

# The changing nature and role of vocational education and training in Europe

## WORK ASSIGNMENT 2

External factors influencing VET - Understanding the National Policy  
Dimension: Country Case Studies

AO/DSI/JP/Changing\_Role\_of\_Vet/009/15

### Case study focusing on Estonia

prepared for CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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*It has neither been revised nor edited by Cedefop.*

## **The changing nature and role of vocational education and training – overall aims**

The purpose of the Changing nature and role of VET-project is to improve our understanding of how VET is changing in the countries belonging to the European Union (as well as Iceland and Norway). Over a three-year period (2016-18) the project will analyse how vocationally oriented education and training has changed in the past two decades (1995-2015) and based on these results investigate the main challenges and opportunities facing the sector today and in the future. Work is divided into six separate but interlinked themes:

- (a) the changing definition and conceptualisation of VET;
- (b) the external drivers influencing VET developments;
- (c) the role of traditional VET at upper secondary level;
- (d) VET from a lifelong learning perspective;
- (e) the role of VET at higher education levels;
- (f) scenarios outlining alternative development paths for European VET in the 21st century.

The study takes as its starting point that vocationally oriented education and training is something more than the traditional VET delivered at upper secondary level (in the form of school-based education or training, apprenticeships, or combinations of these). Due to the requirements of lifelong learning, we are able to observe diversification of VET with new institutions and stakeholders involved. We also see an expansion of VET to higher education areas, partly through reform of existing institutions, partly through the emergence of new institutions. This has been caused by factors internal to the education and training system as well as by external pressures linked to demographic, technological and economic changes.

This particular case study, together with 9 other case studies, provides input to theme (b) of the project ('The external drivers influencing VET developments').

# Table of contents

Estonia .....	1
1. Introduction.....	1
2. What is meant by VET and the national VET system.....	2
3. Historical context – the direction of travel .....	3
4. Changes in enrolment .....	6
5. The interplay between external and the internal factors shaping VET.....	8
Responses to demographic changes .....	8
The gender gap - in education and labour market.....	9
The challenge of integrating local 2nd and 3rd generation immigrant origin people .....	10
A common EU labour market and mobile students plus mobile workers .....	10
Technological change .....	10
The macroeconomic environment (the economic cycle).....	10
Europeanisation .....	10
6. Conclusions.....	11
References.....	12

# Estonia

## Triin Roosalu and Ellu Saar

### I. Introduction

“Rapid developments in Estonian society after the collapse of the Soviet regime at the beginning of the 1990s brought about the need to reorganise almost all social institutions including the vocational education system (Neudorf 1995, 1999; Annus et al. 2000; Loogma 2004). At the beginning of the 1990s, the main development issue was to adapt the system and individual vocational schools to suit the dramatically changed economic environment, as it had transformed from a planned to a market economy. The employment structure in Estonia had changed dramatically, involving a rapid decline in the industrial and agricultural sector and the emergence of the services sector (Loogma 2004, 33). Grootings (2009) has described the fundamental reforms in Post-communist transition countries as systemic, involving changes that are both system-wide and system-deep. The reforms were system-wide in the sense that they required changes to all aspects of institutional organisation. In vocational education, this meant that all the building blocks from delivery to assessment and quality assurance needed to be renewed. Moreover, reforms in vocational education were also system-deep, as they required the development of new relationships between the schools, the labour market and private enterprises (Grootings 2009, 505). The Soviet dual system was transformed into the school-based system. During the last two decades, several reform initiatives have been introduced in vocational education and training in Estonia. Strategic directions have involved the development of occupational standards and a qualifications system. Secondly, the transformation of the vocational school network has been carried out for efficiency reasons, on the one hand, and in order to align it with the changed structure of the economy in Estonia, on the other. This has involved mergers of several former vocational schools and the formation of regional vocational training centres (Loogma 2004, 77). In 2013, there were 41 vocational training institutions (VET schools) in the Estonian VET system (Kutsehariduse Standard 2012), which organise vocational training for people without basic education, based on basic and secondary education (2–4.level based on ISCED 97, UNESCO, 1997) and enable people to obtain qualifications on levels 2–4 in the European Qualification System. In the Estonian context, important factors in 2011 included the fact that when all school curricula needed to be aligned with the national curricula, teachers were in very uneven positions in terms of awareness of the development process and the substance of national curricula. Some teachers (e.g. service field teachers) were already acquainted with the new principles as well as the curricula development process from the mid-1990s, while others (e.g. metalworking teachers; media; and music teachers) only became involved in the process very recently (Loogma and Tafel-Viia 2011). Moreover, participation in top-down initiated reform-related work groups and networks, and international and inter-sectoral networks, has supported the professional development of the vocational teachers involved and the adoption of the changes (Tafel-Viia et al. 2012).”<sup>1</sup>

“Estonian VET is part of the full education system in Estonia and is mainly allowed (available) after compulsory education. So, it stands between basic and higher education. Main purpose of VET is to provide for a person both social and professional readiness for a working on certain occupation and also understanding of the context of continuous training in the lifelong learning process. Estonian VET is school-based includes theoretical and practical studies and these proportion dependent on

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<sup>1</sup> Sirje Rekkor, Meril Ümarik & Krista Loogma 2013). 'Adoption of national curricula by vocational teachers in Estonia', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*

level of VET training. Theoretical studies take place usually at school and practical training at school workshop and in the enterprises. Estonian VET is accessible and open for everyone who is interested about vocational education. For that reason there are created different categories of vocational training (curricula) for examples: VET without the requirements for basic education, VET based on basic education, VET secondary education and VET based on secondary education or just continuing education. Also forms of studies are various, such as full-time or non-stationary study, workplace-based or school-based study. Estonian VET system strategy is to respond flexibly to the needs of the labour market and to ensure a competitive workforce for Estonia (VET is seen as one tool for developing Estonian economy and reduce unemployment) and also for international labour markets. So cooperation between different parties (with other levels of education, enterprises, social partners etc.) is important to provide better responding, quality and also image of VET. There is purpose to increase the proportion of students who enter into VET system after basic school. The problem is that in society vocational education has still seen as dead-end in education life. This understanding comes still from soviet time. So, many adults after graduating higher education come to VET school.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. What is meant by VET and the national VET system

*Vocational education* is a system of knowledge, skills, experience, values and behavioural norms which are required for working in a certain area of specialisation, for obtaining certain qualifications and for applying for and retaining a certain position, and the acquisition and improvement of that system creates the prerequisites for successful professional activity (Republic of Estonia Education Act, 1992, §12) *Vocational training* means the aggregate of learning, teaching and organisational activities the purpose of which is to enable the acquisition of vocational education. (Vocational Educational Institutions Act, 2013, §2). In WAI, the following explanation was provided for EE: "In society mainly formal vocational education is understood through the term of "kutseharidus" or "kutseõpe", translated to vocational training. It means more practical learning and training to acquire needed knowledge and skills for certain work. In society, it is not well known how VET is divided (i.e. between IVET and CVET) and which different educational levels are there presented and which different opportunities are provided for learning. There exist understandings that VET is an evolving field in education and provides a good occupational preparation for work/job but for own relatives it is not suggested (Pärtel, Petti 2013)".<sup>3</sup> In public understanding, *kutseõpe* (vocational learning/training) usually includes students at formal vocational education institutions, including adult students, as in Estonia they are taught in the same schools; to some extent it may include also trainings (non-formal education) that are organised by the same formal education institutions. Nevertheless, it effectively excludes learning outside of vocational schools. For CVET, the terms that are used rather translate to "continuous learning" (*täiendõpe*) or "re-learning" (*üंबरõpe*), therefore these terms are closer to VET - not continuous education, though, as the emphasis is on learning. There is no specific one term that would really cover CVET in wider sense, either in the meaning of (job-related) training or adults participation in IVET or other forms of formal education. There are two other terms that are used in the sense of including any learning occurring as adult/beyond initial formal education: adult education (this mainly has a connotation of non-formal education and training, and perhaps more geared towards the liberal adult education); and lifelong learning (mainly understood as adults continuing their educational careers). This differentiation is reflected also in the division of work in the Ministry of Education, where the department of adult education does not really concern itself

<sup>2</sup> Cedefop Changing VET: WAI Estonian case

<sup>3</sup> Sirje Rekkor, Meril Ümarik & Krista Loogma (2013). 'Adoption of national curricula by vocational teachers in Estonia', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*

with adults in formal education (vocational or general) but mainly increasing participation in non-formal education

### **3. Historical context – the direction of travel**

The developments in VET system have to be understood in the context of changes in the higher education system since 1990s. Higher education has gone through four major phases during the post-socialist period in Estonia (Saar and Roosalu, forthcoming):

1. The first period, 1988–1992, can be considered a period of chaotic, individually and institutionally driven changes;
2. The second period, 1993–1998, saw a major expansion of the higher education system in combination with the development of legal frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms;
3. The third period, 1999–2005, indicated a wave of reforms, including following the principles of the Bologna Process;
4. In the fourth period, from 2006 onwards, new measures are being put in place to strengthen the (international) competitiveness and sustainability of the shrinking higher education sector.

We are inclined to say that the processes of the immediate post-socialist period may have had more impact on the current situation in Estonian HE system than the socialist period.

The changes that are most prominently affecting also VET developments are outlined in the following.

**Classification of HEIs** - Between 1995 and 1998 a series of laws were passed to regulate all sectors of higher education. These were the 1995 University Act (paving the way for the 1996 Standard of Higher Education), the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act (1998), the Private Education Institutions Act (1998), the Vocational Education Schools Act (1998), the University of Tartu Act (1995). Within Estonian higher education legislation each institutional type has its own law.

**Expansion/consolidation of HE** - Due to the system liberalisation there was educational expansion and the Number of HEIs grew significantly until 2000s. After this, when new quality regulations and accreditations were put in place, some were closed (including some as bankrupt) while others merged over time with those existing till now. The number of HEIs has been relatively stable over last years.

**Changes in HE sectors** - Between 1989 and 1991, professional higher education was established as a second HE sector in Estonia. During this period several former specialised secondary schools under pressure from economic and political insecurity started to form a new sector in Estonian higher education – professional higher education modeled after German “Fachhochschulen”. This created a binary divide in Estonian higher education with new curricula introduced in 1991, resulting in introduction of MA degrees; 1995 the system was changed into 4+2 and in 2001 – 3+2.

**Establishment of private universities (also privatization of public HEIs)** - Gorbachev’s administration legalised cooperative enterprises in 1986. In this form the first private higher education institution in Estonia – the Estonian Institute of Humanities was established under the auspices of the Estonian Association of Writers in 1988. In 1989 the second private higher education institution, the Estonian Business School (EBS), emerged. These were professional HEIs, but soon were changed into universities; later, EIH was merged with Tallinn university, while EBS is to this

date the only private university offering education in all three levels: BA, MA and PhD. No public HEIs were privatized in Estonia, however, some major further education and training centres (previously part of the then qualification systems) were privatized and private HEIs were established.

**HE financing** - Between 1992-1995 a sharp decrease in public funding not only made universities dependent on private sources of financing, including tuition fees, but also raised serious concerns about equity of access to higher education. The Ministry of Education tried to find a legal compromise that would allow universities to charge fees for some groups but at the same time maintain the official free-of-charge higher education policy (Tomusk 2004). The government introduced a formula funding mechanism: money was distributed to universities according to student places, weighted by fields of study and level. As a result the student admission quota was renamed to state order allowing universities to admit an additional 20 per cent of students on a fee-paying basis. The actual number of fee-paying students, however, exceeded this percentage. In the early 1990s the majority of students were publicly funded; the situation at the end of the 1990s was that half of all students are fee-paying. The proportion of students paying tuition fees has increased from 7 per cent in 1993 to 54 per cent in 2004. This situation was reversed in 2012 when HE became tuition free for those studying full-time and in Estonian language. A new needs-based student support system was introduced at 2013/2014. Students from less privileged families can apply for study allowance (~75-220 EUR per month) when studying full-time and in Estonian. Students who started their studies in 2012/2013 or earlier and study full-time, can also apply for study allowances (55.93 euros per month). However, full time study is required to maintain the free study place and support. Therefore, VET system, which never introduced the fee, was rather competitive until 2012, but less so afterwards – except that fulltime studies do not have to be maintained, thus making the VET programmes even more suitable for non-traditional, adult and working students.

**Content and organization of the study programme** - In the early 1990s **Russian-language tracks** in Estonian higher education were closed. Although it is possible to study in Russian at several private universities, the students enrolled in these institutions have to pay tuition fees. In total, 11 per cent of all students in higher education are studying in Russian, predominantly in private higher education institutions. The OECD experts (2007) conclude that Russian-speaking school leavers find themselves at a disadvantage accessing the main higher education institutions as these institutions give instruction mainly in Estonian. On the other hand, **more English language instruction** studies are designed in the higher education level, as the fees cannot be collected from Estonian-language mediated programmes, thus offering an incentive for the universities to internationalise their target groups. VET institutions, however, mostly do not have any of this pressure, and there are some (limited) numbers of programmes available still in Russian language tracks in Estonia.

2001 a reform of Degree Structures in accordance with the Bologna Process was adopted. The transition to new study programmes in the Estonian higher education institutions took place in the academic year of 2002/2003. The new system of higher education has two main cycles, following the bachelor master model of the European Higher Education Area. The study programmes of some fields have been integrated into a single long cycle. Universities provide professional higher education, bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes. Professional higher education institutions and some vocational education institutions provide professional higher education. A professional higher education institution may also provide master's programmes.

**Of these more or less structural changes**, perhaps the fact that vocational schools started providing HE programs was more important for the changes in HE sector than other processes, even if opening up the HEI system for private institutions, as well as offering opportunities to study for

fees in the public universities (which used to have only few state funded study places with high competition) was relevant, too. Shift to 3+2 degrees, as well as equalising earlier degrees, was important shift in shortening time spent in education system. Introduction of part-time programmes, evening, weekend and modular studies has helped make the system more student-centered. Wider HE access to nontraditional students, encouraging more adult learning in HEIs, has normalized dual roles of working while studying – including fulltime working while studying fulltime, with many students having professional careers in parallel with learning careers.

From this background, the changes in VET system can be outlined more closely.<sup>4</sup>

“The Soviet VET system in Estonia, an extremely centralised and tightly related to centralised and planned economy, was completely interrupted in the process of the transition to market economy. During the transition the changes in the different levels occur: at system level the transition from Soviet dual system into the school-based system took place during very short time. This transition completely changed the connections between schools and enterprises. Structural changes inside the new system and systemic adjustment of VET system with the economy/employment, general education and other systems have been almost permanent and more or less continuous.

5. In **1987-1988** the transition period in Estonian education begun. The quickest changes were evident in general education where powerful movement of teachers of general education started to innovate the curricula with the main aim to de-ideologize the curricula. The innovations in education did not concern much the VET schools and VET teachers until the dramatic changes in the labour market begun about 1990-1992.
6. In the course of VET reforms different stages can be identified according to the steps taken to regulate and standardize the system and different actors' (public VET schools, other stakeholders) roles and cooperation patterns. First, beginning of **1990s until 1996/1997** almost single determining factor of change was liberal adjustment of VET schools to dramatically changed environment, incl. labour market (in terms of re-orientation from Eastern markets to Western markets, rapid decline of industrial and agricultural sector and emergence of service sector and consequently, changes in the employment/occupational structure etc.). As well, the previous system of practical training was completely destroyed because of extensive restructuring of enterprises, incl closing, privatisation and reorientation of enterprises. In this period, the state intervention was minimal and social partners (employers, unions) were too weak to initiate and support reforms in VET. However, since mid-90s the EU programs (PHARE) for supporting reforms and negotiations between VET schools and social partners started. In 1995, the first legislative act regulating VET schools activity has been compiled (“Kutseõppeasutuse seadus”). At the same time the process of restructuring of the VET schools' network begun in negotiations between social partners. In this time, the main reasons for school network restructuring were the incompatibility of schools' curricula, infrastructure, and regional location with the demand of new emerging economic structure. During the very short period of time the VET system in Estonia has developed from Soviet highly centralised “distorted dual” system into a school based one, which strongly contradicts the previous “Soviet dual” model.
7. In **1997**, which can be considered as beginning of the second stage of the reforms in VET, the first Development Plan for VET has been compiled in the partnership between state, employers and other social partners. Later on, building up the legislative

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<sup>4</sup> WAI Estonia



framework for VET continues. Important milestones in the process included the adoption of the Professional Act in 2000, which served as a legal basis for the development of professional/vocational standards and implementation of the qualification system as agreement between state, employers and unions/professional organisations. Estonian qualification system is competence-based and made up of the development of professional standards and the issue of professional certificates. In this period, the restructuring of the VET schools' network continues with the aim to adjust it according to restructuring of economic and employment structure and make it more effective. In the economic structure the share of employment in industrial and agricultural sectors has decreased dramatically and service sector widened very quickly. The idea behind this process was to establish multifunctional VET regional centers which would be specialized according to the needs of local employment, for both young and adult learners. As a consequence of the implementation of the PHARE programme 13 Pilot schools were selected, most of them became later the VET regional centres. The number of schools diminished considerably - some schools were closed, some schools were merged together.

8. The beginning of next, third stage of VET reforms began in **2000/2001** with the development and implementation of vocational / professional standards. Vocational standards should be taken into account in the schools' curricula development and in attribution of vocational certificates. Qualification system supposed considerably contribute to the recognition and legitimization of individuals' prior/lifelong learning as it is competence-based and different types of learning and work experience can be taken into account attributing qualifications. In 2006 also the standard for VET teachers has been legally established. In this initial phase the right to take qualification exams and issue certificates was given to different organisations (mainly to professional associations) and also to some VET schools. Generally, school-leaving certificates of VET did not automatically give qualification to school-leavers. Gradually, the share of VET schools having right to take qualification exams and issue also certificates has risen.
9. For the fourth stage of VET reforms one can take the process of creating and establishment of national curricula in VET. The process started from about **2004/2005**. The 44 national curricula in different domains of study have been created and legislated by 2008 and 2009. Even the regulation of VET curricula started earlier, until this stage, there existed only the schools' curricula. The central regulation of VET school curricula was minimal: the share of practical training in curricula was prescribed, the school curricula should correspond to vocational / professional standards. Contradicting to the first, liberal adjustment period, later the processes of change in VET in Estonia have led to **stronger and stronger regulation and standardisation.**"<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Changes in enrolment**

Access of VET graduates to other learning opportunities has **increased** since 1990s, for three main reasons:

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<sup>5</sup> Loogma, K (2010) 'The situation of VET teachers in Estonia (with the Integrated summary of interview findings)'. In: Kirpal, S (ed). *Changing roles and competences of VET teachers and trainers. Final Report, Vol 2 (AO/ECVL/RLAR/TT-Changing-competences/014/08)*. National Summaries of Interview Results. Institut Technik+Bildung, University of Bremen, pp 97-116

- better availability of opportunities for **NFE** (for anyone in the labour market) due to wider provision and more competition;
- reorganising of **VET in formal education** system so that there are more options for continuing at higher levels;
- easier access to **general academic programmes** at the level of higher education (due to both general educational expansion and wider provision of study places, lower entrance thresholds, more use of AP(E)L, and probably also the fact that majority of fulltime HEI programmes in Estonia are free (whereas most of these places were available for a fee earlier).

Also, the global economic crises of 2010 made more NFE available for **unemployed** (as by that time, EU funds had already become available to Estonia, these were used to make up for the low contribution to LLL from state budget).

In general, despite the demographic changes, the **number of IVET students** has remained about the same since 2007, indicating shift towards **more adult students**. While in 2007, 69% of students in IVET were under 20 years, in 2016 - 48% was, and the share of those above 25 had increased from 14% to 34%. This has also been supported by the policy of the VET schools to make up for the shrinking cohorts by targeting new groups. The share of those in their **higher level VET programme** (*rakenduskõrgharidus*) remained at about 4%; among them, the share of those under 20 years decreased from 23% to 6%, and those above 25 years – increased from 48% to 68%. With influx of adult students shapes the classroom discussions, it also has the potential to shift the **desirability and esteem of VET** as an educational opportunity. Some adult students (who have time for schooling) choose these programs not only because of their job related retraining and improved employability, but also as their serious **leisure activity** (for example, longer study programs as a way to spend and organise time meaningfully) or to develop specific personal projects (such as for example in landscaping).

Share of adult students (those above 25) in higher education (that can be considered part of their CVET experience) **has generally increased since 2006**: it was 38% in 2006, and 47% in 2016. This has to be seen together with three other trends:

- overall **decrease in student numbers** (there were 68 800 in 2006, and 47 800 in 2016);
- removal of **study fee** from full time, Estonian-language instruction studies in 2012/2013;
- and, somewhat related, increasing the share of English language instruction programmes at higher education level (eventually, while in 2006 just 1% of HE students in Estonia were foreign students, in 2016 their share was 8%).

In Estonia, traditional and non-traditional students (e.g. adult students) **study in the same programmes** together, thus influx of adult students has made an impact on the classroom. As even full-time studies can take place in the evenings or alternating long weekends, it is common for full-time students in higher education to **have jobs** in their field of interest, as well as odd jobs to support their studies.

Important for Estonian case, the share of those students who study in their IVET programme **Estonian as a foreign language** decreased from 18% to 11%. Together with the shift towards higher age among learners this may indicate the fact that among adult VET students, those with Estonian as their mother tongue are over-represented. Higher education institutions have much wider availability of programmes with English as language of instruction.

It has to be understood that studying in VET programmes is (and has been) **without fees** for students, while studying in HE programmes usually entailed a fee for most students since the 1990s until 2012/2013. Thus, potentially the HE programmes gained more relevance for certain target groups of adult students after this.

## 5. The interplay between external and the internal factors shaping VET

### Responses to demographic changes

**Challenge of lower birth rates** started to be immediately felt in Estonian education VET system only after the maturing of the largest recent cohorts, those born in 1987-1990 due to the national awakening, leading to the regaining of independence of the country. First, in 1990s, with the widening educational opportunities (due to the increase of private providers and paid education) at the higher education level as well as large increase in non-formal education opportunities in specific sectors VET remained the viable chance for (1) early school leavers and (2) those secondary school graduates who could not afford to, thought themselves to be academically disadvantaged, or did not care, to continue at the higher education level. The others mostly chose academic higher education. Partly as a result, education system was restructured so that VET was also made available at the higher level, as applied higher education. Thus, at first, in 1990s, the VET cohorts started shrinking, but not too heavily. However, by 2010, when the largest cohorts had already had their point of entrance to the post-compulsory education, VET schools started **targeting other groups** more actively. This included adult students, a target group also discovered by the academic higher education institutions. To the benefit of VET schools, most adults to be considering additional degree qualifications at the time already had some higher education, therefore considering pursuing studies in new but practical field (such as accounting, landscaping, gardening, sewing, ets) for other than job related reasons was among their preferences.

**Number of schools in formal education system** providing VET to adult learners can be considered equal to the number of VET schools and higher education institutions with VET programs, since adults join traditional students in these programs. The trend has been twofold: reorganising existing schools upwards; launching new private schools (1995-2005) and then mergers of these with other private schools or public schools. Also, there has been **consolidation** of public VET schools, that were inherited from the Soviet era, by creating regional structures. General trend of inverted U in the number of schools means that the number is in 2015 about the same as in 1995, while the number of VET schools has decreased by half, compared to 1995.

- Vocational schools: 1995 – 85, 2005 -61, 2015 – 44
- Public general secondary schools and higher education institutions with vocational education programs: 1995 – 4, 2005 – 4, 2015 – 5
- Private schools providing vocational education programs: 1995 – 7, 2005 – 14, 2015 -7
- vocational schools providing (applied) higher education programs: 1995 – 1, 2005 – 7, 2015 – 2
- Applied higher education (public): 1995 – 8, 2005 – 8, 2015 – 8
- Applied higher education (private): 1995 – 10, 2005 – 13, 2015 – 7

While relevance of formal education institutions as learning provider for adults **declined during economic boom** (and increased again during the **global crisis of 2010**), the number of adult

students in formal education remained relatively stable over the period: the number of those working age adults who did study (over 4 weeks before the survey) at any formal education institution (general school, vocational school or higher education institution) changed little (it was 5100 in 1997, and 5100 in 2014). However, the formal education institutions' **importance as a site for learning** for adults decreased from 16,5% in 1997, to 9% in 2014; both patterns can be assumed also to hold for VETs.

On the other hand, a new target group has been identified for VET schools, as the access to VET by early school leavers and other disadvantaged groups has been made easier by laws and regulations, thus diversifying student body in the classroom.

**The challenge of ageing society, extending worklife, and ageing workforce in changing society:** Lifelong learning paradigm has been heavily supported by the state policies and strategies. This has had an impact on adults' chances for continuing their studies on VET degree programmes as well as on other CVET options. Adult Education Act (1993, new version in effect from 2015) differentiates between formal education, work-related training and - opposed to this - liberal adult education, regulating adults' access to employer support in terms of both covering costs of the training course as well as allowing dedicating (unpaid) working time. Namely, for the employee's work-related training, if the employer decided to support it, the employer does not have to pay additionally income tax, which does apply in the case she agrees to cover the costs for formal education and non-job-related training courses; in the latter case, employer's financial contribution is treated by laws as equal to salary support. The regulation is changed with the new version of the law since 2015, whereas the one who "orders" the training pays for it and there are no special clauses for making degree studies more expensive for the employers. On the other hand, this is unlikely to shift the focus of those interested in degree studies towards VET schools, as these do not have fees to begin with; and that at the moment also applies for most, but not all, of the HE programs. Still, it is possibly a clause privileging certain groups of employees who are already at a more advantaged position.

In the beginning of 2000s the situation in CVET provision began to change, too, partly due to the financial support from European Union. **Formal VET institutions have been actively providing specialised courses at no or low costs**, partly due to their improved infrastructural resources and partly due to their improved orientation towards target groups (given also the decrease in student population since larger share of students was admitted to general education programmes). Since significant share of EU funds in Estonia were targeted to improving human resources, **formal VET became a preferred solution for ministries/public sector officials at the local level** (e.g. in providing CVET courses for unemployed and inactive adults).

### **The gender gap - in education and labour market**

Due to the gender segregation (both horizontal and vertical) in the labour market and in education as well, this has also had an impact in the VET, where horizontal gender segregation exists between programmes, whereas more women gain academic education than men; and the fields they study at still differ. Women may, however, be more likely to compensate their lower labour market chances, and lower satisfaction at work, by engaging in VET programmes for personal reasons, thus most of the adult learners in VET in Estonia are women. On the other hand, groups where occupational standards are best described in labour market (teachers, kindergarten teachers, public administration officials) are also overwhelmingly women, they also tend to be the main group in CVET courses.

## **The challenge of integrating local 2nd and 3rd generation immigrant origin people**

As to the large share of Estonian populations being non-native Estonian speakers (different by generations, but about one third of population), whose position in society changed during the social transformation, also their chances to engage in the studies at VET and HEI level in Russian language decreased significantly, as the provision was closed in HEI and number of programmes decreased at VET due to the hopes this would help further immersing in Estonian language.

It is important to discuss also the access to CVET options by language. We can witness the share of those 25-65 who participated in LLL over four weeks before the survey increased 2,7 times since 1997 to 2015 among native Estonians, and over 2,4 times among non-Estonians, indicating similar tempo; nevertheless, with the different starting point (5,5% of LLL participation rate for Estonians, 3,1% for non-Estonians), the result is now quite different, and larger by percentage points (14,7% for Estonians, 7,4% for non-Estonians).

## **A common EU labour market and mobile students plus mobile workers**

VET system, especially in certain programmes, has accepted the challenge by developing international cooperation and offering placements abroad for their students. In some programmes, studying foreign languages has been increased. However, there is as yet rather small provision of English language programmes in VET; this challenge has been met more actively at higher education than at VET programmes.

## **Technological change**

(TBC)

## **The macroeconomic environment (the economic cycle).**

(TBC)

## **Europeanisation**

It has been argued that Estonia, like many other new member states and postsocialist countries, has been more receptive to EU education policy goals and tools (Raudsepp, 2010), and tends to accept EU norms and policy goals less critically, without lengthy discussion (Toots and Kalev, 2015; Toots and Loogma, 2015) than older members, who already have a well-established institutional setup/structure for their VET governance. In the case of transition countries, which have undergone systemic regime change, at least two factors can contribute to this kind of conformist orientation.

- **First, VET reform largely coincided with a period of radical change for the European VET framework** (Grootings, 2009). In a way, Estonia *entered* into the Copenhagen process at a time when no established Estonian institutional setup for VET was in place (in contrast to the situation in old member states). This can be seen as one reason, at least partly, as to why “Estonia has been eagerly adopting the pan-European instruments for VET and Lifelong learning” (Raudsepp, 2010, p. 4).
- Secondly, the general liberalisation and marketisation tendencies in education make a good fit between the Lisbon values and the Estonian national goals in education (Toots, 2009).

Generally, Europeanization in VET started from the horizontal lesson drawing from the episodic best practices of EU countries within the framework of bilateral aid projects in the first period of chaos and liberal adjustment of the VET system to the changing context. The period is characterized by uncritical attempts to transfer foreign policy goals into the domestic reform policies. Discursive

Europeanisation can be considered a further, albeit rather conformist, method of learning. EU VET policy has greatly influenced VET policy formulation in Estonia. The EU's influence on the content and style of the domestic policy documents, or discursive Europeanization, manifests convergence in its "talk" (Radaelli, 2008, p. 24). This is obvious in Estonian education generally (Toots and Loogma, 2015), and particularly in domestic VET policy documents (NAPs). The uncritical approach has slowly declined and even the principles have transferred from the EU, and the policy tools and instruments have developed, considering national/local needs and challenges (Toots and Loogma, 2015). This tendency is already obvious in the third NAP. **However, the standardising policy tools and activities have been adopted almost without discussion, regardless of whether and how they may contribute to the quality of VET** (in terms of labour market relevance, the lifelong learning capacity building of vocational students etc.). The adoption of the comprehensive strategy of lifelong learning (ELLS202) in 2013, manifests even deeper *thick* policy learning by domestic actors, and raises their capacity to formulate their own education policy"<sup>6</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

VET in the period under consideration can be described as the one with interruptions, ever-ongoing reforms and adjustments while taking up the challenges proposed by the changing social and economic context, but also in terms of developments in the education system more widely both at lower as well as higher levels of education.

In terms of developments in Estonian VET, we see most of all the trends of Europeanisation, closely to do with standardisation; and more influx of adults in formal VET, together with more flexible provision. However, the esteem of VET track for one's first level of qualification both at secondary and post-secondary education continues to be low. In fact, VET has been given much wider task in terms of social cohesion, by filling the function of catering to early school leavers and securing unemployed and other disadvantaged groups access to any or new skills and knowledge. This, together with increased share of (more privileged) adult students whose main purpose of studying is maybe not job-related, has meant heavy diversification of the student body, and has also had an impact in how classroom activities can be organised, thus making demands on teaching.

In the future, with changing jobs and qualification standards, and considering further dualisation of labour market, there is both the trend towards more and higher standards for some areas and also less formalisation of standards in other areas. In any case, there is **more need** for retraining, but also more **appetite** for new knowledge and skills to change one's field or position. Thus, there will be more CVET participation and more participation of adults in formal education. the role of formal education institutions in providing NFE will increase as the share of **older adults** among their learners (both in formal education programmes and NFE) will increase due to both extended work life but also habits and changing social norms.

In some areas (e.g. social work, ICT), there will be more **need for practical VET education** and skills (due to labour shortages but also functional flexibility), therefore it is possible that those with higher qualifications in these areas may need to add more practical knowledge to their portfolios. Since more work will be done outside of traditional labour relations the **role of one's employer** in providing learning opportunities will **increase**, as when hiring short-term labour, and **decrease**, over the individual lifecourse, as individuals are expected to be responsible for their skills, therefore, even **larger role for social and educational policies** to enable individuals to participate in further learning also outside of schools.

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<sup>6</sup> Loogma, K (2016) 'Europeanization in VET Policy as a Process of Reshaping the Educational Space'. *International Journal for Research in Vocational Education and Training (IJRVET)* Vol. 3, No. 1: 16-28

It can be also suggested that the relevance of **English language in CVET provision** (both in formal education programs and NFE) will increase in near future due to more labour mobility from and to Estonia as well as more working for foreign enterprises.

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