Estonia

VET in Europe – Country report

2014
The vocational education and training (VET) in Europe Country Report for Estonia was compiled by Evelin Silla (ReferNet Estonia) – Chapters 1, 2, 4 and Olav Aarna (Estonian Qualifications Authority) – Chapter 3.

The contributions of the following experts are also included in the report: Foundation Innove: Kristiina Orion (career guidance and counselling), Andres Pung (proofreading of the report); Ministry of Education and Research: Aino Haller (adult education and training), Meeli Murasov (initial VET), and Mart Reinhold (VET statistics).

This country report is part of a series of reports on vocational education and training produced for each EU Member State plus Norway and Iceland by members of ReferNet, a network established by Cedefop (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training).

The opinions expressed in this report are not necessarily those of Cedefop. Please note that ReferNet reports are based on a common structure and are available at: http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Information-services/vet-in-europe-country-reports.aspx

The preparation of this report has been co-financed by the European Union (EU).
Table of contents

Table of contents .................................................................................................. 3
List of tables and figures ................................................................................ 5
CHAPTER 1. External factors influencing VET ............................................... 6
  1.1. Political and socio-economic context .................................................... 6
  1.2. Population and demographics .............................................................. 7
  1.3. Economy and labour market indicators ................................................. 9
  1.4. Educational attainment of the population ............................................ 11
CHAPTER 2. Providing VET in a LLL perspective ........................................ 14
  2.1. National education and training system .............................................. 14
  2.2. Government-regulated VET provision ................................................. 16
     2.2.1. Governance of formal VET ...................................................... 16
     2.2.2. Financing formal VET .............................................................. 18
     2.2.3. Principles of curricula .............................................................. 20
     2.2.4. VET in Estonia according to new legislation entered into force since
            September 2013 (see Figure 1 for structure) ..................... 20
     2.2.5. VET in Estonia according to legislation effective until August 2013
            (see Figure 2 for VET structure) ............................................. 24
     2.2.6. Apprenticeship training ............................................................ 30
     2.2.7. Formal education for adults ..................................................... 31
  2.3. Other forms of training ........................................................................ 33
     2.3.1. Definition ............................................................................... 33
     2.3.2. Structure overview, target groups and funding ....................... 34
     2.3.3. Main providers and support measures for adult learning .......... 35
     2.3.4. National challenges ................................................................. 36
CHAPTER 3. Shaping VET qualifications ..................................................... 37
  3.1. Foresight of labour market needs .......................................................... 37
  3.2. Occupational qualifications system ...................................................... 38
  3.3. VET qualifications framework ............................................................... 43
  3.4. Occupational standards ........................................................................ 44
  3.5. Occupational qualifications awarding process ....................................... 45
  3.6. Recognition of prior learning in initial VET ........................................... 46
  3.7. Quality assurance of VET qualifications ................................................. 47
  3.8. Challenges .......................................................................................... 48
CHAPTER 4. Promoting participation in vocational education and training ............................................................... 49

4.1. Incentives for individuals and enterprises .......................................................... 49
  4.1.1. Study loans ................................................................................................. 49
  4.1.2. Study allowances ...................................................................................... 49
  4.1.3. Tax exemption on training costs .............................................................. 50
  4.1.4. Study leave for working adults ............................................................... 50
  4.1.5. Incentives for unemployed ...................................................................... 50
  4.1.6. Wage subsidy and work practice supervision remuneration ............. 51
  4.1.7. Tax exemptions ....................................................................................... 51

4.2. Guidance and counselling services ................................................................. 52
  4.2.1. Strategy and provision ........................................................................... 52
  4.2.2. Career services and quality assurance ................................................ 54

Acronyms and abbreviations ............................................................................... 55

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 56
List of tables and figures

Tables

Table 1. Total population (on 1st of January), 2003, 2006, 2009, 2013 .............7
Table 2. Projected old-age dependency ratio, 2013-70 ..................................8
Table 3. VET schools and students by indicator and year, 2008-2013 (absolute numbers) .................................................................9
Table 4. Population aged 15-74 by sex and labour status, 2008-13 (in thousands and as a % of total) .........................................................10
Table 5. Persons aged 15+ by economic sector (as a % of total employment), 2009-13 ........................................................................11
Table 6. Expenditure on education by educational level (2006 – 2012) .......19
Table 7. VET at lower-secondary level ..........................................................24
Table 8. VET at upper-secondary level ..........................................................26
Table 9. VET at post-secondary (non-tertiary) level ..................................30
Table 10. Apprenticeship training ...............................................................31
Table 11. The share of VET students aged 25+ in different types of VET (%, 2010-14) .................................................................33

Figures

Figure 1. Estonian formal education structure since September 2013 ........14
Figure 2. Estonian formal education structure until August 2013 ...............15
Figure 3. Conceptual scheme of the occupational qualifications system ....38
Figure 4. Organisational structure of the occupational qualifications system ..........................................................................................39
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. The head of the State is President. 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. Ministries are established, pursuant to law, for the administration of the areas of government. Education is under the remit of the Ministry of Education and Research (HTM, Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium).

In Estonia, the political context for all policies is defined by the programme of the coalition 2014-15, which started working in March 2014 and consists of two parties. As to vocational education, the goal of the governing coalition is: ‘Vocational education and training needs to be valued in society with the aim to reduce at the labour market the share of people without an occupational qualification. It is important to analyse the provision of practical training and continuing training in vocational education institutions, increase the interest of entrepreneurs and opportunities to involve private funding to vocational education and training’ (Programme of the Coalition, 2014).

Estonia is divided into 15 counties, 30 towns, and 185 rural municipalities. County governments, run by governors, are the regional administration of the state. Local governments are responsible for management of pre-school child care institutions, primary and lower secondary schools, upper secondary general schools, 3 of the 40 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 2014, about 69% of the population was Estonian (Statistics Estonia, 2014b). The instruction in most VET institutions is in Estonian, though there are schools where the curricula are 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. Adults’ labour market choices are largely related to their teenage educational choices. After compulsory (lower-secondary) education (referred to as ‘basic school’ nationally) students can choose between upper-secondary general or vocational education. The majority of basic school graduates continue in upper-secondary general education. Until 2009, about 30% of basic school graduates continued in vocational education the following school year, but in 2013 their share was only 26.7%. At the same time, only 12.4% of upper-secondary school graduates continued in vocational education in 2013.

In recent years the average age of VET students has increased and exceedingly more people aged 20+ wish to acquire vocational and occupational skills to increase their competitiveness in the labor market.

1.2. Population and demographics

The area of Estonia is 45 227 km² with a population of 1 315 819 on 1st of January 2014. In 2013, the natural growth was negative as the number of deaths exceeded the number of births by about 1700 and there was a sharp decline in the number of births. Both immigration and emigration increased in 2013 – over 4 100 persons immigrated to and almost 6700 persons emigrated from Estonia. Table 1 gives an overview of changes in the population in 2003-13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>geo\time</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>491 088 858</td>
<td>497 653 281</td>
<td>504 121 631</td>
<td>507 416 607 (p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>1 356 045</td>
<td>1 344 684</td>
<td>1 340 415</td>
<td>1 315 819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: (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: 13.08.2014
Original label: [tps00001] – Total population; Further selection: none
Source: Eurostat (Demographic Statistics); Date of extraction: 23.9.2014

The proportion of young people in the population continues to decrease. The increasing share of women with higher education giving birth to children shows the desire to attain education before having children. In 2009, the percentage of women with higher education who gave birth to a child was 36.2%; and 44.3% in 2014.
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 those in Europe. Though the negative natural growth in the 1990s has not yet affected the working-age population, its impact will appear in the coming years (Table 2). 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-28 countries, we will see that in 2013 the proportion was close to one to four, meaning one retired against four employed/active population; whereas in 2060, the proportion will be two to two, meaning two retired against two employed/active population.

Table 2. Projected old-age dependency ratio, 2013-70

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>geo</th>
<th>time</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2030</th>
<th>2040</th>
<th>2050</th>
<th>2060</th>
<th>2070</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>27.48</td>
<td>31.82</td>
<td>39.01</td>
<td>45.91</td>
<td>49.43</td>
<td>50.16</td>
<td>49.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>32.43</td>
<td>39.62</td>
<td>45.16</td>
<td>51.35</td>
<td>54.87</td>
<td>48.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Description: Population aged 65+ divided by population aged 15-64 (projections)
Eurostat original label: [tddf611] – 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
Date of extraction: 23.09.2014; Last update: 24.06.2014
Source: Eurostat (EUROPOP2008 – Convergence scenario, national level (proj_08c))

Until 2010, the number of VET students was relatively stable, but there has been a decrease since 2010/2011 due to the low birth rate in the second half of 1990s. In September 2013 there were 25 699 VET students in Estonia. Their number and allocation between different levels of VET is outlined in Table 3. In 2013/2014 51.5% of students were in upper-secondary and 43.1% in post-secondary VET. In VET oriented for smaller target groups – VET without compulsory education requirement and VET based on compulsory education (without upper-secondary education) the shares of students were 3.9% and 1.4% respectively (Table 3).
### Table 3.  **VET schools and students by indicator and year, 2008-2013 (absolute numbers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational educational institutions</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional higher education institutions offering vocational education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students total</td>
<td>27,239</td>
<td>28,363</td>
<td>28,012</td>
<td>27,046</td>
<td>26,172</td>
<td>25,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in vocational education without compulsory education (ISCED 2C)</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in upper-secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B)</td>
<td>17,648</td>
<td>17,627</td>
<td>16,897</td>
<td>15,428</td>
<td>14,152</td>
<td>13,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in vocational education based on compulsory education (ISCED 3C)</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>1005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in vocational courses after secondary education (ISCED 4B)</td>
<td>8,672</td>
<td>9,718</td>
<td>10,180</td>
<td>10,597</td>
<td>10,633</td>
<td>11,078</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: EHIS, 2014.*

The VET institutions network had mostly been rearranged by 2009. The reduction in the number of state-owned vocational education institutions from 54 in 2002/03 to 29 in 2013/14 has been significant. The objective was to increase the quality, accessibility and efficiency of VET institutions. Many smaller institutions were 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 general schools and higher education institutions has been planned.

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

As a counterbalance to population decline, a growing part of the working-age population is economically active, which increases the labour force participation rate. The higher economic activity is, among others, related to the rising retirement age, the slightly declining birth rate and improved labour market conditions. The employment rate has recovered fast after the economic crisis (in comparison to 2010, the increase was 3.9 percentage points in 2011), but its growth was notably slower in 2013 (1.3 percentage points in comparison to 2012). The employment rate of 15-74-year-olds in 2013 was 62.1% (Table 4).
The unemployment rate was 8.6% in 2013, which is below the EU average. The decrease in unemployment was driven by the falling number of the long-term unemployed – the number of people who had been looking for a job for a year or more declined remarkably compared to 2012.

The decline in unemployment has slowed down compared to the two previous years. This slowdown was expected after the rapid recovery of the economy in 2010 and 2011, and also considering the modest growth of Estonia’s GDP and the economic problems in several destination countries of Estonia’s exports.

Employment grew primarily in services, which increased the dominance of the tertiary sector compared to other sectors. In 2013, 65.5% of the employed worked in services and 30.2% in industries (Table 5). The rapid increase in the share of the services sector in employment (which began during the recession) continued in 2013, supported by increased employment in accommodation and food services, professional, scientific and technical activities, wholesale and retail trade, and arts, entertainment and recreation. Employment in manufacturing, the largest economic activity in the industrial sector, changed marginally; employment in construction and energy production decreased.
Table 5. **Persons aged 15+ by economic sector (% of total employment 2009-13)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary sector</th>
<th>Secondary sector</th>
<th>Tertiary sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: The current data have been published based on the revised population figures of Statistics Estonia. In connection with the revision of population series for 2000-2013, based on the 2000 and 2011 censuses and various registers, the Labour Force Survey time series for 2000–2013 was recalculated.


1.4. **Educational attainment of the population**

In comparison with the EU average (Table 6), the proportion of the population with low level qualifications is small (9.4%). For tertiary education, the percentage of the population aged 25-64 with higher education was higher than in most EU member states in 2013. Education has been traditionally highly valued, both in Soviet times and currently. Tertiary level education is valued higher than VET; therefore the participation rate in higher education has been high for several years.

Table 6. **Persons aged 25-64 with a given education attainment level (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 0-2)</td>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4)</td>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First and second stage of tertiary education (ISCED levels 5 and 6)</td>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: 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


However, the share of working-age population (age group 25-64) with lower or upper secondary general education without any professional education (vocational or higher) is 29.6%. In 2011 the highest share (33.7%) of people without any professional education was among the youngest age group (25-34) but during the past few years it has also started to decrease (29.9% in 2013).

In 2013, the percentage of young people (18-24) with compulsory education or less who did not continue their studies was 9.7% and this rate has been decreasing since 2008 (Table 7).
Table 7. Early school leavers (%), 2009-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: 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


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


INDICATORS= OBS_FLAG; INDIC_EM


Since 2008/09 the average dropout rate of VET students has increased, reaching 20.2% in the 2012/13 study year. The dropout rate has been higher in post-secondary VET (ISCED 4B) (22.0% in 2013) than in upper secondary VET (18.1%). According to a survey the reasons for discontinuing VET studies are incorrect choice of speciality, low motivation to study, economic hardship (RAKE and CPD, 2012). In post-secondary VET one of the reasons is also the difficulty in keeping a balance between studying and working.

The number of graduates in VET schools has decreased in upper secondary VET by 10.4% and increased in post-secondary VET by 2% in 2013 compared to 2012 (Table 8).

Table 8. Graduates at ISCED level 3 and 4 by level of education, programme orientation and sex (number and %), 2009-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 3 GEN Total</td>
<td>11 517</td>
<td>10 572</td>
<td>10 080</td>
<td>9 337</td>
<td>9130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (%)</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>57.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 3 VOC Total</td>
<td>4 218</td>
<td>3 858</td>
<td>4 214</td>
<td>3 972</td>
<td>3558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (%)</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 4 VOC Total</td>
<td>3 196</td>
<td>3 531</td>
<td>3 777</td>
<td>3 973</td>
<td>4051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M (%)</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F (%)</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Source: HTM, 2014c.

The perceived value of vocational education has risen against the background of economic recession and unemployment. Traditionally there have been more males than females in vocational education. However, there are differences between VET levels. In upper secondary vocational programmes 66.2% are male graduates, but in post-secondary vocational training only 36.9%
are males according to Estonian education information system EHIS (HTM, 2014a). The most preferred field of study for men is technological trades (tehnikaalad) like mechanics and metal work, energetics and automatics, motor vehicles, shipbuilding and aircraft technology. Women are mostly studying personal services (isikuteenindus), and business and administration (ärindus ja haldus) (HTM, 2014b).

Participation in lifelong learning has been increasing since 2005. With a participation rate of 10.5% Estonia joined the ranks of the top ten countries in the European Union in 2009. In 2013 the indicator stood at 12.6% (Table 9). The Government has set the goal to reach 15% by 2015 and 20% by 2020.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2002</th>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th></th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: (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 metadata: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/lfsi_edu_a_esms.htm
INDICATORS=OBS_FLAG
CHAPTER 2.
Providing VET in a LLL perspective

2.1. National education and training system

Figure 1. Estonian formal education structure since September 2013 (1)

NB: ISCED-P 2011.
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Estonia.

(1) The new VET institutions act stepped into force on September 1st, 2013 (Vocational education institutions act 2013). Pre-primary education is not described on the chart.
Figure 2. Estonian formal education structure until August 2013
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 Ministry of Education and Research (HTM - Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium) administer vocational education and training system.

The legislative framework for the education and training system originates from Parliament. The Parliament has 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 several acts and regulations regulating formal VET in Estonia (2).

The Government of the Republic of Estonia approves national strategies, the vocational education standard (3), higher education standard (HTM, 2008) and basic school (HTM, 2011a) and upper-secondary school national curriculum (HTM, 2011b) as well as national VET curricula. It also determines unified basic cost of study places and curriculum group coefficients, procedures to establish, reorganise and close public educational institutions.

The HTM coordinates the preparation and implementation of education policies. The role of the Ministry is strategic planning, preparation of legislative acts, initiating new initiatives, and determining study places for VET. Moreover, HTM administers most VET schools, e.g. establishes, reorganises and closes public educational institutions, approves study programmes (school curricula), textbooks and teaching/study aids (except for universities); and administers public assets allocated to the education system.

(2) Vocational education institutions act (Parliament, 2013); Vocational education standard (Government, 2013); Policies of implementing workplace-based training (HTM, 2007b); Private education institutions act (Parliament, 1998b); Institutions of professional higher education act (Parliament, 1998a); Adult education act (Parliament, 1993); Conditions and policies for arranging professional training for working adults in VET institutions (HTM, 2007a); Occupational qualifications act (Parliament, 2008); Recognition of foreign professional qualifications act (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2002); Study allowances and study loans act (Parliament, 2003a); Youth work act (Parliament, 1999b).

(3) Vocational education standard is a set of common requirements for lower-, upper- and post-secondary level VET. Please refer to 3.3 for more information.
Since 2012 Foundation Innove (4) has been designated by the Ministry to implement 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 development of national VET curricula. It also organises continuous training for VET teachers and trainers and prepares methodological materials. HTM’s approval of VET school programmes is based on the expert opinion from this agency.

Other ministries involved in VET governance are:
(a) the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sotsiaalministeerium), which is responsible for organising and financing training for unemployed people as well as for adult people with special needs;
(b) the Ministry of Culture (Kultuuriministeerium), which is coordinating through the Integration and Migration Foundation the integration of minorities and providing them with additional education opportunities;
(c) the Ministry of Defence (Kaitseministeerium), which administers the Estonian National Defence College;
(d) the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (Majandus- ja kommunikatsiooniministeerium), which compiles the labour force forecasts which are the basis for determining the State-commissioned vocational education;
(e) the Ministry of Interior Affairs (Siseministeerium), which organises training for police, rescue and prison officials.

The Ministry of Education and Research also involves several advisory bodies and social partner organisations in policy development. 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 Tööandjate 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 occupational standards for each profession

(4) Until the end of 2011 this function was filled by National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (REKK) (Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus). In 2012 NEQC joined Foundation Innove.
At local level, social partners participate in VET school advisory bodies (Kutseõppeasutuse nõunike kogu), established by vocational educational institutions act (Parliament, 2013), which consist of at least seven people. Advisory bodies connect the school and society by advising the school and its manager on planning and organising educational and economic activities.

VET providers can be owned by central or local government or be privately owned and they have a similar management structure according to the vocational education institutions act (Parliament, 2013). The highest collegial decision-making body of the school is the council (nõukogu), the function of which is to organise the activities and plan the development of the school. The head of a school (school director - direktor) directs the work of the council. VET schools are managed by the school director, who is responsible for the activities and development, and legitimate use of financial resources of the school. In 2013, 29 of 40 VET institutions belonged to the State and were run by the Ministry of Education and Research, three were run by municipalities, and eight were private institutions. In addition, there were seven professional higher education institutions that were also providing VET programmes at post-secondary level (ISCED 4B) along with higher education (ISCED 5A).

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 (Parliament, 2013). As there is no obligation to apply State-commissioned education to all VET programmes, a few privately paid VET programmes are also available in State and municipal VET schools. The share of private funding in upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET is about 5%. Of 25 699 students, 97% studied at the State-funded study places in 2013-14. Private VET schools may apply for State-commissioned education as well. State and municipal vocational schools may also provide services for a fee, but they have to be related to the main activities of the school (professional training for adults) or use other sources of revenue (e.g. international projects funded from abroad).

The study costs of State VET schools are covered within the framework 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 overhead costs of all premises (heating, electricity, etc.). The unified basic 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 past decade.

For different VET study levels (5) and types (school based and work-based, also called apprenticeship) the same funding scheme is applied. For VET in lower secondary school (sections 2.2.5.1 and 2.2.5.2) 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.

A curriculum group (e.g. ‘Media technologies’) comprises curricula from related fields (e.g. ‘multimedia’, ‘printing technology’ and ‘photography’). 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 has 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 resources of state-funded study places to finance short term adult education courses (non-formal training for adults described in Section 2.3).

Expenditure on vocational education has been decreasing during the past few years: 8.7% in 2011 and 8.5% in 2012 due to the lower share of foreign funds (Table 6). However, one of the main cost components has been the investments into modernising the premises and equipment of VET schools (30% of total expenditure in 2011). The total expenditure in VET per student without taking into account these investments has remained on the same level since 2008.

Table 6. Expenditure on education by educational level (2006 – 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total general education</td>
<td>350.6</td>
<td>391.9</td>
<td>451.2</td>
<td>435.8</td>
<td>396.7</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>411.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expenditure (million EUR), incl. investments</td>
<td>- investments (million EUR)</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students in general education</td>
<td>180 963</td>
<td>170 994</td>
<td>161 961</td>
<td>154 481</td>
<td>149 641</td>
<td>145 939</td>
<td>142 983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total expenditure per student in general education (EUR)</td>
<td>1 937.6</td>
<td>2 292.1</td>
<td>2 786.0</td>
<td>2 820.9</td>
<td>2 651</td>
<td>2 546</td>
<td>2 879</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) For detailed description of VET study levels – see sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.5
### 2.2.3. Principles of curricula

Modular national and school curricula have been developed on the basis of occupational standards. The curricula ensure the acquisition of general and basic skills required in the modern world, and enable students to specialise within the curriculum. The new occupational standards are competence-based and describe learning outcomes. These standards are approved by sector skills councils, which consist of representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the corresponding area of activity and the representatives of the State (see section 3.2 for more information). National VET curricula are based on these occupational standards, which are renewed once every four years. Consequently, the curricula are also outcome-based and are renewed once every four years. This ensures that the formal qualifications correspond to labour market needs as much as possible.

### 2.2.4. VET in Estonia according to new legislation entered into force since September 2013 (see Figure 1 for structure)

The new VET Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013b), which entered into force on 1 September 2013 substantially transformed the VET system regulation by:

(a) defining new types of VET qualifications linked to the Estonian qualification framework;

(b) promoting extensive implementation of learning outcomes (LOs) based approach;

(c) establishing a new quality assurance structure for VET;
(d) defining the Estonian VET credit points (EKAP) for measuring study volume.

In addition, the law established principles of formulating the vocational education standard and national curricula for VET, the bases for establishment, reorganisation and closure of VET institutions; the principles of VET institutions management, the basis for their budgeting and financing, the rights and obligations of VET institutions personnel, internal evaluation and State supervision over the activities of schools.

The new legislation 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 for Estonian qualification framework levels 2-5. These learning outcomes for all levels are described in the vocational education standard (Government, 2013) and in occupational standards. According to these, vocational training can take place on EQF levels 2-5. Based on the new law, vocational training is divided into initial vocational training (IVET) and continuing vocational training (CVET). An IVET qualification enables access to training at the next qualification level. In CVET one can acquire additional competences and also raise one’s qualification level. Both IVET and CVET provide knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary to enter the labour market.

According to the new VET institutions act, the volume of VET is expressed in Estonian VET credit points (EKAP - Eesti kutsehariduse arvestuspunkt). This indicates the estimated volume of student’s work necessary to achieve the learning outcomes described in the curriculum or module. One credit point equals 26 hours of student work. A study year in VET is equivalent to 60 EKAP. The principles of the ECVET (European credit transfer system for vocational education and training) will be used to introduce the EKAP. All VET school curricula must be renewed by September 2017.

VET studies end in achieving the learning outcomes described in the curriculum for a qualification or a partial qualification, assessed by an external examination, administered by employers (known as ‘professional examination’ (kutseeksam) in the national context). If it is not possible to take such an examination, which is the case for some specialties, studies can be completed with a comprehensive examination, administered by the school. Graduates receive a VET certificate at the respective EQF level (kutsetunnistus) together with a transcript proving programme completion. The lower secondary general education (referred to as ‘basic education’ in the national context) certificate can be acquired during or after completing VET studies at EQF levels 2 and 3. Likewise, the upper secondary general education certificate, which gives the right
to enter higher education, can be obtained during or after completing EQF level 4 VET studies.

2.2.4.1. **VET leading to EQF level 2 (ISCED 251)**

In VET leading to EQF level 2 (*teise taseme kutseõpe*) the student acquires the knowledge, skills and attitudes of that level and the graduates can work in elementary occupations described in ISCO 08 (6). Only IVET curricula are used in VET leading to EQF level 2. Basic education is not required as a prerequisite to start studies. The volume of studies is 15-120 EKAP and the share of work-based learning (practical training at school and at the enterprises) is at least 70%. Many curricula at this VET level are also suitable for students with special educational needs. Graduates can enter the labour market or continue the studies.

2.2.4.2. **VET leading to EQF level 3 (ISCED 251)**

In VET leading to EQF level 3 (*kolmanda taseme kutseõpe*) the student acquires the knowledge, skills and attitudes of that level and graduates can work as 'plant and machine operators', 'craft and related trades workers', 'skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers' or 'service and sale workers', described in ISCO 08. Only IVET curricula are used at this level. Basic education is not required as a prerequisite to start the studies. The volume of studies is 15-120 EKAP and the share of practical training and practical work is at least 50%, with 25% at a VET institution and 25% at an enterprise. Graduates can enter the labour market. Those with basic education can continue their studies at upper-secondary level.

2.2.4.3. **VET leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 351, 354)**

In VET leading to EQF level 4 (*neljanda taseme kutseõpe*) the student acquires the knowledge, skills and attitudes of that level. The graduates can work in more complex occupations of 'plant and machine operators', 'craft and related trades workers', 'skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers' or 'service and sale workers' (ISCO 08). Both IVET and CVET curricula are used at this level. Basic education is a prerequisite to start the studies. Those entering CVET programmes need to have an EQF level 4 qualification or competences in addition to basic education.

(6) ISCO- The international standard classification of occupations.
The volume of IVET studies is 15-150 EKAP (ISCED 351), and 180 EKAP for music and performance. The share of work-based learning is at least 50%, with 25% at school and 25% at enterprises. The volume of CVET is 15-60 EKAP.

IVET studies leading to EQF level 4 can also take place in the form of ‘VET combined with upper-secondary general education’ (kutsekeskharidusõpe) (ISCED 354), which also gives access to higher education programmes. Students over 22 may enter without basic education if they have acquired relevant competences. The volume of studies is 180 EKAP and it includes studies of key competencies for at least 60 EKAP. The share of work-based learning is at least 35%, with 17.5% at school and 17.5% at the enterprises.

To graduate, VET students in these programmes are not obliged to take the so called ‘State examinations’ (7), obligatory for upper-secondary general education graduates. One exception is the Estonian language exam, which is obligatory for students in VET programmes provided in a language other than Estonian. However, VET graduates may want to take the ‘State examinations’, since these are required for entrance at most public universities. Graduates can take the exams the same year or following an additional one-year general education studies in subjects of their choice at a VET school or upper-secondary general school to prepare for the State examinations. Graduates can enter the labour market or follow further pathways at EQF level 4 or 5 (in CVET) or, if higher education entrance requirements are fulfilled, in bachelor studies or in professional higher education.

2.2.4.4. **VET leading to EQF Level 5 (ISCED 454)**

In VET leading to EQF level 5 the student acquires the knowledge, skills and attitudes at this level. These studies are also called ‘specialised VET’. Both IVET and CVET curricula are used. IVET graduates can become ‘technicians and associate professionals’ or ‘clerical support workers’ (ISCO 08). CVET graduates can be expected to work in more complex occupations like ‘plant and machine operators and assemblers’, ‘craft and related trades workers’, ‘skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers’, ‘service and sales workers’ or ‘clerical support workers’ (ISCO 08).

Completed upper-secondary education is a prerequisite for VET at this level. The volume of IVET studies is 120-150 EKAP and 60-150 EKAP for military and public defence curricula. To start CVET studies at EQF level 5, an additional prerequisite is having EQF level 4 or 5 qualification or relevant competences. The

---

(7) Referred to as ‘matura examinations’ in other national contexts.
volume of CVET is 15-60 EKAP. The share of work-based learning is at least 50%, with 25% at the VET institution and 25% at the enterprise. Graduates can enter the labour market or follow further pathways in CVET, in bachelor studies or in professional higher education, or enter the labour market.

2.2.5. VET in Estonia according to legislation effective until August 2013 (see Figure 2 for VET structure)

2.2.5.1. VET at lower secondary level

Table 7 gives an overview of the main fields of study and other indicators of VET at lower secondary VET.

Table 7. VET at lower-secondary level

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


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

According to the vocational education standard (Government, 2006) 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 continuing studies. Vocational training in lower secondary schools is provided by a VET school in cooperation with a lower secondary school. The students follow the lower secondary school curriculum and are enlisted as students of a lower secondary school. The study is conducted according to a shortened version of a VET school curriculum in the same field. 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 old. The training can be carried out on the premises of either the lower secondary school or the VET institution. The volume of studies is usually 15-40 study weeks and can be organised as elective subjects. The graduates receive the diploma of the lower secondary school and a transcript from the VET school, which certifies the course(s) taken. The courses will be
recognised if the student continues at a VET school. In most specialities it is possible to take a professional examination, administered by employers, and if successful, get a qualification.

In lower secondary school also preliminary vocational training (kutsealane eelkoolitus põhikoolis) up to 15 study weeks can be organised as elective subjects, which are foreseen in the national curricula for lower secondary schools and other national curricula, simplified for SEN learners. This VET option is a low-volume introduction to occupations, provided for the purpose of vocational orientation. These courses are directly financed from the general school budget and VET institutions do not have to be involved in offering them.

2.2.5.2. 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, chosen by 70% of students) or at a VET institution to acquire upper secondary vocational education, granting access to higher education (HE) (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 VET at upper secondary level:

- VET and preliminary VET in upper secondary general schools (kutseõpe gümnaasiumis);
- Upper secondary vocational education (kutsekeskharidus), giving access to HE;
- Vocational training based on compulsory education (kutseõpe põhihariduse baasil);
- Vocational education and training without compulsory education requirement (põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõpe).

Table 8 gives an overview of the main fields of study and other indicators of VET at upper secondary VET.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of educational programme</th>
<th>Main fields of study</th>
<th>Corresponding ISCED level/orientation</th>
<th>Balance between general and vocational subjects</th>
<th>Balance between school- and work-based learning (WBL)</th>
<th>Duration of studies</th>
<th>Transfer to other pathways (ISCED 97)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VET and preliminary VET in Upper Secondary General Schools</td>
<td>Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services</td>
<td>(VET for students in 3A) Mostly general subjects</td>
<td>50/50% in VET courses (50% WBL with 25% at school and 25% in enterprise)</td>
<td>15-40 study weeks</td>
<td>3B- can go directly to the 2nd year in VET school if takes 1 year of VET subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary vocational education, giving access to HE</td>
<td>Humanities and arts Social sciences, business and law Science Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services</td>
<td>3B 2:1</td>
<td>50/50% (50% WBL with 25% at school and 25% in enterprise)</td>
<td>At least 3 years, general subjects at least 1 year.</td>
<td>4B, 5A if passes ‘State exams’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training Based on compulsory Education</td>
<td>Social sciences, business and law Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services</td>
<td>3C VET subjects only</td>
<td>50/50% (50% WBL with 25% at school and 25% in enterprise)</td>
<td>0.5-2 years</td>
<td>3A, 3B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET without compulsory education requirement</td>
<td>Humanities and arts Engineering, manufacturing and construction Agriculture Services</td>
<td>2C Vocational subjects only</td>
<td>50/50% (50% with 25% at school and 25% in enterprise)</td>
<td>0.5-2.5 years</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Upon graduation, the person has to complete, to the full extent, the studies prescribed by the school curriculum and pass the final exam of the profession or area of specialisation. Learners can opt out of the VET school final examination and instead, take a professional examination and if successful, get a VET qualification.

**VET and preliminary VET in upper secondary general schools (ISCED 3A)**
The aim of vocational training in general upper secondary schools (*kutseõpe gümnaasiumis*) 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 continuing studies. 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 shortened VET curriculum in the same field. 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 old. The volume of the VET studies is usually 15-40 study weeks and can be organised as elective subjects. Graduates receive the upper secondary school certificate and a transcript from the VET school, which certifies the courses taken. The credits will be recognized if the student continues in a VET school. In most specialities it is possible to take a professional examination, administered by employers, and if successful, get a qualification.

In upper secondary general school also preliminary vocational training (eelkutseõpe gümnaasiumis) up to 15 study weeks can be organised as elective subjects, which are foreseen in the national curricula for upper secondary schools and other national curricula, simplified for SEN learners. This VET option is a low-volume introduction of occupations, provided for the purpose of vocational orientation. These courses are directly financed from the general school budget and VET institutions do not have to be involved in offering them.

**Upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B), leading to HE access**

Of all VET students in Estonia, 54% studied in these programmes in 2012. 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, two thirds of which is dedicated to subjects related to the profession or area of specialisation.

Practical training in enterprises is an integral part of the curricula in these programmes. 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 curriculum objectives. Providers are also responsible for supervising and assessing the training.

To graduate, VET students in these programmes are not obliged to take the so called ‘State examinations’ (8), obligatory for graduates of upper-secondary general education programmes. One exception is the Estonian language exam,

---

(8) Referred to as ‘matura examinations’ in other national contexts.
which is obligatory for students in VET programmes provided in a language other than Estonian. However, VET graduates may want to take the ‘State examinations’, since these are required for entrance at most public universities. Graduates can take the exams the same year or following an additional one year (up to 35 study weeks) general education studies in subjects of their choice at a VET school or upper-secondary general school to prepare better for the State examinations.

The school provides the graduate with an upper secondary VET certificate (lõputunnistus kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta) and a transcript of proof of concluding the studies. Students who discontinue their upper secondary vocational studies have the right to continue in upper secondary general school. They can transfer the grades on presenting the transcript to the teachers’ council of the school for approval.

**Vocational training based on basic (9) education (ISCED 3C)**

The students undergoing ‘vocational training based on basic education’ acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performing skilled work in a profession, speciality or occupation. This type of VET does not include general upper-secondary education component. The studies take place at a VET school and the students are enrolled as VET students. Of all VET students 3.7% participated in this type of VET in 2012.

The volume of studies is 40 to 100 study weeks and up to 120 study weeks in music and performing arts programmes. Work-based learning makes up at least 50% of the volume of vocational training.

The graduate receives a ‘VET based on compulsory education certificate’ (lõputunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutseõppe lõbimise kohta) and a transcript of proof of concluding the studies. Graduates can enter the labour market or acquire upper secondary general education and then continue their studies in higher education or CVET.

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

Vocational training without lower secondary/compulsory education requirement (põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõpe) (ISCED 2C) is meant for persons over minimum school-leaving age (17 years), who lack lower-secondary education. Having a

---

(9) A person is obligated to attend school until they acquire basic education or attain the age of 17 years (Basic schools and upper secondary schools act, 2010).
specified education level is not part of the entrance requirements. Of all VET students, 1.6% studied in this type of VET in 2012 (Table 3).

The volume of studies is 20 to 100 study weeks. According to VET standard work-based learning makes up at least 50% of the volume of the training. The study includes vocational training but not lower-secondary general education.

The school issues a VET without basic education requirement certificate (lõputunnistus põhihariduse nõudeta kutseõppe läbimise kohta) together with a transcript of proof of concluding the training. The graduates may then enter the labour market. If the person acquires lower secondary general education from a basic school, simultaneously with vocational training or thereafter, he/she may continue their studies in upper secondary general or vocational education.

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

After acquiring upper secondary general (ISCED 3A) or upper secondary vocational (ISCED 3B) education, students can choose to continue in post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education (ISCED 4B). The objective is to prepare skilled workers and students are given the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes to perform complicated work independently. VET at post-secondary level is provided at 39 VET schools and 8 professional higher education institutions. In 2011, 39.2% of all VET students studied in VET at post-secondary level. There is no age limit for this programme. Students have become older in recent years as they tend to continue their studies after working a few years.

Study duration is between 1-2.5 years (40 to 100 study weeks and up to 120 study weeks in music and performing arts programmes). Work-based learning makes up at least 50% of the training. Table 9 gives an overview of the main study fields and other indicators of VET at post-secondary level.
Table 9. VET at post-secondary (non-tertiary) level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of educational programme</th>
<th>Main fields of study</th>
<th>Corresponding ISCED level/orientation</th>
<th>Balance between general and vocational subjects</th>
<th>Balance between school- and work-based learning (WBL)</th>
<th>Average duration of studies</th>
<th>Transfer to other pathways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 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% (50% WBL with 25% at school and 25% in enterprise) | 0.5-2.5 years                | 5A                         |


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

Graduates receive a post-secondary VET Certificate (Tunnistus keskhariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta) and a transcript of proof of concluding the training. After graduation the students can enter the labour market or continue in higher education.

2.2.6. Apprenticeship training

In Estonia all vocational education (sections 2.2.4-2.2.5) can be provided either in the form of school-based or work-based (apprenticeship) training. In 2007, a regulation was issued by the Ministry of Education and Research concerning the procedure of work-based training (apprenticeship training). Based on the school curriculum, the school designs an individualised curriculum for the apprentice. The programme is meant for people already working and in need of formal qualifications or learners who wish to work while acquiring a VET qualification. In 2012, 2.1% of all VET students participated in apprenticeship training. Table 10 gives an overview of the main study fields and other indicators regarding apprenticeship training.
Table 10. **Apprenticeship training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of educational programme</th>
<th>Main fields of study</th>
<th>Corresponding ISCED level / orientation</th>
<th>Balance between general and vocational subjects</th>
<th>Balance between school- and work-based learning (WBL)</th>
<th>Average duration of studies</th>
<th>Transfer to other pathways</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship training</td>
<td>Humanities and arts</td>
<td>2C, 3C, 3B, 4B</td>
<td>Depends on the programme</td>
<td>Mostly 0.5-1 year</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                                                             | Social sciences, business and law       |                                                      |                                               |                                               |                             |
                                                             | Science                                |                                                      |                                               |                                               |                             |
                                                             | Engineering, manufacturing and construction |                                                |                                               |                                               |                             |
                                                             | Agriculture                            |                                                      |                                               |                                               |                             |
                                                             | health and welfare                      |                                                      |                                               |                                               |                             |
                                                             | Services                               |                                                      |                                               |                                               |                             |
</code></pre>

Source: Vocational Education Institutions Act (1998), Vocational Education Standard (2006), EHIS.

General characteristics of apprenticeship programmes are:

(a) the school, the enterprise and the apprentice sign a tripartite study and work contract, where the expected learning outcomes and the process is specified. An expert opinion on whether the workplace is suitable for meeting the objectives has to be attached to the contract;

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

(c) apprentices receive a wage during enterprise training and a study allowance during theoretical studies at school. They also have a four-month probation period;

(d) study groups are small (up to eight apprentices);

(e) studies are complete after passing a professional or final examination.

The apprentice has two appointed supervisors, one at the school and the other at the workplace. An apprenticeship programme is usually funded through the state-funded study places scheme. In that case, the school pays the salary for the supervisor at the enterprise. There can be other arrangements to fund the programme. The law also provides that any student with special needs must have a legal guardian.

### 2.2.7. Formal education for adults

National legislation does not specify the age of an adult learner. Most commonly, persons between 25 and 64 are considered adult learners in overviews and analyses in the field of education. In addition to part-time studies, adult learners often attend full-time studies in VET or higher education.
Since 1993, adult education is governed by the Adult education act (Parliament, 1993). 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 its funding from the State budget. There are also other important acts and regulations (10) that regulate vocational education and training for adults.

The Adult Education Act is currently being renewed. 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 lifelong learning strategy for 2014-2020 was adopted in February 2014. It focuses on providing training for low-skilled people with low educational level. The aim of the strategy is to bring back 1500 people to formal education and also to provide training courses for 53 500 people to raise their qualification.

According to the adult education act, adult education can be defined within one of three categories:

(a) formal education programmes for adults (tasemekoolitus) in general education schools for adults, vocational education institutions or higher education institutions;
(b) work-related education and (re)training (tööalane koolitus);
(c) popular adult education (vabahariduslik koolitus).

In this section the first of the three categories - formal education for adults- is described as it relates to the nationally defined VET qualifications. Work-related 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 formal education framework. There is no age limit to start VET studies. Adults can participate in VET at all levels described in Sections 2.2.4-2.2.6. VET schools offer adult students the possibility to acquire vocational education in the form of part-time study, where the student completes cumulatively more than 50% of the studies which, according to the curriculum, must be completed by the end of each academic year (Parliament, 2013).

(10) Regulations ‘Conditions and policies for arranging professional training for working adults in VET institutions’ (HTM, 2007a) and ‘The procedure for the formation of State-commissioned education within the remit of the Ministry of Education and Research’ (HTM, 2010); ‘Institutions of professional higher education act’ (Parliament, 1998a); ‘Universities act’ (Parliament, 1995); ‘Private schools act’ (Parliament, 1998).
Courses are free of charge in formal VET, 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 learners over 25 has increased and constituted 23.3% of all VET students in 2013. Table 11 gives an overview of such learners in different types of vocational education and training.

Table 11. The share of VET students aged 25+ in different types of VET (%, 2010-14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of VET</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vocational education without compulsory education</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocational education based on compulsory education</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper-secondary vocational education</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocational courses after secondary education</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HTM, 2014c.

2.3. Other forms of training

2.3.1. Definition
According to the adult education act, in addition to formal education for adults, there is also non-formal education in the form of work-related training (tööalane koolitus) and popular 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. Popular 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

Three ministries coordinate adult training in Estonia. The HTM contributes to the general development of the adult education system and supports course development, adult educators and educational institutions. HTM finances continuing education and retraining of individuals through educational and training institutions.

Since 2007 with the resources of the European Social Fund (ESF) and State funds, the HTM has applied the State-funded study places scheme to provide short-term training for working adults in the existing VET schools and in professional higher education institutions providing VET 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 HTM has been financing training of work-related and lifelong learning key competences also in popular adult education centres. The state-financed training is available in all counties of Estonia.

The Ministry of Social Affairs (SM) is responsible for training the unemployed and at 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 HTM. In recent years the SM 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 an occupational qualification.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications supports training in enterprises through the foundation Enterprise Estonia. Enterprise Estonia has a grant programme for enterprises for the development of knowledge and skills by providing, among other things, professional in-service training of employees and/or managers for a duration of up to 6 months. The minimum amount of grant 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, the training budget is part of the annual salary cost for the school (e.g. 3% of the annual salary fund for teachers).

Non-formal education and training can also be provided for a fee and paid for either by the participant or the employer. Participants can apply for exemption from income tax on the work-related or popular adult education training cost if the trainer has a valid training licence, issued by the HTM. If the employer pays for
non-work-related training for employees, the employer has to pay taxes on the value of the training, as this is considered a fringe benefit.

In 2011 there were about 400 000 participants in adult education and 65% of them took part in non-formal education. Of the participants, 14.8% paid for the training themselves, whereas 46.6% of the training was financed by employers (Statistics Estonia, 2011a and b).

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 (38 schools), professional higher education institutions (11) and universities (7). There are more than 24 000 participants annually in 48 VET schools and professional higher education institutions providing vocational education and more than 86 000 participants in institutions providing liberal adult education (~200 institutions, ~80 of them are very active) (HTM, 2012).

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 lasting more than 120 hours or longer than 6 months a year need a training licence from HTM.

To develop quality assurance mechanisms, activities have been initiated at the national level. The internal and external evaluation system is being implemented by the Estonian non-formal adult education association (ENAEA – *Eesti Vabaharidusliit*), an umbrella organisation that unites popular adult education centres. Numerous training courses for educators have been carried out. They also oversee the awarding of professional qualifications of adult educators/andragogues. The Association of Estonian Adult Educators (ANDRAS) aims at increasing the competence of adult educators by also awarding professional qualifications of andragogues.

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 the country. ANDRAS is organising campaigns and events such as the ‘adult learner’s week’ and the ‘adult education forum’.
Several activities exist 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, HTM and SM concluded an agreement, to cooperate in developing career services. The development and provision of career services to a larger target group than before was 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 institutions 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 various programmes.
CHAPTER 3.
Shaping VET qualifications

Shaping initial and continuous VET qualifications in Estonia is based on occupational standards (11), which are a focal component of occupational qualifications system.

3.1. Foresight of labour market needs

The foresight of labour market needs has both, quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The quantitative aspect (how many employees, including the number of new entrants of different qualification levels are needed in the sectors of national economy) is covered by the Ministry of Economy and Communications (MKM) forecast, prepared annually as a labour market needs forecast for the next 7 years. The forecast is based on regular labour market surveys conducted by Statistics Estonia and prepared for 42 sectors and subsectors of national economy and for 5 major occupational groups. The foresight of labour market needs reflects changes in employment and the need for replacing the employees leaving the labour market during the period 2013-2022. The results have been adjusted using the data of the 2011 population census (MKM, 2014).

In February 2014 the Government adopted the Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020 (HTM, Koostöökogu et al., 2013). One of the strategic aims of the strategy is “correlation of lifelong learning opportunities with the needs of the labour market”. The objective is to create study opportunities and career services that are of good quality, flexible and diverse, and that also take the needs of the labour market into account, to increase the number of people with vocational (occupational) qualifications in different age groups and regions. One of the measures to achieve this is developing a system for monitoring, assessing and forecasting labour market needs, combining quantitative and qualitative approach. During the first half of 2014 the methodology of this approach was piloted in 10 sectors of national economy.

(11) Occupational qualification means a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession resulting from work-based learning.
3.2. Occupational qualifications system

The occupational qualifications system in Estonia is an interface between the labour market and the life-long learning system (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Conceptual scheme of the occupational qualifications system

The occupational qualifications system consists of:
(a) a system of occupational qualification standards;
(b) a system for awarding occupational qualifications;
(c) an occupational qualifications register.

The organisational structure of the occupational qualifications system is presented in Figure 4.
Pursuant to the Occupational Qualifications Act institutions responsible for the occupational qualifications system are:

- the Ministry of Education and Research (HTM);
- the Estonian Qualifications Authority (Kutsekoda);
- the Board of Chairmen of Sector Skills Councils;
- the Sector Skills Council;
- the institution awarding occupational qualifications;
- the institution awarding initial occupational qualifications\(^{12}\);
- the Occupational Qualifications Committee;
- the Assessment Committee.

The HTM is responsible for the development of an integral and structured occupational qualifications system. To perform these functions, the HTM has entered into a contract with the Estonian Qualifications Authority (Kutsekoda), which is a private foundation, founded by the representatives of employer and employee organizations to oversee the occupational qualifications system development. The tasks of the foundation are:

- the organisation and coordination of the activities of the Sector Skills Councils and their Board of Chairmen;

\(^{12}\) Initial occupational qualification is acquired in graduation of formal education institution.
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 in Estonia;
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 sector skills councils chairmen. This board coordinates the activities of sector skills councils. It decides on the need to develop occupational standards and the allocation levels to the occupational qualifications according to 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:
- develops occupational standards in their own occupational fields;
- submits proposals for the development of occupational standards to the board of chairmen of sector skills councils;
- approves the occupational qualification standards;
- grants the institutions awarding occupational qualifications the rights to award occupational qualifications and exercises supervision over their activities;
- approves the procedure for awarding occupational qualifications and the amount of fee thereof.

The sector skills councils appoint working groups to develop occupational qualification standards in the field. 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.

An institution 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
such rights is decided by the respective sector skills councils as a result of a public competition. The institutions awarding occupational qualifications:

- develop rules and procedure for the awarding of occupational qualifications;
- organise the awarding of occupational qualification;
- issue the occupational qualification certificates or the duplicates thereof;
- 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 shall be entitled to award will be determined. There are 104 institutions awarding occupational qualifications at the Estonian Qualifications Authority.

An institution awarding initial (entry level(s)) occupational qualifications is an educational institution or training provider who has been granted the right to award such qualifications. Necessary condition to get this right is that the study programme meets the requirements of the occupational standard and has been accredited or for professions governed by the EU Directive 2005/36/EU the study programme meets the requirements of this directive. The name of the occupational qualification and the Estonian qualifications framework level are recorded on the diploma supplement (for higher education qualifications) or certificate (for VET qualifications) issued by the institution. The awarding of the initial occupational qualifications 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:

- 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;
- develops in cooperation with the institutions awarding occupational qualifications procedures related to the assessment of competence and awarding of occupational qualifications and respective documents;
- checks the documents of the applicant and decides on the form and manner for assessment of the occupational competence of the applicant;
- appoints assessment committee(s) to assess the conformity of the applicant’s competence with the requirements of the occupational qualification standards;
• approves the instructions for assessment and the examination materials;
• decides on awarding or refusing to award occupational qualification to the applicant;
• 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.

The occupational qualifications register was established in 2001 with the objective to collect, systematise and maintain data regarding sector skills councils, occupational standards, occupational qualification certificates, institutions awarding occupational qualifications, occupational qualifications committees and procedures for awarding occupational qualifications. The register is kept as a single-level computerised database in accordance with the occupational qualifications act (Parliament, 2008), the national databases act (Parliament, 1997), statutes for maintenance of the professions register (Government, 2009) and other legislation.
3.3. VET qualifications framework

In June 2013, Parliament passed the VET Institutions Act that came to force on 1 September 2013 (see section 2.2.4) Uniform requirements for VET programmes and qualifications are stipulated by the Government in the vocational education standard. The standard describes the requirements for national and school curricula, determines the terms and conditions for recognising prior learning (RPL), describes the objectives, expected learning outcomes (LOs), volume of study and graduation requirements for different types of initial and continuous VET programmes, requirements for pedagogical professionals, and the curricula groups in accordance with the ISCED 97 classification. It also assigns the Estonian Qualification Framework levels to the types of VET qualifications.

National VET curricula are drafted in co-operation with social partners and are based on occupational standards, the vocational education standard and the upper-secondary school national curriculum. National VET curricula are developed for EQF level 4 programmes that give higher education access. They need to be approved by the HTM. By August 2014, 13 new national VET curricula had been approved, four were in the process of approval and two under development. Together with national curricula from the ‘previous generation’ they cover all the specialities.

School curricula are compiled for every individual qualification that can be acquired at the school. EQF level 4 programmes that give higher education access are developed based on national curricula. Other school curricula are developed based on the vocational education standard and the respective occupational standard(s). In cases where no such standards exist, the school must apply for recognition of the curriculum by social partners.

The VET Institutions Act stipulates five types of VET qualifications:

- VET qualification certificate, leading to EQF level 2;
- VET qualification certificate, leading to EQF level 3;
- VET qualification certificate, leading to EQF level 4;
- Upper secondary VET certificate (which gives higher education access and is referenced to the EQF level 4);
- VET qualification certificate, leading to EQF level 5.

The vocational education standard stipulates that LOs of modules are described in terms of occupation specific knowledge and skills, autonomy and responsibility, learning skill, communication skill, self-definition competence, operational competence, ICT competence, and entrepreneurship competence defined as follows:

- occupation specific knowledge are facts, theories and practices of an occupation, vocation or speciality acquired through learning process;
• occupation specific skill is an ability to apply knowledge for performing tasks and solving problems; skills are described in terms of their complexity and diversity;
• autonomy and responsibility describe to what extent the graduate is able to work independently and carry responsibility for the results of work;
• learning skill is an ability to manage learning process using efficient learning strategies and proper learning styles;
• communication skill is an ability to communicate in different situations and on different topics in oral and written form;
• self-definition competence is an ability to understand and evaluate yourself, give sense to your activities and behaviour in the society, develop yourself as a person;
• operational competence is an ability to identify problems and solve them, plan your activities, set goals and expected results, select proper tools, act, evaluate results of your action, cooperate with others;
• ICT competence is an ability to use ICT tools and digital media skilfully and critically;
• entrepreneurship competence is an ability to take initiative, act creatively, plan your career in the modern economic, business and work environment using acquired knowledge and skills in different spheres of life.

The vocational education standard describes the expected LOs of various VET programmes at threshold level, to indicate what is needed to pass a programme or module (at ‘satisfactory’ grade). Qualification standards for the EQF levels 2 through 5 define level specific competences in terms of LOs.

3.4. Occupational standards

The occupational standard (OS) is the focal element of the occupational qualifications system, which describes occupational activities and provides competence requirements for occupational qualifications. Competence is an ability to perform a specific part of work or a task together with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required.

The occupational standard is the basis for compiling VET national curricula and school curricula, curricula for higher education and other training programmes, and for assessment of individuals' competence, incl. self-assessment and awarding an occupational qualification. Occupational standards
are available in the State register of occupational qualifications (*Kutsekoda*, 2014a).

An occupational standard consists of three parts. Part A of the standard (description of the occupation) provides an overview of the nature of an occupation, 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. 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.

Occupational standards must meet the following conditions:

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

Occupational standards are updated every four years, 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 standards developed are competence (learning outcomes) based.

### 3.5. 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 with an opportunity to apply for the occupational qualification using application methods and evidence, making repeating assessment and validation of the competences that have been assessed and validated earlier unnecessary.

3.6. 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 in:

- fulfilling the school's terms of admission;
- meeting the requirements of the curriculum (except for the final examination) by considering prior learning in assigning a final grade for a subject, topic or module;
- 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 to evaluate prior learning.
3.7. Quality assurance of VET qualifications

Ensuring quality in the occupational qualifications system includes:

- ensuring the quality of occupational qualification standards;
- ensuring the quality of granting the institutions awarding occupational qualifications the right to award occupational qualifications;
- ensuring the quality of assessment and validation of applicant’s competence by the institutions awarding occupational qualifications;
- periodical external assessment by the Estonian Qualifications Authority of the institutions awarding occupational qualifications.

Respective principles and procedures have been established in the occupational qualifications act (Parliament, 2008) that in turn proceeds from the requirements of ISO 17924 (general requirements for personal certification).

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

- internal assessment conducted by the VET institution;
- external assessment conducted by independent experts;
- decision passed by the assessment council on the basis of external assessment.

External quality assurance of school’s curriculum groups is conducted within the process of awarding the right to provide instruction. The right to provide instruction is the right granted to a school for a specified term to provide initial and continuous VET programmes in the relevant curriculum group. The minister for education and research shall decide the granting of this right on the basis of documents submitted by the school and the results of external assessment by an expert committee, and additional evidence, if necessary. The right to provide instruction upon the establishment of a new school or opening study in a new curriculum group shall be granted for three years.

To extend the right to provide instruction, the relevant curriculum group must get accredited. Accreditation comprises external evaluation of curriculum groups at schools, based on the school’s self-evaluation reports, and assessment conducted by an external evaluation committee. Performance and sustainability of study processes (teaching and learning), leadership and management, human resources management, cooperation with stakeholders and management of resources are evaluated. Accreditation is organised by the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA).

---

13 A curriculum group (e.g. ‘media technologies’) comprises curricula from related fields (e.g. ‘multimedia’, ‘printing technology’ and ‘photography’).
The minister for education and research has nominated the quality evaluation council for VET under the auspices of the EKKA, which approves the accreditation decision and makes a proposal on the extension of the right to provide instruction. The Council has thirteen members representing stakeholders. Upon the evaluation of the council’s proposal the minister for education and research shall make one of the following decisions:

- extend the right to provide instruction in a curriculum group by six years;
- extend the right to provide instruction in a curriculum group by three years;
- refuse to extend the right to provide instruction.

3.8. Challenges

To speed up the implementation of reforms foreseen by the VET institutions act and the new vocational education standard, a ‘reform of initial and continuous VET study programmes and VET institutions management' was launched in September 2013.

One of the major challenges is development and implementation of the system for monitoring, assessing and forecasting labour market needs, combining quantitative and qualitative approach. This will be accomplished in the framework of the European Social Fund sponsored programme OSKA during the period 2015-2020.
CHAPTER 4.
Promoting participation in vocational education and training

In Estonia it is considered important to promote participation in VET to enhance the competitiveness of the workforce and their accessibility to lifelong learning. Different incentives and actions have been adopted both for individuals and enterprises to support the growth of participation rates in VET.

4.1. Incentives for individuals and enterprises

4.1.1. Study loans
The study allowances and study loans act (Parliament, 2003) provides the bases, conditions and procedure for the grant of study allowances and study loans 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 six months or more, have the right to obtain a study loan if he or she is enrolled in full-time upper secondary education at a State, municipal or 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 2014/15 the maximum amount of study loan is 1 920EUR per study year (Government, 2014). In 2013 about 5.9% of VET students enrolled in upper secondary education obtained a study loan (HTM, 2014).

4.1.2. Study allowances
VET students can apply for study allowances. 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 study places. Basic allowance is paid on the basis of student achievements and it is a fixed amount paid on a monthly basis. In recent years about 50% of all VET students received basic allowance.

A VET school can also establish a special allowance fund that is financed from the resources of the basic allowance fund. From the special allowance fund allowances can be granted disregarding the requirements specified for basic
allowances and taking into account other circumstances which hinder the learner from continuing his or her studies. The procedure for the use of the special allowance fund shall be approved by the VET school board.

For full-time VET students a transport allowance is available for travelling between the school and their home, up to a certain limit. The ticket has to be presented for reimbursement. Full-time IVET students who are up to 20 years old obtain also school lunch allowance according to the new regulation (Parliament, 2013).

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 HTM. 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 1 920 EUR 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 (Parliament, 1999a).

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 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 Ministry of Social Affairs (SM) (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 SM. 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 they develop
professional or other skills which facilitate their employment. Labour market training may last for a period of up to one year. EUIF orders labour market training from educational institutions (incl. VET schools) and private educational institutions which hold an education licence. EUIF also facilitates ‘work practice’ for the unemployed. Work practice is a labour market service for gaining practical experience provided by employers to unemployed persons to improve the knowledge and skills needed for their employment. Its duration is up to four months (Parliament, 2005). Unemployed persons have the right to receive a grant and also transport and accommodation allowances while 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 voucher system. Vouchers 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 2 500 EUR per training (until July 2011, the sum was up to 959 EUR). The employment training was provided for 20 958 persons in 2011 (in some cases one person participated more than once) (9 706 in 2010), of which vouchers were used in 61.6% of the instances (40.4% in 2010).

4.1.6. Wage subsidy and work practice supervision remuneration

According to the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act (Parliament, 2005) the employers receive remuneration for supervising work practice (described in Section 4.1.5) of the unemployed. For each work 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.

4.1.7. Tax exemptions

In Estonia formal training is not imposed with value added tax. This includes learning materials, private tuition relating to general education and other training services and excludes other training services provided for business purposes (Parliament, 2003b).

Since the beginning of 2012 enterprises are exempt from income tax if they pay for formal education (tasemeharidus) of their employees (Parliament, 1999a). 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.
4.2. Guidance and counselling services

4.2.1. Strategy and provision

2013-2014 have been years for restructuring the educational support services provision in Estonia. In June 2013, Parliament adopted amendments to the basic schools and upper secondary schools act, also the lifelong learning strategy 2014-2020 was approved in the beginning of 2014. The strategy sets five strategic goals of which two are closely tied to educational support services:

- correspondence between opportunities for lifelong learning and the needs of the labour market;
- equal opportunities for lifelong learning and growth of participation in learning.

It is expected that educational opportunities and high-quality, flexible career services, which offer diverse choices and take into account the needs of the labour market, will increase the number of people with specialist qualifications in various age groups and regions of Estonia. The State must ensure all people have equal opportunities to get a quality education according to their abilities. Yet there are a number of social, linguistic and gender-related (as well as economic and regional) barriers that limit these opportunities. Ensuring equal educational opportunities for children and young adults with special needs continues to be a problem. To implement the strategy, the Ministry of Education and Research and Foundation Innove have developed a programme to provide and develop both guidance for educational needs and career services.

By 1 September 2014, Foundation Innove had established 16 Rajaleidja (‘Pathfinder’) centres (at least one in each county) to provide the following services in an integrated form:

- special educational, speech therapy, social pedagogical and psychological counselling;
- career counselling and career information;

In addition, Rajaleidja centres will begin organising the work of the county counselling committees. The centres’ direct target group is children and young adults from 15 to 26 years of age. As to career guidance services, the priority target groups are:

- learners at the third level of basic school;
- learners at upper-secondary level in general and VET institutions;
- 18-24-year-olds, who have dropped out of the education system without acquiring more than basic education.
Counselling is also provided to parents, educational institutions’ staff, local government and other specialists on topics related to child development and support, organisation of studies and implementation of support measures.

Career guidance in the education sector is provided within formal education. Within general education, career education is taught as a compulsory cross-curricular theme and additionally 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. Rajaleidja centres visit schools to provide individual and group counselling and career information services.

Modernisation of the national VET curricula has been ongoing during the past few years. The new curricula include a 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 VET. 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 health, etc. Currently some of the VET schools are focussing on developing career studies and are actively discussing how to plan them efficiently and effectively as part of the learning process, which methods to use, and how to assess the acquisition and level of career competence. Development activities are coordinated by Foundation Innove agency for lifelong guidance.

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 VET schools are looking for ways to include career studies as an elective module in school curricula.

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 16 career information points (CIP) to serve the clients’ information needs regarding job seeking and job mediation in EU and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. There are career information specialists and career counsellors working in every EUIF department.

The majority of guidance services provided by Rajaleidja centres and EUIF are free of charge, and are provided in both individual and group settings, often accompanied by computer-based activities.
4.2.2. Career services and quality assurance

Three inter-related career services currently operate in the country: career education, career information and career counselling services. Career services are supported by three quality manuals which contain ideas and resources on:

- 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;
- how to develop service quality-assessment reviews and requirements concerning service delivery and record management systems; and
- how to understand the management and delivery of career services, which in turn affects the quality of careers provision.

There are three occupational standards for career practitioners: ‘career counsellors’, ‘career information specialists’ and ‘career coordinators at schools’. The standards regulate the required level of education and specialisation.

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 2-5 years and career information specialists who have worked for 1-3 years have the right to acquire an occupational qualification. At present, 24 career counsellors and 18 career information specialists have an occupational qualification. There are no regular accredited basic training programmes offered to the career specialists in the public universities.

Foundation Innove agency for lifelong guidance organises various short and long-term courses for the career practitioners about innovative guidance and information retrieval methods, trends in economy and employment, mobility, 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. Also, specialisation programmes for all three groups of career specialists have been provided. The study programmes are based on the professional skills requirements set out in occupational standards. To exchange knowledge, related to the provision and development of career services, agency for lifelong guidance organises international study visits in cooperation 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 Rajaleidja (Pathfinder).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms and abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANDRAS</strong></td>
<td>Association of Estonian Adult Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEDEFOP</strong></td>
<td>European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CIP</strong></td>
<td>Career Information Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECTS</strong></td>
<td>European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EFTA</strong></td>
<td>European Free Trade Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EHIS</strong></td>
<td>Estonian Information System for Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EKKA</strong></td>
<td>Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENAEA</strong></td>
<td>Estonian Non-formal Adult Education Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESF</strong></td>
<td>European Social Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU</strong></td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EUIF</strong></td>
<td>Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EURES</strong></td>
<td>European Job Mobility Portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HTM</strong></td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICT</strong></td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISCED</strong></td>
<td>International Standard Classification of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LFS</strong></td>
<td>Labour force survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LLL</strong></td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NRCG</strong></td>
<td>National Resource Centre for Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OQS</strong></td>
<td>occupational qualification standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REKK</strong></td>
<td>National Examinations and Qualifications Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RPL</strong></td>
<td>Recognition of prior learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SM</strong></td>
<td>Ministry of Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VET</strong></td>
<td>Vocational education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>YICC</strong></td>
<td>Youth Information and Counselling Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

https://valitsus.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/failid/kevadkoalitsiooni_tegevuskava.pdf

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act/1014805

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/129072014017

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13185447

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128082013013

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/326062014001

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/13247999

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/12902567

http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=7157

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/12979838

http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=11474


HTM (2012). *Täiskasvanute tööalane koolitus ja arendustegevused and Täiskasvanute koolitamine vabahariduslikes koolituskeskustes.* Unpublished data collected by Ministry of Education and Research during the ESF programmes.


http://www.kutsekoda.ee/

Ministry of Social Affairs (2002). Välisriigis omandatud kvalifikatsiooni Eestis
nõutava kvalifikatsiooniga võrdlemise kord. [Recognition of foreign
professional qualifications act]. RTL 2002, 4, 45.
https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/753903

MKM - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (2013). Tööjõuvajaduse
progoos aastani 2020. [Foresight of Labour force until 2020].
https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/toojouvajaduse_progoos_aastani_20
20_luhikirjeldus.pdf

until 2019].
https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/toojouvajaduse_progoos_aastani_20
22_luhikirjeldus.pdf

[Adult education act]. RT 10 I 1993, 74, 1054.
https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=12778179


[Institutions of professional higher education act]. RT I 1998, 61, 980.
https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/784141

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/816790

https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/13000993


seadus. [Study allowances and study loans act]. RT I 2003, 58, 387.
https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/13001095


https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/948762


