SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND TRAINERS FOR SUCCESSFUL REFORMS AND QUALITY OF VET

ESTONIA

Mapping their professional development in the EU
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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# Table of contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................................4
   1.1. Main categories of teaching and training professionals ..................................................5
   1.2. Definition of IVET .............................................................................................................6

2. Teaching and training professionals in school-based settings ...............................................6
   2.1. National legislation regulating professional development of teachers .................................................6
   2.2. Initial teacher education and qualifications for teachers .....................................................6
       2.2.1. Initial qualifications for teachers ..................................................................................7
       2.2.2. Qualifications for practitioners .......................................................................................8
   2.3. Qualification levels and competence requirements for teachers and vocational teachers in VET schools .................................................................8
       2.3.1. Competences of teachers ..............................................................................................8
       2.3.2. Competences of vocational teachers ............................................................................9
   2.4. Provisions to bring young people to teach in VET schools ..............................................9
   2.5. Provision to bring professionals from the labour market to teach vocational subjects in VET schools ......................................................................................10
   2.6. CPD of VET teachers: main approach .............................................................................11
   2.7. EU-funded projects to support VET teachers’ professional development ........................................12
   2.8. Cooperation and partnerships between the world of education and the world of work in support to teachers’ CPD .................................................................13

3. Vocational and apprentice trainers in companies ..................................................................14
   3.1. Vocational and apprentice trainers in companies in legislation ........................................14

4. Conclusions .............................................................................................................................15

List of abbreviations ..................................................................................................................15

References ..................................................................................................................................16
1. Introduction

Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership is one of the five strategic goals established in the lifelong learning strategy of Estonia (Ministry of Education and Research of Estonia et al., 2014) (1). The role of a teacher is of key importance in carrying out changes necessary to achieve the goal of the lifelong learning strategy of providing all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their lifespan. The strategy emphasises that the image of teacher in society needs to change: wages must be more competitive and the work organisation must be such that working as a teacher is highly valued in society, as an attractive choice for the best of the best.

Teaching as a profession is not attractive in Estonia: the proportion of young people, particularly males, in the teaching profession is low, the interest in enrolling in the teacher education programmes is limited, and among those who have trained to be teachers, many choose not to work in schools.

Table 1. Distribution of VET teachers by age group, 2014/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age groups</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percent of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 30</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and more</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EHIS, 2015.

The majority of Estonian teachers are female. The share of men in general education is 14%, in vocational education and training (VET) the proportion is more balanced – 38% of 2,283 teachers in VET are male. The share of teachers aged over 50 has been increasing: it was 45% in 2005, 50% in 2012 and 50.6% in 2014. At the same time, the

(1) The lifelong learning strategy 2014-20 is a document that guides most important developments in the area of education. It is the basis on which the government makes its decisions for educational funding for the years 2014-20 and for the development of programmes that support the achievement of necessary changes.
share of those aged under 30, is just 7.9% \(^2\). Table 2 gives an overview of the qualification of VET teachers in 2014/15.

### Table 2. Distribution of VET teachers by qualification, 2014/15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Percent of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General special education(^*)</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>1 806</td>
<td>81.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) Education from the previous system recognised as between general and higher education.

Source: EHIS, 2015.

In VET, there have been important developments during the last years. The new vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013) that entered into force on 1 September 2013, introduced changes in legislation concerning teachers. Most importantly, the qualification requirements for teachers are based on the professional standards of teachers and vocational teachers now. To bring more young people and professionals from the labour market to VET schools as teachers, becoming a teacher in VET has been made more flexible and less bureaucratic. To improve the participation in continuing professional development (CPD), ensure the quality and innovativeness of teaching in VET, the participation in CPD and self-assessment have been made compulsory for the teachers by law.

### 1.1. Main categories of teaching and training professionals

In the vocational educational institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013), the term ‘teacher’ is used for all teaching and training professionals in VET. The distinction between teachers and vocational teachers is made in professional standards where the qualification requirements for teachers and vocational teachers have been set out:

- **(a)** teachers (higher education, master degree) are teachers of general education and can work at a basic school, upper secondary general school or a vocational educational institution and teach one or several general subjects (mathematics, physics, chemistry, languages, etc.).

(b) vocational teachers (higher or vocational education, work experience and pedagogical training recommended) usually teach both theoretical subjects in school and practical subjects in school workshops or simulated learning environments. Many of teachers of vocational subjects working part-time do not have any pedagogical qualification.

1.2. Definition of IVET

Based on the law, vocational education and training is divided into initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and 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.

2. Teaching and training professionals in school-based settings

2.1. National legislation regulating professional development of teachers

The new vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013) indicates that the qualification requirements for teachers rely on professional standards for teachers and vocational teachers (Kutsekoda). A professional standard is a document which describes professional practice and provides the set of skills, knowledge and attitudes or competence requirements needed for successful professional practice.

Initial educational preparation of teachers and their CPD are based on the regulation of the framework requirements for teachers training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2000).

2.2. Initial teacher education and qualifications for teachers

Teacher training is provided at higher education level and its volume is 180 ECTS credits (3) for vocational teachers and 300 ECTS credits for teachers of general subjects. The qualification requirements for teachers have been set out in the

(3) European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS).
professional standards of teachers and vocational teachers. The percentage of teachers corresponding to the lowest level of a professional standard of vocational teacher shall not be more than 20% at the school (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013).

There are different opportunities to become a vocational teacher. Persons who have acquired a professional qualification in a vocational educational institution or have work experience in the field, can apply to study in the vocational pedagogy programme at bachelor level (180 ECTS) at Tallinn University or the vocational teacher programme (180 ECTS) at the University of Tartu. When a person who seeks to become a vocational teacher already has a bachelor degree, he/she can enter the vocational teacher programme at master level (120 ECTS). Tallinn University of Technology has a curriculum for technical teacher education at master level. The universities offer opportunities for flexible and part-time study to combine studies with work and/or family.

There are no specific programmes for teachers of general subjects to teach in VET schools. Teachers of general subjects are trained in a 3+2 system, i.e. three years of bachelor studies in the subject (languages, history, mathematics, chemistry, physics, etc.) and two years of master studies in teaching. Teachers of general subjects are trained by Tallinn University and University of Tartu. The training for the profession of a teacher includes subjects from the field of education like general educational studies, psychology, didactics, and research methods in pedagogy. Programmes supplement classroom study with mentored student teaching practicums that last for at least 10 weeks.

To support and assist beginning teachers as they enter the profession, the induction year is foreseen by the regulation on framework requirements for teacher training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2000). For the induction year, a mentoring programme is developed by the educational institution offering teacher training. During the first year, a new teacher can get support, counselling and feedback from a mentor appointed by the school. The mentor has to have at least three years’ teaching experience and participated in a training for mentors. At the end of the year, the beginning teacher compiles a development portfolio and writes a self-evaluation. The mentor evaluates the portfolio and the self-evaluation, gives feedback to the school leader on the professional practice of the new teacher and to the educational institution on the teacher training programmes.

### 2.2.1. Initial qualifications for teachers

The competences of teachers of general subjects and vocational teachers are described in professional standards. When a person completes his/her studies according to the professional standard and the national curriculum, an initial (entry level) occupational qualification as a teacher or a vocational teacher is awarded. Initial
occupational qualification is of an indefinite duration. The awarding of initial occupational qualifications was introduced in 2011.

Persons who have completed a vocational teacher bachelor degree programme at a higher education institution get the occupational qualification of a vocational teacher at level 6 of the Estonian qualifications framework (EstQF). Earning a vocational teacher master degree qualifies graduates to become vocational teachers at EstQF level 7 (Tallinn University, 2014). When completing the teacher of general subject master degree programme, a graduate gets the qualification of a teacher at EstQF level 7.

2.2.2. Qualifications for practitioners

Occupational qualifications for practicing teachers of general subjects are awarded by the Association of teachers and for vocational teachers by Tallinn University. A committee assesses the qualifications of the teacher against the occupational standard and has the right to award a certificate.

Teachers, who are already working as vocational teachers but have no qualification, can apply for an occupational qualification of a vocational teacher at EstQF level 5, 6 or 7. The occupational qualification of a vocational teacher EstQF level 5 is of an indefinite duration, while the ones at levels 6 and 7 are awarded for five years. After this period, a teacher can re-apply for the qualification by submitting required documents. Teachers of general subjects can apply for the occupational qualification of a teacher at EstQF level 7.

2.3. Qualification levels and competence requirements for teachers and vocational teachers in VET schools

2.3.1. Competences of teachers

The pedagogical competences of teachers are described in the professional standard of a teacher at EstQF level 7. Teacher at level 7 plans learning activities independently and with other teachers. He/she develops a learning environment supporting the development of learners and reflects on his/her activities with the purpose of professional development. He/she counsels learners and parents in case of a specific need or problem. Teacher at level 7 participates in the development of the educational institution as a team member, cooperates with colleagues, support specialists, parents and learners. Senior teacher at level 7, in addition to the above, supports the development of other teachers and the organisation and develops methodology of the field in his/her own organisation. Master teacher at level 8, in addition to the previous, participates in development activities in and outside the organisation and cooperates with a university.
2.3.2. Competences of vocational teachers

The competences of vocational teachers are described in the professional standards of vocational teachers at EstQF levels 5, 6 and 7.

Vocational teacher at EstQF level 5 has upper secondary general education or VET combined with upper-secondary general education and work experience or an occupational qualification in the respective occupation. A vocational teacher at this level mainly conducts practical training, developing practical skills of students.

Vocational teacher at EstQF level 6 has higher education in the respective field or higher education in another field and work experience in the respective field and pedagogical preparation acquired during initial or continuing teacher training. He/she develops learning environment supporting the development of learners' knowledge, skills and attitudes and develops methodology of the field in his/her organisation.

Vocational teacher at EstQF level 7 has higher education in the respective field, a master degree and work experience in the respective field. If there is no higher education programme in this field, they have higher education in another field, are awarded an occupational qualification in the respective field and have a long-term experience in providing instruction in VET. They have pedagogical preparation acquired during initial or continuing teacher training. Vocational teacher at level 7 teaches theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills. In cooperation with enterprises and professional associations, they develop methodology of the field in their own organisation and outside it. They support the development of other teachers and the organisation.

In addition to the above, there are two common requirements for all levels:

(a) being in command of a foreign language at level B2 of the common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR) of the Council of Europe and of Estonian language at the level defined in the language Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2011);

(b) developing educational technology skills according to teacher standards of the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

2.4. Provisions to bring young people to teach in VET schools

The new vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013) offers an opportunity especially for young people to enter the profession of a teacher. A person can work as a teacher for three years even if he/she does not meet the qualification requirements at first. The condition is that he/she is acquiring the necessary qualification during this time. The goal of this regulation is to make it easier for young people to become a teacher, considering the high average age of teachers.
To support beginning teachers outside big cities, beginner’s allowance (1) for teachers has been established in 2008. It can be applied to a person who has acquired higher education or completed teacher training at a higher education level and starts working as a teacher in a school for the first time, except in a school located in the biggest towns in Estonia, Tallinn and Tartu. Persons who start working as teachers during their teacher training or studies at the first level of higher education immediately preceding teacher training may also apply for beginner’s allowance. Also, a person who has worked as a teacher before starting teacher training may apply for the allowance after completing the training. The applicant’s work load has to be at least 50% of the full time and their competences have to meet the qualification requirements. If the work load is less than full time, the allowance is reduced accordingly.

2.5. Provision to bring professionals from the labour market to teach vocational subjects in VET schools

The new vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013) has made the assessment of the qualification more flexible and less formal, focusing on the content and meaning of the qualification requirements rather than on formal education and documents. That makes it easier to bring professionals from the labour market as teachers to the VET schools and to link the world of work and the world of education. The schools can hire professionals from the labour market as teachers if the latter have necessary competences and meet the actual needs of the school. The head of school assesses the compliance of the candidate’s competences with the qualification requirements for teachers set out in the professional standards of vocational teachers. The competences of the candidate rather than the studies in formal education are crucial for the decision. However, the competences of professionals from the labour market have to be evaluated continuously and CPD provided if necessary. The share of teachers at the lowest level of the professional standard (general education) shall not be more than 20% of all the teachers at the school (2).

Another measure to smoothen the process of hiring competent specialists from the world of work and to reduce bureaucratic burdens that may hinder the process is a

(1) The amount of the allowance is set in the state budget of the respective year and paid by the Ministry of Education and Research. In 2015, it was 12 783 EUR. Fifty percent of the allowance is paid in the first year, twenty-five percent in the second as well as in the third year of work. The person who gets the allowance has to work as a teacher for five years; otherwise, he/she has to reimburse the money (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013, paragraph 41).

(2) The restriction does not apply upon the provision of instruction in military specialities.
A vacant position of a teacher shall be filled by a public competition. However, a public competition is not necessary when the work load in the position is less than 50% of full time. Many professionals teaching in VET work in enterprises or are entrepreneurs and teach at schools part-time, sometimes just some hours a week. According to statistics, there are 1 448 full-time positions as teacher in the VET system in Estonia but 2 283 persons worked as teachers in 2014/15 (EHIS).

2.6. **CPD of VET teachers: main approach**

According to the vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013), teachers have to participate in CPD to maintain their professionalism. The regulation of the Government of the Republic framework requirements for teacher training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2011) sets the goals of CPD as follows: provide teachers with opportunities for self-evaluation and professional development and create an inspiring and innovative attitude that helps to use their knowledge and skills in the best way to support the development of students.

In the organisation of CPD of teachers, there have been significant changes in recent years.

Until 2015, the framework requirements for teacher training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2011) set a certain number of hours of CPD for teachers for a period of time. A distinction was made between teachers of general subjects and teachers of vocational skills: the former had to participate in CPD for 160 academic hours in five years and the latter for two months in three years.

The current approach is based on individual needs of the teacher and on those of the institution as well as on the national priorities of education. Individual needs for CPD vary as they depend on the competences of a teacher and his/her tasks at the institution. No distinction is made between vocational teachers and teachers of general subjects and no fixed number of hours is required.

According to the vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013), it is the responsibility of the school to ensure the opportunities for CPD for its teachers. CPD has to be in accordance with the competences described in occupational standards and with the self-evaluation of the teacher and the school leader’s feedback on it. The role of school leaders is, among others, to give regular feedback to teachers on their contribution and competence and support the teachers' professional and individual development. Teachers’ self-evaluation takes place at schools annually and helps to indicate the needs for CPD. Teachers prepare an evaluation report which is discussed with and evaluated by the school leader. Self-evaluation is compulsory and replaces the previous system of teacher attestation.
As of 2013, the CPD can be carried out as practical work at an enterprise or organisation in the field taught by the teacher. During this time (at least two months during five years, consecutive or accumulated), the teacher is released from teaching. The exact procedure and requirements for practicing at an enterprise are established and applied by the school.

According to the data available in the EHIS (6), 80% of the teachers working in VET in 2013/14 had participated in CPD during the last three years. Of the teachers, 20% were not engaged in CPD during this period. Slightly more than 50% are engaged in CPD each year. The average volume of CPD courses has been 159.5 hours or almost 20 days (eight hours equal one day) per teacher. About three-fourths of the teachers engaged in CPD described the training as ‘work-related’ and 30% as ‘other’. Some 8% of the teachers have provided data about practical work at an enterprise.

The providers of CPD courses for VET teachers are universities, VET institutions, private companies and foundations.

When considering the volume of the training, the universities were the leading providers of the CPD courses. About 43% of the teachers, who had attended CPD courses, did it at universities and approximately 16% at VET institutions.

Most popular topics of CPD courses were arrangement of academic work (implementation of new curricula, self-evaluation of teachers, team work, writing research papers, teaching in multilingual environment, problems of counselling, problem solving, etc.), field-related courses (updating the knowledge of the developments in their field), pedagogic/didactic (modern approaches, content and language integrated learning (CLIL), assessment for learning, etc.), ICT (how to use different tools and opportunities of ICT in the classroom).

2.7. EU-funded projects to support VET teachers’ professional development

Within the framework of the European Social Fund (ESF) programme, ‘Substantive development of vocational education 2008-13’, the CPD of vocational teachers, teachers of general subjects and practical training instructors was supported. Seminars, workshops and other teacher training events were carried out to help teachers develop their subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Different

(6) At national level, data on teachers and their CPD are collected permanently in the Estonian education information system (EHIS). The schools are obliged to provide the EHIS with data on the volume and the field of CPD training. The data are used by the Ministry of Education and Research for analyses.
network events to enhance the professional development of teachers were organised where the stakeholders and enterprises were involved, too.

For 2013/14, the programme was prolonged and, among others, more teacher training and training for in-company trainers was provided to support students in VET better.

The ESF programme, ‘Support for teachers, school leaders and youth workers' professional development’, includes the activity, ‘Maintenance and development of VET teachers’ competences 2015-18’. CPD activities in cooperation of VET institutions and enterprises are foreseen to enhance the subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills (including teaching adult learners) of VET teachers. Also, the cooperation of vocational teachers and teachers of general subjects shall be supported through CPD to integrate VET and general subjects and transversal skills.

The Archimedes Foundation is the implementing body of different international and national programmes and projects in the field of training, education and research. In 2008-13, they administered, among others, VETPRO projects of the Leonardo da Vinci programme that had the aim to improve the professional qualifications of VET professionals. Seventy percent of the participants were VET teachers, 20% other members of staff and 10% stakeholders from enterprises. The mobility activities had the average duration of seven to nine days; discussions with colleagues from other countries and observation of learning process in school-based and work-based settings were the main activities. Currently, the Archimedes Foundation is implementing Erasmus+ and Nordplus programmes that include international mobility actions for VET professionals. International mobility activities can be recognised as CPD on the basis of recognition of prior learning and work experience.

Recognition of competences acquired on the job and in non-formal setting is also possible. Acquired competences have to be supported by such evidence as a work contract, an artefact, a presentation, etc.; a description of the work experience and a self-evaluation has to be added (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2008).

2.8. Cooperation and partnerships between the world of education and the world of work in support to teachers’ CPD

Vocational teachers participate in speciality networks of professionals which provide information on new developments in their profession/occupation and on events that offer opportunities to refresh their knowledge and competences.

Professional associations organise seminars, study visits, conferences where the professionals of a speciality working in enterprises and in schools can meet and learn about the latest developments in their industry or occupation(s) and update their knowledge and relevant competences.
3. Vocational and apprentice trainers in companies

Besides teachers and vocational teachers, the third important party teaching students in VET are vocational trainers (praktikajuhendaja) and apprentice trainers (õpipoisi praktikajuhendaja) in companies. Their role in VET cannot be overestimated but there are no qualification or competence requirements for them. The companies find suitable persons for the role of vocational and apprentice trainers. Trainers provide students with practical skills and theoretical knowledge at the workplace in a real working situation. They help students adapt to working life and provide feedback to the VET provider on student performance. The activities, obligations, liability of and qualification requirements for trainers at the workplace are not regulated by national legislation.

3.1. Vocational and apprentice trainers in companies in legislation

Vocational and apprentice and trainers are mentioned in two regulations:

(a) policies and conditions of implementing practical training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2013a);

(b) conditions for implementation of work-based studies (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2013b).

The regulation concerning practical training (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2013a) stipulates that practical training in enterprises is based on a contract between the VET institution, the student and the (either a public or private) enterprise. According to the regulation, both the trainer from the school and the trainer from the enterprise have to prepare the practical training and cooperate to support the development of the student. The duty of the school is to provide information, training and guidance to trainers in companies. The trainers’ task is to mentor and advise students during the preparation period for practical training and the training itself; support the students’ self-assessment and evaluate their achievements against the learning outcomes. The cooperation between schools and enterprises serves to improve teachers’ knowledge of current work practices and improve trainers’ general pedagogical skills and competences.

In apprenticeship programmes, one-third of the curriculum is delivered through theoretical instruction and two-thirds through practical training at an enterprise. An apprentice, too, has two appointed trainers, one from the school and one from the enterprise. When appointing the trainers, their occupational and pedagogical skills have to be considered. It is the school’s responsibility to ensure that the trainers have got relevant information, training and guidance for their work as trainers for work-based learning. The regulation also stipulates that one trainer from the enterprise cannot have more than four students.
4. Conclusions

According to the vocational education institutions Act (Parliament of the Republic of Estonia, 2013), the qualification requirements for teachers rely on professional standards for teachers and vocational teachers. The standards describe the competences of teachers and vocational teachers.

Initial teacher education is provided at higher education level. The vocational education institutions Act has made it easier to bring young people and professionals from the labour market to teach in VET schools.

According to the Act, it is the duty of teachers to participate in CPD to maintain their professionalism. There are no requirements in terms of hours but CPD is based on individual needs of the teacher and on those of the institution. CPD can be carried out as practical work at an enterprise or organisation in the field taught by the teacher. Decisions about CPD of teachers are made at the school level.

Approximately 50% of the teachers working in VET are engaged in CPD each year. For the period 2015–18, a programme supporting the CPD of VET teachers has been approved by the minister for education and research. VET teachers also are involved in mobility projects of the EU to support their professional development.

Besides teachers of general subjects and vocational teachers in schools, VET students are also trained by vocational and apprentice trainers in companies. Despite their important role in VET, there are no qualification or competence requirements for them. However, schools have to provide them with information, training and guidance.

List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>continuing professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EstQF</td>
<td>Estonian qualifications framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| EHIS         | Eesti hariduse infosüsteem  
Estonian information system for education |
| ICT          | Information and communications technology |
| ESF          | European Social Fund |
| ECTS         | European credit transfer and accumulation system |
References

**EHIS: Eesti hariduse infosüsteem [Estonian information system for education] Database.** http://www.ehis.ee/


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