian Adult Educators (ANDRAS) too aims at increasing the competence of adult educators by attributing professional qualifications of andragogy.

Both ENAEA and ANDRAS are participating in the development of education policy and take active part in promoting adult education and the concept of lifelong learning in Estonia. ANDRAS is organising campaigns and events such as the Adult Learners Week and the Adult Education Forum.

There exist several activities to develop a support structure for promoting learning, for example through guidance and counselling and implementing a system for recognising prior learning and work experience. In 2008, MoER and MoSA concluded a cooperation agreement, according to which career services will be developed together. The development and provision of career services to a larger target group than before will be initiated with ESF resources. Much attention is also paid to learning at home through various e-study opportunities. Formal education institutions are especially keen on using e-learning for adult education. E-learning is widely used in most VET colleges and universities thanks to an ESF project called E-key (E-Võti) and Vanker.

#### **2.3.4. National challenges**

There are two main challenges in the field of non-formal education. Firstly it is important to increase the quality and effectiveness of training courses and to increase the number of courses leading to occupational qualifications. Secondly, it is important to make lifelong learning more attractive for adults by ensuring that training leads to the acquisition of qualifications and by providing information about the benefits of different programmes.

## CHAPTER 3.

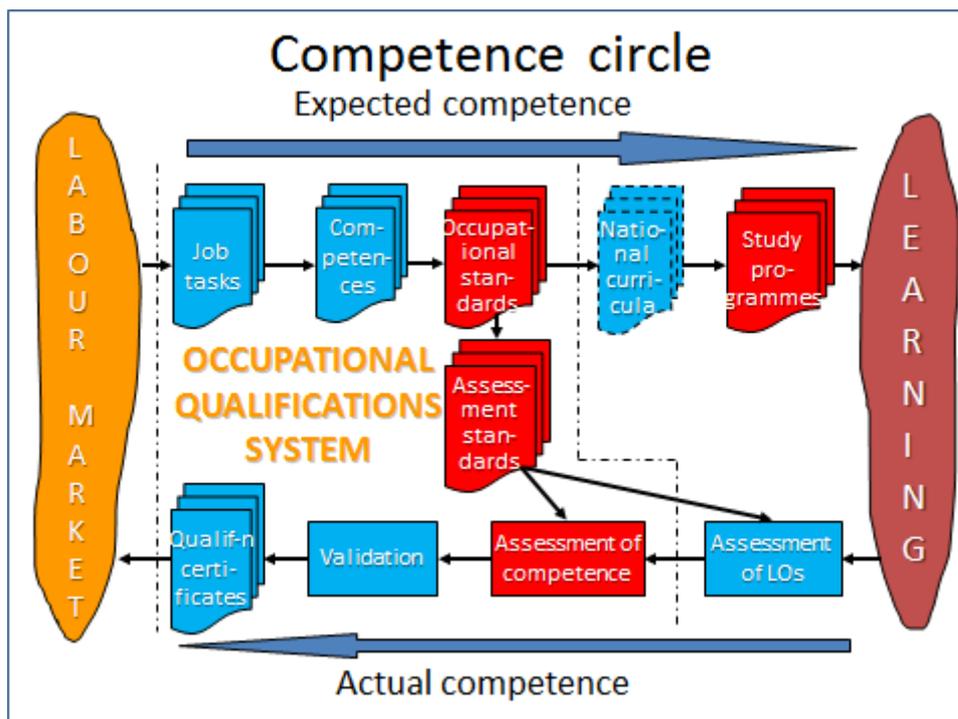
# Shaping VET qualifications

Shaping initial and continuous VET qualifications in Estonia is based on occupational qualification standards <sup>(3)</sup>, which are a focal component of occupational qualifications system.

### 3.1. Occupational qualifications system

The occupational qualifications system in Estonia is an interface between the labour market and the life-long learning system (Figure 2).

Figure 2. **Conceptual scheme of the occupational qualifications system**



The objective of the occupational qualifications system is:

<sup>(3)</sup> Occupational qualification means a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession resulting from work based learning.

- (a) to support the competitive edge of the Estonian workforce to ensure that the workforce is competent, and that they have the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for successful operation;
- (b) to ensure that the content and quantity of studies targeted at occupational activities meet the requirements of the labour market;
- (c) to facilitate that the competence of individuals is appreciated and recognised, regardless where and how the studies took place;
- (d) to make occupational qualifications internationally comparable.

The following principles have been taken into account while developing the occupational qualifications system in Estonia:

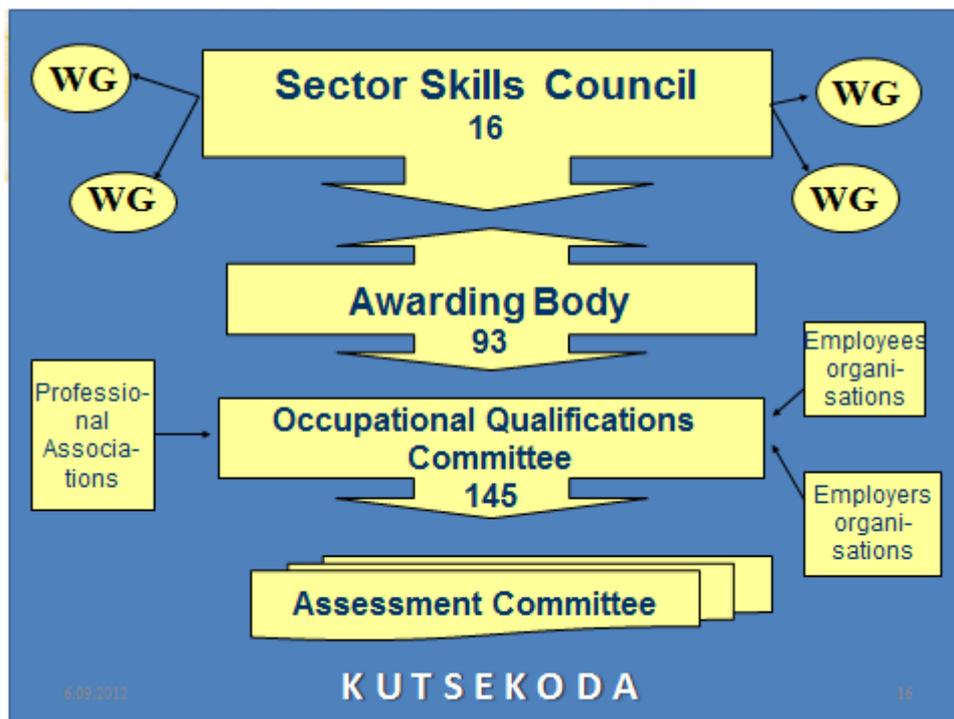
- (a) stakeholders of the labour market are involved in all parts of the occupational qualifications system: employers, employees, the state, and training providers. Agreements are based on the co-operation of various stakeholders;
- (b) the main concept of the occupational qualifications system is competence, that means the system is based on competence both conceptually and in reality;
- (c) the occupational qualifications system operates as a quality assurance system.

The occupational qualifications system consists of:

- (a) a system of occupational qualification standards;
- (b) a system for awarding occupational qualifications;
- (c) the register of occupational qualifications.

The organisational structure of the occupational qualifications system is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Organisational structure of the occupational qualifications system



Pursuant to the Occupational Qualifications Act institutions responsible for the occupational qualifications system are:

- (a) the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER);
- (b) the Estonian Qualifications Authority;
- (c) the Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils;
- (d) the Sector Skills Council;
- (e) the institution awarding occupational qualifications;
- (f) the institution awarding initial occupational qualifications;
- (g) the Occupational Qualifications Committee;
- (h) the Assessment Committee.

The MoER is responsible for the development of an integral and structured occupational qualifications system. In order to perform these functions, the MoER has entered into a contract with the Estonian Qualifications Authority.

The Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) is a private foundation organising the development of the occupational qualifications system. The task of the Estonian Qualifications Authority is the organisation and coordination of the activities of the Sector Skills Councils and their Board of Chairmen; the development and approval of documents related to occupational qualification standards; arranging the development of occupational qualification standards, the technical organisation of the awarding of occupational qualifications, the

supervision of the activities of institutions awarding occupational qualifications, the maintaining of the register of occupational qualifications, arranging the work of the Europass centre, acting as the National Coordination Point for implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, and counselling and training with regard to the occupational qualifications system.

The Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils is a cooperation body consisting of the chairmen of Sector Skills Councils. The Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils coordinates the activities of Sector Skills Councils. It decides on the need to develop occupational qualification standards and the allocation of the occupational qualifications in the Estonian Qualifications Framework.

The Sector Skills Council is a cooperative body of confederations of employers/employees of the respective fields of occupational activity, professional associations and the authorised representatives of the ministries. The Sector Skills Council:

- (a) develops occupational qualification standards in their own occupational activities;
- (b) submits proposals for the development of occupational qualification standards to the Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils;
- (c) approves the occupational qualification standards;
- (d) grants the institutions awarding occupational qualifications the rights to award occupational qualifications and exercises supervision over their activities;
- (e) approves the procedure for awarding occupational qualifications and the amount of fee thereof.

The Sector Skills Councils appoint working groups in the field to develop occupational qualification standards. These working groups shall map the field of occupational activity; develop the occupational qualification standards and schemes for awarding occupational qualifications.

There are 16 Sector Skills Councils formed by the Estonian Government.

The institutions awarding occupational qualifications is a legal entity or authority that has been granted the right to award occupational qualifications based on one or several occupational qualification standards. The granting of rights to an institution awarding occupational qualifications is decided by the Sector Skills Councils of the respective area of occupational activity as a result of a public competition. The institutions awarding occupational qualifications:

- (a) develop rules and procedure for the awarding of occupational qualifications;
- (b) organise the awarding of occupational qualification;
- (c) issue the occupational qualification certificates or the duplicates thereof;

(d) at least once a year submit a report to the Sector Skills Councils.

The organisation having won the competition is granted the right to award occupational qualifications for five years and qualifications will be entered into the register of occupational qualifications (Estonian Qualifications Authority, 2012). Upon registration, the names and levels of occupational qualifications which the institution awarding occupational qualifications shall be entitled to award will be determined.

There are 86 institutions awarding occupational qualifications at the Estonian Qualifications Authority.

An institution awarding initial occupational qualifications is an educational institution or training provider who has been granted the right to award initial occupational qualifications (entry level or levels into the occupation) where the study programme meets the requirements of the occupational qualification standard and has been nationally recognised or where the studies provided regard a profession governed by the EU Directive 2005/36/EU and the study programme meets the requirements of this directive; the name of the profession and the Estonian Qualification Framework level is recorded on the diploma or certificate supplement issued by the institution awarding initial occupational qualifications. The awarding of the initial occupational qualification started in 2011.

The occupational qualifications committee is a committee established by the institutions awarding occupational qualifications to ensure impartiality of the awarding process. The Occupational Qualifications Committee:

- (a) consists of the parties interested in awarding occupational qualifications in the given field: specialists, employers, employees, trainers, representatives of professional associations and, if necessary, representatives of clients, as well as other interested parties;
- (b) develops in cooperation with the institutions awarding occupational qualifications procedures related to the assessment of competence and awarding of occupational qualifications and respective documents;
- (c) checks the documents of the applicant and decides on the form and manner for assessment of the occupational competence of the applicant;
- (d) appoints assessment committee(s) to assess the conformity of the applicant's competence with the requirements of the occupational qualification standards;
- (e) approves the instructions for assessment and the examination materials;
- (f) decides on awarding or refusing to award occupational qualification to the applicant;

- (g) resolves the complaints submitted regarding the activities of the assessment committee.

An Assessment Committee is set up for the assessment of the competence of the person applying for an occupational qualification; it accepts the occupational qualification exam, prepares records for the arrangement and results of the assessment and submits it to the Sector Skills Council.

A register of occupational qualifications was established in 2001 with the objective to collect, systematise and maintain data regarding Sector Skills Councils, occupational qualification standards, occupational qualification certificates, institutions awarding occupational qualifications, the Occupational Qualifications Committee and procedures for awarding occupational qualifications.

The register is kept as a single-level computerised database in accordance with the Occupational Qualifications Act, the National Databases Act, Statutes for Maintenance of the Professions Register and other legislation.

### 3.2. VET qualifications framework

The VET Institutions Act stipulates four types of VET programmes:

- (a) upper secondary VET;
- (b) VET without compulsory education requirement;
- (c) VET based on lower secondary education;
- (d) VET based on upper secondary education.

The VET qualifications corresponding to these types of programmes are:

- (a) upper secondary VET certificate (EstQF level 4);
- (b) VET without compulsory education requirement certificate (EstQF level 2);
- (c) VET based on lower secondary education certificate (EstQF level 3);
- (d) VET based on upper secondary education certificate (EstQF level 4).

There are two types of VET standards in Estonia: the Vocational Education Standard, and national curricula for VET. According to the Standard of VET, the aim of VET is to prepare responsible skilled workers. The National Curriculum for VET is a document that determines the objectives of VET, the expected learning outcomes, assigns the Estonian Qualification Framework levels to the corresponding types of qualifications, determines the requirements for commencing and graduating, the modules of curricula and the volumes thereof together with short descriptions, the possibilities of and conditions for electing modules and possibilities of specialisation.

The content of VET established by a school curriculum is laid down in the form of modules. A module is a comprehensive content unit within a curriculum which determines the learning outcomes conforming to the requirements of an occupational qualification standard. A module is made up of one or several subjects or topics. The volume of study prescribed by a module is presented in study weeks.

The classification of curricula into broad groups of studies, fields of study and programmes is based on the ISCED 97.

The register of national curricula includes over 50 entities.

### 3.3. Occupational qualification standards

The occupational qualification standard (OQS) is the focal element of the occupational qualifications system, which describes occupational activities and provides competence requirements for occupational qualifications.

The occupational qualification standard is the basis for compiling national curricula in the field of VET, curricula for higher education and other training programmes, and for assessment of individuals' competence, incl. self-assessment and awarding an occupational qualification. Occupational qualification standards are available in the State register of occupational qualifications.

An occupational qualification standard consists of three parts. Part A of the standard (description of the occupation) provides an overview of the nature of work, major parts of work and tasks, necessary tools, work environment, incl. the specificities of work and describes the personal characteristics and skills enhancing occupational activities. This is a source of information for a person upon selection of an occupation. This also contains useful information for career advisers, labour market consultants, human resources managers and trainers.

The competence requirements presented in part B of the standard serve as a basis for the assessment of the applicant for the occupational qualification. These requirements are presented as descriptions of mandatory and optional competences. Competence is an ability to perform a specific part of work or a task together with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required. Proceeding from the nature of the occupation, its specificity and traditions, attesting competences related to a specialisation or optional competences may be the prerequisite for being awarded the occupational qualification.

Part C of the standard contains general information and references to annexes.

OQS shall meet the following conditions:

- (a) be based on a job analysis or functional analysis;
- (b) describe expected competences as observable and assessable;
- (c) define the method(s) for assessing of persons' competence;
- (d) define the Estonian Qualification Framework level of the respective occupational qualification.

A proposal regarding the need for developing or updating an occupational qualification standard is made by the Sector Skills Council based on the proposals of appropriate organisations or persons. A decision regarding the development of occupational qualification standards is passed by the Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils. The occupational qualification standard is prepared by the working group established by the Sector Skills Council. The working group includes the specialists of the respective field – employers, specialists and trainers. The Estonian Qualifications Authority organises the work of the working groups.

Based thereon, occupational qualification standards are updated, the methods for assessing competence are improved, inter alia an option is provided for awarding initial occupational qualification upon the completion of a VET or higher education institution. All new occupational qualification standards developed are learning outcomes based.

### 3.4. Occupational qualifications awarding process

The rules and procedures for the awarding of occupational qualification describe general requirements for the awarding process and the procedure for the application and methods for assessing the applicants' competence.

In the process of awarding an occupational qualification the assessment committee, established by the occupational qualification committee, shall assess the compliance of the competence of the applicant with the requirements of the occupational qualification standards based on the criteria described in the rules and procedures for awarding the qualification or in the assessment standard.

The occupational competence of a person is assessed and recognised despite whether this has been obtained from formal, non-formal or informal learning. Recognition of prior learning provides the applicant an opportunity to apply for the occupational qualification using appropriate methods and evidence, avoiding assessment and validation of the competences that have been assessed and validated earlier.

### 3.5. Recognition of prior learning in initial VET

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) in vocational education is legally governed by the VET Institutions Act and on the terms and conditions set out in the Vocational Education Standard. The recognition of prior learning terms and procedures are set out in a school's rules for organisation of studies. Prior learning may be taken into account:

- (a) in fulfilling the school's terms of admission;
- (b) in completing the curriculum except the final examination by considering prior learning as a final grade of a subject, topic or module;
- (c) in recognising a previously passed vocational examination as passing of final examination.

A VET institution is obligated to inform its students of the RPL terms, conditions and procedures, including the deadlines and expenses related to the assessment and validation, and of the possibilities of contesting the results, ensure all the necessary information to the applicants and the availability of counselling.

RPL is certified by a graduation certificate, diploma or some other certifying document. Experiential learning, hobby activities or any other everyday activity shall be certified by a reference to the work accomplished and its presentation, an occupational qualification certificate, contract of employment, copy of assignment to the post or any other documental proof. A description of the vocational experience and self-analysis is added to the application.

If necessary, a school has the right to give an applicant some practical tasks, have an interview with him or her, or evaluate his or her skills in some other way in order to evaluate prior learning.

### 3.6. Quality assurance of VET qualifications

Ensuring quality in the occupational qualifications system includes:

- (a) ensuring the quality of occupational qualification standards;
- (b) ensuring the quality of granting the institutions awarding occupational qualifications the right to award occupational qualifications;
- (c) ensuring the quality of assessment and validation of applicant's competence by the institutions awarding occupational qualifications;
- (d) periodical external assessment of the institutions awarding occupational qualifications by the Estonian Qualifications Authority.

Respective principles and procedures have been established in the Occupational Qualifications Act that in turn proceeds from the requirements of ISO 17924 (general requirements for personal certification).

The quality assurance in the Estonian initial VET system is made up of:

- (a) internal quality assurance at VET institutions together with corresponding external consultations;
- (b) periodical external evaluation of schools (licences, thematic and incident-based national supervision).

The system of licences is based on the requirements set for study programmes, qualification of pedagogical staff, learning environment, and on their conformity control. A licence is valid until the end of the nominal study period of the programme on which the licence is issued. The system of licences only extends to municipal and private VET institutions. The same requirements apply to state VET institutions, but there is no requirement to apply for a licence to the MoER and the accompanying procedures.

### 3.7. Challenges

The new VET Institutions Act that is being prepared foresees transfer from the present types of initial VET programmes and qualifications to an entirely learning outcomes based system. The curricula are prepared on the basis of expected learning outcomes defined by the levels of Estonian Qualification Framework (curricula of level 2, curricula of level 3, curricula of level 4, and curricula of level 5);

The new VET Institutions Act will introduce a new unit for accounting the student workload – the Estonian VET Credit Point (*eesti kutsehariduse ainepunkt*). It shows the estimated amount of work a student has to perform on achieving learning outcomes described in the curriculum or module. One credit point equals 26 hours of student work. The principles of the ECVET (*Euroopa kutsehariduse ainepunkt*) application will be used while introducing the Estonian VET Credit Point;

Major scheduled changes in the quality assurance of VET involve the development and implementation of the national recognition system in 2011-13. The national recognition system follows the principles of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET and is based on accreditation of a group of study programmes and consists of:

- (a) internal assessment conducted by the VET institution;
- (b) external assessment conducted by independent experts;

- (c) decision passed on the basis of external assessments by the assessment council.

## CHAPTER 4.

# Promoting participation in vocational education and training

Estonia has a long-standing position to promote participation in VET in order to enhance the competitiveness and accessibility of VET. Different incentives and actions have been adopted both for individuals and enterprises to support the growth of the number of VET students.

### 4.1. Incentives for individuals

#### 4.1.1. Study loans

The Study Allowances and Study Loans Act (2003) provides the bases, conditions and procedure for the grant of study allowances and study loans in order to ensure access to vocational education and motivate pupils to complete vocational training, to acquire a vocational secondary education, to study full time and successfully complete the study programme within the nominal period.

Students whose study programme lasts nine months or more, have the right to obtain a study loan if he or she is enrolled in full-time study on the basis of upper secondary education at a state or municipal vocational educational institution or at a private vocational educational institution. Students also have the right to obtain the study loan if studying abroad at a vocational education institution in a similar form of study.

In 2012-13 the maximum amount of study loan is 1 920EUR per study year (Study Allowances and Study Loans Act). In 2012 about 8.7% of VET students enrolled on the basis of secondary education obtained a study loan (MoER).

#### 4.1.2. Study allowances

VET students can also apply for study allowances. A study allowance consists of a basic allowance and a supplementary allowance. Students studying in upper secondary and post-secondary VET can apply for basic allowance if they follow a full-time curriculum for which the state has commissioned student places. Basic allowance is paid on the basis of student achievements and it is a fixed amount paid on monthly basis. In recent years about 50% of all VET students received basic allowance. Supplementary allowances are meant for students attending post-secondary VET whose place of residence is not in the same local

government area as the school or in a neighbouring local government area. Supplementary allowance is granted in order to cover expenses related to housing and transport (Study Allowances and Study Loans Act). This allowance is a fixed amount paid on monthly basis. In recent years about 40% of all post-secondary VET students received supplementary allowance. A VET school can also establish a special allowance fund that is financed from the resources of the basic allowance and supplementary allowance funds. From the special allowance fund allowances can be granted disregarding the requirements specified for basic and supplementary allowances and taking into account other circumstances which hinder the pupil or student from continuing his or her studies. The procedure for the use of the special allowance fund shall be approved by the board of the VET school.

For all students attending vocational upper-secondary education a transport allowance is enabled in order to compensate them for the transportation expenses involved in travelling between the school and their home. This allowance is obtained based on expense documents. Students studying at upper secondary VET, in VET based on lower secondary education or in VET without compulsory education requirement obtain also school lunch allowance according to Conditions and Policies for School Lunch Allowance (2006) in state owned VET institutions.

#### **4.1.3. Tax exemption on training costs**

Estonian residents can be exempt from income tax on training costs, if the training provider has a valid training licence, issued by the MoER. Training costs are certified costs incurred for studying at a state or local government educational establishment, public university, private school which holds a training licence or has been positively accredited with regard to the given study programme, or a foreign educational establishment of equal status with the aforementioned, or for studying on fee-charging courses organised by such educational establishments. According to the Income Tax Act since the beginning of 2012 the maximum limit for all eligible deductions is 1 920EUR per taxpayer during a period of taxation and not more than 50% of the taxpayer's income taxable in Estonia for the same period of taxation (Income Tax Act, 1999).

#### **4.1.4. Study leave for working adults**

The Adult Education Act provides the right for employees to take a study leave if a written proof is presented to the employer from the educational institution. The length can be at up to 30 calendar days in a calendar year at the person's request. While participating in formal education or professional training, the employer continues to pay the average wages for twenty days. Additional study

leave (15 days) is granted for preparing for final exams. An employee has also the right to leave without pay in order to take entrance examinations. These rights and benefits are applied in both public and private sector, in small, medium sized and large companies.

#### **4.1.5. Incentives for unemployed**

The MoSA (*Sotsiaalministeerium*), is responsible for the training of the unemployed. Vocational training for unemployed people is funded by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF) (*Eesti Töötukassa*) under the MoSA. The Fund allocates resources to employment offices to purchase and organise labour market training. Labour market training is professional training organised for unemployed persons and other persons during which the persons receive or develop professional or other skills which facilitate their employment. Labour market training may last for a period of up to one year. The EUIF orders labour market training from educational institutions (incl. VET schools), private educational institutions who hold an education licence. The EUIF also enables work practice for the unemployed. Work practice is a labour market service for gaining practical experience provided to unemployed persons by employers with the aim to improve the knowledge and skills needed for the employment of the unemployed persons. Its duration is up to four months (Labour Market Services and Benefits Act, 2006). Unemployed persons have the right to receive a grant and also transport and accommodation benefits if they participate in labour market training or in work practice.

For large education commissions, employment offices arrange public procurement. Since 2009 the labour market training is offered for the unemployed also on the basis of the system of vouchers. Vouchers ought to offer a quick and flexible way for the unemployed to use the resources for further training or retrain to find a new job. EUIF will pay up to 2 500EUR for training (until July 2011, the sum was up to 959EUR). The employment training was provided for 20 958 persons (in some cases one person participated more than once) in 2011 (9 706 in 2010), of which vouchers were used in 61.6% of the instances (40.4% in 2010).

#### **4.1.6. The KUTSE programme for VET dropouts and adult learners**

The dropout rate in vocational education and training has been relatively high during the past few years (18-20%). Aiming to reach the group of people whose studies have been discontinued and offer them new opportunities in VET to acquire professional qualifications, a programme has been initiated by MoER in 2010. The programme is called KUTSE (a pun on words, meaning profession/calling/call). Another target group of the programme is adults without

professional education or qualifications. Following this programme additional state-financed study places were created in VET schools and professional higher education institutions.

## 4.2. Incentives for enterprises

### 4.2.1. Wage subsidy and work practice supervision remuneration

According to the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act the employers receive remuneration for supervising work practice (described in Section 4.1.6) of unemployed. For each practice hour attended by an unemployed person, the employer receives remuneration for supervision in the amount of 100% of the minimum hourly wage during the first month, 75% of the minimum hourly wage during the second month and 50% of the minimum hourly wage during the third and fourth month the unemployed person participates in work practice.

### 4.2.2. Tax exemptions

In Estonia formal training, including learning materials, private tuition relating to general education and other training services, except other training services provided for business purposes, is not imposed with value added tax (Value Added Tax Act, 2003).

Since the beginning of 2012 enterprises are exempt from income tax if they pay for formal education (*tasemeharidus*) of their employees (the Income Tax Act, 1999). If liberal education (*vabaharidus*) is funded by an employer, it is treated as a fringe benefit and additional taxes need to be paid by the employer.

## 4.3. Guidance and counselling services

### 4.3.1. Strategy and provision

Lifelong guidance has been embedded in several national education strategies including the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2009-13, the Development Plan for the General Education System 2007-13, the Estonian Youth Work Strategy 2006-13 and in the ESF Operational Programme for Human Resource Development. In the Development Plan for Adult Education for 2009-13, measures are taken to increase the volume of career services to employed and unemployed adults and to develop career guidance for adults in cooperation with two ministries – the MoER and the MoSA; the cooperation will be strengthened also on the regional level, between the career guidance units and schools. The ESF Operational Programme for Human

Resource Development states that the development of a unified guidance system within the framework of an integrated counselling model will be continued and career guidance will be initiated in vocational education institutions, the availability of the service will be ensured in all VET institutions, and these will be linked to other counselling categories. The development of career education, and of other activities supporting career planning for pupils, will be continued in general education schools. In youth work, projects on youth information for the development of information services will be supported, including the training of the practitioners, and the development of methodological and information materials.

In 2008, a contractual agreement regarding career services in Estonia was signed between the two Ministries. As an outcome, a national programme was started and the National Career Guidance Forum was set up in the beginning of 2009. The forum unites stakeholders from many different levels and sectors including policy makers from relevant ministries, practitioners, target groups etc.

As part of the activities of the ESF programme 'Development of Career Services' in 2011 the Foundation Innove National Resource Centre for Guidance (NRCG) carried out a comprehensive survey (RAKE, 2011). The aim of the study was to evaluate the citizens' awareness of career services and their career planning skills, analyse the availability of career services and cooperation between different stakeholders in providing career services in Estonia. This study is also the input for developing the framework concept in his field.

Since 2009 the development and provision of career services lies within Foundation Innove. In each county (15), there is at least one centre (called Youth Information and Counselling Centre – YICC). As part of the national strategy, 17 centres provide young people with career information and career counselling. The centres provide on-the-spot services and visit schools. Services are targeted at students in general education and VET schools. They also cooperate with teachers, parents and companies.

In Estonia, three inter-related services currently operate: career education, career information and career counselling. Career service developments are informed and supported by three quality manuals which contain ideas and resources on: (i) how to ensure the quality of career education in schools, aimed at teachers and directors of general education and vocational training institutions, linking pedagogical principles to lifelong guidance policies and practices; (ii) how to develop service quality-assessment reviews and requirements concerning service delivery and record management systems; and (iii) how to understand the management and delivery of careers services, which in turn affects the quality of careers provision.

Career guidance in the education sector is provided within formal education and as part of youth work (extra-curricular activities). Within general education, career education is provided as a compulsory cross-curricular theme. In addition, career issues are taught by classroom teachers and/or as elective courses. Career related issues are also discussed in student evaluations, during aptitude and professional suitability evaluations and discussions with students with learning difficulties. The schools organise information sessions and visits to fairs, seminars and lectures.

Modernisation of the national vocational training curricula has been proceeding in Estonia during the past few years. Among other innovations it is also foreseen to support the learning outcome 'the student understands his/her responsibility to make informed decisions in a lifelong career planning process'. This means that career management is becoming an integral part of vocational education and training. In developing the career planning skills in VET the focus is on self-analysis, how to best use your professional skills in the labour market, how to keep and raise professional qualifications through continuous self-improvement, how to combine family life and work, how to value the health etc. Currently some of the VET schools are focussing on developing career studies and are actively looking for the answers to the following questions: how to plan career studies efficiently and effectively as a part of the learning process, what methods to use, and how to assess the acquisition and level of career competence. Development activities are coordinated by the national resource centre for guidance of Foundation Innove.

Many other vocational schools have also taken an initiative by implementing projects to ensure the appropriate training for teachers who will be teaching career planning. Several Estonian vocational schools are looking for ways to include career studies as an elective module into school curricula. In addition, regional youth information and counselling centres are offering support to VET schools. Since 2009 youth information and counselling centres have an obligation to provide career services also for VET school students. As the number of career consultants is currently very low, the centres mainly provide counselling for school graduates. In 2011 career services were offered for about 50 000 persons (one person could participate more than once). The number of participants from vocational schools is expected to increase in coming years.

Since 2009 the network of career counsellors in the labour market sector is co-ordinated by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF). In addition, the network of The European Job Mobility Portal (EURES) counsellors is engaged in job mediation to EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. There are 16 Career Information Points (CIP) all over Estonia

to serve the clients' information needs regarding job seeking. In 2006, the Employment Services and Benefits Act came into force with the aim to achieve a high employment rate and to prevent long-term unemployment and social exclusion by providing career services and employment support. Career counselling is provided by 21 career counsellors working in 15 EUIF departments. Depending on client needs, a career counsellor will: help assess individual educational and job related aspirations; map their existing qualifications; assess professional suitability; inform about the labour market situation and different training possibilities; advise on how to make well-informed decisions concerning employment and training; and/or provide instructions on job seeking.

#### **4.3.2. Target groups and modes of delivery**

The main target groups of YICC are young people aged 7-26. Parents and teachers can also access the centres for advice. The majority of services are free of charge, and are provided in the form of both individual and group counselling, often accompanied by computer-based activities. The latter include information retrieval on learning and working opportunities from the Internet, and in some cases, the completing of various personality and ability tests.

Career counsellors working at EUIF generally provide their services to registered unemployed people or those who have received a redundancy notice, i.e. official job seekers. The above mentioned Career Information Points with all the information services are open to everybody.

Career information specialists help to fulfil the target groups' need for information concerning education, labour market and professions. They support clients' career information search and help them with different application forms, organise thematic workshops and other events, etc. As the counsellors have a strong background in psychology, they tend to use a selection of elements from different counselling and therapy approaches. Main methods include solution oriented therapy, humanistic and behaviouristic approaches.

#### **4.3.3. Guidance and counselling personnel**

There are three professional standards for career practitioners: career counsellors, career information specialists and career co-ordinators at schools. The standards regulate the required level of education and specialisation which provide the right to work in their field after having passed a professional training course.

The majority of the practitioners have a background in psychology, youth work, teacher training, information sciences or social work. Career counsellors

who have worked for 3-5 years have the right to acquire a professional qualification. At present, 21 career counsellors have a formal qualification.

There are no regular accredited basic training programmes offered to the career specialists in the public universities. Estonian institutions of higher education provide career counselling education (both at the Bachelor's and Master's levels) primarily within the field of psychology and business management.

NRCG organises various short and long-term courses for the practitioners in the education and labour sector about innovative guidance and information retrieval methods, trends in economy and employment, mobility, mentoring etc. In cooperation with three main public universities a joint study programme (9 ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) for the career specialists has been offered. The study programme is based on the professional skills requirements set out in professional standards. To exchange knowledge, related to the provision and development of career services, NRCG organises international study visits in co-operation with colleagues from the Euroguidance network.

In addition to the training programmes, practitioners are supported by methodological and informational materials which are also available on the national web-portal Pathfinder.

## Acronyms and abbreviations

ANDRAS	Association of Estonian Adult Educators
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CIP	Career Information Points
EAEA	European Association for the Education of Adults. Helsinki
ENAEA	Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EHIS	Estonian Information System for Education
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
EUIF	Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund
EURES	European Job Mobility Portal
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LFS	Labour force survey
LLL	Lifelong learning
MoER	Ministry of Education and Research
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NEQS	National Examinations and Qualifications Centre
NRCG	National Resource Centre for Guidance
OQS	occupational qualification standard
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
VET	Vocational education and training
YICC	Youth Information and Counselling Centre

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