
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

LATVIA





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CHAPTER 1.

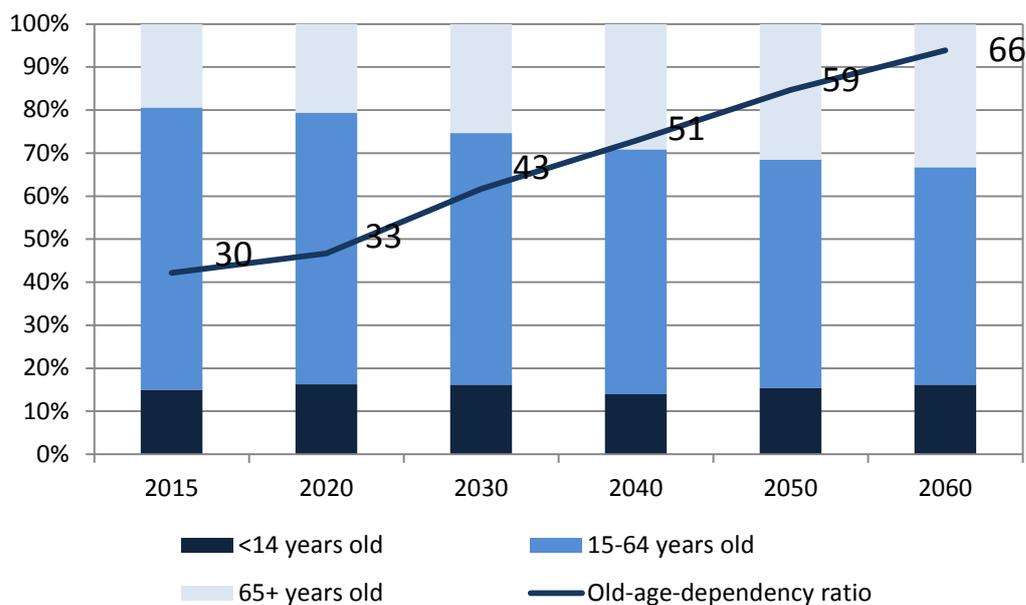
External factors influencing VET

1.1. Demographics

Latvia has a population of 1 934 300 (2018) and a territory of 64 573 km². The population has decreased in the past two decades due to a negative natural increase and emigration of people in search of employment abroad.

While the share of people of pensionable age slightly increased from 21.1% in 2010 to 22.5% at the beginning of 2018, the working age population has decreased from 64.7% to 61.7%. At the same period the share of the population under working age has slightly increased – (from 14.2% to 15.8%). However, according to Eurostat forecasts, due to aging of population, the old-age-dependency ratio is expected to increase from 29.5% in 2015 to 65.7% in 2060 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Population forecast by age group and old-age-dependency ratio



Source: Eurostat, proj_15ndbims [extracted on 7.11.2018]

Most people reside in urban areas (68.5%). Riga residents comprise 33% of the total population, which is one of the highest indicators in Europe. The urban/rural ratio has not changed significantly since 2009, but an inland migration from rural areas to Riga continues. Most social and economic facilities are concentrated in the cities and there is limited availability of education and other services in rural areas.

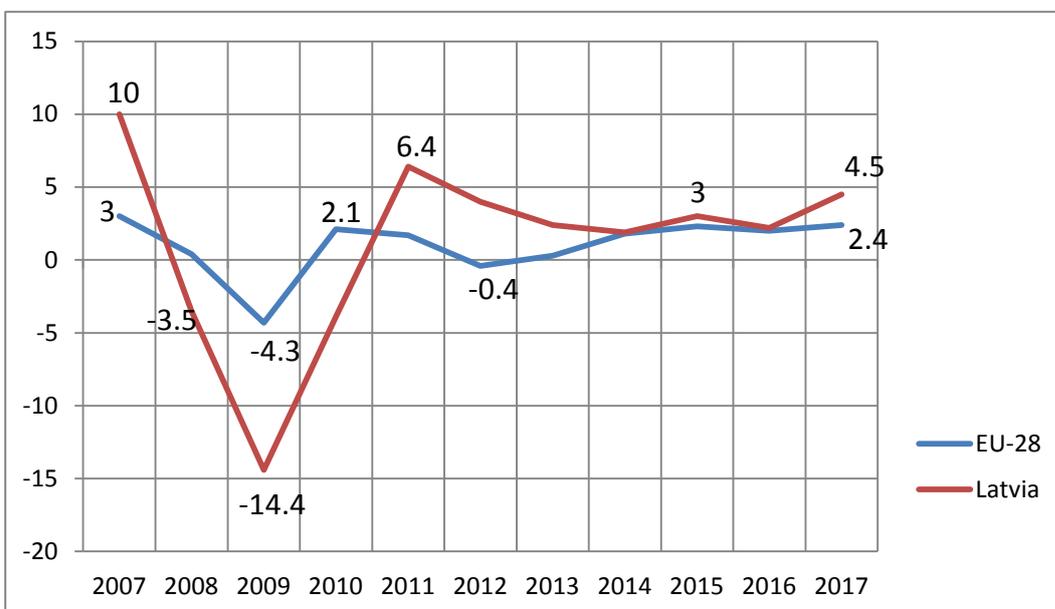
Demographic changes have an impact on vocational education and have led to rearrangement of vocational education institutions network: the number of State-governed vocational education schools has reduced from 58 in 2010 to 21 in 2018. To increase the quality and efficiency of vocational education, many small providers were merged into regional vocational education competence centres offering a wide range of qualifications and other services. Several providers were merged by the local governments in integrated general and vocational education institutions.

The country has a multicultural community. At the beginning of 2018, 62.2% of population were Latvians and 25.2% Russians, 3.2% Belarusians, 2.2% Ukrainians, 2.1% Poles and 5.1% other nationalities. State vocational education schools implement programmes in Latvian, while some private providers use Russian or both Latvian and Russian. By 2020 all providers will implement vocational programmes in Latvian only.

1.2. Economy and labour market indicators

During the economic crisis GDP decreased by 25%. Since end-2009, growth has resumed. From 2011 to 2013, the economy expanded rapidly – on average by 4.4% per year. It was among the fastest growths in the EU. Due to an unfavourable external market environment (low demand in some trading partner countries), GDP growth in 2014-16 was slower, but in 2017 again reached 4.5%.

Figure 2. Real GDP growth compared to the previous year

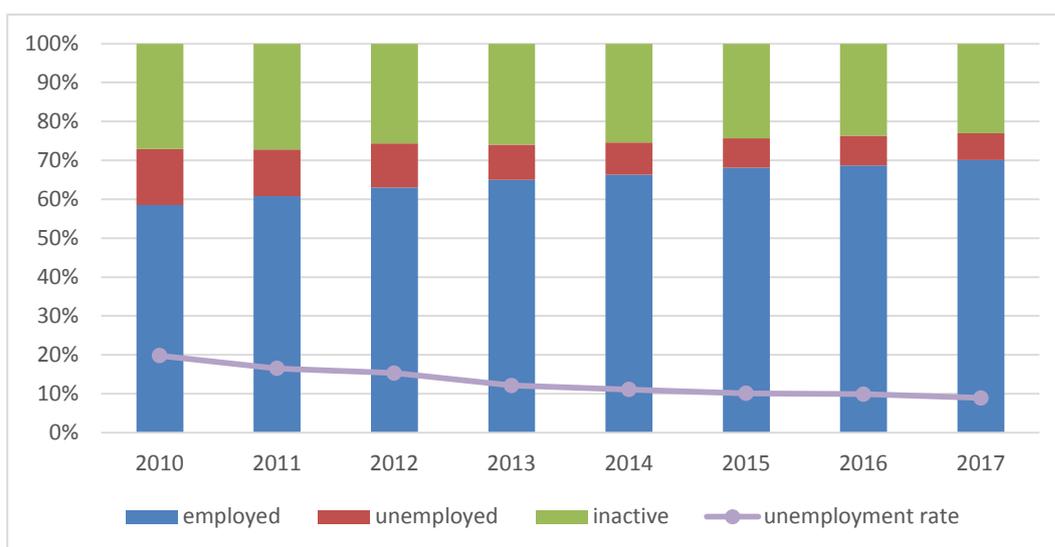


Source: Eurostat, tec00115 [extracted on 27.4.2018].

Most companies are micro and small-sized. Since 2010, the export of Latvian goods and services has grown very quickly, and it is the main drive of economic development. Wood-processing, production of chemical products, electrical and optical equipment, manufacture of basic metals, machinery and equipment manufacturing, as well as manufacture of transport and equipment had the greatest positive contribution to the growth of the manufacturing. Domestic demand-oriented industries contributed the most to the GDP growth in recent years (Ministry of Economics, 2018b).

Along with the improvement of the economic situation, positive trends can be also observed in the labour market – decreasing unemployment and growing employment rate (Figure 3). However, the increase has slowed down because economic growth is primarily based on productivity increase, but less on increase in the number of employees (Ministry of Economics, 2018c).

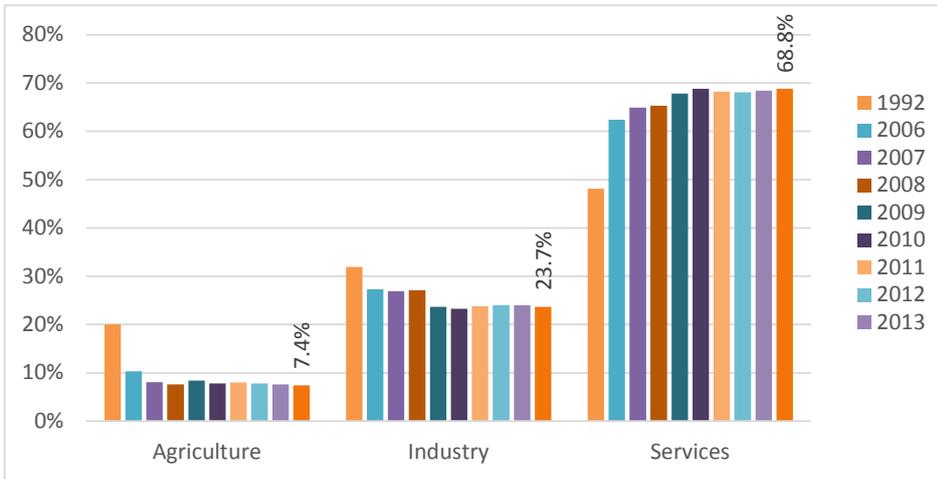
Figure 3. Employed, unemployed and inactive population (aged 15-64) in 2010-17 (%)



Source: CSB [extracted on 26.4.2018]

In 2014, 68.8% of employment was in services and 23.7% in industry (Figure 4). The primary economic sector share was 7.4%. In the 1990s, the services sector expanded significantly, employing more people in accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, financial and insurance activities. Employment in manufacturing and especially in primary sector has decreased, which led to changes also in vocational education offer. Since 2009, the balance between sectors has remained relatively stable.

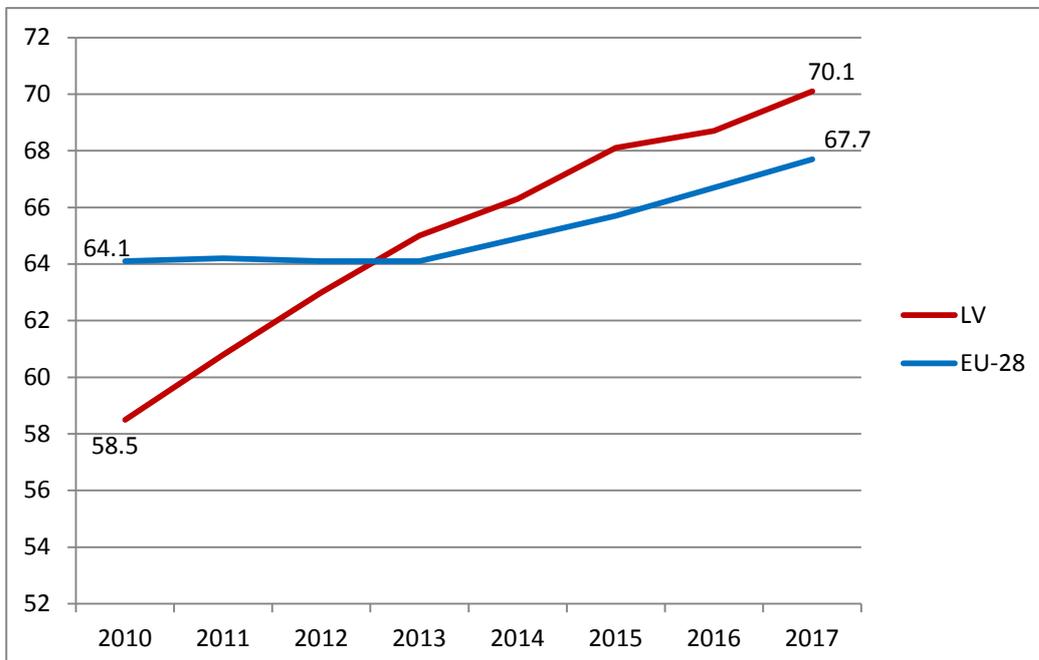
Figure 4. Employment by economic sector in 1992-2014 (aged 15 and above, % of total employment)



Source: Eurostat, [lfsi_grt_a] Last update: 21-01-2016 [extracted on 26.4.2018].

Since 2013, the employment rate of the 15 to 64 age group has been above the EU-28 average (Figure 5).

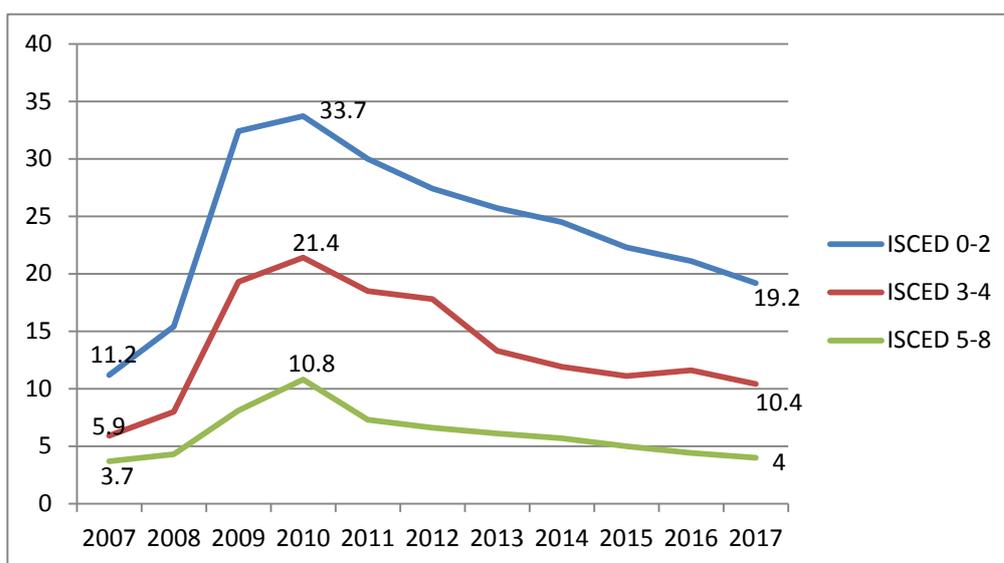
Figure 5. Employment (%) of total population aged 15-64



Source: Eurostat, lfsi_emp_a [extracted on 3.5.2018]

The unemployment rate depends on educational attainment (Figure 6). The gap has increased during the crisis as unskilled workers are more vulnerable to the unemployment. In 2017, the unemployment rate of people with low- (ISCED levels 1 and 2) and medium-level qualifications (ISCED levels 3 and 4) was still higher than in the pre-crisis years.

Figure 6. Unemployment rate (aged 15-64) by education attainment level in 2007-17



Source: Eurostat, lfsa_urgaed [extracted on 26.4.2018]

According to the public employment service (State Employment Agency, *Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, NVA), the share of young people (aged 15 to 24) in total numbers of registered unemployed has gradually decreased from 14.3% in 2010 to 6.6% in 2018. The employment rate of recent VET graduates ⁽¹⁾ increased from 71.5% in 2014 to 74.8% in 2016 but then decreased to 69.1% in 2017.

1.3. Employment policies relevant to VET

Developing the employment policy is a responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*). Main priorities are:

- a) supporting the labour demand – stimulating economic activities and entrepreneurship, including reduction of the labour taxes, combating undeclared employment, indirect

⁽¹⁾ 20 to 34 year-olds who graduated one to three years ago from upper secondary and post-secondary vocational education (ISCED levels 3 and 4). Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_24](#), [extracted on 24.7.2018.]

- and direct support measures for businesses ensured by the government, measures to reduce administrative barriers, business incubators, etc.;
- b) strengthening the labour supply – increasing the competitiveness of the unemployed and people at risk of unemployment in the labour market, including skills development according to the labour market needs (continuing vocational education, non-formal learning for the unemployed, consultations and professional mobility), lifelong learning measures, advice for starting a business, etc.;
 - c) facilitating the adjustment of the labour supply and demand – improving the education system, involving of employers' organizations in the improvement of education quality, forecasting the compliance of the labour market supply with demand, educating the labour market participants, including learners on labour market and career issues ⁽²⁾.

In 2015, the government approved the Inclusive Employment Guidelines for 2015-20 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2015) in order to facilitate creation of an inclusive labour market policy; thus, using the full potential of human resources in Latvia, including reducing social consequences of unemployment, supporting the return of the unemployed to the labour market and maximizing the duration of staying in the labour market of people representing groups at the risk of social exclusion, as well as improving the quality of workplaces. These guidelines are aimed at securing the long-term unemployment rate under 15% of the total number of unemployed and 2.5% of all economically active persons by 2020 and in the long run. Guidelines foresee more learning opportunities and activities for helping the unemployed and job-seekers start up their own businesses.

Education policy priorities, formulated by the Ministry of Education and Science in the education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) foresee close cooperation with the employment sector. To promote employment, vocational schools are more actively engaged in implementation of respective policies. According to legislation on supporting unemployed and job-seekers (Saeima, 2002), the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science provide vocational education, career guidance and requalification and professional development for the unemployed and job-seekers. They also offer non-formal learning and courses for the (self-) employed at risk of unemployment. Both ministries work on improving employment policy and support involvement of unemployed/job-seekers/(self-) employed in learning through State and EU cofinanced projects.

National policy for reducing unemployment is implemented by NVA – a public agency supervised by the Ministry of Welfare. NVA cooperates with State and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. Policy is

⁽²⁾ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-national-reform-programme-latvia-en.pdf>

implemented in line with government procedures for organising and financing active and preventive employment measures (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011a).

Education institutions that provide training for the unemployed are procured by NVA. A list of occupations and skills in demand is annually approved by a Ministry of Welfare commission including representatives from ministries (welfare, economy and education), NVA, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia and other institutions.

Since 2017, vocational continuing education, professional development, non-formal learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning (EQF level 2-4) for employed are coordinated by State Education Development Agency (Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra, VIAA) using ESF support in cooperation with local governments.

The Management Board of Adult Education including representatives from relevant ministries, social partners' organisations and regional governments, in cooperation with Sectoral Expert Councils defines learning areas and education programmes for the employed according to economic trends and labour market short-, medium- and long-term forecasts.

1.4. Regulation of access to occupations/professions

Requirements for non-regulated professions are determined by employers. The Law on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Saeima, 2001b) and relevant government regulations stipulate special requirements for education programmes, recertification or recognition of qualifications in regulated professions to:

- (a) ensure that professional activities meet safety, health or other specific requirements;
- (b) ensure staff has the qualifications required for specific occupations/professions;
- (c) enable recognition of Latvian qualifications abroad and foreign qualifications in Latvia;
- (d) promote free movement of individuals in the EU and members of the European Free Trade Association.

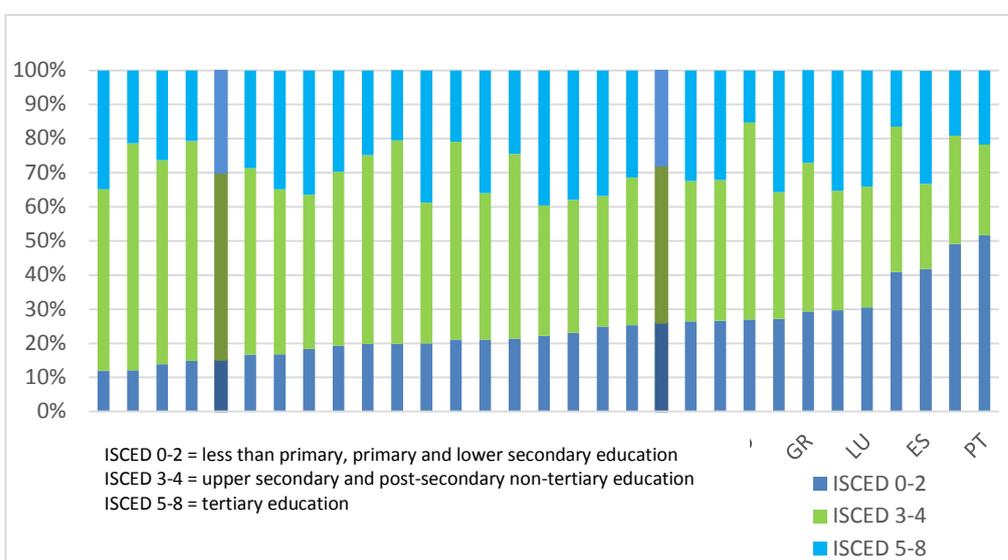
Regular recertification/evaluation is usually conducted by non-governmental certification centres in the relevant sector, such as Certification Centre of the Latvian Railwayman Society, Certification Commission of the Latvian Nurse Association. A total of 72 regulated professions, 170 specialities and 85 sub-specialities (2018) are currently covered by legislation (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006b). A list of regulated professions is available in the national database ⁽³⁾ hosted by the Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs*).

⁽³⁾ Database of regulated professions: <http://www.aic.lv/regdip/?lang=2>

1.5. Education attainment

Education attainment in Latvia is traditionally high (Figure 7). In 2017, the share of population aged up to 64 with upper secondary education including vocational education (ISCED levels 3 and 4) was 54.8% and it is the eight highest in the EU, following Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Germany. The share of population with tertiary education (30%) is higher than in EU-28 average (27.9%). The share of those with low or without a qualification (ISCED level 0-2) is 15.2% – the fifth lowest in the EU, following Lithuania, Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.

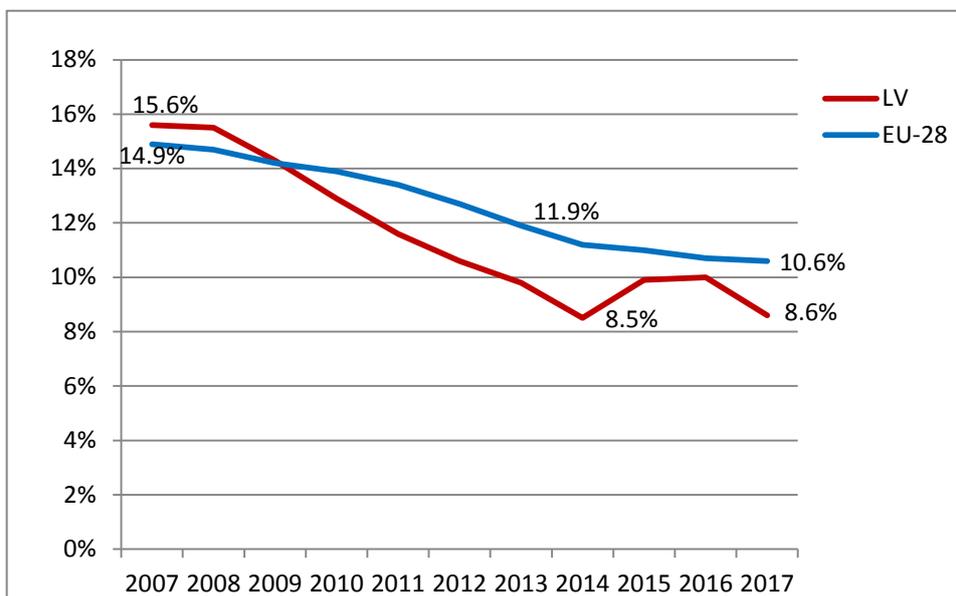
Figure 7. Population (aged 15 to 64) by educational attainment level in (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_ifs_9903] Last update: 20-04-2018 [extracted on 2.5.2018]

The share of early leavers from education and training has decreased from 15.6% in 2007 to 8.6% in 2017 (Figure 8). Since 2010, it is below the EU on average and since 2013, below the national objective (10%) for 2020.

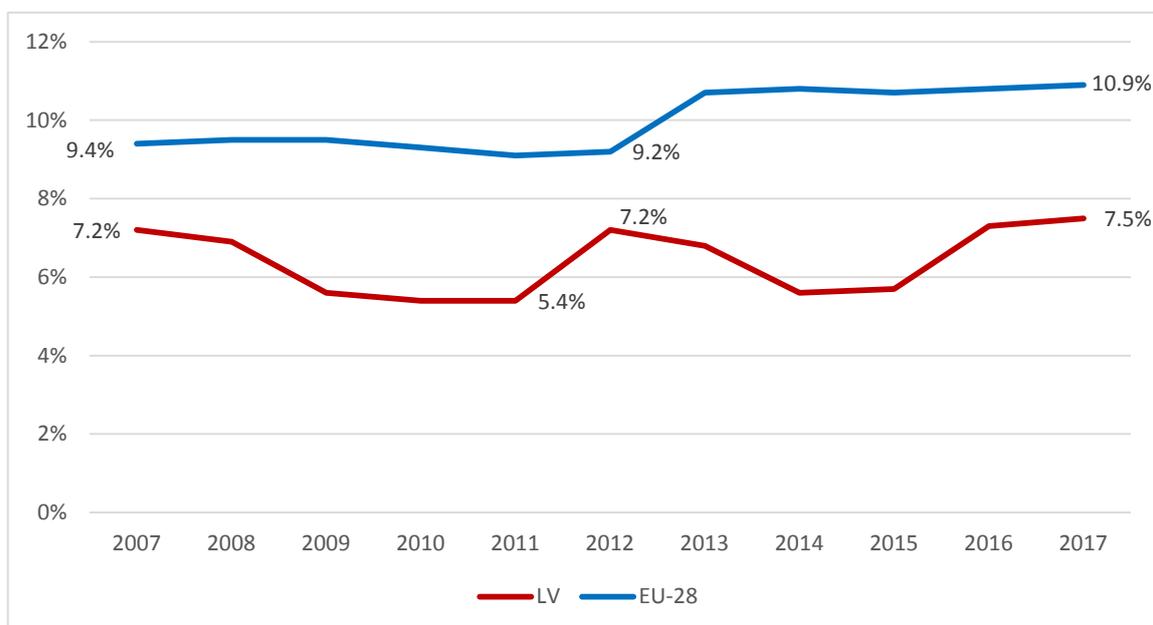
Figure 8. Early leavers from education and training in 2007-17, % of population aged 18 to 24



Source: Eurostat, sdg_04_10 [extracted on 2.5.2018].

Participation in lifelong learning (Figure 9) in 2007-17 fluctuated from 5.4% to 7.5% (in 2017). It is still below the EU average and far below the national objective (15%) for 2020.

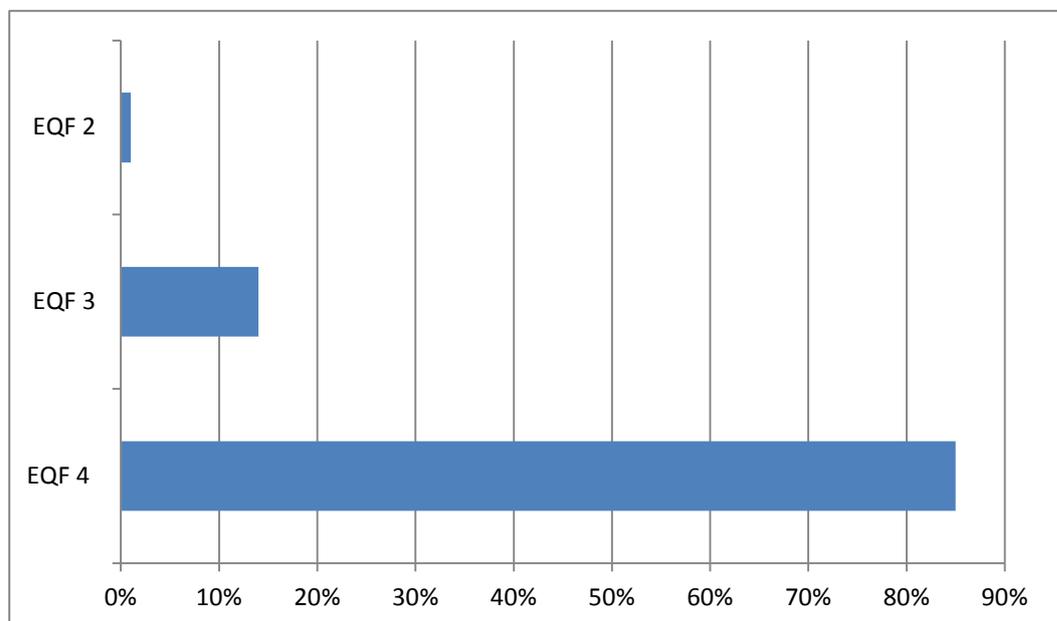
Figure 9. Participation in lifelong learning in 2007-17 % of population aged 25 to 64



Source: Eurostat sdg_04_60 [extracted on 2.5.2018].

In 2017/18, there were 28 528 vocational education learners, most of them (85%) were in EQF level 4 upper secondary programmes ⁽⁴⁾ (Figure 10).

Figure 10. VET learners by EQF level in 2017/18



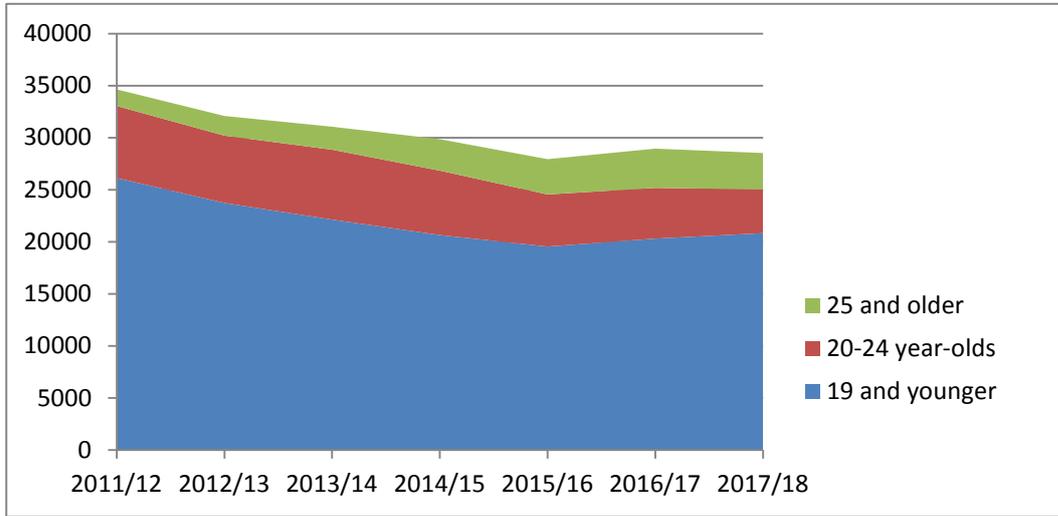
Source: CSB and MoES

From 2010 to 2017, there was a 19% decrease of vocational education students (excluding higher education). It is less than for general education (32% decrease) at upper secondary level (CSB, 2018).

The share of adults (aged 25 and above) in vocational education has doubled since 2011/12 and reached 12% of the total vocational education population in 2017/18 (Figure 11). This reflects changing needs of the labour market and widening offer of education opportunities for people aged 25+ supported by ESF funds.

⁽⁴⁾ EQF level 4 vocational education programmes include programmes types ISCED 354 and ISCED 453.

Figure 11. VET learners by age in 2011-17



Source: CSB

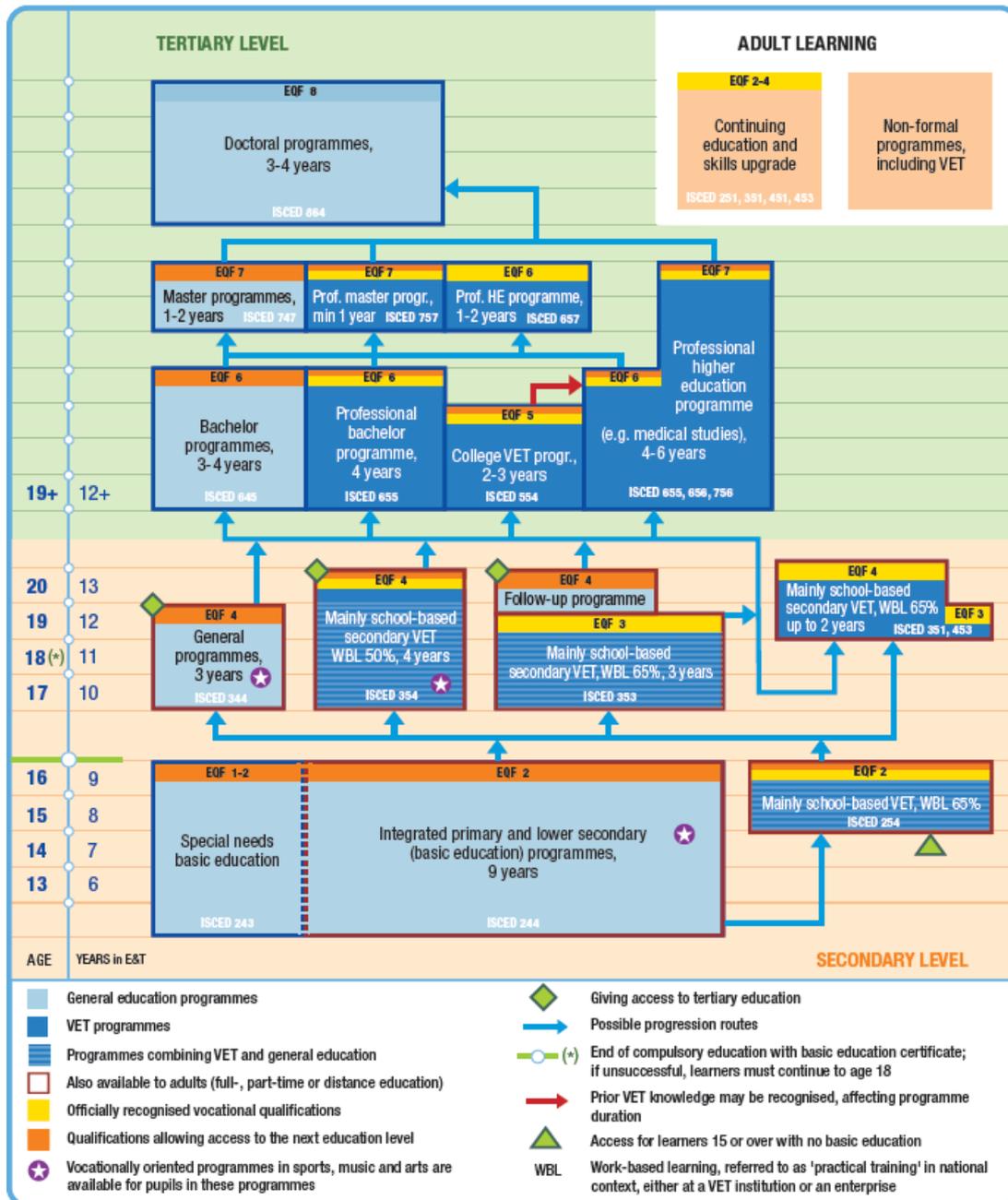
In past years, distribution of enrolled vocational education students between fields of study has varied only slightly. The most popular programmes in 2017 were in engineering, manufacturing and construction (35%) services (26%), humanities and arts (12%), social sciences, business and law (11%). Traditionally lesser part has been enrolled in programmes of health and welfare (7%), natural sciences, mathematics and information technologies (6%) and agriculture (4%).

CHAPTER 2.

Provision of VET

2.1. VET in Latvia's education system

Figure 12. VET in Latvia's education system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Latvia.

Education system comprises:

- (a) pre-school education (ISCED level 0);
- (b) integrated primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 1 and 2) (hereafter basic education);
- (c) upper secondary education (ISCED levels 3 and 4) (hereafter secondary education);
- (d) higher (tertiary) education (ISCED levels 5, 6, 7 and 8).

Pre-school education for five to six year-old children is compulsory. It is followed by nine years of compulsory basic education and three years of non-compulsory secondary education. Basic education is mainly general, however, vocational education is offered for learners with mental disabilities or without completed basic education. Secondary education can be acquired through general or vocational programmes. Higher (tertiary) education includes both academic and professional study programmes.

The Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) has eight levels corresponding to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (Cabinet of Ministers, 2017). Table 1 demonstrates placement of formal qualifications in the LQF. Vocational education qualifications are referenced at LQF/EQF levels 2-7.

Table 1. Latvian formal education qualifications and LQF/EQF levels

LQF/ EQF level	Latvian education documents (qualifications)
1	Certificate of general basic education (special education programmes for learners with (severe) mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)
2	Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education Certificate of professional qualification
3	Certificate of vocational education (<i>arodizglitiba</i> – without rights to enter higher education) Certificate of professional qualification
4	Certificate of general secondary education Diploma of vocational secondary education Certificate of professional qualification (without rights to enter higher education)
5	Diploma of first level professional higher education (first level professional higher (college) education; length of full-time studies two to three years)
6	Bachelor's diploma Professional bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (second level professional higher education, length of full-time studies – at least four years)
7	Master's diploma Professional master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (second level professional higher education, total length of full-time studies – at least five years).
8	Doctor's diploma Professional doctor's diploma in arts

Source: Cabinet of Ministers, 2017.

In line with amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) and to the corresponding regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2005a) certificates of vocational education and professional qualification should include the relevant LQF level since 2017.

In higher education, since 2013, diploma supplements include reference to LQF/EQF or European higher education area (EHEA) framework level. All LQF/EQF levels are also reflected in the diagram of the Latvian higher education system that is part of the diploma supplement (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013b).

2.2. Government-regulated VET provision

Initial vocational education is regulated by the State. The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) set the policy priorities – development of occupational standards, modular vocational education programmes and implementation of apprenticeship type scheme (nationally called ‘work-based learning’) – which are supported by the ESF projects.

The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) provides legal regulations and defines three levels of vocational education:

- (a) basic vocational education;
- (b) secondary vocational education;
- (c) professional higher education:
 - (i) first-level professional higher (college) education;
 - (ii) second-level professional higher (university) education.

2.2.1. Initial VET pathways

Vocational education providers offer programmes in all study fields. Vocational education programmes are mainly school-based, with practical learning periods at schools or enterprises. Since 2015, vocational education can be implemented also as an apprenticeship type scheme (nationally called ‘work-based learning’) with flexible curricula implementation taking place alternately at school and in enterprise. To acquire a qualification (at EQF levels 2 to 4), learners have to undergo qualification practice and take a State qualification exam at the end of the programme.

Vocational education institutions can be public (State, local government) and private. Institutions that provide vocational secondary education programmes and additionally act as regional methodological and further education centres and carry out validation of professional competences acquired outside formal education can obtain a status of ‘vocational education competence centre’ according to criteria established by the Cabinet of Ministers (2013a) (Daija, Z., Kinta, G., Ramina, B., 2014).

Students are admitted to public vocational schools according to annual enrolment plans. The Ministry of Education and Science collects, adjusts and transforms all school requests into enrolment plans regarding the proposals of the Sectoral Expert Councils. The plans are then endorsed by the National Tripartite Subcouncil for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment.

To prepare pupils for studies in vocational education programmes in arts, culture or sports, vocationally oriented education programmes are implemented concurrently with basic and secondary general education. They provide systematised knowledge and skills in the selected field, but do not lead to a professional qualification.

Since 2010, young people (aged 17 to 25) who have not taken part in subsidised training for two years may apply to participate in short (1 to 1.5 year) vocational education programmes within the ESF project coordinated by VIAA. Since 2012, also young people with a professional qualification, who are not (self-) employed, may enrol. Most programmes are secondary education programmes at EQF level 4. One-year programmes ensure mastering simple occupations of EQF level 3. Since 2014, these programmes have been available for young people (aged 17 to 29) in the youth guarantee framework.

(a) Basic vocational education programmes leading to EQF level 2 (ISCED 254)

Duration of basic vocational education programmes is one to three years and they are part of formal education. The main target groups are learners with intellectual disability and early leavers from compulsory basic education. Programmes are provided mainly by special education institutions/development centres or vocational education institutions. Young people (at least 15 years old) can enrol in such programmes regardless of their previous education. Share of learners in this programme type represents 1% of the total number of vocational education learners (in 2017). Work-based learning proportion is 65% including workshops at schools and in-company training. Programmes, which are based on learning outcomes, are elaborated by providers according to the national template ⁽⁵⁾ developed by VISC. They lead to a certificate of basic vocational education (*aplīcība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*), with professional qualification of EQF level 2 (such as cook's assistant, carpenter's assistant). It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Graduates can enter the labour market or progress to secondary level vocational education. Learning form is contact studies which can be implemented also as an apprenticeship type scheme. For early leavers without basic education additional general basic education courses can be offered for improving their general basic knowledge and better integration into the education process. Graduates who have passed general basic education exams have also access to secondary level general education.

(b) Secondary vocational education programmes leading to EQF level 3 (ISCED 353)

At secondary level, duration of vocational education (*arodizglītība*) programmes is three years and it is part of formal education. Main providers are vocational education schools. The main target group are young people after completion of basic education. Entry requirements are 15 years and basic education. Share of learners in this programme type is 5% of the total number

⁽⁵⁾ <https://visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/programmas.shtml>

of vocational education learners (in 2017). Work-based learning share is 65% including workshops at schools and in-company training. General study subjects are part of this programme type and their share is 60%. Content of these education programmes, which are elaborated by providers, is defined by the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000) and occupational standards ⁽⁶⁾ (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016d) and is based on learning outcomes. Learning form of this programme type is contact studies which can be implemented also as an apprenticeship type scheme.

Vocational education programmes lead to a certificate of vocational education (*atestāts par arodizglītību*) with professional qualification of EQF level 3 (such as cook, carpenter). It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Graduates can enter vocational secondary education. These programmes do not give the right to enter higher (tertiary) education directly. For admission to higher education a one-year intermediate general secondary education 'bridge programme' must be followed.

(c) Vocational secondary education programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 354)

Duration of vocational secondary education (*profesionālā vidējā izglītība*) programmes is four years and it is part of formal education. The main target group are young people after completing general basic education. Main providers are vocational education schools and some colleges. Entry requirements are age 15 years and basic education. Share of learners in this programmes type is 71% of the total number of vocational education learners (in 2017). Work-based learning share is 50% including workshops at schools and in-company training. General study subjects are compulsory part of this programme type and their share is 60%. Content of these programmes, which are elaborated by providers, is defined by the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000), occupational standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016g), and is based on learning outcomes. Vocational secondary education programmes lead to a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diplooms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) with professional qualification of EQF level 4 (such as car mechanic, electronic technician, mechanical engineering technician). It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Vocational secondary education students must also take State centralized exams in the following general study subjects: Latvian, mathematics, foreign language and one subject selected by the student. This provides students with a certificate of general secondary education (*vispārējās vidējās izglītības sertifikāts*) and the right to enter higher education.

⁽⁶⁾ Since 2016, in parallel to the occupational standards, Cabinet Regulations stipulate qualifications requirements and sectoral qualifications framework (SQF) descriptions. In further text, the term 'occupational standards' includes all the mentioned documents.

(d) One year secondary vocational education programmes leading to EQF level 3 (ISCED 351 or 453)

Duration of these vocational education (*arodizglītība*) programmes is one year and it is part of formal education. The main target group is young people. Main providers are vocational education schools. Entry requirements are age 17 and basic education (for programmes of ISCED 351) or secondary education (for programmes of ISCED 453 ⁽⁷⁾). Since 2014/15, these programmes have been offered to 17 to 29 year-olds with basic or secondary education in the 'youth guarantee initiative' using ESF support. Share of learners in this programmes type is 9% of the total number of vocational education learners (in 2017). Work-based learning share is 65% including workshops at schools and in-company training. General study subjects are not included. Content of programmes, which are elaborated by providers, is defined by the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000), occupational standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016g), and is based on learning outcomes. Short vocational education programmes (*arodizglītība*) (ISCED-P 351 or 453) lead to a certificate of professional qualification (*profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība*) of EQF level 3 (such as cook, electrician, dentist assistant). It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Graduates can enter labour market. Learning form of this programme type is mainly contact studies which can be implemented also as an apprenticeship type scheme however some programmes are offered in part-time form.

(e) One-and-half year vocational secondary education programmes leading to EQF level 4 (ISCED 453)

Duration of short vocational secondary education (*profesionālā vidējā izglītība*) programmes is one to one and a half years and it is part of formal education. The main target group is young people. Main providers are vocational education schools. Entry requirement is secondary education. Since 2014/15, programmes mainly of duration one-and-half year have been offered to 17 to 29 year-olds with secondary education in the 'youth guarantee initiative' using ESF support. Share of learners in this programmes type is 14% of the total number of vocational education learners (in 2017). Work-based learning share is 70% including workshops at schools and in-company training. General study subjects are not included. Content of programmes, which are elaborated by providers, is defined by the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000), occupational standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016g), and is based on learning outcomes. Short vocational secondary education programmes (ISCED-P 453) lead to a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diplooms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) with professional qualification of EQF level 4 (such as car mechanic, bookkeeper, dental technician). It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Graduates can enter labour market. Learning

⁽⁷⁾ Post-secondary education programmes, in contrast to what their name suggests, in Latvia belong to secondary education level.

form of this programme type is mainly contact studies which can be implemented also as an apprenticeship type scheme however several programmes are offered in part-time or distance learning form.

2.2.2. Professional higher education

Higher education programmes (see Annex 2) can be academic (lead to a degree) and professional (lead to a degree and/or professional qualification). More than two thirds of all higher education students study in professional higher education programmes that allow continuous progression from EQF levels 5 to 8 ⁽⁸⁾. In 2018, a new type of professional qualification – professional doctor’s degree in arts – was introduced (Saeima, 1995 with amendments in 2018). Higher education institutions, including colleges (*koledža*) provide full-time, part-time and distance studies at all levels. While universities provide a full range of professional programmes, colleges only offer first-level professional higher education programmes leading to qualifications of EQF level 5.

2.2.3. Adult learning programmes

Adult learning includes continuing vocational education and professional development programmes. Both programme types have been included in classification of the Latvian education system (Cabinet of Ministers, 2017), referenced to the LQF/EQF and, since 2014, also to ISCED (Table 2).

Table 2. Classification of continuing vocational education and professional development programmes

Programme	Stage of education	LQF/ EQF level	ISCED 2011-P
Continuing vocational education (480 hours)	Basic	2	251
Continuing vocational education after (non-) completed basic education (480 hours or more)		3	351
Professional development after (non-) completed basic education		2	351
Continuing vocational education after completed secondary education (640 hours or more)	Secondary	3 or 4	453
Professional development after completed secondary education		4	451

Source: Cabinet of Ministers, 2017; Saeima, 1999a.

⁽⁸⁾ Graduates of professional higher education programmes of EQF 7 have right to enrol doctoral studies (EQF level 8).

2.2.3.1. Continuing vocational education

Continuing vocational education programmes enable adults with previous education/work experience to acquire a professional qualification (Saeima, 1999a). Continuing vocational education and initial vocational education have the same legal and governance framework.

Similar to initial vocational education, students of continuing vocational education take a final qualification exam in accordance with procedures approved by the government (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c). Examinations are organised by the education provider in cooperation with National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības satura centrs*, VISC) to ensure that all graduates comply with the knowledge, skills and competences required for a profession. Social partners are involved in evaluating examination performance.

At least 30% of continuing vocational education programme content has to be based on the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000), occupational standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016g) and they are based on learning outcomes. These programmes lead to a certificate of professional qualification (*profesionālās kvalifikācijas apliecība*) of EQF level 2-4. It is possible to acquire such professional qualification through validation of prior learning. Graduates can enter labour market.

Programmes are always offered for a specific State-recognised qualification/profession:

- (a) for learners with vocational secondary or vocational education to acquire a professional qualification of EQF level 4 (e.g. bookkeeper), minimum duration of the programme is 960-1 280 hours depending on the field;
- (b) for those without a prior education requirement to acquire a professional qualification of EQF level 3 minimum duration of the programme is 480 or 640 hours depending on the field;
- (c) for those without a prior education requirement to acquire a professional qualification of EQF level 2 minimum duration of the programme is 480 hours.

All continuing vocational education programmes (480 hours or more) must be licensed and accredited by the State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*, IKVD). Providers mainly are private education centres offering full-time, part-time and extramural studies. Vocational education schools are encouraged to provide continuing education for adults and during last years the number of such activities is growing. Continuing vocational education providers cooperate with the public employment service (NVA) that procures training for the unemployed through its network of 28 regional offices. Since 2017, continuing education providers cooperate also with VIAA that procures training for the employed.

2.2.3.2. Professional development programmes

Professional development programmes (at least 160 hours) enable people regardless of their age and previous education or professional qualifications to master systematised professional knowledge and skills corresponding to requirements of the labour market. They do not lead to a formal qualification. Professional development programmes (160 hours or more) must be

licensed and providers must be accredited by the State Education Quality Service (Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests, IKVD). These programmes lead to a certificate of professional development education (profesionālās pilnveides izglītības apliecība) (Cabinet of Ministers, 2005b). Providers cooperate with the public employment service (NVA) that procures training for the unemployed through its network of 28 regional offices. Since 2017, there are professional development programmes for the employed which are financed by ESF with cofinancing of the state budget.

2.3. Other forms of training

2.3.1. Non-formal learning

Work-related knowledge, skills and competences can also be acquired through non-formal learning or short courses (e.g. automotive electrical equipment diagnostics, data analysis and reporting). They are provided by vocational education institutions, university continuing education departments and their local/distance learning centres, chambers of commerce, adult education centres, associations and private providers.

Providers of non-formal learning programmes (159 hours or less) must obtain a licence from local government. Public providers can offer non-formal learning programmes without a licence.

Providers cooperate with the public employment service (NVA) that procures training for the unemployed through its network of 28 regional offices. Since 2017, providers cooperate also with VIAA that procures training for the employed.

Enterprise-provided learning that assists employees in adapting to new tasks to guarantee/improve their careers is a type of non-formal learning, which provides an opportunity to acquire new skills and competences. Education providers (education centres in large enterprises or external (adult) education centres) can provide learning programmes in accordance with enterprise needs. Teachers can be employed by an education provider or may be directly contracted by employers to provide courses. It is usually the providers' responsibility to design their own education programmes. For certain regulated professions, other bodies may be consulted to ensure that relevant occupational standards are met. Quality of provision is not monitored otherwise.

Large enterprises ensure work-based learning for their employees at the enterprise. Generally, these learning activities focus on specific technical skills, such as performing dangerous work.

Meanwhile, many medium and small enterprises cannot provide such learning opportunities. Most enterprises (although mainly large) are ready to finance upskilling of their employees. Job rotation within the organisation is also used as a means of training.

2.3.2. Craftsmanship

Craftsmanship has existed since 1992, but is provided in a rather small scale in crafts. As defined in the Law on Crafts (Supreme Council, 1993), a 'craft apprentice' is a person, who has joined a crafts company or an education institution and signed a training contract. Craftsmanship is implemented separately from programmes in other education sectors and are not included in the national education classification (no relevant ISCED or EQF level). Only the Law on Crafts stipulates norms for craftsmanship and procedures for awarding craftsman qualifications (Daija, Z.; Ramina, B.; Seikstule, I., 2014).

Craftsmanship programmes lead to journeyman (*amata zella diploms*) and master of crafts (*amata meistara diploms*) qualifications.

Craftsmanship programme includes learning at workplace followed by a journeyman and master of crafts exams organised by the Chamber of Crafts. The chamber has signed cooperation agreements with several vocational schools that provide acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Thus, craftsmanship programmes include school- and enterprise-based learning. The proportion between school- and enterprise-based learning is not defined.

The chamber supervises training and registers craftsmen, journeymen and craft apprentices, crafts companies and crafts master workshops in its database. It also issues licences that give people a right to train craft apprentices, a right that craftsmen have by default.

Young people are admitted to craftsmanship programmes regardless of their previous education, but not earlier than the year in which they turn 16 (unless they have permission from a parent or guardian). Persons can become craft apprentices if they find a teaching-master. Craft apprentices have to attend an education course on crafts history provided by the chamber. Craftsmanship programmes are designed by the relevant professional association and approved by the council of the Chamber of Crafts. Duration of programmes is set by craft associations – on average three years. Craft apprentices can often receive remuneration from the second year of craftsmanship paid by the crafts master or the company.

2.4. VET governance

Most vocational education providers are governed by the State, which is the Ministry of Education and Science in most cases. Others are under responsibility of the ministries of culture, welfare and interior. There are also vocational education schools established (or taken over from the State) by local government and private ones.

The VET system is governed by the following State institutions:

- (a) Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) defines policies and strategies for vocational education and sets procedures for: development of occupational standards, organisation of work placements/apprenticeship scheme, and professional qualification exams. It also regulates mandatory documents for VET provision, list of mandatory occupational

- standards, activities of Sectoral Expert Councils, examination centre quality assurance, sets the criteria for issuing State-recognised qualifications and recognising foreign qualifications, sets price list for validation of informal and non-formal learning, grants the status of 'vocational education competence centre' to providers, as well as sets the procedure for the distributing the State budget earmarked subsidies for teachers' salaries;
- (b) Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) develops the framework regulations for vocational education. The ministry proposes allocation of funds from the State budget and finances the vocational education providers it has established. The ministry also organises implementation of career education, ensures validation of informal and non-formal learning, approves regulations and appoints heads of vocational education institutions under its responsibility;
 - (c) other ministries (culture, welfare and interior) develop proposals for allocation of funds for financing vocational education schools under their responsibility and organise continuing professional development for teachers. The ministries also organise continuing vocational education for adults and professional development and training for the unemployed. They cooperate with the MoES on designing occupational standards, ensuring quality assurance and other issues;
 - (d) National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības saturs centrs*, VISCS) under the supervision of MoES develops content of basic, secondary and continuing vocational education, professional development and vocationally oriented education. It develops the content and procedures for State exams and coordinates development of study materials in line with the State vocational education standards. The centre also coordinates development of occupational standards and professional development of vocational teachers;
 - (e) State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*, IKVD) under the supervision of MoES licenses general and vocational education programmes (EQF level 1-4). It also ensures quality assurance of vocational (except professional higher) education, coordinates validation of informal and non-formal learning (EQF level 2-4), and since 2013 coordinates implementation of the common European quality assurance for VET (EQAVET) in Latvia;
 - (f) State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra*, VIAA) under the supervision of MoES promotes development and implementation of education policy (including continuing education) by acting as the liaison body involved in management and ex post monitoring of EU funds, introducing EU programmes, supporting development of career education policy, arranging national-level professional skills competitions and ensuring participation in international competitions. Since 2014, VIAA coordinates actions of four national experts nominated by MoES to promote the European credit system for VET (ECVET) and ease its implementation in Latvia;
 - (g) Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*, MoW) is responsible for labour market policy development, including training interventions;

- (h) State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, NVA) under the supervision of MoW implements labour market policy, including programmes for the unemployed;
- (i) local governments participate in the implementation of vocational education by managing their own schools. They promote business development in their territory, cooperate with employer organisations and help students finding work placements.
- (j) Social dialogue and strategic cooperation is arranged (at institutional level) through the National Tripartite Subcouncil for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*), founded in 2000 by the ministries (Welfare, Economy, Finance, Justice, Agriculture, Education and Science, Regional Development and Local Government Affairs), the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, and the Employers' Confederation of Latvia. The tasks of the subcouncil are to:
 - i. review policy proposals and draft legal norms for vocational education, human resource development and employment;
 - ii. evaluate and propose changes in management, funding and implementation of vocational education;
 - iii. endorse occupational standards;
 - iv. endorse annual student enrolment plans prepared by Sectoral Expert Councils.
- (k) Employment Council (*Nodarbinātības padome*) consists of three ministers – Minister of Economics, Minister of Education and Science, and Minister of Welfare (established in 2016). Employment Council was established with a goal to solve not only the tasks identified by each individual ministry, but to jointly address the labour market, education quality issues and the impact of demographic trends on a wider scale.
- (l) Twelve Sectoral Expert Councils (*Nozaru ekspertu padomes*), founded in 2011. Their main functions are to propose solutions for long-term human resources development in their respective sectors and ensure that vocational education provision is in line with labour market needs. This includes participation in development of sectoral qualifications frameworks (SQFs), occupational standards, education programmes, quality assessment procedures, work placements, apprenticeships scheme, etc. Councils prepare and submit vocational education enrolment plans to the MoES. Representatives from the MoES, Ministry of Economics, Employers' Confederation and Free Trade Union Confederation are also involved in the councils. Representatives from the MoW and NVA can also participate in council meetings. In 2015, the Councils' role and functions were included in the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a). In 2016, new regulations stipulating operation of Councils were approved by the Cabinet of Ministers (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016c).
- (m) Collegial advisory bodies – Conventions – established at each vocational education institution since 2015. Employers or representatives of employers' organisations, as well as the representatives from local government and supervising ministry are involved in the Conventions to make proposals in relation to the development strategy of education institution, as well as contribute to its cooperation with the local enterprises in order to

ensure students' work placements outside school and apprenticeship scheme opportunities (Saeima, 1999a).

The establishing legal framework for employers' participation in developing vocational education (Cedefop, 2015) is result of recent policy initiatives.

2.5. VET funding

Procedures for financing vocational education are stipulated by the Education and Vocational Education Laws (Saeima, 1998; 1999a).

Education institutions are financed from the State budget, local government budget or private funding according to their ownership (Table 3). State budget allocations for vocational education programmes are calculated per student.

Table 3. Sources of vocational education funding

School affiliation	Teacher salary	Fixed expenses (*)	Non-fixed expenses (**)
State	SB	SB	SB
Local government	SB	LGB or SB	LGB or SB (except teacher salary)
Private	PF/SB	PF	PF

SB: State budget; LGB: local government budget; PF: private funding.

* Missions, services, energy and water, learning aid, equipment.

** Scholarships, maintenance of dormitories, rehabilitation, catering, practice placements, insurance, culture education and sports, salary.

Source: ReferNet Latvia.

Salaries of teachers in State and local government education institutions (including pre-schools) are paid from the State budget. Local governments may supplement salaries of teachers. For private schools implementing accredited basic, secondary and higher education programmes the State can also finance salaries of teachers.

There are fixed and non-fixed costs (Cabinet of Ministers, 2007) covered by the government, for example:

- (a) allowances (scholarships);
- (b) student residence maintenance;
- (c) rehabilitation and catering services for students with special needs;
- (d) culture education and sports activities;
- (e) practical training in enterprises;
- (f) accident insurance for practical training in enterprises;
- (g) salary of employees (wages and employer's State social insurance contributions).

In higher education, the State covers fees for a certain number of negotiated study places for students with good grades. Students with lower achievements or willing to enrol in a non-subsidised field of study (with a surplus of students/graduates) may be charged a tuition

fee. Local governments may charge a fee in municipal sports and music vocational education schools.

Education institutions may simultaneously implement education programmes funded from different sources.

According to the Education Law (Saeima, 1998), adult education may be financed from State and local government budgets, employers' resources, students' fees, donations and other sources. Some local governments allocate a fixed percentage to adult education from their budget. Important sources of funding are EU, Norwegian and Swiss financial assistance instruments, including Structural Funds and Erasmus+ that have helped creating more learning opportunities for adults through various projects.

According to Eurostat data, the education budget has decreased from 6.7% of GDP in 2009 to 5.5% in 2016 ⁽⁹⁾ (in EU-28 accordingly from 5.3% in 2009 to 4.7% in 2016). The budget for vocational education institutions under responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science increased from EUR 54.07 million in 2011 to EUR 70.36 million in 2018 (Saeima, 2017),

In addition, other resources (including EU funds) have been allocated to development of the VET system. For example, in 2009-15, EUR 163.6 million and in 2016-23, EUR 89.07 million has been invested in modernisation of equipment and infrastructure. Schools also use their own revenues to finance their activities.

In 2014-20, the Operational Programme 'Growth and employment' supports employees' skills development at the request of the companies to promote the introduction of innovations in enterprises. Different sectoral associations implement employees' training projects cofinanced by EU funds. The Latvian Information and communications technology association (*Latvijas Informācijas un komunikācijas tehnoloģiju asociācija*), the Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Latvijas Tirdzniecības un rūpniecības kamera*) and the Investment and Development Agency (*Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra*) receive EU funds support and coordinate implementation of human resources development projects of companies in ICT, non-technologies (business management, quality assurance and management, project management) and in attracting investors.

The NVA coordinates learning activities for the unemployed (including those at risk of unemployment or at the request of the company) cofinanced by EU funds.

According to the plan for implementation of adult education (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016a), VIAA implements a national ESF project on improvement of professional competence of the employed in cooperation with local governments, addressing the employed aged at least 25. Activities include – among others – professional vocational continuing education,

⁽⁹⁾ Eurostat: General government expenditure by function (COFOG) [gov_10a_exp] Last update: 16-05-2018⁽¹⁰⁾ See <https://cvvp.nva.gov.lv/#/pub/pakalpojumi/prognozes/> [accessed 17.8.2018].

professional development, non-formal learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

2.6. Teachers and trainers

The term 'trainer' is not used in the Latvian vocational education. Teachers provide both theory and practical learning at school. Every vocational education teacher can work in initial and continuing vocational education at basic and secondary education levels.

Vocational education teachers:

- (a) implement education programmes according to the State vocational education standards and occupational standards and foster creativity and independence of learners;
- (b) develop syllabi (to be approved by heads of vocational education institutions);
- (c) apply new ideas, technologies and methods in the learning process;
- (d) assess knowledge and skills of learners.

Government regulations set requirements for initial education and professional qualification of teachers and procedure for improving their professional competences (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018b). In addition, teachers are required to undertake at least 36 hours of professional development every three years.

Teachers of vocational subjects must have a professional qualification minimum of either tertiary education in a relevant field (such as engineering) or may be in the process of completing studies (have acquired at least 240 hours) or vocational secondary education (EQF level 4) or master of crafts qualification.

Their professional qualification must be complemented by teaching competences acquired either in: tertiary teachers' education or a teaching-competence development course (72 hours offered by a higher education institution) or in their tertiary education programme, courses in pedagogy were at least of 80 hours.

Teachers of vocational subjects in special needs education institutions providing vocational basic education programmes must have a tertiary education in pedagogy and special education teaching qualification and teaching qualification in relevant subject or module.

The requirement for teaching competences does not apply to vocational subjects teachers with less than 360 teaching hours per year.

In-company trainers involved in providing apprenticeship type scheme must have (as of January 2019) a master of crafts qualification, vocational education or at least three years of relevant work experience and have acquired 72-hour teaching competence-development course or special 32-hour teaching competence-development course for in-company trainers of apprenticeships (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016b).

Teachers of general study subjects in vocational education must have a minimum of either:

- (a) tertiary education in education and a teaching qualification in the particular subject or masters'/doctor's degree in education;
- (b) tertiary education in the relevant field of science and either a teaching qualification in a particular subject (may be in the process of completing) or working under supervision of teacher-mentor for no longer than one year at one school (until 2022).

Most vocational education teachers have higher education. With the decrease of vocational education institutions since 2010/11, number of vocational education teachers has decreased by 12%. At the same time, the share of teachers with tertiary education increased from 91% to 93%. (For more information see: Daija, Z.; Kinta, G.; Ramina, B., 2016).

Requirements for higher education lecturers/professors, including college teachers' education and qualifications are stipulated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995 with amendments in 2018).

In terms of Erasmus+ project TTT4WBL 'Testing New Approaches to Training VET and Workplace Tutors for Work Based Learning' (2017-20) implemented by VISC and MoES the tandem training approach is piloted with half of the trainees (teachers) coming from a vocational school and half – from an enterprise. In such a way the competence of WBL teacher/trainer/mentor is co-created in exchange process. After the piloting phase, similar systemic approaches might be considered.

CHAPTER 3.

Shaping VET qualifications

3.1. Anticipating skills needs

Responsibility for providing labour market forecasts rests with the Ministry of Economics (*Ekonomikas ministrija*) and NVA.

The Ministry of Economics produces medium- and long-term forecasts. It set up an advisory council for labour market forecasting (*Darba tirgus prognozēšanas konsultatīvā padome*) – a platform for dialogue between representatives of the State, employers, employees and local governments.

The report with medium- and long-term labour market forecasts (Ministry of Economics, 2018c) include an overview of labour supply and demand, and educational areas, levels and progression routes (including vocational education) of the labour force. The data as well as annual proposals of Sectoral Expert Councils are used by the Ministry of Education and Science to plan vocational education provision including numbers of potential students and types of programmes.

According to a report on labour market medium- and long-term forecasts (Ministry of Economics, 2018c), the highest rise of three quarters in labour market force demand until 2025 is expected in manufacturing industry and transport and storage. Almost two thirds of the increase will be in education, State administration and information and communication services. The demand is expected to decrease in traditional sectors such as agriculture. As a result, demand for highly qualified specialists (with higher and vocational secondary education) will increase rapidly. In the agriculture and forestry sector, similar to the EU average, the number of the employees in the sector will decrease. In the future, the demand for labour force in the construction sector will gradually increase. The fastest increase in the number of employees is expected in the commercial services sectors. The growth of the commercial services sector will be driven mainly by the development of other sectors of the economy and the growing demand for outsourcing. In the long-term, the fastest increase in demand is expected in services and manufacturing, as well as in trade and transport.

The NVA carries out short-term labour market forecasts and has created corresponding online tool ⁽¹⁰⁾. It also conducts employers' express surveys once a year to anticipate changes in structure of the labour force. The surveys aim at clarifying reasons for changes in demand and supply for occupations. Their results are used to adjust the education offer for the unemployed. In 2016, the NVA, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, has started a

⁽¹⁰⁾ See <https://cvvp.nva.gov.lv/#/pub/pakalpojumi/prognozes/> [accessed 17.8.2018].

national level ESF project 'Development of labour market forecasting system' including creating the pre-emptive system of labour market changes. The system will provide information on skills and professions in the short-, medium- and long-term, as well as information on learning opportunities. Active labour market policy measures will be evaluated and the offer of vocational education programmes will be based on the outcomes of skills forecast. Furthermore, the interpretation of labour market forecasts should be broadened by involving Sectoral Expert Councils and education institutions in this process, as well as by creating regional forums for more precise identification of labour market needs at regional level, etc.

In 2017, to start a national level ESF project 'Competence development of employed persons', the Management Board of Adult Education (which includes representatives from relevant ministries, social partners' organisations and regional governments) in close cooperation with Sectoral Expert Councils defined learning areas, i.e. education programmes in four sectors of the economy (construction; timber industry; electronic and optical equipment manufacturing, information and communication technologies; as well as in metalworking), in which – regarding the forecasts of the Ministry of Economics – the greatest shortage of skilled workers has been stated at present.

The Central Statistical Bureau (*Centrālā statistikas pārvalde*, CSB) conducts a labour force survey four times per year and collects data on education levels, employment by type of economic activity and occupation.

Data on higher education institutions' and vocational education providers' graduates are collected by the institutions themselves and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science and to the CSB for further analysis and publication. According to the respective legislation (Saeima, 1995), higher education institutions have to ensure that information about graduates' employment is collected and analysed. Various aspects of graduates' professional activities are also explored in the labour force and profession survey and other small-scale studies conducted by the CSB.

Sectoral Expert Councils and Conventions of vocational schools provide feedback to vocational education at sectoral and regional levels respectively (Saeima, 1999a).

3.2. Designing qualifications

Vocational education programmes are designed in line with the State education and occupational standards or qualification requirements (if occupation does not have a standard) and sectoral qualifications frameworks.

Content of vocational education programmes is defined by State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000). The standards include strategic aims, basic principles, mandatory content, ratio of theory and practice and evaluation procedures. Vocational education providers also ensure that specific skills and competences required in the

occupational standards/professional qualification requirements are included in the programmes they offer. To respond to high youth unemployment, State vocational education standards were amended to introduce short vocational education programmes for 17 to 29 year-olds (one to one and a half year, EQF level 3 and 4). Previously such programmes lasted two years. Implementation of short programmes is supported by an ESF project in the youth guarantee initiative framework and coordinated by VIAA. Programmes were agreed with the National Tripartite Subcouncil for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment.

Occupational standards and professional qualification requirements were elaborated by designated working groups comprising representatives of ministries, local governments, employers, employees, chamber of commerce and industry, NGOs and vocational education providers. The standards were endorsed by the National Tripartite Subcouncil for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment, and reviewed at least once every five years (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016d). Since 2007, occupational standards have to include professional competence, namely necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain work situations. In 2010-15, key occupational standards in 14 sectors were aligned with recent labour market needs and this process has been continued in 2016-21 using ESF support. In April 2018, 15 sectoral qualifications frameworks were officially approved, marking an agreement between educators and employers on qualifications required by the labour market (Cedefop, 2018). The sectoral qualifications frameworks serve as guidelines for developing occupational standards and implementing vocational education programmes, including modules leading to specialisations.

The new modular approach for vocational education programmes (Cedefop, 2013a) includes use of learning outcomes, relevant teaching/learning methods and indicators of achievement. In 2017, the amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) set the legal framework for modularization of vocational education programmes – modules are defined as parts of professional qualifications and are based on learning outcomes as an assessed and approved set of knowledge, skills and competences. Modular vocational education programmes lead to qualifications of EQF levels 2-4 and their professional content consists of a set of modules. After completing one or several modules recognizable in the labour market, but not proving acquisition of a qualification, vocational schools will have to issue a new type of certificate indicating the programme, module/-s, achieved learning outcomes and their assessment. In 2017, modules have been included in the State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000).

Qualification exams (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c) that consist of theoretical and practical parts are designed in line with both occupational and State vocational education standards. Representatives from relevant sectoral organisations participate in the examination process.

3.3. Quality assurance

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for policies and strategies to ensure accessibility and quality of education.

Quality is assured through:

- (a) elaboration of education policy;
- (b) registration and accreditation of education providers;
- (c) licensing and accreditation of education programmes;
- (d) supervising the education process.

The further development of quality monitoring system is among the priorities of vocational education policy. A principle of accreditation ensures each programme's content meets required standards of vocational education provided by public (State, local government) and private institutions (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016e). It also increases transparency of education provision and fosters recognition of Latvian qualifications abroad. IKVD among other functions organises licensing and accreditation of vocational education programmes, and accreditation of vocational education providers and examination centres ⁽¹¹⁾ of State, local government and private entities.

A licence is permission to implement a particular programme that meets all requirements of State education and occupational standards or professional qualification requirements. Providers must ensure proper infrastructure and equipment, and if necessary, obtain an agreement from the relevant professional association. The licence is issued for an indefinite period by IKVD.

Accreditation is the evaluation of the performance of the relevant education provider and/or the quality of implementation of the education programme. As a result of accreditation, education provider obtains a right for two to six years to issue a State-recognised qualification for a particular programme. In an accreditation process, quality of implementation of the relevant education programme is evaluated against criteria aligned to EQAVET. For example, when accrediting vocational education programmes (EQF level 2-4), the following areas of criteria are assessed:

- (e) content of education – education programmes implemented by institution;
- (f) teaching and learning;
- (g) learners' achievements;
- (h) support to learners;
- (i) environment of institution;
- (j) resources of institution;
- (k) work organisation, management and quality assurance of institution.

⁽¹¹⁾ Examination centre is an accredited commercial company or association in arranging professional qualification exams, which does not implement education programmes (Saeima, 1999).

When describing these criteria, vocational education institutions should include information on the following EQAVET indicators: teachers participating in continuing education; participation rate in vocational education programmes; completion rate in vocational education programmes; graduates' employment; use of acquired skills at the workplace; percentage of participants in vocational education classified as disadvantaged groups; identification of demand for vocational education programmes in the labour market; and increasing accessibility to vocational education programmes (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016e).

All public continuing vocational education programmes (480 hours or more) and professional development programmes (160 hours or more) must be licensed and accredited by IKVD. Providers of professional development programmes (159 hours or less) must obtain a licence from local government. Public providers can offer non-formal learning programmes without a licence.

Only accredited local governments' and private vocational education institutions may apply for State funding for continuing vocational education, professional development and vocationally oriented education programmes. During the licensing or accreditation process, IKVD hires external experts and representatives of sectoral NGOs and employers to evaluate the programmes' compliance with State education standards, occupational standards or professional qualification requirements and other regulations. All experts have specific knowledge of the accreditation process.

VISC ensures development of content for vocational education (except higher education) in compliance with State vocational education standards (see Section 2.2.5). It also ensures development and implementation of a uniform content of vocational education State examinations, coordinates development of study aids complying with State general and vocational education standards, and coordinates teachers' professional development.

The Higher Education Council (*Augstākās izglītības padome*) is responsible for quality assurance of higher (including professional) education. The council takes decisions on accreditation of higher education institutions in general and submits them to the Ministry of Education and Science for approval.

Since 2012, study fields (including all programmes of the same field) undergo joint quality assurance. Since 2015, quality assurance of higher education institutions/colleges and study fields, and licensing of study programmes is organised by the Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs, AIC*) – Quality Agency for Higher Education (*Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes aģentūra*). The AIC develops and complies with the methodologies and procedures for external quality assessment of higher education institutions/colleges and study fields in line with the standards and guidelines developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Quality Assurance Board carries out strategic management and planning for organizing accreditation of higher education institutions/colleges and study areas in the AIC and decides on the accreditation of a higher education institution/college.

The decision on the accreditation of the study field is taken by the study accreditation committee.

AIC maintains the register of study fields – a public portal ⁽¹²⁾ that includes information on higher education programmes and quality assurance of institutions and study fields. AIC implements an ESF project ‘Support for fulfilling requirements of EQAR agency’ (2016-19). Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA) became a full-fledged member of ENQA in July 2018, and a new e-platform for quality assurance is developed.

3.4. Recognition of prior learning

System for validation of prior learning (EQF levels 2-4) was launched in 2011 after amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a). Accredited education providers and examination centres with an IKVD permit carry out the validation process according to the government regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011b).

The validation procedure includes the following steps:

- (a) submission of application;
- (b) consultation (free of charge) on requirements of relevant occupational standard or professional qualification requirements and the exam procedure.
- (c) professional qualification exam (for a fee);
- (d) certification of professional qualification.

Since 2017, ESF support is used to compensate the cost of the qualification exam both for the unemployed and employed. After successfully passed the exam, a certificate of a professional qualification (EQF level 2-4) is issued according to government regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c). The qualification gives access to labour market.

For higher education, the validation procedure and criteria were approved in 2012 following amendments of 2011 to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995). Knowledge, skills and competences acquired in previous learning may be validated according learning outcomes of study course or module (for regulated occupations – only in theoretical course or module) while learning outcomes acquired through professional experience may only be recognised in a practical course or module of the study programme (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018a).

⁽¹²⁾ See <http://svr.aic.lv/Form.aspx?id=contacts> [accessed 17.8.2018].

CHAPTER 4.

Promoting participation in VET

4.1. Incentives for VET learners, education providers and enterprises

Attractiveness of initial vocational education and reduction of early leaving from education are national policy priorities.

The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) foresee preventive and compensatory actions, including:

- (a) promoting youth involvement in leisure and extracurricular activities that increases the interest in the practical areas and facilitates skills development;
- (b) providing scholarships for vocational education students;
- (c) conducting a study on reasons for leaving education early;
- (d) implementing initial vocational education programmes in the youth guarantee initiative framework;
- (e) identifying young NEETs and involving them in education.

Unlike general education students, vocational education students receive a monthly allowance according to government regulations on scholarships (Cabinet of Ministers, 2004). Students in public vocational education programmes receive State allowance which amounts to between EUR 10 and 150 per month depending on performance. Orphans/children without parental care (not in care institutions or foster families) and best performers in studies or school social activities receive a higher allowance.

From 17 to 29 year-old students of short programmes in the youth guarantee initiative have an opportunity to receive ESF cofinanced scholarships per month up to EUR 70-115.

Tax incentives for individuals are also available and regulated by Law on Personal Income Tax (Saeima, 1993). The Law was amended to introduce, as of January 2017, tax exemption of apprenticeship scholarships not exceeding EUR 280 per month.

Since 2018, individuals may request the State Revenue Service (*Valsts ieņēmumu dienests*) to reduce their taxable income by amounts of their education (and medical) expenses up to a maximum of EUR 600 per year, including expenses paid for brothers/sisters/children under 24 years of age (Saeima, 1993). The revenue service is also responsible for monitoring use of tax incentives. Recent statistics, however, do not include all claims, as expenses may be claimed up to three years after they have been incurred.

For taxation purposes 'education' is understood as participation in:

- (a) State-accredited education programmes (including higher and vocational education);
- (b) EU/European economic area occupational learning;
- (c) skills or qualification development;

(d) interest education for children under 18 years of age.

Tertiary (including professional) education students can apply for two types of study loans to cover tuition fees and costs of living. Loans are offered by selected banks (or other credit institutions) and are State-guaranteed (Saeima, 1995).

The Employers' Confederation of Latvia started a national level ESF project (2017-23) on vocational education students' involvement in apprenticeship and work placements. Enterprises, vocational schools and students receive a financial support while implementing the project.

4.2. Guidance and counselling

The Education Law (Saeima, 1998) stipulates local governments' responsibility for provision of career education for children and youth, students' right to receive career guidance and counselling; responsibilities of heads of education institutions for ensuring access to career development services. The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) determines responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science for introducing guidance and counselling in vocational education.

The present career development support system has been in place since 2006. It was launched by a Ministry of Welfare policy paper on improving career guidance (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006a). The paper covers all aspects of lifelong guidance including the mechanisms to ensure better cooperation and coordination between key stakeholders at different levels. The development of career education and widening access to individual career services in a lifelong learning context is also one of policy priorities set by the education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) and is implemented with support from public and EU funds.

In 2007, the national guidance and counselling forum (*Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas sadarbtības padome*) was established. It gathers policy-makers from the relevant ministries, guidance providers, social partners and users. The forum proposes changes at national and local levels, thus, contributing to development of guidance and counselling policy and system. It also cooperates with the Latvian delegation to the European lifelong guidance policy network.

The provision of career education is one of the criteria for assessing quality in general and vocational education schools (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016e). Vocational education competence centres should provide individual career counselling and support measures for career education to help students acquire career management skills (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013a).

VIAA represents Latvia in the Euroguidance network and supports implementation of career education policy within the education sector.

The agency develops methodological materials for career guidance practitioners working at schools and guidance materials for young people and adults. VIAA also organises seminars for practitioners, since 2012, organises a 'career week' in big cities for young people including visits at enterprises and meeting representatives of different occupations, organizes participation of young professionals in international level competitions – EuroSkills and WordSkills – in which Latvian teams have competed successfully since 2010 and 2011 respectively, and since 2017 organizes SkillsLatvia – the largest national professional skills competition for vocational education learners. The agency also maintains and updates an education opportunities database ⁽¹³⁾ with information about general, vocational and higher education providers and programmes, as well as information about non-formal learning opportunities. VIAA also offers a website ⁽¹⁴⁾ which informs about the world of work.

According to the Support Law for Unemployed Persons and Persons Seeking Employment (Saeima, 2002), NVA's functions imparts ensuring free career advice for the unemployed, job-seekers or other persons and developing career counselling methods and career guidance information.

NVA provides group and individual career consultations. Counselling methods depends on client's needs. The first meeting in individual career consultation is devoted to clarifying aims of the consultation and selecting the most appropriate working method, which may be focused on exploring professional interests, vocational aptitude, or exploring clients' knowledge, skills/competences and values. If need be, psychological support is ensured (client resource assessment to show their strengths for a successful future life planning) terms. The NVA web portal www.nva.gov.lv section 'Career services' ⁽¹⁵⁾ informs about job searching and career decision making, it includes descriptions of occupations, education opportunities, self-assessment tests.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995), students have a right to receive information on issues regarding their studies and potential careers. Higher education institutions have designated career centres that provide information on education and career opportunities.

In the private and NGO sectors, provision of guidance services is underdeveloped, but there are some promising initiatives. An example is the youth consultation web portal ⁽¹⁶⁾ (since 2008), which is considered the largest in Latvia informing on career and education issues.

⁽¹³⁾ See www.niid.lv [accessed 17.8.2018].

⁽¹⁴⁾ See www.profesijupasaule.lv [accessed 17.8.2018].

⁽¹⁵⁾ See Karjeras pakalpojumi, <http://www.nva.gov.lv/karjera> [accessed 18.7.2018]

⁽¹⁶⁾ See www.prakse.lv [accessed 18.7.2018].

4.3. Key challenges and development opportunities

Latvia has already reached most of its targets for Europe 2020 Strategy (employment, early school leaving and tertiary education attainment rate). Vocational education policy aims to increase the share of vocational learners by offering them better future work opportunities and updating the curriculum according to the needs of labour market. Yet, challenges remain.

Promoting participation in vocational education is one of challenges outlined in the Latvian national reform programme for implementation of EU 2020 strategy. Regardless of past investments in modernisation of vocational schools and reform, basic school graduates prefer general education. This relates with results of recent public opinion survey ⁽¹⁷⁾ which shows that general education has a more positive image than VET. Furthermore, the perception of the VET image is narrowed to the widespread opinion that VET is mainly for students of lower academic performance, and does not relate to respondents' own views on the greater benefits of VET than general education in the world of work. VET labour market outcomes in Latvia are perceived controversially. Therefore, feedback loops for VET should be developed and potential of career guidance/education especially at lower secondary education level should be used to greater extent regarding information on labour market needs and labour market outcomes of education.

Another challenge is developing the adult education system as the participation of adults in further education is low. The 2014-20 adult education policy initiatives and a new national adult education cooperation model were discussed with stakeholders. As a result, the implementation plan of Adult education governance model for 2016-20 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016a) was created. It foresees creating cohesive and sustainable adult education system, shared and specific responsibilities, interaction of sectoral policies and improving adult education access and quality. The plan encourages employers' active cooperation with vocational education institutions and eases employees' participation in continuing education by introducing incentives. The plan also addresses the current lack of statistics on the non-formal adult education sector and learning taking place at enterprises.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Forthcoming: Daija Z., Krastina L., Rutkovska S. Cedefop European Public Opinion Survey on Vocational Education and Training – analysis of the Latvian data sample.

List of abbreviations

AIC	Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs [Academic Information Centre]
AIKA	Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes aģentūra [Quality Agency for Higher Education]
CSB	Centrālā statistikas pārvalde [Central Statistical Bureau]
CVET	continuing VET
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for VET
EHEA	European higher education area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAVET	European quality assurance in VET
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
IKVD	Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests [State Education Quality Service]
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IT	information technology
LQF	Latvian Qualifications Framework
NEET	young people not in education, employment or training
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVA	Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra [State Employment Agency]
SQF	sectoral qualifications framework
VET	vocational education and training
VIAA	Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra [State Education Development Agency]
VISC	Valsts izglītības satura centrs [National Centre for Education]

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ReferNet Latvia: www.refernet.lv

Ministry of Education and Science: www.izm.gov.lv

VISC: www.visc.gov.lv

IKVD: www.ikvd.gov.lv

VIAA: www.viaa.gov.lv

Latvian Chamber of Crafts: www.lak.lv

Employers' Confederation of Latvia: www.iddk.lv

Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees: www.lizda.lv

National database on learning opportunities: www.niid.lv

CSB: www.csb.gov.lv

Academic Information Centre: www.aic.lv

Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA): <https://www.aika.lv/en>

Latvian Qualifications Database: <https://www.latvijaskvalifikacijas.lv/en/>

Ministry of Culture: www.km.gov.lv

Ministry of Economics: www.em.gov.lv

Ministry of Welfare: www.lm.gov.lv

NVA: www.nva.gov.lv

Annex 1.

Glossary

Apprenticeship scheme (*mācekļības shēma*)

In the Latvian context, the term is similar to the international definition: systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace. In 2015, the legal framework of apprenticeship type scheme was put in place. In Latvia, first a person should enrol an education programme and only thereafter their potential individual learning at the company may be discussed. Apprenticeship is organised in the form of scheme where learners follow the theoretical and practical part of the programme in a vocational school and along with it receive both theoretical and practical training in a company. An agreement is signed between the vocational school, the student and the enterprise, and student receives remuneration or scholarship. The scheme provides qualifications referenced to NQF and are part of the formal education system.

Competence (*kompetence*)

Regarding the national framework, the term is expressed as ability to carry out analysis, synthesis and assessment. In the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a as amended in July 2010) only 'professional competence' is defined: necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in work situations. However, the definition used in context of the EQF could be applied: the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In context of the EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Craftsmanship (*mācekļu izglītība*)

Craftsmanship in Latvia exists in small scale in crafts sector. The crafts apprentice is contractually linked to an employer and may receive remuneration. The employer assumes responsibility for providing the crafts apprentice with training leading to a specific occupation according to education programmes developed by the Chamber of Crafts and the Ministry of Education and Science. Craftsmanship is implemented separately from programmes in other education sectors and is not included in the education programme classification (no relevant ISCED or EQF level).

CVET (<i>profesionālā tālākizglītība</i>)
A special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for adults with previous education and professional experience to acquire a professional qualification at a specific level (Saeima, 1999a). Thereby, the term is interpreted similarly to the international definition, namely, CVET can be broadly defined as professional or vocational development through education and training undertaken typically after one has completed initial vocational education. It is provided and undertaken on initiative of public authorities, social partners, sectors, enterprises, individuals as well as a range of voluntary and community organisations.
Tertiary or higher education (<i>ISCED 5-7, augstākā izglītība</i>)
An education level, which is acquired after secondary education, in science or art (Saeima, 1998).
Formal learning (<i>formālā izglītība</i>)
Includes basic education, secondary education and higher education (Saeima, 1998).
General education (<i>vispārējā izglītība</i>)
Education mainly designed to lead participants to a deeper understanding of a subject or group of subjects, especially, but not necessarily, with a view to preparing participants for further education at the same or a higher level. These programmes, which do not specialise in particular areas, are typically school-based. After successful completion participants are not provided with a labour-market-relevant qualification. However, the term 'general education' is mostly used to refer to secondary education, while the term 'academic education' is used for higher education level programmes.
Initial VET (<i>sākotnējā profesionālā izglītība</i>)
Formally organised vocational education, mostly at secondary education level, which is similar to the international definition, namely, education undertaken after full-time compulsory education (mainly nine years basic education) to promote acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to enter an occupation. Management and legal basis of initial vocational education are not separated from continuing vocational education. Most vocational education is implemented through school-based programmes, which include practical learning periods at school and enterprise; in Latvia initial vocational education is referred to as 'vocational education'.

Lower secondary education (ISCED 2, <i>pamatizglītības otrais posms</i>)
Division of lower and upper secondary education is not used in Latvia; therefore, this stage of education belongs to basic education and is called the second stage of basic school (grades seven to nine) including both general and vocational education programmes.
Non-formal learning (<i>neformālā mācīšanās</i>)
Educational activities in conformity with interests and demand organised outside formal education (Saeima, 1998).
Occupation (<i>profesija</i>)
See 'profession'.
Post-secondary (non-tertiary) education (ISCED 4, <i>pēcvidējā izglītība</i>)
One to three-year programmes are categorised nationally as secondary. These programmes provide professional knowledge and skills only. Education process and assessment are organised similar to other secondary education programmes. Students are usually older than those in secondary education.
Profession (<i>profesija</i>)
A type of occupation of a natural person in fields of production of goods, distribution or services, as well as education, culture and art which require certain preparedness (Saeima, 1999a).
Qualification (<i>kvalifikācija</i>)
A formal outcome of an assessment and recognition process, i.e., documentary confirmed assessment which is obtained when a competent body determines that a person has achieved learning outcomes according to the pre-established standards.
Skills (<i>prasmes</i>)
The Latvian definition is similar to the international one ⁽¹⁸⁾ , namely, ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3, <i>vidējā izglītība</i>)
Division of lower and upper secondary education is not used in Latvia; upper secondary education refers to 'secondary education' after nine years basic school; it lasts three to four years and includes both general and vocational education programmes.

⁽¹⁸⁾ In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Work-based learning (*darba vidē balstītas mācības*)

On 8 February 2016, the European Commission's Employment Committee (DGEMPL) (as a result of the vote) re-decided that Latvia, when it comes to the newly established apprenticeship type scheme, has the right to use the term 'work-based learning'.

Annex 2.

Professional education at tertiary level

Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding level of study	Academic: professional subjects (%)	Class-based learning: practice (%)	Average duration of studies
First-level higher professional education programme (college programme)	Secondary education	Primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport,	ISCED P 554/A 550 EQF level 5	36:64	70:30	Two to three years
Second-level higher professional education programme (university programme)	Secondary education or first- or second-level higher professional education, or bachelor degree	business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED 6 to 7 (see below) EQF levels 6 to 7	17:83	70:30	Four to five years, at least four years after secondary education and not shorter than two years after college education
University programmes						
Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding level of study	Content of study programmes (*)		Average duration of studies
Second-level higher professional education programme	First-level professional higher education (college programme)	Primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport,	ISCED P 655/A 650 EQF level 6	Total 40 Latvian CP (1 Latvian credit =1.5 European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS), of which: (a) 4 CP theoretical courses in the branch; (b) 26 CP practice; (c) 10 CP State exam (including final thesis).		One to two years Total duration of higher education studies – at least four years
Professional bachelor or professional higher education	Secondary education	business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED P 655/A 650 EQF level 6	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which: (a) minimum 20 CP general courses; (b) minimum 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and information technology (IT) courses;		Minimum four years

programme				(c) minimum 60 CP courses of occupational speciality; (d) minimum 6 CP free choice courses; (e) minimum 20 CP practice; (f) minimum 12 CP State exam (including final thesis).	
Second-level higher professional education programme	Academic or professional bachelor degree, second-level higher professional education		ISCED P 657/A 650 EQF level 6	Total at least 40 Latvian CP, of which: (a) minimum 4 CP theoretical courses of speciality; (b) minimum 20 CP practice; (c) minimum 10 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least one year Total duration of higher education studies at least four years
Second-level higher professional education programme	General or vocational secondary education		ISCED P 756/A 750 EQF level 7	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which: (a) minimum 20 CP general courses; (b) minimum 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and IT courses; (c) minimum 60 CP courses of occupational speciality; (d) minimum 6 CP free choice courses; (e) minimum 20 CP practice; (f) minimum 12 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least five years
Professional master programme	Academic or professional bachelor degree, second-level higher professional education		ISCEDP 757/A 750 EQF level 7	Total at least 40 Latvian CP, of which: (a) minimum 5 CP courses of recent achievements in sector's theory and practice; (b) minimum 3 CP courses of research, creativity, design and management; (c) minimum 26 CP practice (for academic bachelor graduates); (d) minimum 6 CP practice (for professional bachelor/programmes graduates); (e) 20 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least one year Total duration of higher education studies at least five years

Professional doctoral programmes in arts (**)	Academic or professional master degree	Arts	ISCED P 864/A 860 EQF level 8	Total at least 132 Latvian CP, of which: (a) minimum 12 CP courses of recent achievements in sector's theory and practice; (b) minimum 20 CP courses of artistic, creative and design work; (c) minimum of 15 CP courses of research work; (d) minimum of 20 CP artistic practice; (e) 40 CP State exam (including final thesis); minimum of 5 CP free choice courses.	At least three years
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(*) CP: credit points (*kreditpunkti*).

(**) New programme, to be introduced in 2019.

Source: ReferNet Latvia.