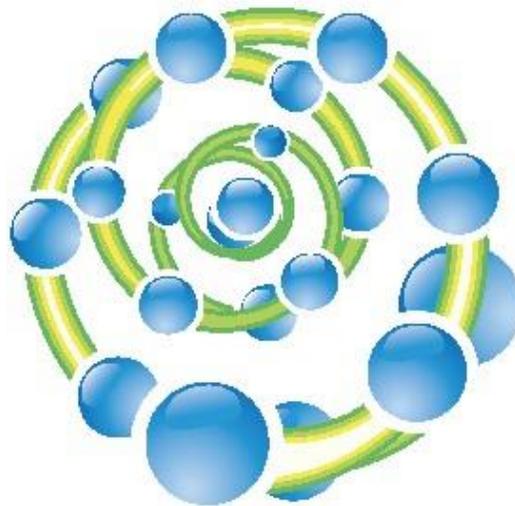


Apprenticeship-type schemes and structured work-based learning programmes

Estonia



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A. History

In 2002 the workplace based learning as a new and innovative study form was firstly piloted in Estonia during the project named 'Development of Work Based Learning Programs and Network in North-East and South Estonia and in Islands Region'. The project was coordinated by Innove Foundation and funded by the Phare program. There were 180 students participating.

In 2005 the project of 'Implementing the Workplace Based Study Form in VET' was started by Innove Foundation. The project lasted until 2008 and it was funded by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of Education and Research. 16 VET institutions (about 30%), more than 130 enterprises and about 1000 students were participating in the project (Toom, 2006, p. 86). In addition to students, the target groups of the project were also VET teachers, VET institutions' managements, the workplace based supervisors and representatives of the social partners. The project gave important contribution to the improvement of cooperation between VET institutions and enterprises and also offered several development challenges to VET teachers.

In 2006 the workplace based learning was legalised as a new study form in addition to school-based study form by Vocational Education Institutions Act and in 2007 the regulation of 'Policies and Conditions for Implementing Workplace Based Learning' was adopted by the Minister of Education and Research.

B. Governance

In Estonia workplace based study form is defined as the form of study where the work practice constitutes at least two thirds of the volume of curriculum (in school based study form the share of work practice is up to one half of the volume of curriculum. Half of the practical training takes place in enterprise).

The procedure for application of workplace based study is established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research 'Policies for Implementing Workplace Based Learning' that was renewed and adjusted with new Vocational Education Institutions Act in 2013.

According to this regulation workplace based learning (WBL) is implemented in cooperation of the vocational institution, the student and the enterprise who conducts the work practice. WBL takes place in VET institution and in enterprise whereas both contact-study and independent work by a pupil are in use to achieve the learning outcomes described in curricula.

VET curricula are prepared on the basis of professional standards where the competences for professions are described. In the curricula expected learning outcomes are defined for the levels 2-5 of Estonian Qualification Framework (Vocational Education Institution Act, 2013). These learning outcomes for all levels are described in Vocational Education Standard and in professional standards. The professional standards are approved by professional councils, which consist of representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the corresponding area of activity and the representatives of the state.

There are no separate curricula for WBL. Vocational education institutions play a key role in adopting curricula for school-based study form for WBL. According to the legislation WBL as study form can be implemented at all levels (equal to EQF levels 2-5) of VET. The school curriculum stipulates the duration and aim of curricula, content of modules, learning outcomes and assessment principles. If necessary, individual curricula is designed on the basis of school curricula in collaboration with the company where practical training takes place. Individual curricula will be added as part of WBL contract signed between VET school, student and company (Policies for Implementing Workplace Based Learning, 2013). Individual curriculum usually contains the general data about student, the reason for implementing individual curriculum, differences as compared with the school curricula in study arrangement, optional study modules and assessment. According to the Vocational Education Standard the achievement of learning outcomes will be assessed by a professional examination.

According to the legislation it is possible to widen the choice for WBL programs by VET institutions in collaboration with companies. Currently the expanding of the choices of WBL programs is rather a responsibility of VET school and depends on the needs of companies in concrete region.

Upon organisation of WBL, the relations between the VET institution, the pupil or his/her legal representative and the company that conducts the work practice is regulated by a contract signed by all three parties before commencement of the work practice, setting out the specific organisation of WBL and the rights and obligations of the parties to the contract.

Before entering into WBL contract the VET institution together with the company that conducts the work practice are assessing the learning conditions in enterprise where the practical training will take place, its readiness to fulfil the aims of the curricula and to guarantee the health and safety protection. Additional assessment of enterprise is possible in the course of practical training.

Two supervisors are appointed for students in WBL (one based in VET institution and one based in workplace) taking into account their professional and pedagogical competence. The workplace based supervisor may have up to four trainees/students. It is VET institutions responsibility to provide preparation training for supervisors. The enterprise is obliged to guarantee the appropriate work arrangements necessary for implementing the WBL.

The enterprise conducting the practical training pays remuneration for students for fulfilling the job assignments at enterprise that cannot be lower than national minimum wage established by the Government of Estonia. In case there is valid employment contract between enterprise and student the aforementioned remuneration is not paid, instead the student gets paid the salary according to the employment contract.

Monitoring of WBL (and of other study forms and educational levels) in Estonia is performed by EHIS – Estonian Education Information System. Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for data processing in EHIS. According to regulation (Establishment and Regulation of Estonian Education Information System, 2004) educational institutions are responsible for inserting the data about learners (incl. individual characteristics as gender, age, nationality, special education need etc. but also information about their studies (graduating, dropping out) into the system.

The share of students in WBL is rather modest – about 2 % of all VET students. In 2013/14 there are about 583 students in WBL. 52% of the students are male and 48% female. The most of the students (about 71%) are older than 25 years, 24% are aged 20-24. The share of WBL students aged 25+ has been growing during the past 5 years from 55% in 2009/10 to 71% in 2013/2014. The age distribution of students in WBL can be explained with the specifics of specialities offered in this study form. Adult people are often interested in gaining or raising their professional qualification in order to improve competitiveness in labour market and/or start new career. The main fields of study where WBL takes place are wholesale and retail sales (22%), forestry (11%), social work and counselling (10%), electronics and automation (9%), motor vehicles, ships and aircraft (9%), electricity and energy (9%), mechanics and metal work (8%).

At local level, social partners participate in VET school advisory bodies which consist of at least seven people and are formed by the owner of a school for 5 years. The role of advisory body is to connect the school and society and to advise the school and manager of school upon planning the development and organisation of teaching and education and economic activities. Among other activities the advisory body provides assessment on the organisation of practical training at school, institutions and enterprises.

Currently the dialogue is held with the central organisations of employers regarding vocational education and more precisely about developing WBL. It is also planned to widen the dialogue to sector organisations. In addition to VET schools aforementioned organisations offer their support in finding company for on the job training. In 2015 the ESF program for development of WBL will be launched in the course of which the cooperation will expand to single enterprises.

C. Attractiveness and career guidance

C.1. Improve guidance and counselling

In Estonia, there is no special guidance or counselling service for providing the information about WBL. However, three inter-related services currently operate: career education, career information and career counselling. The aim of the career services is to provide adequate information about further learning possibilities and study forms as well as about career planning for students in lower and upper secondary education. These services are available for all young people. Unemployed adults can get career guidance through Unemployment Insurance Fund.

According to the degree Student Admission Procedures for VET (2013) the admissions Committee of VET institution coordinates and organises counselling of potential students in choosing the appropriate study field and evaluates their readiness to achieve the learning outcomes of particular curricula. Since 2013 the study module 'Career guidance and entrepreneurship' is a mandatory part of all new VET curricula. 'Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship competence' that includes elements of career planning is also one of the eight learning outcomes ⁽¹⁾ of vocational education stipulated in Vocational Education Standard that stepped into force in 2013.

According to paragraph 3 of the Vocational Education Institution Act (2013) VET institution needs to ensure the necessary support services for students including career services, learning support, special and social pedagogical and psychological services and health services to the extent mentioned in the Act.

VET learners are also supported with the services of career information and counselling. There are 17 Regional youth information and counselling centres (YICCs) that provide career services on site as well as at VET schools by information specialists and counsellors. These centres are coordinated and managed by Innove Foundation.

⁽¹⁾ Learning competences stipulated in Vocational Education Standard (2013) are: professional and vocational knowledge, professional and vocational skills, learning to learn, communication competences, social and civic competences, digital competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship

In addition, information about educational opportunities and study forms is provided by the Regional Youth Work Centres that are coordinated by Estonian Youth Work Centre (EYWC). EYWC is a national centre for youth work under the administrative authority of the Ministry of Education and Research and its main objective is to develop and organise youth work in the framework of the national youth policy. Unemployment Insurance Fund provides career guidance for unemployed adults.

C.2. Improve the status of apprenticeship/work-based learning (WBL) programmes

There are two main reasons for current low share of WBL in Estonia. According to the empiric survey conducted in 2013 the one reason is lack of cooperation between different parties (Antson, 2013) but good cooperation between parties is a prerequisite to provide WBL as study form. The other issue is that the whole society including enterprises and potential students do not have enough information about such study opportunity and thereof their potential to provide WBL is unused. In addition, majority of enterprises in Estonia are small or micro-sized.

A new ESF program is under preparation in the framework of which extensive measures are foreseen to raise awareness about WBL, provide training and information for companies/supervisors and encourage the cooperation between VET institutions and enterprises. It is also planned to widen the WBL target groups and involve more young students and students with special educational needs.

C.3. Ensure apprenticeship/WBL programmes lead to formal qualifications

In Estonia VET students can acquire full or partial VET qualification that is recognised on the labour market. Competence-based occupational qualification standards describe competence profiles for full and partial qualifications for an occupation. In the new ESF program starting in 2015 more attention will be paid to designing and implementing WBL curricula for partial qualifications. One aim of the program is to enable adult persons without formal qualifications to acquire the qualification through WBL.

In most specialities it is possible to take professional exam and in addition to school diploma get also professional certificate during VET studies. Taking professional examination within one year from graduation is free of charge for students.

If it is not possible to take professional examination at the WBL in some specialities the studies can be completed with school final examination. The school issues to a person graduating the VET certificate together with a results report in proof of concluding vocational education.

C.4. Promote a positive image of apprenticeship/WBL towards parents and learners

There are several channels for promoting the image of VET including WBL study form to learners and their parents.

In 2008 ESF-funded VET promotion programme was launched by Innove Foundation. In the framework of the program various activities have been carried out to raise awareness of the Estonian population and potential students about vocational education and training (VET) and inform about VET study options.

In 2011, the separate website for VET (www.kutseharidus.ee) was launched. The purpose of the website is to introduce specialties offered by VET schools. Website allows to get information about study possibilities: study fields and forms (WBL or school based), specialties, VET schools, regions and required educational level.

The other major activity for youth is releasing the brochure *Abiks otsustajale: kutseõppevõimalused* ('Helping to decide: study opportunities in VET') advertising the opportunities to study VET and giving information also about study forms including WBL. This brochure is released once a year and distributed by career counsellors for all compulsory education graduates in Estonia. It is also available both electronically and in paper format in all school libraries and electronically on VET website (www.kutseharidus.ee).

One of the important yearly event (more than 8000 visitors) is vocational education fair 'Young Master' organised by Innove Foundation where among other activities young people also receive the information about WBL options in VET.

D. Support for companies, in particular SMEs

Currently the implementation of WBL is the responsibility of VET institutions and raising awareness about WBL has not been nationally coordinated. A new ESF program is under preparation for 2015-20 in the framework of which extensive measures are foreseen to raise awareness about WBL, provide training and information for companies/supervisors and encourage the cooperation between VET institutions and enterprises. Measures are planned to be implemented both on national and local level.

In implementing WBL at state commissioned study places the VET institution is responsible to cover the costs for school-based studies, supervisors' training and the remuneration paid for school based supervisor. According to the conditions agreed in work practice agreement the VET institution assigns up to 50% of the cost of study place to enterprise to pay the remuneration for workplace based supervisor.

In the framework of the new ESF program the VET institutions will become training centres that locally administer and organise support, provision of information and training about WBL for SMEs. Also the training for workplace based supervisors will be organised by VET institutions.

E. Quality assurance in apprenticeship

E.1. Learning outcomes

National and school curricula have been developed on the principle of modules and on the basis of professional standards. WBL takes place on the basis of school curricula. Curricula ensure the acquisition of the skills and competences necessary for working in particular profession. The new professional standards are competence-based and describe which knowledge, skills and competencies should specialists have. These standards are approved by professional councils, which consist of representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the corresponding area of activity and the representatives of the state. VET curricula (both national and school curricula) are based on these professional standards, which are renewed once every four years. Consequently, the curricula are also outcome-based, defining learning outcomes and are renewed once every four years. Thus the formal qualifications correspond to labour market needs as much as possible.

E.2. Accreditation

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

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

In order to extend the right to provide instruction, the relevant curriculum group shall be accredited. Accreditation means the external assessment conducted at a school by curricula groups which is based on internal assessment and conducted by extra-school independent assessors. There are five main fields that are assessed - the performance and sustainability of teaching and education, leading and management, human resources management, cooperation with interest groups and management of resources. The conditions and procedure for accreditation are established by a regulation of the Minister of Education and Research named 'Conditions and Policy for Accreditation in Formal VET' (2014).

The Minister of Education and Research shall form an assessment council that approve the accreditation decision and make a proposal on the extension of the right to provide instruction. The assessment is carried out by assessment council that consists of representatives of Ministry of Education and Research, VET experts and representatives of employers' organisations.

E.3. Validation and recognition of competences/qualifications

There are some regulated occupations at vocational education level where professional certificate is required. These occupations are for example car technician, welder, potter etc. (Estonian Qualifications Authority, 2013).

In Estonia the number of regulated occupations is rather low. Regulated occupations are those for which the employer is not allowed to hire employee without certain experience/qualification. Occupations related with health services (nurse, doctor, dentist), electrical, gas and construction work occupations (Estonian Government Regulation, 2008) are regulated by the law. Most of the regulated occupations require higher education.

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. VET school can take prior learning into account in admission of new students, in completion of curricula and/or in graduating VET school (Vocational Education Standard, 2013).

E.4. Establish a credit system for apprenticeship/WBL programmes

The new VET Institutions Act introduced in 2013 a new unit for accounting the student workload – the Estonian VET Credit Point (*eesti kutsehariduse arvestuspunkt*). It applies for all study forms including WBL. The Credit Point System shows the estimated amount of work a student has to perform on achieving learning outcomes described in the curriculum or module. One credit point equals 26 hours of student work. The principles of the ECVET (*Euroopa kutsehariduse arvestuspunkt*) application will be used while introducing the Estonian VET Credit Point. All VET school curricula must be renewed by 1st September 2017.

F. Innovative or special apprenticeship initiatives

Organising work practice at tertiary level has been widely discussed. The new ESF program is being prepared in order to improve the organisation of work practice in vocational education as well as in higher education. At tertiary level the term 'workplace based training' is not in use in legislation but several projects have been initiated where the work practice forms major part of studies.

G. Conclusion

In Estonia the number of students in WBL is rather low. Most of the companies are SMEs and are not used to provide WBL as systematic and quality training for apprentices. The WBL as study form needs more promotion in society especially among enterprises. Also the monitoring system for WBL has to be further developed to gather information about enrolment of apprentices to labour market.

The legislative framework for wider spread of WBL has been adopted and the new ESF program foresees extensive measures to raise awareness about WBL, provide training and information for companies/supervisors and encourage the cooperation between VET institutions and enterprises. It is also planned to widen the WBL target groups and involve more young students including students with special educational needs and adult persons without formal qualifications.

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