

Developing work-based learning / apprenticeships (until 2022)

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 ESTONIA

Timeline

2019 Implementation 2020 Implementation 2021 Implementation

2022 Completed

ID number 35356

Background

Development and expansion of work-based learning (apprenticeships) is regarded as a promising option to diversify VET paths, enhance cooperation between education institutions and employers, increase the responsiveness of education to the needs of the labour market and increase the attractiveness of VET for both young and adult learners.

Objectives

To develop a well-functioning and sustainable work-based learning (WBL) system involving employers, and to create flexible and appropriate forms of study for young people and adults for obtaining a qualification.

Description

Work-based learning is developed under the Labour market and education cooperation programme.

In Estonia, WBL (apprenticeships) is defined as a form of study where work practice comprises at least two-thirds of the volume of the curriculum. The apprenticeship system was introduced in 2006 (updated in 2014) and the number of WBL learners, fields of study and qualification levels have gradually increased. In 2019, the share of WBL learners was, on average, 8% of all VET students and over 12% of graduates. Most learners study curricula at EQF level 4. While apprenticeship is intended for both adult workers needing upskilling or reskilling and new recruits, it is dominated by adults (average age 39.6 years).

WBL developments include:

- (a) development of a systematic approach to work-based learning and piloting of different models of work-based learning tailor-made for enterprises of different sizes and from various business sectors;
- (b) training for enterprises and practical guides for implementing apprenticeships;
- (c) cooperation with social partners, including local authorities and employers' and employees' organisations;
- (d) provision of additional study places; 40% of study places have been planned for young

- people without basic education or for young people and adults with no qualifications;
- (e) since 2016, promotional activities have been launched to motivate employers to offer training places, including a conference on apprenticeships for employers, a Facebook campaign, a dedicated homepage and WBL promotional videos.

In 2016-17, templates for work practice and apprenticeship agreements were designed through cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research, employer representatives and the Innove Foundation. The stakeholders started a preliminary analysis of the possibility of extending the apprenticeship scheme to higher education. The piloting took place in September 2017 and 2018.

VET schools have received support to strengthen cooperation between employers and education institutions for developing work-based learning. Cooperation activities supported under the projects include:

- (a) training company instructors;
- (b) preparing, rolling-out and evaluating work-based learning activities;
- (c) piloting and developing new forms/models of work-based learning; introducing short-term internships for VET teachers in enterprises;
- (d) involving representatives of business in teaching;
- (e) creating additional apprenticeship study places.

In 2018, education-business coordinators were introduced into schools, tasked with finding enterprise partners and coordinating cooperation in apprenticeships training. Two surveys were conducted to analyse problems and best practices about in-company training and to get feedback from WBL graduates. A WBL quality assessment framework was developed.

2019 Implementation

In 2019, a WBL quality assessment process was piloted and additional apprenticeship study places were created. In addition, travel and accommodation allowance was piloted. To promote WBL, Best company for work practice and Best apprentice awards were created.

2020 Implementation

Participation in WBL has increased rapidly. In the academic year 2020/21, WBL students accounted for 9% of all VET students and over 15% of all VET graduates. Over 90% of WBL students are adults (+25). The pilot project to involve young people in WBL, which started in 2018, has not produced the expected results – the share of young people in WBL has remained marginal.

In 2020, WBL quality assessment was pioneered in four VET institutions. Based on the results of the assessment, expert help and counselling has been made available to the institutions.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VET institutions reorganised work-based learning on a case-by-case basis, sometimes postponing or temporarily terminating work practice in enterprises, and sometimes continuing it. Students' participation in on-site practical training was voluntary and protective equipment and disinfectants were provided.

2021 Implementation

The share of WBL graduates has grown significantly since 2017 and has reached the target set for 2021: 17.2% of all VET graduates. In 2021, the development of the WBL system and the empowerment of professional and employer associations to provide and expand WBL continued, together with the development of quality assurance of WBL. To promote WBL, this form of study was introduced at seminars and on social and print media, and the Best Apprentice and the Best Company for Work Practice were awarded. In 2021, almost 200 new companies joined the WBL system. Since 2015, more than 1 500 companies and institutions have been involved and 7 214 WBL training places have been created.

2022 Completed

In 2022, the development of the WBL system and the empowerment of professional and employer associations to provide and expand WBL continued, together with the development of quality assurance of WBL. Due to the end of programme period, the number of WBL learners decreased: in 2022, 158 students enrolled, and 781 students graduated (cf 2021: 795 students enrolled, 1094 graduated). WBL was actively promoted at seminars and on social and print media, and by granting the Best Apprentice and the Best Company for Work Practice awards. The number of companies introducing WBL was stabilising: in 2022, only 22 new companies joined. The total number of companies and institutions involved WBL was 1526, and after the launch of the new programme the number of learners is expected to increase again.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Research
- Estonian Employers' Confederation
- Innove Foundation (until 2020)
- Education and Youth Board

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Adult learners
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment
Low-skilled/qualified persons

Entities providing VET

Companies
VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET
Further developing national quality assurance systems

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Diversifying modes of learning: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning;
adaptable/flexible training formats
Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning
Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Regulation on the procedure for implementing work-based learning](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

Developing work-based learning and practical training

Developing WBL and practical training includes the following measures:

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Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Developing work-based learning / apprenticeships (until 2022): Estonia. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/35356>