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The thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) systems provided in 'VET in Europe' reports. The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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Introduction

The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2006) defines eight key competences: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; cultural awareness and expression.

Some of the key competences are explicitly outlined in the national lifelong learning strategy 2020 (2014) guiding developments in education including VET. The strategy emphasises the necessity to develop creativity and entrepreneurship, problem solving and teamwork skills, critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as digital competence. It also promotes teacher's role in developing critical and creative thinking of a student, as well as analytical and entrepreneurial skills, team work and written and oral communication. Teachers should also support students to learn how to manage and take responsibility for own development and learning.

VET institutions act (Parliament, 2013) substantially transformed the VET regulation by defining new types of qualifications linked to the national qualifications framework (NQF, levels 2-5) and by promoting learning outcomes based approach. Learning outcomes are used in formulating the vocational education standard and national curricula for VET.

Completion of lower secondary education (referred nationally to as 'basic education') is compulsory. Those without compulsory education must acquire at least key competences at lower secondary level by age 22.

At upper secondary level, vocational studies are often combined with general education providing graduates with access to higher education. In such VET programmes, 50% key competences ⁽¹⁾ are taught in special modules common for all students and 50% are integrated into basic modules of vocational studies that vary by qualification. Curriculum exists for every qualification that can be acquired at school: for secondary VET programmes on the basis of national curricula, for other programmes on the basis of vocational education standard and the respective occupational standard(s). Learning outcomes of the modules are described in terms of occupation specific knowledge, skills and key competences:

- (a) occupation specific knowledge are facts, theories and practices of an occupation, vocation or speciality acquired through learning process;

⁽¹⁾ Communication in the mother tongue and foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.

- (b) 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;
- (c) autonomy and responsibility describe to what extent the graduate is able to work independently and carry responsibility for the results of work;
- (d) learning skill is an ability to manage learning process using efficient learning strategies and proper learning styles;
- (e) communication skill is an ability to communicate in different situations and on different topics in oral and written form;
- (f) 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;
- (g) 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;
- (h) ICT competence is an ability to use ICT tools and digital media skilfully and critically;
- (i) 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 extent and the choice of key competences depend on requirements of the particular qualification.

1. Key competence: communication in the mother tongue

| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
|---|--|
| How is it promoted? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional policy document(s) | <p>The national lifelong learning strategy 2020 promotes development of written and oral communication skills of VET students. It promotes VET teachers responsibility to enable students oral and written interaction.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | <p>No</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | <p>VET curricula are based on vocational and occupational standards. The level of communication in Estonian competence varies for different qualifications. Learning outcomes define the requirements.</p> <p>At upper secondary VET (EQF level 4), students require to explain a viewpoint in precision even in unfamiliar situations both orally and in writing and to solve problems in their occupational field using different information sources and evaluating the reliability of the information. The outcomes also include the ability to construct a reasoned argument relevant to the context. Some features of communication skills like the accuracy of the language and the broad range of vocabulary</p> |

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| | <p>as well as considering the situation and the interlocutor are included in learning outcomes of other skills and competences described in the vocational education standard (occupation specific skills and the self-definition competence).</p> <p>The Estonian language is acquired through the general subject 'mother tongue and literature'. The objectives, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the module are described in the national curriculum. In addition, a compulsory module 'planning the carrier and the basics of entrepreneurship' supports the students' ability to interact.</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training VET teachers trainers | <p>Teacher training comprises active teaching methods: pair and group work, discussions, etc. Their purpose and usage are explained on the meta-level. Teachers-to-become are encouraged using these methods as well as collaborative tasks in the classroom that promote communication skills of VET students.</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | <p>Only a small part of upper secondary VET students take the national examination in Estonian (mostly to enrol in higher education) which is an instrument of centralised assessment. As the number of participants is small, no conclusions about the competence can be made. In general, assessment of communication skills is integrated in assessment of the learning outcomes in which they occur.</p> | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No | |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | | No |
| How is it monitored? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through international or national statistical data | No | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survey(s) | No | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benchmark(s) | No | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other instrument(s) | No | |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | | No data |

2. Key competence: communication in foreign languages

| | |
|---|--|
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional policy document(s) | <p>Foreign languages strategy 2009-15 promotes learning vocationally-oriented foreign languages in VET.</p> <p>The programme for matching the labour market needs and education 2015-18 sets the goal to provide VET students with additional opportunities to study foreign languages.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | <p>Learning of foreign language(s) varies from school to school and from programme to programme depending on requirements of the occupational standard. Vocational standard defines communication in foreign languages as an occupation-related learning outcome. It is often a stand-alone subject ('foreign language') in VET programmes at upper-secondary level.</p> <p>Students are required to achieve an independent user level (Common European framework of reference for languages level B1) of at least one foreign language. It is often the language (most commonly English) studied at lower-secondary level. Learning outcomes of this study module include the ability to describe and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue in different situations, to describe themselves, their strengths and interests, ideas, intentions and experiences in relation to their field/occupation, to compile documents in a foreign language necessary for applying for a study or work placement abroad.</p> <p>In a smaller volume, VET students may also continue with the second foreign language (most commonly Russian) or start with a new language. The choice of the new language depends on the occupation, e.g. chefs often study French.</p> <p>In occupational standards, the requirements for foreign languages depend on the needs of an occupation. For example, CNC machine operator qualification requires English or Russian at level B1; quality specialist needs at least one foreign language at level B2; machine tool operator needs to master professional terminology in a foreign language (English is recommended).</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training VET teachers trainers | <p>VET teachers are required to have a good command of one foreign language at level B2 and are encouraged to use it in teaching. Teacher training includes a foreign language as a subject.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | <p>Only a small part of upper secondary VET students take the national examination in foreign language(s) which is an instrument of centralised assessment. As the number of participants is small, no conclusions about the competence can be made. In general, assessment of communication skills is integrated in assessment of the learning outcomes in which they occur.</p> |

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| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| How is it monitored? | |
| • through international or national statistical data | No |
| • survey(s) | No |
| • benchmark(s) | No |
| • other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

3. Key competence: competences in maths, science and technology

| | |
|--|--|
| The title(s) in the national context | Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology |
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | No |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | <p>Vocational standard defines mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology of qualifications. In upper secondary VET, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology are compulsory for all upper secondary VET learners and acquired through general study modules 'mathematics' and 'science'. 'Mathematics' teaches learners to use and present data, to link mathematics with other subjects, and to apply mathematical thinking, also in learning. 'Science' teaches to understand the connections between different sciences, to use science to explain the natural world and to solve problems in everyday life, to understand the influence of science and technology on the environment, humans and health.</p> <p>For VET programmes that do not comprise general education part and do not allow access to higher education, the presence and volume of mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology depends on occupation.</p> |

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| • training VET teachers trainers | No |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | Only a small part of upper secondary VET students take the national examination in mathematics which is an instrument of centralised assessment. As the number of participants is small, no conclusions about the competence can be made. In general, assessment of communication skills is integrated in assessment of the learning outcomes in which they occur. No centralised exams available for science and technology. |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| How is it monitored? | |
| • through international or national statistical data | No |
| • survey(s) | No |
| • benchmark(s) | No |
| • other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

4. Key competence: digital competence

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|--|--|
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | The national lifelong learning strategy 2020 promotes more efficient application of digital technologies in teaching and learning in order to improve the level of digital skills of the population. It requires that teachers and headmasters have sufficient digital skills to implement curricula of formal education, including VET. Digital focus programme (2015) renews occupational standards and VET curricula (including 'digital skills standard') to ensure acquisition of digital skills in VET. It also supports the development of digital teaching and learning materials, and teacher training on the use these digital materials. |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | The vocational standard stipulates the learning outcomes in ICT. At upper secondary VET, learners use Internet and applications for personal and work purposes: they search, create and present digital information, critically evaluate its |

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| | reliability and related risks. Occupational standards dictate the presence and volume of digital competences depending on occupation. The digital competence is not available as stand-alone subject but rather integrated in other subjects/modules. |
| • training VET teachers trainers | VET teacher training at universities comprises a stand-alone 'digital learning' subject. Teachers are required to have digital skills to be able to support the development of such skills in their students. In 2008-13, e-courses for 38 curriculum groups covering 1 222 study weeks in total and 665 different learning objects for 31 curricula were designed and made available to VET teachers and students; teacher training events have been organised to raise the professional competence of VET teachers in the implementation of e-learning tools and opportunities. E-learning has been widely accepted by VET teachers (Civitta, 2014) and thus digital competences of the students are developed on the level of learning methods and tasks throughout the studies Professional standards for VET teachers are in line with those of International society for technology in education (ISTE). |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | No |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| How is it monitored? | |
| through international or national statistical data | No |
| survey(s) | No |
| benchmark(s) | No |
| other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

Example of the 'sales organiser' programme (EQF5) at *Lääne-Viru Rakenduskoõrgkool*

Digital competence is not introduced as a stand-alone subject, but through learning outcomes, learning methods and assessment criteria. Learning and assessment methods include overviews and reports, where learners use ICT to retrieve, assess, store, and produce information. The products are typed on a computer and often presented using digital tools. Learners also use e-learning materials developed by teachers or other authors and accessible online. When completing a task in a team,

learners also use computers to communicate and exchange information. Learning methods make use of ICT and develop digital competence of learners. For example, a learner writes e-mails for different purposes, develops business plans using computer, searches and retrieves information on different subjects, often as team work, compiles e-portfolio.

5. Key competence: learning to learn

| | | |
|--|--|-----|
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | The national lifelong learning strategy's 2020 strategic goals promote new approach to learning that supports individual and social development, learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship. The teacher's role is to teach learners to manage their own learning, cope with changes and take responsibility for own development and learning. The programme for matching the labour market needs and education 2015-18 supports the acquisition of 'learning to learn' competence. | |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No | |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | The vocational standard defines learning to learn competence in VET. It is implemented in VET at the level of learning and assessment methods in the implementation plan. There are implementation plans of curricula that describe how the curricula are implemented at schools. Those plans include descriptions of learning and assessment methods that are used to achieve learning outcomes. The learning and assessment methods described in the plan and used in the classroom enable students to acquire learning to learn competence. At upper secondary VET, students use autonomous learning and self-regulatory strategies as well as evaluate and analyse their knowledge. | |
| • training VET teachers trainers | No | |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | No | |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No | |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | | No |
| How is it monitored? | | |
| • through international or | No | |

| | |
|--|---------|
| national statistical data | |
| • survey(s) | No |
| • benchmark(s) | No |
| • other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

Example of the 'sales organiser' programme (EQF5) at *Lääne-Viru Rakendusõrgkool*

Learning to learn competence is not introduced as a stand-alone subject, but through learning methods and assessment criteria. According to them, a student should be able to learn autonomously, but also to work collaboratively as part of the learning process. For example, learners retrieve information about the taxation system in Estonia and present the results as a team. Learning methods enable students to build on prior knowledge and experiences. As a learning method, discussions e.g. about environment for entrepreneurship and its influence are described in the implementation plan. A teacher's role is to guide and support students who are encouraged to gain and construct their knowledge and seek advice, information and support from the teacher when appropriate. Learners evaluate their own work and share what they have learnt. Through these activities they become more successful learners. Learning to learn competence is developed in both school-based and work-base environments.

6. Key competence: interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, and civic competence

| | |
|--|--|
| The title(s) in the national context | Social and civic competences |
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | National lifelong learning strategy 2020 promotes components of social and civic competences such as team work. According to the strategy teachers should develop team work skills to implement an approach to learning that supports learners' individual and social development. |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | Learning outcomes related to social and civic competences are included in vocational standard. Self-definition competence and the operational competence help learners to use self- |

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| | <p>evaluation to improve behaviour, work in and lead teams.</p> <p>In VET comprising upper-secondary general education part, learning outcomes also include the understanding and appreciation of healthy lifestyle, the knowledge of how to maintain and restore physical and mental health, the ability for self-actualisation within society, to act as responsible, tolerant citizen.</p> <p>This competence is included in curricula as learning methods rather than a stand-alone subject.</p> |
| • training VET teachers trainers | No |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | No |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| How is it monitored? | |
| • through international or national statistical data | No |
| • survey(s) | No |
| • benchmark(s) | No |
| • other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

7. Key competence: entrepreneurship

| | |
|--|--|
| The title(s) in the national context | Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship |
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | The national lifelong learning strategy's 2020 strategic goal is to implement an approach towards learning that supports entrepreneurship. |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | Vocational standard stipulates sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. At upper secondary VET, learners think systematically and creatively and are able to assess critically their ideas and independently find opportunities to turn them into action; initiate, develop and implement ideas; have basic |

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| | <p>knowledge about business; are able to compile a short- and long-term career plans, independently find opportunities for continuing training and finding a job.</p> <p>All VET curricula include a module (comprising several subjects) promoting sense of initiative and entrepreneurship as well as career planning competences. Otherwise it cannot be approved. The description of the module in terms of general goals, learning outcomes and assessment criteria is developed by a working group led by foundation Innove and is accessible online. The entrepreneurship module allows students to make informed decisions in the context of lifelong career planning, to have a broad understanding of the economy and entrepreneurial environment; to make use of rights and duties at work; to interact in a way that supports mutual communication. Different aspects of the module are usually taught by different teachers, often during the whole study period.</p> |
| • training VET teachers trainers | No |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | No |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| | |
| through international or national statistical data | No |
| survey(s) | No |
| benchmark(s) | No |
| other instrument(s) | No |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | No data |

Example of the ‘sales organiser’ programme (EQF5) at *Lääne-Viru Rakendusõrgkool*

Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship competences are introduced in the entrepreneurship module. The module allows students to make informed decisions in the context of lifelong career planning, to have a broad understanding of the economy and entrepreneurial environment; to make use of rights and duties at work; to interact in a way that supports mutual communication. The assessment of the module in this programme relies on an e-portfolio and its presentation. Completed practical tasks and their outcomes in the e-portfolio show the presence of entrepreneurship competences.

Some examples of the tasks: search for information on work practice placements, complete documents and a motivation letter to get a placement, analyse the own strengths and weaknesses, set goals for the studies and work practice using the GROW model, participate in a role play as a work seeker in a work interview, analyse the local entrepreneurial environment, complete a tax return, participate in a role play communicating with clients in the mother tongue and in a foreign language

8. Key competence: cultural expression

| | |
|--|--|
| The title(s) in the national context | cultural awareness and expression |
| The acquisition of the key competence at upper secondary VET is promoted at national/regional level | Yes |
| How is it promoted? | |
| • national/regional policy document(s) | No |
| • national/regional law(s), regulation(s) | No |
| • national/regional curricula, standards and qualifications | The key competence cultural awareness and expression is described in the vocational standard as a part of the self-definition competence. There are the following learning outcomes for upper secondary VET: the student is aware of and appreciates national and other nations' cultural heritage and events of contemporary culture; appreciates and enjoys works of arts and performances as well as self-expression through creativity. Introducing of cultural awareness knowledge/skills is decided by schools through learning outcomes of the programme or module, their assessment criteria, and learning and assessment methods. Cultural heritage concerning a skilled work and its historic background are usually part of the curriculum, its length and the level of implementation depend on the occupation. |
| • training VET teachers trainers | No |
| • centralised assessment of the key competence in VET | No |
| • other instruments (e.g. ways of working, teaching/learning methods) | No |
| The progress of improving key competence levels/learning outcomes among upper secondary VET students is monitored | No |
| How is it monitored? | |
| • through international or national statistical data | No |

| | | |
|--|----|---------|
| • survey(s) | No | |
| • benchmark(s) | No | |
| • other instrument(s) | No | |
| Key competence level improved among upper secondary VET students since (+/-) 2010 | | No data |

Conclusions

Key competences have got much attention as outlined in the national lifelong learning strategy. The vocational education standard stipulates that the content of VET is based on occupational standards and the 2006 EU recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. Key competences are represented in all national and school curricula. Learning outcomes are described in terms of occupation specific knowledge, skills and key competences.

The volume of key competences varies by programme. The key competences are offered as stand-alone subjects or integrated in learning methods.

Only a small part of upper secondary VET students take the national examinations which is an instrument of centralised assessment. This assessment covers key competences in mathematics and communication in mother tongue and foreign languages. The number of participants is small. The progress of improving key competence levels among upper secondary VET students is not monitored and there are no data available about the improvement of key competences. The assessment of key competences is integrated in assessment of the learning outcomes in which they occur.

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rok/votmepadevused/yldoskuste-moodul](http://www.innove.ee/et/kutseharidus/kutsehariduse-rok/votmepadevused/yldoskuste-moodul)