



spotlight on VET

ESTONIA

VET in Estonia

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Estonia is the key to ensuring a flexible and skilled workforce capable of adapting to changes in the labour market. It is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research and the institutional framework includes a network of VET schools, a quality assurance body, sectoral skills councils, and awarding organisations.

Occupational standards in the eight-level Estonian qualifications framework are all outcomes-based and serve as the basis for VET curricula. Social partners are involved in VET policy development and implementation to help respond to labour market needs. At national level, they participate in sectoral skills councils and are involved in drafting VET-related legislation, including national VET curricula. At school level, their representatives belong to the counsellors' boards of VET institutions.

Recognition of prior learning and work experience has improved accessibility to VET for learners from diverse education and professional backgrounds. The VET infrastructure has recently been upgraded.

VET institutions offer both, initial and continuing VET programmes. Initial VET is offered at the second, third, fourth and fifth levels of the Estonian qualifications framework (corresponding to European qualifications framework, EQF). Learners can choose between full-time studies (independent learning is less than one half of the study volume) and studies where the emphasis is on self-study and contact hours are fewer (referred to as 'non-stationary' studies in the national context). Full-time studies are available as school-based tracks and include up to 70% work-based learning, and apprenticeship. Financial assistance is available for VET students to guarantee equal access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances.

At second and third levels there are no minimum admission requirements. Curricula are designed to meet labour market needs in elementary occupations. As a rule, fourth level studies require completed basic education to enter, but there are exceptions for over 22-year-olds without basic education. Programmes at this level give learners the skills

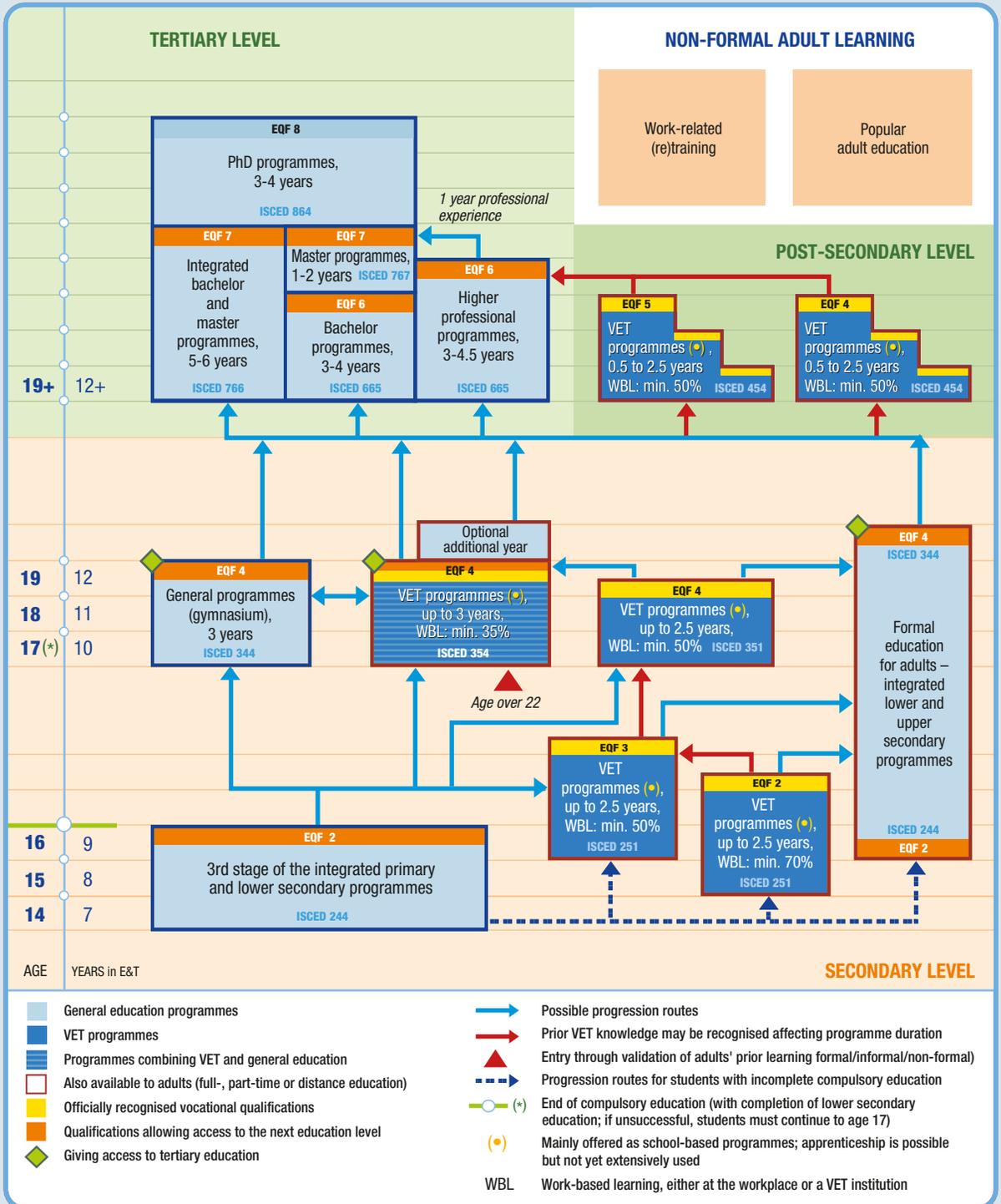
needed to perform more complicated jobs. It is possible to follow vocational programmes (ISCED-P 351) only or to study VET along with upper secondary general education (ISCED-P 354). The qualification achieved (certificate in vocational secondary education) is a precondition for accessing higher education. National State examinations are compulsory for upper secondary general education graduates, but VET graduates also take them as they function as entrance examinations for most higher education programmes. Vocational secondary education certificate holders can study general education subjects of their choice to prepare for the State examinations. Upper secondary education also gives access to EQF level 5 IVET programmes (ISCED-P 454). These post-secondary programmes prepare learners for technical and associate professional occupations.

Continuing VET (CVET) is offered at EQF levels 4 and 5. It includes vocational courses for adults, which focus on the acquisition of single competences. To enrol in CVET, learners need to have at least a vocational qualification or validated competences and an educational qualification at EQF level 4.

Higher education programmes start at EQF level 6 and the first level of tertiary education has both an academic branch and professional higher education branch. These are accessible to all graduates of both general and vocational secondary education, as well as graduates of post-secondary VET.

Adult education is divided into formal education and continuing education. Formal education acquired within the adult education system allows adults to acquire general lower and upper secondary education at adult upper secondary schools. Schools implement individual curricula when needed. In addition to formal education, VET and higher education institutions provide continuing education and retraining courses.

VET in Estonia's education and training system



Distinctive features of VET

It is possible to pursue a VET programme not only in Estonian, but also in other languages. In 2015, 78.5% of VET students studied in Estonian, 21.3% in Russian, and 0.1% in English and Latvian. In the case of a foreign-language curriculum, Estonian language classes are mandatory. To complete the studies, such students must pass the State examination in Estonian as a second language or undergo a vocational or professional examination in Estonian. The aim is to equip graduates with language skills sufficient for professional activity in an Estonian-language working environment.

The share of adult learners in VET is increasing. By 2015, the number of VET students decreased to under 25 000 (30 000 in 2009). At the same time, the number of VET learners aged 25+ nearly doubled between 2009 and 2015. The participation rate of those aged 25+ in VET reached 32% in 2015 (15% in 2009) while the share of pupils below 20 decreased to 47% in 2015 (63% in 2009). Since 2010, the proportion of adults who are university degree holders entering VET has been increasing.

The share of work-based learning (WBL) forms at least half of the VET part of the curriculum. Depending on the type of training, WBL can vary between 35% and 70%. WBL is usually equally divided between workshops at school and learning at a workplace. It features work and study assignments with specific study objectives.

Most basic education graduates pursue general secondary education. Preferences in education paths vary greatly across regions: only 10% of girls finishing Estonian-language schools in cities (Tallinn and Tartu) choose vocational education, while this option is preferred by 60% of Russian-speaking young men in the North-Eastern part of the country.

Challenges and policy responses

Among adults aged 25 to 64, 29.2% have neither a professional nor a vocational qualification. The objective is to reduce this share to less than 25% by 2020. Several measures have been launched to encourage adults without a prior professional or vocational qualification to return to formal education.

There is a high level of skills mismatch. To improve alignment between education and the labour market, a labour market needs monitoring and forecasting system (OSKA) was launched in 2015. Results are used in curriculum development, career counselling, and planning of State-funded education.

Early leaving from education and training is a significant problem in Estonia. The rate in the first year of IVET was 24.7% in 2015. The goal is to reduce it to less than 20% by 2020. To prevent early leaving, career-counselling services are offered and several other measures implemented.

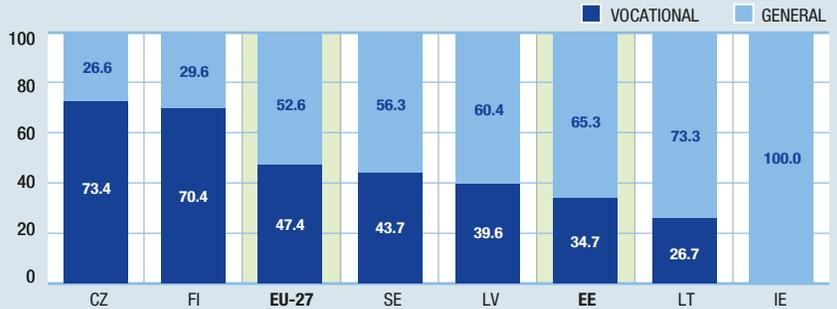
Participation in lifelong learning had been steadily increasing up to 12.5% in 2013 but dropped to 12.2% in 2015. The goal is to increase it to 20% by 2020. Age appears to have a substantial impact. Only 4.5% of people aged 55 to 64 participated in lifelong learning in 2015, in comparison with 23.4% in the 25 to 34 age group. To increase participation rates, the focus is on broadening access to non-formal education, training courses for developing key competences, career services and facilitating the participation of adults in formal education.

Participation in apprenticeship training is low (2.4% of all VET students). The number of participants started to increase gradually in 2015 due to the education ministry's effort to develop a functioning and sustainable work-based learning system with stronger employer involvement.



Education and training in figures

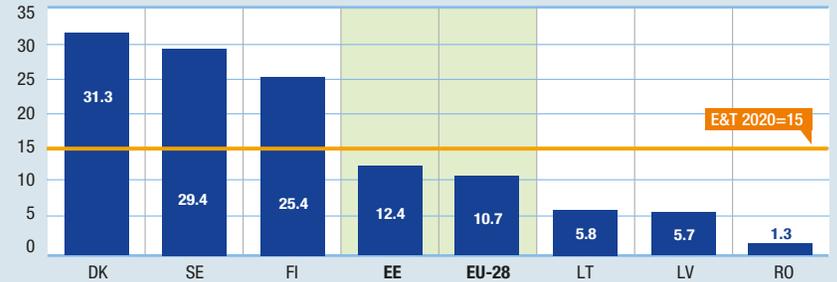
Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2014



NB: 47.4% is the provisional weighted EU average for 2014 based on available country data (27 countries). While there are programmes with a vocational dimension in Ireland at ISCED level 3, these are considered general programmes.

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 22.4.2016.

Lifelong learning
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2015



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 16.5.2016.

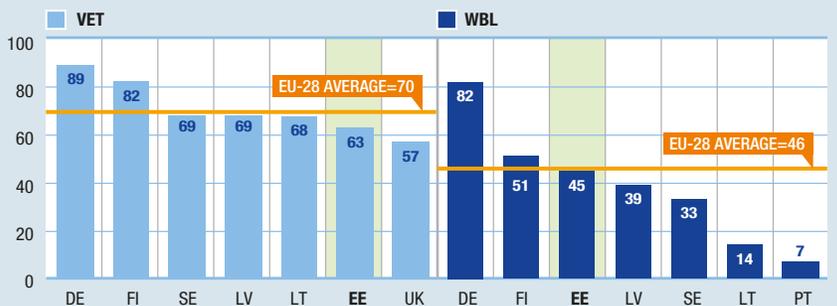
Early leavers from education and training
% of early leavers from education and training, 2015



NB: Break in time series in EU-28; low reliability in HR; definition for national target differs in LT, SE and ES.

Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 16.5.2016.

Share of employees (aged 24 to 65) with medium-level education (ISCED 3-4) who obtained a vocational qualification, and whose highest level of education involved some learning in a workplace (% , 2014)



NB: VET: survey respondents described their highest qualification as vocational;

WBL: studies involved some learning at a workplace (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, other forms of work-based learning).

Results may differ from those reported in national statistics and international surveys, as the online data collection method used does not always lead to fully representative findings.

Source: Cedefop European skills and jobs survey, 2014.



Further information

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www.employers.ee	Estonian Employers' Confederation
www.tootukassa.ee	Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund
www.ekka.archimedes.ee	Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency

This Spotlight is based on input from the Ministry of Education and Research (ReferNet Estonia 2016).



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Publications Office

ISBN 978-92-896-2203-5



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