
CEDEFOP OPINION SURVEY
ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

ESTONIA





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Introduction

We have reached the point in Estonia, where the recession that hit at the beginning of the decade has been overcome, the economy is on the rise, but due to the demographic trends, more people are leaving the labour market than entering. The employers need employees with professional education and practical skills and the shortfall in skilled workers is becoming the main barrier in the growth process of Estonia's economy.

The Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020 aims to create high-quality, flexible and diverse learning opportunities and career services that consider the development needs of the job market in order to increase the number of people with professional qualifications across various age groups and different regions in Estonia. The share of adults (aged 25-64) with no professional or vocational training was 28.5% in 2016 and has remained at a similar level for the last 3-4 years. The goal set in the lifelong learning strategy for 2020 is to reduce the share of adults without professional and vocational education to 25%, which is difficult to achieve (Annual analysis by the Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

After basic school, young Estonian residents tend to continue their education in gymnasiums (general upper-secondary schools), rather than vocational schools. The Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (henceforth the Cedefop survey) provides an insight into the opinions and views of the residents of Estonia on the vocational secondary education directed towards the youth, how satisfied they are with the education they received when at upper-secondary school and how they have managed after graduating. The aim of the survey is to understand the attitudes towards vocational education and training as well as gain a better understanding of the reasons to choose VET.

During the survey conducted among the residents of Estonia in June 2016, face-to-face interviews were held with 1,001 respondents who were at least 15 years old. The opinions and assessments of the residents of Estonia are compared to the results of other EU countries, which provides a significant international context for the results.

Previously the Ministry of Education and Research has ordered vocational education image and employer satisfaction surveys in Estonia (Pärtel and Petti, 2013; Nestor and Nurmela, 2013), also the post-basic school educational choices have been analysed and the question how is a stricter directing of the youth towards vocational education reasoned in an Estonian context (Järve et al., 2016). The following analysis refers to the results of these studies as well, and where appropriate, comparison with the Cedefop analysis is made.

The article's structure is based on the Cedefop survey structure, which includes four main topic areas. The first chapter discusses the awareness of the residents of Estonia of vocational education in general, what is their awareness regarding learning opportunities when finishing basic school, and which arguments affected their decisions of continuing their education. The second chapter analyses the attractiveness of vocational education, and assessments given to it in the society. The third chapter focusses on the experience during the studies where satisfaction with the studies and skill acquisition of people with vocational education and general upper secondary education is compared. The fourth chapter discusses the outcomes of vocational education both in terms of labour market and continuing education, and the actual lives of the graduates, and the conclusion part of the article sums up the survey results.

CHAPTER 1.

Awareness of vocational education

In order to make a conscious decision about continuing one's education, it is necessary to have information on what are the possibilities to continue learning, what are the known advantages and disadvantages of the choices, and possible obstacles.

The Cedefop survey results show that awareness and participation in vocational education is linked, and the countries, where, when finishing basic school, the students are informed about studying in vocational school, the rate of participants in vocational education is higher. Here, Estonia stands out as an exception. Although the Estonian residents' awareness of vocational education is high, and the level of students being informed when finishing basic school is one of the highest in Europe (only the youth in Slovakia and Slovenia are better informed), the participation in vocational education at secondary school level is considerably below the EU average when compared.

94% of the participants have heard of vocational education before the survey, which is a notably better result than the EU average (86%). For Estonian people, vocational education is mostly related with preparation for a specific occupation, but also with personal development, and continuous professional development in adult life. Also, 86% of the respondents agree with the statement that it takes place before starting working life. Although the majority of respondents (84%) relate vocational education primarily with the school environment, every third respondent out of four also relate vocational education with the work environment. Practical training and work-based learning has a very important role in vocational education, to embed the acquired skills and obtain actual work experience.

In Estonia, the basic school graduates are mostly 16 years old. Although the Estonian vocational education institutions are often unhappy with how poorly the young people, parents, and general education school teachers are informed of different professions and the vocational education opportunities, then based on the Cedefop survey, it can nevertheless be said that in general, Estonian people are very well informed about vocational education, compared to other EU countries.

A significant part of the Estonian respondents confirmed that they were well informed about the vocational education possibilities after finishing basic school. If the EU average agreeing with this statement is 57%, then in Estonia the rate is 80%. Only 18% of respondents say they were not given information about vocational education at the time, and 22% of the ones choosing general upper

secondary education say that at the time of making their decision, they were advised against taking vocational education. In other EU countries, on average 25% give the same response, in Hungary 51%, Romania 48% and Italy 47%. Most often family is named here as a source of advice (15% of respondents), the influence of friends and school is mentioned considerably less (5% and 4% of respondents respectively).

The surveys conducted previously in Estonia have revealed that the general awareness of the public about what goes on in vocational education is rather low. The fact that the research questions are positioned differently in different surveys definitely plays a part here. The results of the vocational education image survey in 2013 (Pärtel and Petti, 2013) show that only 24% of the adult population consider themselves to be well aware of what goes on in vocational education, more importantly, younger people are more informed, which also makes sense, because their direct experience with the education system is recent. Although the general awareness is rather low, more than half of the respondents consider being aware of what goes on in vocational education important, mainly to know about training possibilities for themselves or for their children, also just to have more extensive awareness of life.

When interpreting the Cedefop survey results it is important to keep in mind that for many respondents, graduation from basic school was a long time ago and the assessments given now may not be objective. Relying on the survey it can be said however, that the basic school graduates in Estonia are free in their choices and the awareness of vocational education has been good at the time of making the choice. Over the past 15 years, a lot has been put into developing career services in Estonia, but the small size of Estonia's society also plays a role. Compared to larger countries, the number of possibilities is limited, which is why people are more aware of different educational options.

Favouring general upper secondary education after basic school can be considered a tradition in Estonia. Cedefop survey confirmed this. Only 30% of the Estonian people participating in the survey had opted for vocational secondary education after finishing basic school.

To influence the existing trends, in the Government-approved (2014) Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020 the indicator set is the share of vocational education students among all students of the secondary education level, and have it increase to 40%, but so far no positive changes have happened, and rather, over the past years, the share of vocational education students has decreased even more (Table 1). Educational choices have quite a strong gender-based difference in Estonia. In 2015, after finishing basic school, 36.4% of boys continued with vocational secondary education, while the same rate for girls was only 19.2%.

Table 1. Share (%) of vocational education students among the secondary education students

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2020
Share of vocational education students (on secondary education level), %	33.7	33.2	33.0	33.0	32.2	31.1	30.1	40.0

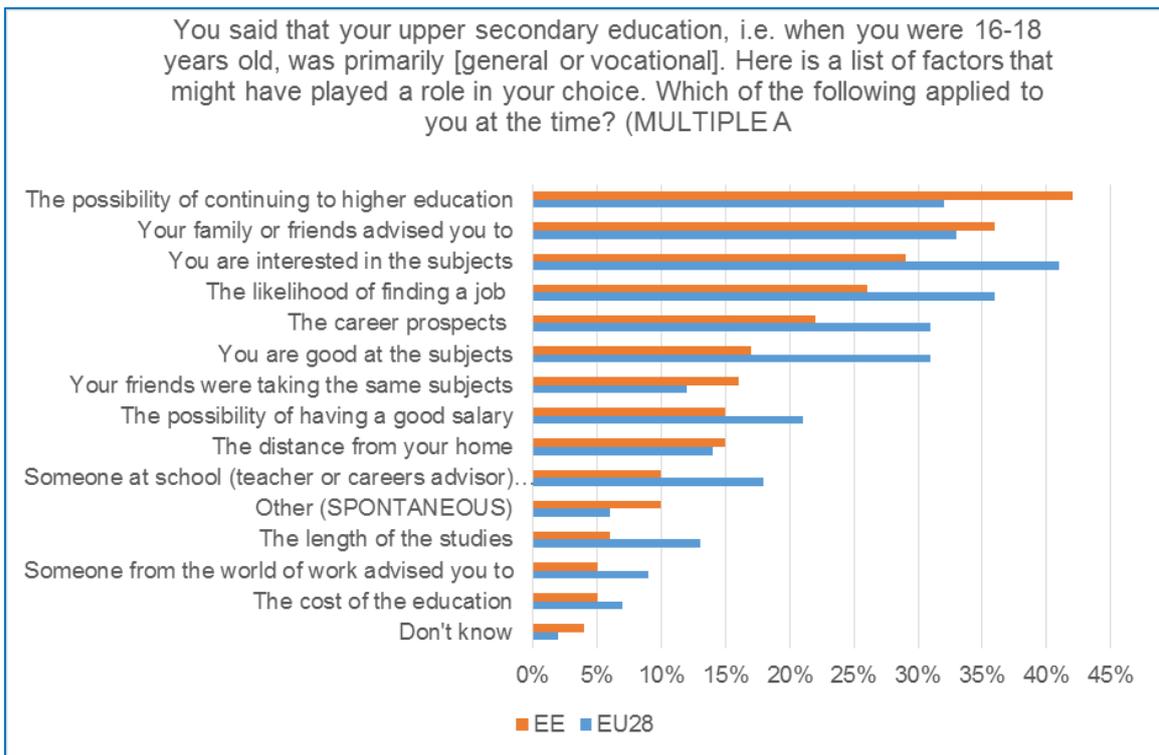
Source: Estonian Education Information System.

Systematic efforts have been made in Estonia since 2008 to raise the popularity of vocational education - professional skill competitions are organised, information on learning opportunities is shared via different channels along with the success stories of the alumni, marketing and communication training is provided for the schools, and recently virtual tours of all schools were made. Based on the results of previous vocational education image surveys (Pärtel and Petti, 2013), it can be said that there is an improvement in the way the society sees vocational education, but the efforts made have not resulted in visible changes in the students' behaviour.

In a recent analysis of post-basic school choices (Järve et al., 2016) the authors questioned whether the use of soft measures is sufficient to point more basic school graduates to vocational education and how relevant would it be to apply more strict measures. According to the analysis authors' assessments, the general liberal organisation of society, and small and open economy, support the Estonian society's orientation towards general education. Since modern society and the economy are in constant flux, the workers must also be prepared to adjust, and a general skill set makes such adjustment easier.

Based on the Cedefop survey, some conclusions can be drawn on which factors have affected the youth's choices on their educational paths. Assessing subsequently what are the main arguments for the choices made after finishing basic school, the Estonian people mention most often the possibility of continuing to higher education, and recommendations made by family and friends (Figure 1). Compared to all EU residents the continuing in higher education is much more important for Estonian residents, at the same time interest in the subjects, career and employment prospects are somewhat less important when making the decision. The cost of education is named as the least important factor when choosing the education (in Estonia, secondary education is free for everyone), as well as the length of the studies and career counselling at school.

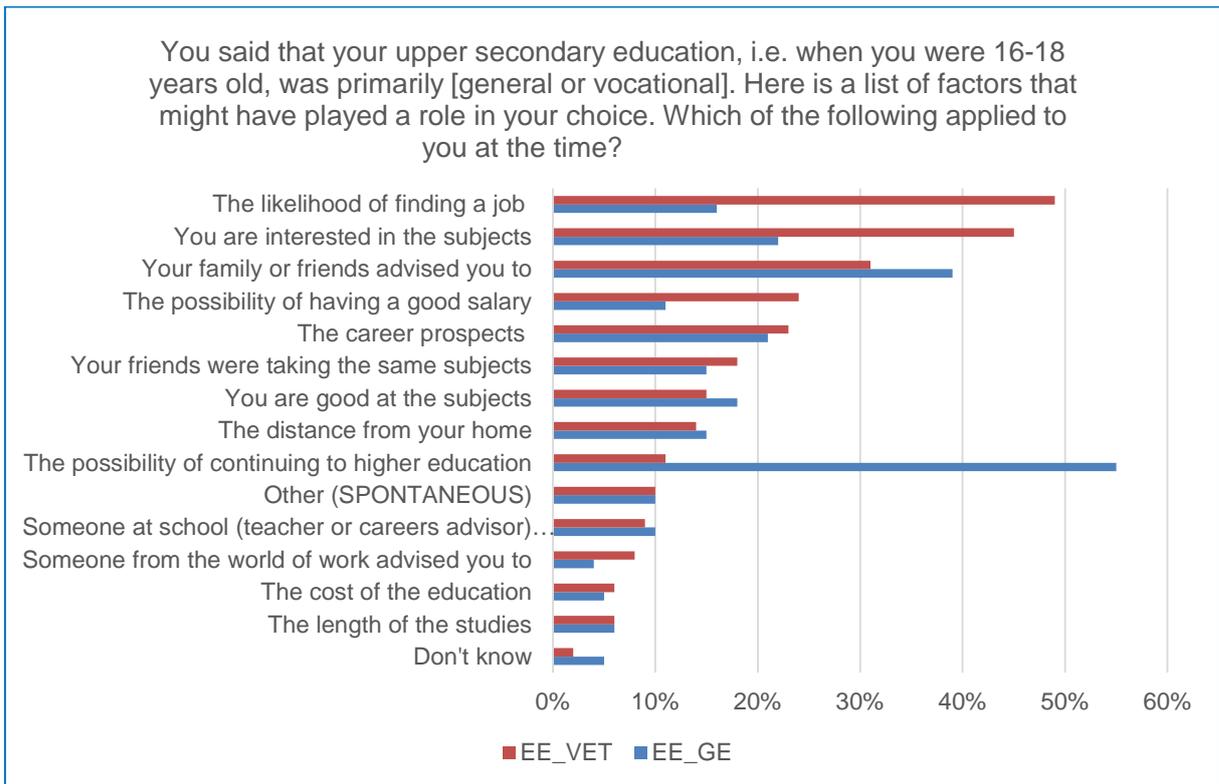
Figure 1. Factors that influenced decision on education path (EE vs EU28)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

If we look at the arguments more closely and consider the choice the respondents made after basic school, we see that the arguments of those who decided in favour of vocational secondary education in Estonia differ significantly from those made by the ones choosing general upper secondary education (Figure 2). The possibility to proceed to higher education is especially important for those who chose general upper secondary education and it is known that a significant number of upper secondary school graduates indeed continue in higher education. Those deciding in favour of vocational secondary education valued the likelihood of finding a job and the interest in some specific subjects more.

Figure 2. Factors that influenced decision on education path (EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

Thus, those deciding in favour of vocational secondary education were more clearly oriented on working when finishing basic school, while the ones continuing in a gymnasium saw pursuing higher education as their main aim at the time. Often, for those continuing in general upper secondary education, it is unclear at the time of finishing basic school, in which field they will continue their studies after upper secondary school, and it is therefore visible that at the time of finishing basic school, career perspectives and also a good income are not as relevant for them as arguments. The choice is not so much based on their interests and strengths, rather the choice of future profession is postponed until the gymnasium is finished.

The survey results confirm that obtaining a higher education diploma is an important educational aim for many Estonian people. According to 2016 data, the share of 30-34-year-olds with higher education is 45.5% of the age group. Thus, the Estonia 2020 and Europe 2020 aim, which is 40%, is exceeded. The gap between the proportions of men and women with higher education is significant in Estonia: 38.8% of men and 52.4% of women aged 30-34 have higher education (Annual analysis by the Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Gender gaps in education and income are of particular concern in Estonia. The latter is especially obvious among vocational education graduates.

According to the analysis data, the income gap between women and men, without counting any additional factors, is 18%. Particularly noticeable is the income gap among vocational education graduates: women earn 30% less than men (Jaggo et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, at the moment it was impossible to analyse the men's and women's answers separately in Cedefop survey, but it is rather likely that the women have been more oriented to higher education than men, which would also explain their lower participation in vocational secondary education. Opposite explanation is also possible: since most girls choose general upper secondary education after basic school, it is logical to continue in higher education after this.

To sum up, it can be said that although the Estonian people's awareness of vocational education is good and the level of prejudice is rather low, the access to higher education is one of the most important factors when choosing education and a main argument for those who have decided in favour of general upper secondary education after basic school. Those more oriented to working have decided in favour of vocational secondary education and they make their choice based on their interests and work and salary possibilities.

CHAPTER 2.

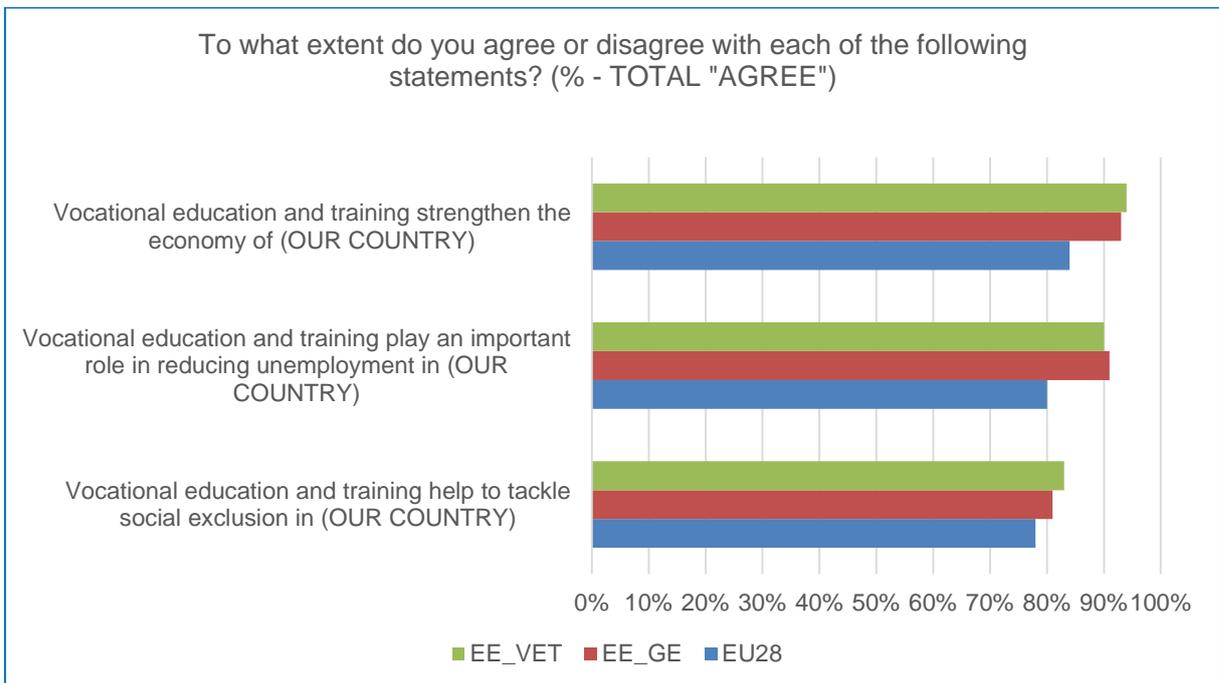
Attractiveness of vocational education

2.1. Image of vocational education

When making the decisions on education and continuing learning we are not affected only by what we know about one or other level of education, speciality or school, but also how we feel about this profession or school, that is, what are our emotions concerning one or other choice. Our opinions are formed by actual facts and knowledge, but also by personal, or other people's experiences, media coverage, public opinion, etc.

Estonian people value the importance of vocational education in economy, reducing unemployment, and increasing social cohesion highly. And in this case the educational background of the respondent does not matter. The assessments of the Estonian respondents are higher in all these aspects compared to the EU average (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Role of VET in society (EU28 vs EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

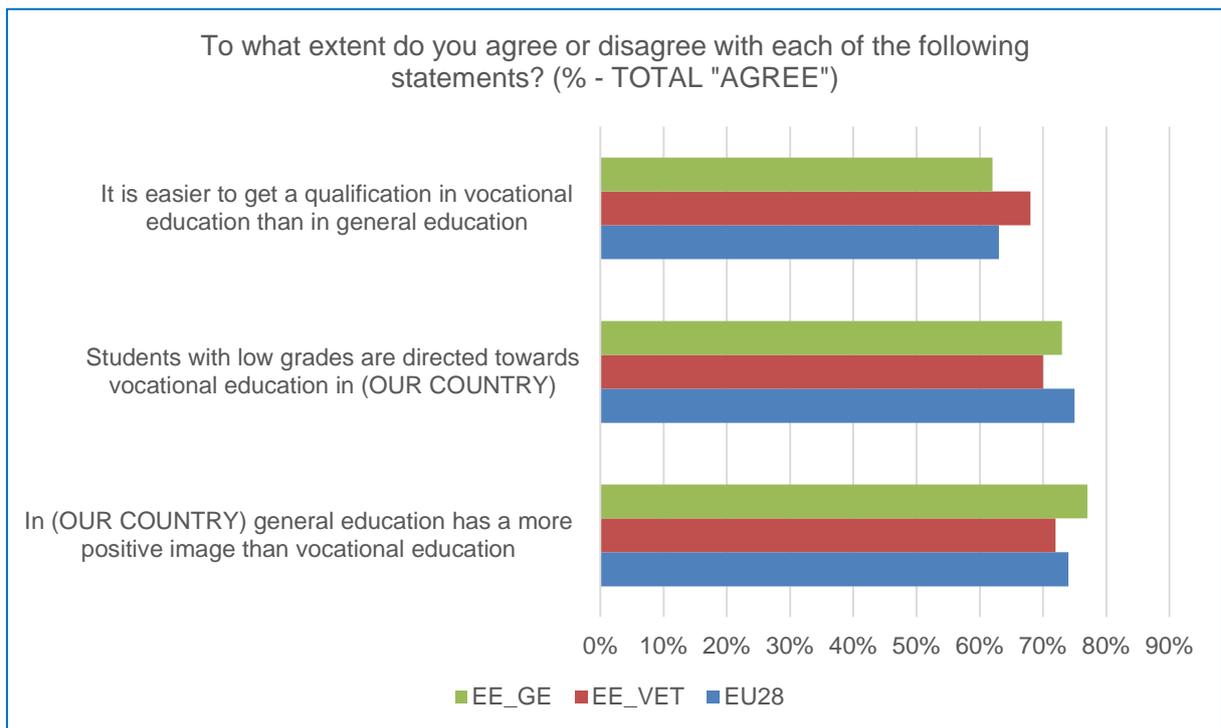
If the Estonian people's awareness of vocational education can be considered very good, then the assessments on vocational education's image are rather on the modest side. Two people out of three think, nevertheless, that

vocational education has a good image, whereas 23% of the respondents believe the opposite. Here, the Estonian people have exactly the same opinion as the average EU citizen.

Comparison of different countries shows somewhat surprisingly that there is no direct connection between the general image of vocational education and participation in vocational education. This conclusion is also true for Estonia. Although the assessments on vocational education's image in Estonia are at the average EU level, the share of those deciding in favour of vocational secondary education is considerably lower than the EU average.

When looking deeper, it is apparent that if you compare vocational secondary education and general upper secondary education, then although the general image of vocational education is considered good, the general education is assessed even higher. 73% of Estonian respondents agree with the statement that general education has a more positive image than vocational education, 14% do not agree with this statement and 13% do not know (Figure 4).

Figure 4. General perceptions of VET (EU28 vs EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)

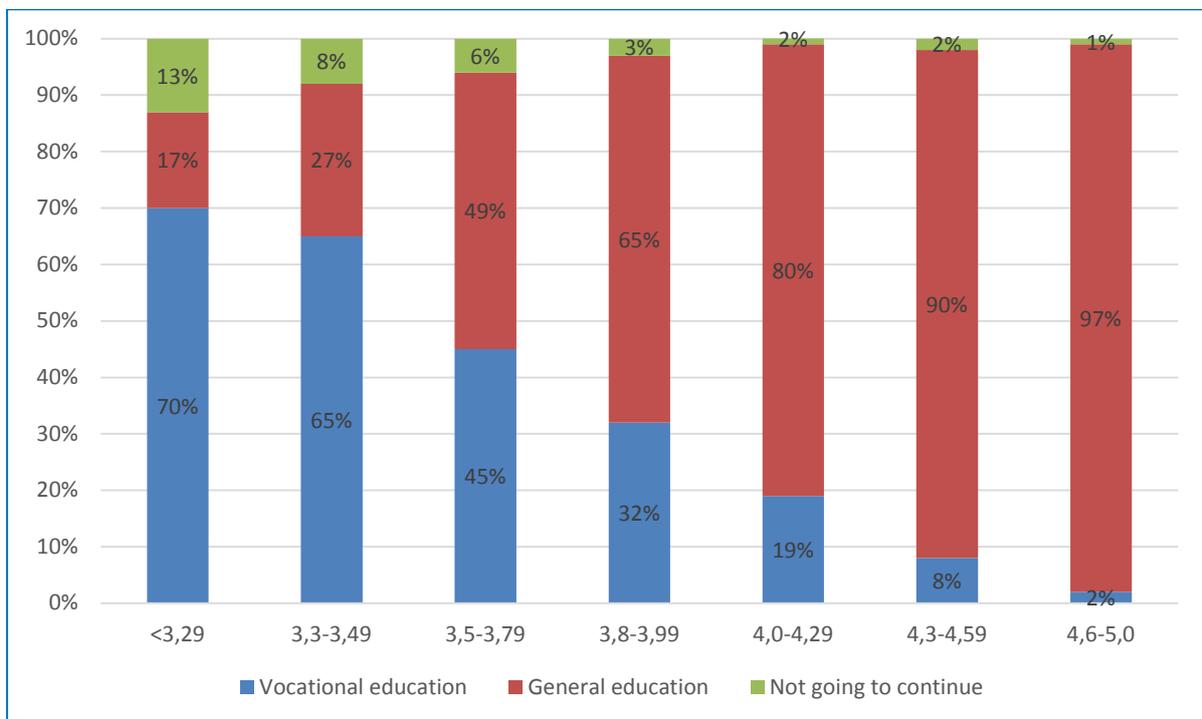


Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

More than two thirds of the respondents (70%) agree with the statement that students with low grades are directed towards vocational education, 17% do not agree with this statement. 13% of the respondents do not know. The number of

people disagreeing with this statement is somewhat larger among the people with vocational education than among those preferring general upper secondary education, but the difference is not significant (21% vs 14%). Thus, such belief reflects an opinion common in the society, and as the analysis dealing with students' choices (Järve et al., 2016) has shown, also the objective reality. The choice of continuing education after basic school is clearly connected with how successful the basic school studies are, and vocational secondary education in Estonia is for the weaker basic school students (Figure 5). The question here is, how much does this have to do with directing students in one or other direction and how much has this to do with the students' own choice.

Figure 5. Average grade of basic school report card when making different educational choices in 2014



Source: Järve et al., 2016

Acquiring qualification in vocational secondary education is often considered easier compared to general upper secondary education because vocational education is more pointed towards acquiring practical knowledge and skills which may seem easier compared to acquiring theoretical knowledge. An interesting fact is that people with vocational secondary education are the ones in Estonia who more frequently think that acquiring qualification in vocational secondary education is easier than in general upper secondary education. 68% of the respondents with vocational secondary education agree with this statement, whereas 62% of respondents with general upper secondary education think the

same. Nearly every fifth general upper secondary education graduate does not know how to answer this question, reflecting that people do not know substantially how simple or complicated the vocational education curricula are and thus they do not wish to share their opinion.

General upper secondary education and vocational secondary education are different for Estonian people and do not share a common part and thus changing the educational paths is uncommon. Therefore, 44% of the respondents believe that transferring from vocational education to general education is rather complicated, 33% consider it simple and 23% do not know the answer. Since in vocational education, general subjects are studied to a much lesser volume and greater emphasis is on professional skills, this is what makes the transfer complicated. People with vocational secondary education more often find, than those with general upper secondary education, that this transfer is rather simple.

2.2. **Recommending vocational education for the next generation**

Considering all the aforementioned, it is important, what will be the recommendation of the respondents based on their experience and knowledge, to the young people who at some point in time will need to make a decision regarding further education. Most of the society members are, in addition to everything else, also parents who will certainly discuss the further learning plans with their children.

The survey shows that the recommendations in favour of one or other educational path are not linked with the image of vocational education, rather with the general participation in the vocational secondary education in the country. In the case of the Estonian results, the respondent's personal educational experience is also important. 56% of people with vocational secondary education recommend vocational education for the basic school graduates, and 18% recommend general education. Among those that have general education, the majority are those who think that such decisions are up to people themselves (35%), 33% would rather recommend general education and 28% vocational education.

The results of the vocational education image survey conducted in Estonia (Pärtel and Petti, 2013) show that nearly half the parents are ready to recommend vocational education to their child finishing basic school. At the same time, according to the survey conducted among employers in 2013 (Nestor and Nurmela, 2013), as much as 86% of respondents believe that vocational education is a reasonable choice for a young person. Demand for vocational education institution graduates often exceeds the supply. Employers also expect eagerly that their options would expand and they would not have to settle for

workers who have ended up with the profession by accident, but who have acquired the profession because they are interested in it and motivated.

A strong correlation is discovered in the Cedefop survey between how much the survey participants support the prioritisation investments in vocational education in national educational policy, and what are people's recommendations for continuing education. Overall, in the EU countries, preferring vocational education over general education is considered important when making financing decisions. As expected, such views are more common among people with vocational education, but 46% of respondents with general upper secondary education also find that investments in vocational education should have higher priority. If investments into vocational education are considered important on a national level, then more young people are recommended to choose this path also.

Although in Estonia, the image of vocational education is considered good and its role in society is deemed important, the general upper secondary education is nevertheless regarded more highly. Vocational secondary education is often seen as a suitable studying solution for youth with less learning capabilities.

CHAPTER 3.

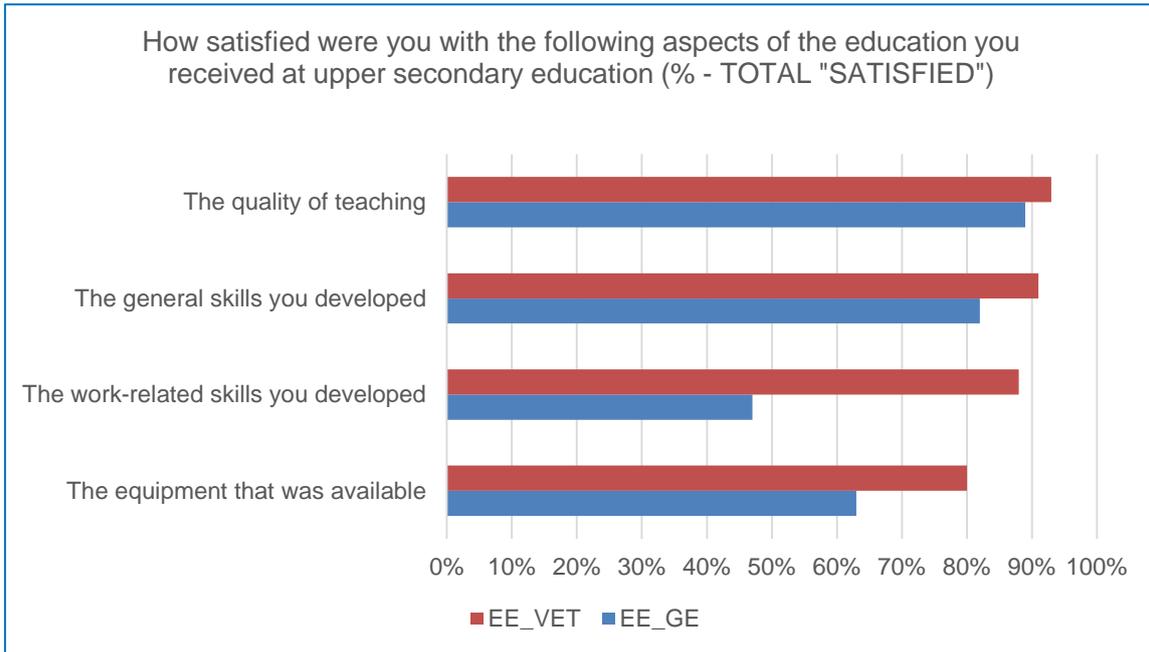
Experience at upper secondary education

The Cedefop survey is very valuable in terms of that, in addition to studying general attitudes, one of its aims is also to analyse how the respondents assess their own educational paths and the skills acquired there. The respondents were asked to remember their own secondary education studies and assess different aspects related with the studies. One definite drawback of such a method is that in time, people's opinions change and are no longer completely objective, but at the same time it does provide an insight into how happy people are with their education in retrospect.

A somewhat unexpected finding in the Cedefop survey is that out of all the aspects approached in the survey, the assessments of their own education are higher in cases of the ones with vocational secondary education, compared to those who had acquired general upper secondary education (Figure 6). It is expected that those with vocational secondary education assess the work-related skills much more highly, and to which general upper secondary education does not put that much emphasis. As much as 33% of the general upper secondary education graduates are in retrospect dissatisfied with development of work-related skills, while in case of vocational secondary education graduates, every tenth is dissatisfied (10% of the respondents with vocational secondary education).

The assessments of the respondents with vocational secondary education are also higher in terms of general skills, teaching quality and school equipment.

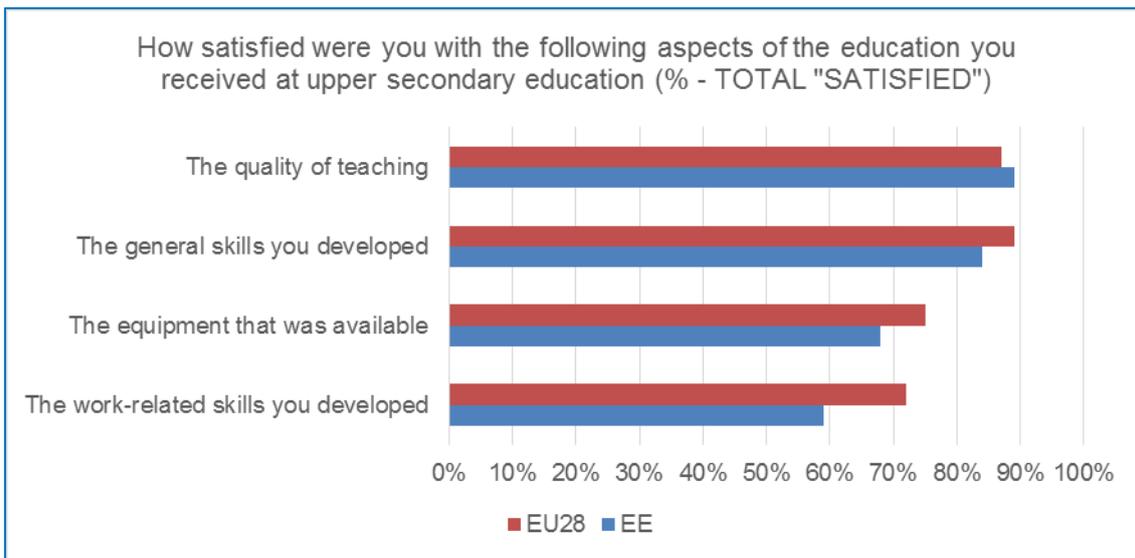
Figure 6. Overall satisfaction with aspects of education (EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

Compared to the averages of other EU countries, the assessments on secondary school level education are rather in the lower end in Estonia (Figure 7), which results from the fact that for some reason the people who have obtained general upper secondary education are on average more critical towards their studies, at the same time their share among the respondents is also high, and their assessments will dominate. Compared to other countries, in Estonia those who have general upper secondary education are proportionally less satisfied with both acquired general skills and work-related skills and also with the equipment that was available. Based on this survey, Estonia belongs among those countries, where people are rather dissatisfied with the general upper secondary education they have acquired.

Figure 7. Overall satisfaction with aspects of education (EU28 vs EE)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

Such survey results are somewhat surprising, although if we look only at the equipment of schools quite reasonable. Thanks to the resources from the European Regional Development Fund, the physical environment of vocational education facilities have undergone a significant renovation over the past 10 years. Learning is possible in modern and contemporary conditions, although keeping up with the fast upgrading of technology is definitely difficult. Renovating the learning environment of general upper secondary education has been tackled only recently.

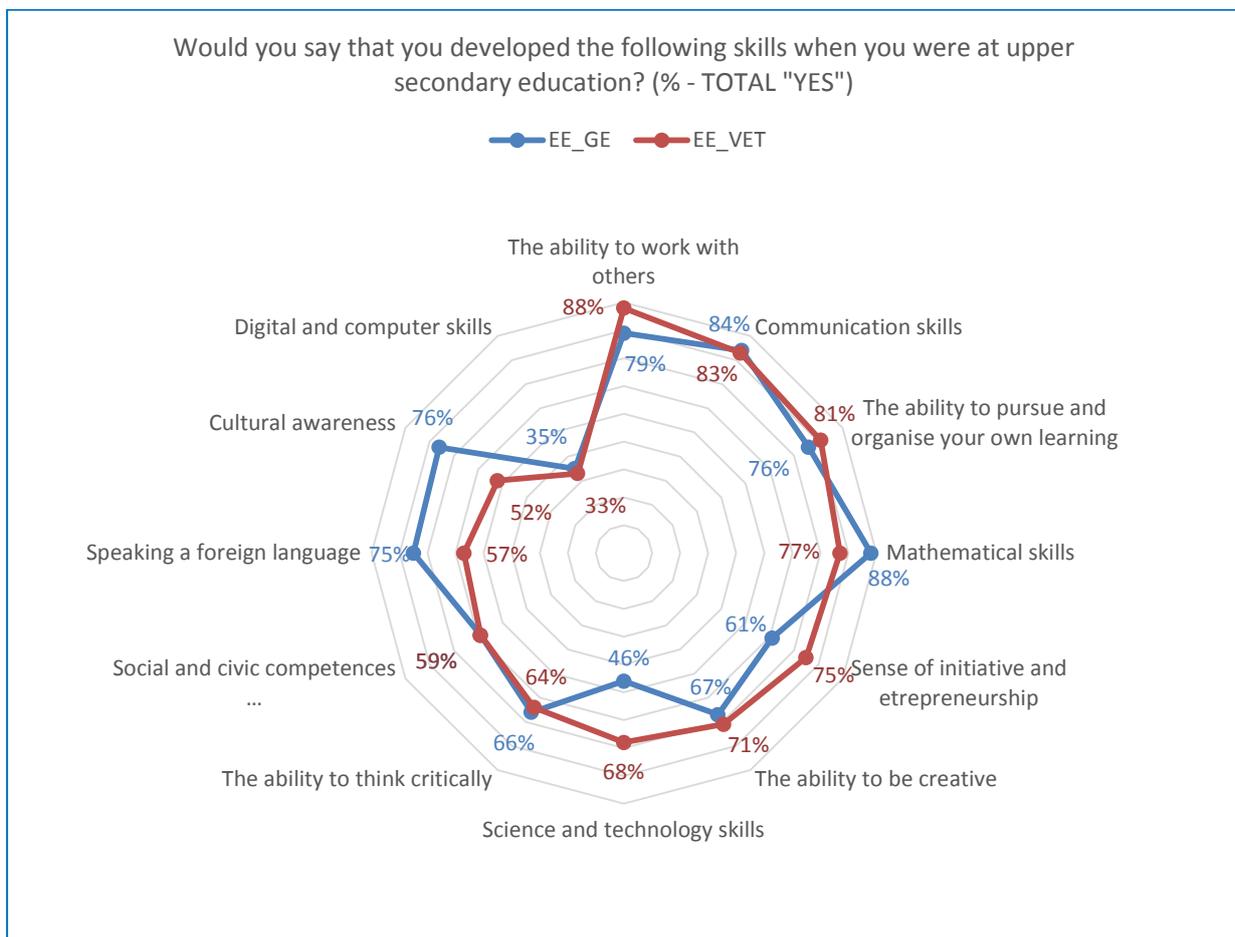
People's opinions may have been affected by the general context and focus of the survey, as well as several individual matters, but partially such significant difference and low satisfaction assessment on general upper secondary education studies may hint that at least a part of the people with general upper secondary education are not happy with their choice in retrospect and the studies did not meet their expectations. It is possible that for some respondents, vocational education would have been a better choice but for some reason they chose differently.

In addition to general assessments, the survey also focuses on specific skills. The respondents were asked to assess, on what level different skills were developed when learning at an upper secondary education level. The survey results report that general and vocational secondary education have, according to the respondents' assessment, developed different skills (Figure 8). There is a clear distinction between mathematical skills, speaking a foreign language, and cultural awareness skill development, which the people with general upper secondary education name considerably more frequently, at the same time science and technology, the ability to work with others, sense of initiative and

entrepreneurship are skills named more often by people with vocational secondary education.

The differences between developing digital and computer skills, social and civic competences, critical thinking, and communication skills were minimal. Although currently, digital and computer skills are essential for getting by in life, it is, however, a modern skill, which has appeared in the curricula over the past 20 years, meaning that at the time many of the respondents were students this skill was not yet topical. This explains why developing these skills is named much less frequently compared to others.

Figure 8. Personal views on development of key competences in education (EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)

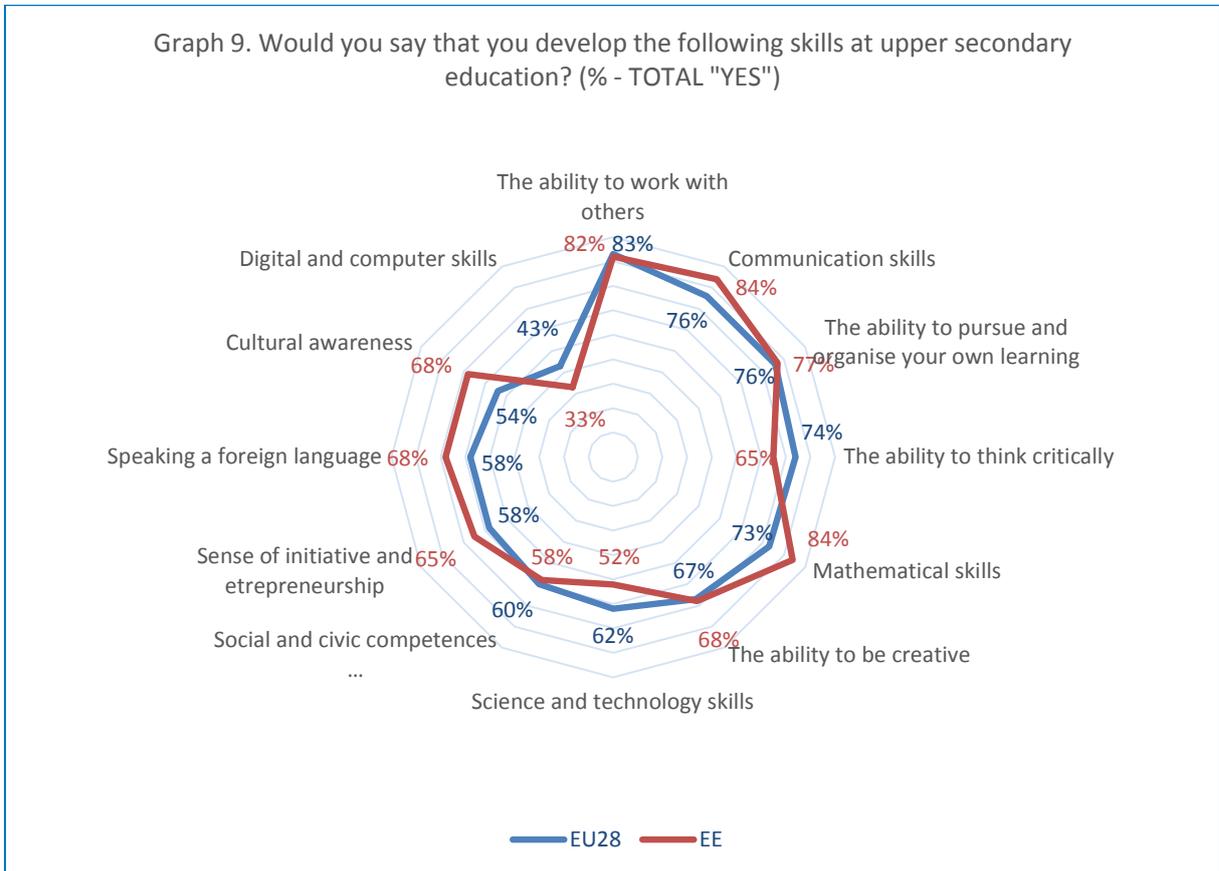


Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

Comparing Estonian results with the EU average, we see that the Estonian respondents name cultural awareness, maths, and foreign language skill development much more frequently than other EU countries (Figure 9). Development of these skills is important in general upper secondary education and since the rate of respondents with general upper secondary education is very

high in case of Estonia, it also explains why these skills are so frequent in the Estonian respondents' assessments. Compared to other countries, the digital and computer, science and technology, and critical thinking skill development are named less frequently.

Figure 9. Personal views on development of key competences in education (EU28 vs EE)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

Although the majority of youth chooses general upper secondary education after finishing basic school, a lot of them are later unhappy with its content. Vocational secondary education and general upper secondary education develop slightly different skills, thus filling the society's demand for people with different competences.

Outcomes and effectiveness of VET

4.1. Vocational education and continuing studies

Previous analysis reveals that the possibility to continue in higher education was one major argument for many survey participants deciding in favour of general upper secondary education after basic school. This seems to imply that continuing in higher education after vocational education is considered somehow problematic. The survey, however, proves that this is not the case. Continuing in higher education after vocational education is the matter in which the Estonian residents are far more positive than the rest of the EU. 84% believe that after vocational education it is possible to continue studying in higher education. The spread of such belief is also supported by the fact that a similar result was indicated in the 2012 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2012). Moreover, the opinion is independent from whether the respondent has general or vocational secondary education. However, it is important here to consider another methodological aspect. The wording of the question had somewhat different emphasis in Estonian questionnaire compared to the English version. The corresponding statement in the Estonian questionnaire was: "It is possible to continue into higher education such as university after vocational education at upper secondary education." Thus, the Estonian respondents did not assess so much whether it is easy to continue in higher education, rather if it is at all possible.

This result is somewhat surprising, as in general only a few continue in higher education after graduating upper secondary vocational education, and this is actually considered as one of the main image problems of vocational education. The electronic admission system SAIS ⁽¹⁾ used in Estonia provides data that allows the analysis of how many vocational secondary education graduates actually continue studying and it has been found that immediately after finishing only a small number continues. The gap between them and those who acquired general upper secondary education is large. At the same time, the SAIS data shows that vocational education graduates continue higher education studies later and not immediately after acquiring vocational education. The analysis of people applying for higher education in 2016 shows that from all the candidates with vocational secondary education, only 1/5 were the same year graduates. Most of the vocational education graduates prefer to start working

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.sais.ee>

immediately after graduation and begin thinking about continuing learning only after some time. From the Cedefop respondents with vocational secondary education, 37% continued later in higher education.

Thus, the positive attitude revealed in the Cedefop survey may cover a belief that since there are no regulative barriers in Estonia, the higher education is free of charge if to choose curriculum conducted in Estonian, and lifelong learning is promoted and normal, everything depends on the person and their motivation.

In addition to educational level, participating in lifelong learning and continuously developing one's skills and knowledge is also important. Over the past 12 months, 38% of people with general upper secondary education, and 33% with vocational secondary education, had participated in professional training, which was a considerably higher rate than the EU average (19%). People with vocational secondary education more often have participated in training courses to update and modernise their skills. People with general upper secondary education have rather participated in learning entirely new skills, and to change careers.

Participation in lifelong learning is accepted well in Estonia and the relevant indicator is much higher than the EU average. During the four weeks preceding the Estonian Labour Force Survey in 2016, 15.7% of adults were acquiring further education or participated in training; the earlier share of participants was ca 12% (Annual analysis by the Ministry of Education and Research ,2017). Respective EU28 ratio in 2016 was 10.8% (Eurostat database).

Studying or working abroad has quickly become normal for Estonians after joining the EU. 90% of people with vocational education and 86% with general upper secondary education find that it is possible to study or work abroad with vocational education. Here we see a distinct difference compared to the EU average. The EU average of this opinion is 61% (Eurostat database).

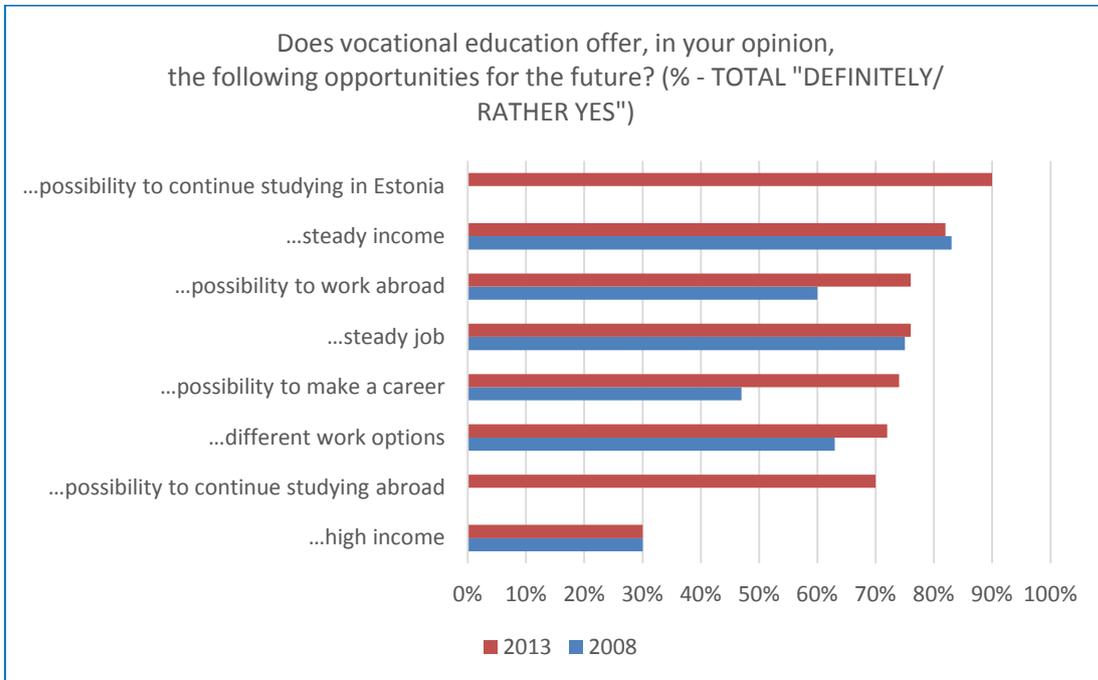
4.2. Vocational education and labour market perspectives

Without a doubt, vocational education is the type of education related closest with the labour market. Vocational education is acquired mainly in order to find work with the help of acquired skills. Thus, it is very important that the curricula would meet the labour market needs and the study process organisation would be as practical as possible. Due to their tight connection, the opinions on vocational education cannot be viewed separately from what is going on in labour market.

The previous vocational education image surveys conducted in Estonia (Pärtel and Petti, 2013) have reported that the perspectives of a person with vocational education are considered quite good on the labour market, moreover, the assessments improved significantly in the comparison of 2008 and 2013

(Figure 10). The only thing remaining is the respondents' scepticism regarding whether vocational education would provide a high income in future. The next similar survey in Estonia is planned for spring 2018, which then allows to assess how much people's opinions and views have changed in the meantime.

Figure 10. Opinions about VET

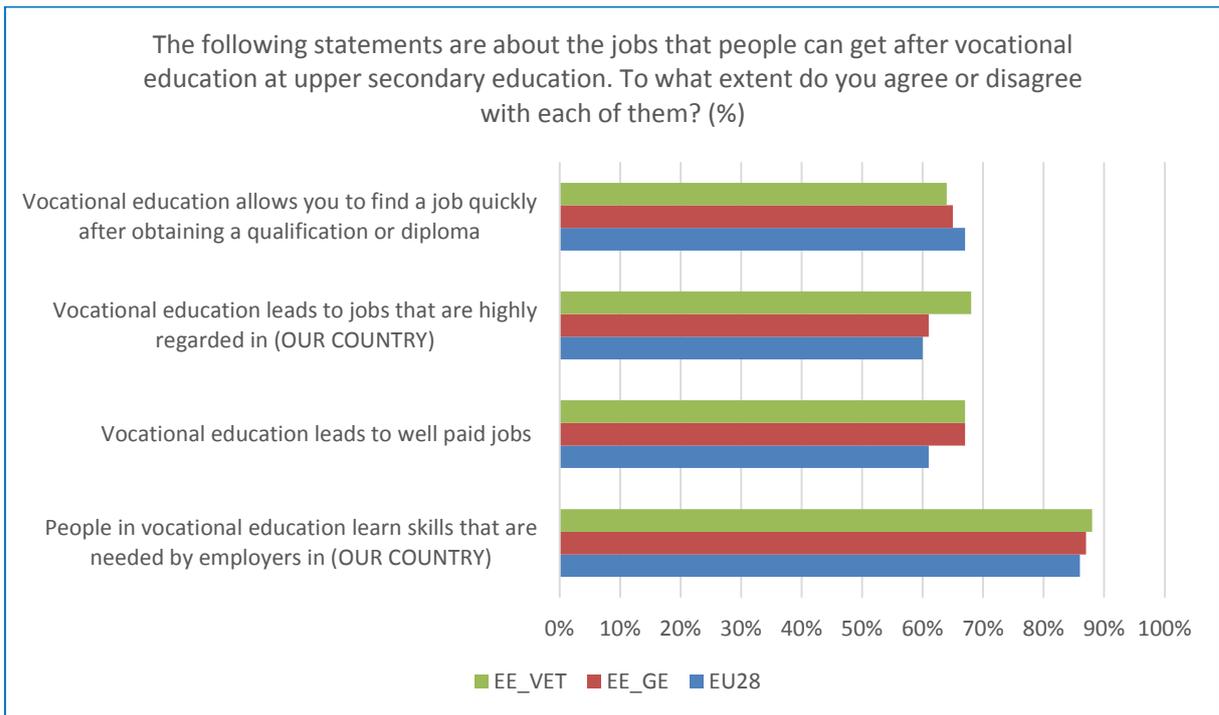


Source: Pärtel and Petti, 2013.

The Cedefop survey shows that the Estonian respondents rather agree that vocational education provides skills necessary for the labour market. 87% of respondents agree with this statement, 8% disagree (Figure 11).

Although the difference is not significant, the survey nevertheless shows that opinions about the work-related perspectives of the people with vocational education are somewhat poorer than the opinions on vocational education itself. 64% of respondents agree that after acquiring vocational secondary education it is possible to find a job quickly, 25% disagree with this statement.

Figure 11. Core benefits of VET in relation to labour market issues (EU28 vs EE_VET vs EE_GE participants)



Source: Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training (2017).

The Estonian labour market is currently in a rather good state - the rate of participation in the labour force is very high, unemployment is rather low (7.1% in 2016, age 16 to retirement age) and demand for workers increases. However, the differences are considerable depending on the region, and the unemployment rate may differ by more than double, thus, the responses may have been affected by the respondents' location and personal experience. The speed and perspective on finding a job are very closely linked to how mobile a person is, and what are the specific requirements at a work place.

62% of the survey participants agree with the statement that jobs requiring vocational education are highly regarded in the society, 31% do not agree. 66% of the respondents think that jobs requiring vocational education are well paid, 26% believe the contrary, and this where the participants' opinions are more positive in this matter than in surveys taken in Estonia a few years back. Regarding the aforementioned aspects, the Estonian people's opinions are more positive compared to the EU average. Differences in the opinions between those with general upper secondary education and vocational education are minimal, which confirms that these are common views independent from the personal educational experience of the respondent. Those with vocational education nevertheless do assess the general image of jobs a bit more highly, but are less optimistic about the speed of finding a job.

4.3. Vocational education and professional success

The labour market can experience calm and storm, and the period of Estonia's independence has also seen times of very high unemployment in turn with active economic growth and high labour force demand.

Opinions regarding whether people with vocational education find work more easily than people with higher education, are divided quite evenly in Estonia, and the respondent's educational background does not play a part here. 35% of respondents think people with vocational education have an advantage on the labour market, 34% think people with higher education are more likely successful. For 16% of respondents the educational level is determining and 15% do not have an opinion. Therefore, although the Estonian society is very strongly oriented to higher education, simply having a higher education may not provide an advantage on the labour market according to people's assessments.

From the people participating in the Cedefop survey, 78% of the vocational secondary education graduates, and 77% of the general upper secondary education graduates have not had trouble with finding a job after finishing their studies (incl. after finishing higher education studies). 19% of people with general upper secondary education and 16% of people with vocational secondary education have had trouble. When it comes to the speed of finding a job, it does not matter which educational path is selected after basic school. Three quarters of the respondents found a job already before the end of their main studies, or in less than a month after graduating.

Recent analysis by the Ministry of Education and Research (Leppik, 2017) that tackled the success of vocational and higher education graduates on the labour market, highlighted that 62% of vocational secondary education graduates from 2005-2014 are employed, additionally 10% of the alumni try to work and study at the same time, which means that in total, 72% of graduates are employed. The remaining 28% includes those only studying, staying at home or in military service and the registered unemployed. It is noteworthy that the Estonian registers do not have information on 11% of the graduates, meaning a large number of them is likely working abroad, thus away from the Estonian labour market.

The same analysis reveals, based on data from different registers, that average salary of the vocational secondary education graduates, after finishing school, is significantly below the Estonian average. From the people acquiring vocational secondary education in 2005-2014 only 25% earned income above the Estonian average in 2015. Higher education provides people with a significant income addition and is considerably more gainful compared to vocational education.

The analysis of post-basic education choices concludes that vocational education provides an advantage in salaries and employment rate when entering

the labour market compared to general education, but this effect dissolves over time and throughout life the people with general education are more successful compared to those with vocational education (Järve et al., 2016).

Estonian people are in general satisfied with their professional careers, and the number of satisfied people in Estonia is higher (85%) than the EU average (81%). Choice of education after finishing basic school has not determined how content a person is with their professional life. 85% of people with general upper secondary education and 86% of people with vocational secondary education are satisfied with their professional lives.

Estonian people have very positive attitudes towards the possibilities of vocational secondary education graduates continuing in higher education, but the actual situation is that most of the vocational secondary education graduates do not aspire to higher education. The likelihood and speed of finding a job do not depend significantly on the path chosen after basic school. The majority of Estonian people are happy with their professional careers regardless of which pathway they chose after finishing basic school although based on the administrative data analysis there are differences in the labour market outcomes between different educational pathways in terms of income levels.

CHAPTER 5.

Main conclusions and recommendations for further research

The results of this survey allow to analyse the residents' opinions on vocational education, which factors affect the young people's choices after basic school, and how well the people who chose vocational education do afterwards compared to those who chose general upper secondary education. It can be concluded based on the survey that the choices young people make after finishing basic school, may not be directly linked to their awareness of vocational education or assessments to vocational education's image or to the future perspectives of a person with vocational education.

Although Estonian people's views and assessments on vocational education are often much more positive than the EU average, quite a small number of young people choose vocational secondary education after basic school. The survey did not give a clear answer as to why.

According to the popular belief supported by actual data on the labour market outcomes of graduates, higher education ensures better coping and security on the labour market. This is one of the reasons why higher education is valued highly in Estonia. Although according to the survey results, vocational secondary education is not considered a barrier when applying for higher education, vocational secondary education remains mainly a choice for those who have not been successful learners in basic school, and who are more oriented towards the labour market, and because of that stop aspiring towards higher education later.

The survey method sets several limits for interpreting the results - significant time may have passed from studying, and assessments of the decision to continue learning or learning experience given in retrospect may be affected by the latter experience. It is definitely necessary to analyse the survey results considering the social-demographic features of the respondents (gender, age, ethnic background, place of residence). It is also important to analyse the experience of those who have finished their upper secondary education studies recently and draw conclusions regarding the content and organisation of modern upper secondary education.

Although this survey provided some answers to important questions and proved that the general image of vocational education in Estonia is good, it also raised new questions that need answers in future surveys, incl. what should be the suitable upper secondary education model for Estonia, which would consider the employers' needs and expectations of the society.

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