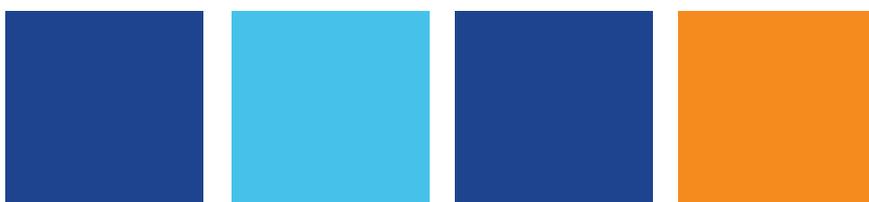


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INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY  
IN APPRENTICESHIPS: FOCUS  
ON LONG-TERM MOBILITY  
**ESTONIA**

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REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
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#refernet

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## CHAPTER 1.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

The Estonian vocational education and training (VET) system has undergone extensive reforms over the past decades, as the expansion and improvement of upper secondary VET is a policy priority in Estonia. The reforms have aimed to consolidate the VET school network and modernise the facilities, to reorganise the qualifications system, and to increase work-based learning and develop apprenticeships. (OECD, 2019)

Compared to many other countries, participation in upper secondary VET is relatively low. Less than one third of young people enter an upper secondary vocational track, and around a quarter of all entrants fail to complete their education. Most VET is provided at the upper secondary and post-secondary levels (at EQF levels 4 and 5). VET curricula are also available for learners without basic education (EQF levels 2 and 3).

Development and expansion of the apprenticeship system is regarded as a promising option to diversify the paths to VET qualifications and increase the attractiveness of VET for both young and adult learners. (OECD, 2019)

In Estonia, workplace-based study (apprenticeship scheme) is defined as a form of study where work practice comprises at least two thirds of the volume of the curriculum. The apprenticeship system was introduced in 2006, and has gradually increased in terms of the number of learners, fields of study, and qualification levels. It was legalised as a new study form in addition to school-based studies with the Vocational Education Institutions Act (Riigikogu 2013) and in 2007, the regulation 'Policies and conditions for implementing workplace-based learning' was adopted by the Minister of Education and Research (HTM 2013).

The apprenticeship scheme (*töökohapõhine õpe*) can be offered at all VET levels and types of curricula (initial and continuing), and lead to qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 5. Apprenticeships follow the same curricula as school-based studies but differ regarding the implementation of study modules (e.g in teaching and assessment methodologies). VET institutions cooperate with employers to design implementation plans for apprentices based on the existing curricula.

General characteristics of the apprenticeship scheme are:

- (a) the apprenticeship contract between the school, the learner, and the employee stipulates the rights and obligations of the parties as well as the details of the learning process;
- (b) the total study duration is from three months to three and half years;

- (c) employers compensate the students for tasks performed to the amount agreed in the contract;
- (d) apprentices have to pass the same final examinations as in school-based VET;
- (e) each apprentice is supported by two supervisors: one at school and one at the workplace.

While apprenticeship is intended for both adult workers needing upskilling or reskilling and new recruits, it is currently dominated by adults (average age 39.6 years). In 2015/16, there were 678 apprentices. In 2016/17, further ESF investment has allowed to increase the number to 1 381 (5% of VET learners, Cedefop (2017)). In 2017/18 and 2018/19, there were around 1 700 apprentices (7% of VET learners). In 2018, 30 vocational education institutions and around 400 companies offered apprenticeship training. The intention is to encourage young people to take up apprenticeships and to attract a total of 7 200 apprentices by 2020 (HTM 2019).

## CHAPTER 2.

# Factors influencing the mobility of apprentices at the upper secondary level

### 2.1. The economy

Estonia is a small country with 1.3 million residents and an open economy. Openness at this level means that Estonia's economy is receptive to changes in the external environment and that the economy and labour market have gone through extensive fluctuations during a short period of time. The number of regulated occupations is limited, and the labour market is flexible. Vocational education is necessary in all main fields of economy (information and communication; electronics and electronic components; machine and metal industry; transportation and logistics; wood and furniture industry) (Cedefop 2017).

Estonia has more than 130 000 economically active enterprises, of which only a little more than 180 are large enterprises (with over 250 employees) (Eesti Statistikaamet 2019a). Most enterprises are micro- and small enterprises.

The small size and structure of Estonia's economy may limit the opportunities of incoming as well as outgoing long-term learning mobility. There may be fewer enterprises that are interested in offering apprenticeship, in addition enterprises are small and their ability to deal with apprentices depends on the general economic situation as well. There are very few large enterprises in Estonia that would be attractive destinations for incoming learning mobility and that would encourage mobility in apprenticeship.

### 2.2. The labour market

The mobility of apprentices is also affected by the general status of employment. The unemployment rate for the first quarter of 2019 was 4.7% and the rate of employment 67.5%. The number of employed people was 661,800 and the rate of part-time employment is continually on the increase. (Statistics Estonia 2019b). Due to the decrease in the birth rate during the 1990s, the more active age group of the labour market (ages 25–64) will start to decrease by 5 000–6 000 people per year (Riigikantselei 2019).

The decrease in working-age population and the relatively high employment rate make it increasingly difficult for enterprises to find new employees. Changes on the labour market and demographic developments also limit the need and opportunities of companies to recruit apprentices (high employment rate), while, on the other hand, it might facilitate the extension of apprenticeship at the level of vocational secondary education (broader inclusion of the younger target group).

At the same time, the shortage of workforce has influenced the employers to contribute to the increase of the next generation of employees. Apprenticeship in cooperation with a vocational educational institution offers great opportunities to organise this; however, it is the percentage of adult learners (average age 39.6) that has mainly increased. In the academic year 2018/2019, as many as 88.4% of learners following an apprenticeship were older than 25. The number of learners in the younger age groups has consistently remained lower. On the basis of earlier surveys on the age distribution of learners (Kantar Emor 2018), it can be said that apprenticeship is for people who are already employed and who learn with the aim of improving their specialist skills and acquiring a certificate of competency. Enterprises also prefer adult apprentices as they lack the skills and capacity to deal with young people, who need more instruction in basic skills and key competences.

In Estonia, the age profile of the participants hinders more extensive apprenticeship mobility. The long-term mobility of adult learners is hindered by the existence of a family and a job and the domestic obligations of the students (e.g. loans, leases, taking care of their parents). When a person enrolling in a vocational educational institution already has a good job and salary, they may not have motivation to leave the country for a longer period a time; the local employer may also not approve of mobility. However, in the longer perspective, the employer would gain from the improved knowledge and skills of the employee with international experience.

An example can be given as regards the mobility of students on higher education. A survey indicated that separation from family or employment hindered the mobility of nearly half of the respondents. Nearly a third indicated that they lack motivation to study or train abroad. Short-term mobility is hindered by a large percentage of employed students and the aging of the student population. The number of people who have other obligations besides studying is on the increase (HTM 2019).

The future policies can take into account the gathered experience of apprenticeship and the age distribution of apprentices. It helps to offer different measures that can increase the interest of young people and adults to do training periods abroad.

### 2.3. Matching the skills and education with the expectations of the labour market

The Estonian qualifications system is based on occupational standards agreed upon with employers. In addition, the provision of VET is increasingly guided by the OSKA system (qualitative and quantitative surveys on sectoral needs for labour and skills) to harmonise the educational supply with the demands of the labour market.

In the context of a globalising labour market and the free movement of labour within Europe, transferable skills and key competences become increasingly more significant and one of the best opportunities to develop such skills and competences is to work or study in a different cultural and economic environment.

Estonia's strength is the high-level inclusion of adults in life-long learning. According to the data of Estonia's workforce survey, 19.7 percent of residents aged 25–64 participated in adult learning during the past year, which is a 2.5 percent increase in comparison with 2017 (HTM 2019).

The interest of adults in acquiring VET increases annually, while the participation of the youth in VET has remained stable (HTM 2019).

According to the survey report of the OSKA labour market monitoring and forecasting system, the educational level of Estonia's employees is quite high. The number of top and mid-level specialists is on the rise and the proportion of groups of professions that require lower qualification levels is decreasing. New workforce is mainly needed because people leaving the labour market need to be replaced by newcomers, except in some 'youth sectors' such as ICT. As many older people work in positions that require vocational education and they will retire within the next decade, the greatest discrepancies between workforce demand and supply tend to appear in fields that require vocational training. According to the forecast, 48% of new workforce demand is for employees with higher education and every third new employee should have vocational training (Kutsekoda 2018).

Different studies and analysis of skills, labour market and economy can be used to get the information of labour market needs and on that basis to create better opportunities for incoming and outgoing mobility. Apprenticeship mobility may be one measure to reduce the skills mismatch and to prepare and educate specialist in the fields where the shortage of labour force is seen.

### 2.4. Migration

Estonia's migration policy does not impose restrictions on learners coming from foreign countries. Although on the one hand, the number of young people reaching

working age is lower than the labour market demand, positive migration and the increasing activeness of the working-age population (15–74) may compensate for the low number of young people.

The population mainly decreases within the working-age population (people aged 15–64) and Eurostat forecasts indicate that in 20 years, there are 100 000 fewer people of working age living in Estonia. At the same time, Estonia has a fairly high percentage of non-citizens (15%, Eurostat, Statistics Estonia), which limits the opportunities of importing foreign labour that several EU Member States have used to increase the supply of workforce (Riigikantselei 2019).

Estonia's migration policy has been updated due to EU requirements and labour market needs, but its main foundations have remained the same. The annual immigration quota has remained stable, but the groups of migrants allowed to enter Estonia outside the immigration quota has been extended. The immigration quota does not apply to immigrants arriving to Estonia for learning purposes.

In the case of learning mobility, the educational institution where the third-country immigrant arrives to study must evaluate the learner's prerequisites to study according to the specific curriculum. The student must additionally undergo an inspection by the Police and Border Guard Board and the Board may refuse to grant the student a residence permit if it the student's financial resources are insufficient to cope in Estonia or if they pose a security risk or for other reasons (Praxis 2018).

Estonia's immigration policy does not hinder the arrival of foreign students. They are subject to the same laws regarding the regulation of employment relationships, social guarantees, and occupational safety as local students. In higher education there are supporting measures for mobility that can be expanded to vocational education.

## CHAPTER 3.

# Apprenticeship scheme and cross-country learning mobility

### 3.1. Factors supporting or hindering mobility in apprenticeships

Apprenticeship was introduced in Estonia in 2006 and within a little more than a decade, the number of learners using this form of study has increased to 7% of all VET students. The short tradition and low engagement in apprenticeship studies are definitely factors that obstruct both the inward and outward long-term mobility of apprentices.

From the student's perspective, learning mobility has several pros and cons. Apprenticeship is financed on the same grounds as school-based studies and the financing is stable. However, when travelling abroad for learning mobility, the student will need additional resources for travel, accommodation, and other expenses. When undergoing apprenticeship abroad, the student has to be sure that the legal requirements have been correctly fulfilled by the employer: taxes paid, the status of the employee or student clear, and social guarantees provided for in Estonia. It is all related to mobility as if it's not possible to complete the curriculum or the social guarantees are not provided, the students may decide not to use the opportunities to study abroad.

The factors supporting long-term learning mobility are the increased competitiveness of the student, a broader perspective, and the development of linguistic skills and key competences (especially social skills). Studies may be hindered by the social immaturity, differing needs, and unrealistic expectations of the student. Poor cooperation with the foreign enterprise can affect the quality of training and increase the risk of terminating the apprenticeship.

The language skills of students do not generally hinder learning mobility in Estonia, as foreign language studies generally begin already at the elementary level and more than 95% of basic and general secondary education students learn English. Languages studied alongside English are mainly Russian, German, and French.

The obligations and details of the study process between the school, the student, and the employer are stipulated in a practice agreement and the

provisions of this agreement do not hinder learning mobility. The conclusion of an agreement is normally initiated by the school, but it can also be done by enterprises as well as students. The agreement must comply with labour law, but learners maintain the status of a student even when an employment contract is concluded with them in addition to a practice agreement and students learning in apprenticeship positions maintain the same social guarantees as those participating in school-based learning.

Inward mobility may be hindered by Estonia's fairly low salaries. Employers pay the apprentices a salary regardless of the duration of their studies and this salary must not be lower than the minimum wage. In 2019, the gross minimum wage for full-time employment is 540 euros per month.

### 3.2. Social security and labour standards

Incoming apprentices and students (whether from the EU or from third countries) are subject to the country's labour law and benefit from labour and safety protection in the same conditions as their counterparts in the country (i.e. local learners at work). It should favour mobility as providing certain conditions and guarantees can increase the confidence.

In Estonia, students and apprentices involved in international learning mobility have access to health care under the Health Insurance Act, and learners from EU countries are entitled to free healthcare. This gives them access to coverage of costs of health services, medicinal products, and medical technical aids, and entitles them to benefits for temporary work incapacity.

The organisation of apprenticeship studies is subject to the regulation of working and resting time pursuant to the Employment Contracts Act. An apprenticeship position provides the student with working conditions that correspond to occupational health and safety requirements and the materials and tools necessary for the suitable fulfilment of duties (HTM 2013).

### 3.3. Organisation of studies and cooperation

Apprenticeship studies are organised in cooperation between the vocational educational institution, the student, and the employer. If an enterprise wishes to offer apprenticeship positions to train existing employees or find new ones, then they must first analyse their skills needs. For an enterprise, it is an opportunity to train employees who have exactly the required skills.

When planning the workload and tasks of an apprentice, the apprentice's workload at school must also be considered alongside their work at the enterprise. The need to combine studying and working applies to both Estonian and foreign students. In case of learning mobility (both incoming and outgoing), it might be more difficult for learner to achieve the learning outcomes set in the curriculum. Preparations for learning mobility must ensure that the skills acquired while working at an enterprise abroad can be taken into account in the completion of studies.

The employer is mainly responsible for organising the practical part of the apprenticeship studies. The enterprise must be capable of offering training according to the curriculum and suitable supervision, and ensuring the occupational health and safety of the student. Estonian micro- and small enterprises often lack the capacity to offer apprenticeship studies and provide the necessary support and supervision to the apprentices. The acceptance of foreign apprentices may pose an additional challenge due the need to provide support and supervision in a foreign language.

The German Technological School of Pärnu, which is a private vocational educational institution belonging to the German foundation *Stiftung Bildung und Handwerk*, is one example of the widening of an apprenticeship system. It shows that in system level in general there are no obstacles for outgoing mobility. From the initiation of the PRÕM <sup>(1)</sup> project, the school has gradually transferred from school-based learning to apprenticeship-based learning and has acquired funding through the project. During the past academic year, the school operated 100% in this study form and plans to continue this way. The school's fields of studies are multimedia, energy, and business administration and as at spring 2019, it has 96 students. On the basis of its practical experience, the German Technological School of Pärnu considers apprenticeship suitable and applicable also for longer curricula. The school has had the opportunity to use the training bases organised by the German owners in Berlin where a dual study system similar to the Estonian system is applied.

### 3.4. The duration of apprenticeship and training

The overall duration of apprenticeship studies varies from three months to 3.5 years, as is the case with school-based vocational studies. Because three months is considered the minimum duration of long-term learning mobility, training abroad

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(1) Development of Vocational and Higher Education in Meeting Labour Market Needs (PRÕM)

may only fit into longer apprenticeship. Long-term work experience in a foreign enterprise may make working abroad so attractive that the student decides to stay in the foreign country and to terminate their studies. A longer stay abroad breaks ties with the school and the Estonian society and decreases motivation to return. On the other hand, long-term apprenticeship abroad enriches the student. Upon their return, the students can share their international experience and motivate others to participate in learning mobility.

### 3.5. Erasmus+ learning mobility projects

The most widely used opportunity for learning mobility in higher as well as vocational education is the Erasmus+ programme.

VET institutions can get help and support from the Archimedes Foundation when completing and submitting a mobility project application. The Foundation informs VET institutions about opportunities for international mobility through various seminars and information events. The information is also available on the website of the Foundation. Companies can also get information about and assistance with learners from other countries who come to them to develop work experience <sup>(2)</sup>.

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(2) <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/mobility-scoreboard/country-fiches>



## CHAPTER 4.

# Conclusion

Short- and long-term mobility in Estonia's vocational education and training is affected by the small size of our economy and enterprises as well as salary levels and the internal organisation of studies and regulation of apprenticeship studies. Most enterprises are either micro- or small enterprises and there is a lack of large enterprises that could efficiently support and use the advantages of apprenticeship-based studies.

Apprenticeship studies were introduced in 2006, but the participation rates have remained low. Increasing mobility is hindered by high employment rates (including the youth employment) as well as labour market needs. Within the framework of a globalising labour market and the free movement of labour within Europe, transferable skills and key competences become increasingly important on the labour market and one of the best ways to develop these is to work or study in another cultural and economic environment.

Estonia's immigration policy does not hinder the arrival of foreign students. They are subject to the same laws regarding the regulation of employment relationships, social guarantees, and occupational safety as local students.

In order to make use of apprenticeship and the mobility of students, enterprises need competent supervisors and must organise work on the basis of an agreement, which usually means additional work load. On the other hand, participation in apprenticeship and learning mobility offers opportunities to train a new generation of specialists for their field and to increase the qualification of the current staff.

The system level or the training agreement between the school, the student, and the employer do not obstruct learning mobility, but mobility can only be organised during the study period and long-term learning mobility may not be suitable for shorter duration of apprenticeship training. The need to combine studying and working applies to Estonian students as well as students arriving to apprenticeship positions from abroad.

During mobility, a student acquires useful work experience, widens their perspective, and improves language skills. Learning mobility may be hindered by family obligations, the social immaturity of young people, and work-related matters such as salary and finding a replacement for the mobility period. Long-term experience in a foreign enterprise may make working abroad so attractive that the student decides to stay there.

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