

Vocational reintegration programme of early school leavers "Kutse"

KUTSE - Kutseõpe Uesti, Toetus Sinu Eduks!

 **Estonia**

1 Description

Timespan 2010-2013

Stage **NO LONGER OPERATIONAL**

According to the ministry representative, although the target group was potentially big, there was, at least in the beginning, little interest towards the programme. In Estonia, if there are vacant study places in the vocational education system then anyone who wants to study can come and apply for a study place. Currently there is more emphasis on the provision of support measures and career guidance counselling. These are seen as the remedies to reduce the share of people who discontinue their studies and/or choose the wrong specialty. Therefore, there is no need for a separate measure or a programme that specifically aims to bring back people who once discontinued their vocational education studies. Often people also want to change their specialty, which may be the main reason for dropping out. Last but not least, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF), also has measures for people who have not got a qualification. Thus, while the ministry supports activities that enhance career guidance and other study support measures, the EUIF focuses on activities that aim to give people a proper qualification.

Focus area



MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET



MATCHING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

2 Foundations

Policy area



INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It targets the reintegration of dropouts to VET schools. To give

them a second chance in obtaining a qualification, thus to better equip them with knowledge and skills relevant for the labour market.

Policy goal

To enhance the return and re-integration of dropouts to VET schools, thus preventing their unemployment and reducing their vulnerability in the labour market. The policy goal is related to lifelong learning and the development of human resources, specifically the goal is to increase participation in lifelong learning according to the possibilities and needs of the population.

The rationale for the intervention is to increase the competitiveness of people with lower education and no formal qualification, who discontinued their studies at the time of the economic boom and after the collapse, and to equip them with skills and knowledge relevant to the labour market. The instrument contributes to achieving the policy goal by giving a second chance to people to return to school and finish their studies. The focus of the instrument is on the learner and his/her choice of specialty (personal preference), and not so much on national priority study specialties or areas.

Mismatch**PART OF BROAD POLICY MEASURE OF WHICH SKILL MISMATCH IS ONLY A MINOR PART**

It is part of the national education (VET) policy with the lateral intention to prevent skill mismatch resulting from the dropouts of VET learners.

Aim of policy instrument

UPSKILL AND MATCH SKILLS OF UNEMPLOYED



UPSKILL EMPLOYED ADULTS



OTHER

In the situation where there were many applicants and there was competition in fulfilling the study places, applicants with lower education levels and applicants not working (at the time of applying) were preferred. Furthermore, priority was exclusively given to the learner and his/her choice of specialty (and not to national priority study areas).

Legal basis

MINISTERIAL ORDER

Administrative level

NATIONAL

Main responsible body

Ministry of Education and Research as the main implementation institution (rakendusasutus). Vocational education and adult departments as the main responsible departments.

Stakeholders

 TRAINING PROVIDERS (PUBLIC/PRIVATE)

 GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)

 SOCIAL PARTNERS

 OTHER

Accounting - financing department in the Ministry of Education and Research
Funding - ESF (85%), national SF (15%)
Advising/consulting - if needed and possible, other departments in the Ministry of Education and Research, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund
Acting as observer - Sihtasutus Innove (rakendusüksus - implementation unit)
Implementing - Sihtasutus Innove (rakendusüksus - implementation unit), vocational education institutions, professional higher education institutions
Monitoring, surveillance and control - Sihtasutus Innove (rakendusüksus - implementation unit)
Programme, process evaluation - Sihtasutus Innove (rakendusüksus - implementation unit)

Funding

€1,517,319.7. Funding - ESF (85%), national SF (15%).

Intended beneficiaries

The intended beneficiaries of the instrument are people who discontinued their vocational education studies or professional higher education studies sometime during the period 01.01.2003-01.09.2009 and managed to complete 50% of the curricula before discontinuing their studies. The expected benefits are: to increase their competitiveness on the labour market; to give them the chance to finish their studies and to obtain a formal qualification; to give them the chance to receive a diploma, certificate etc; and to equip them with skills and knowledge relevant to the labour market.

3 Processes

Use of labour market intelligence

 INFORM JOB-SEARCH DECISIONS OF UNEMPLOYED



INFORM DECISIONS ON COURSE FUNDING/PROVISION



INFORM CAREER-MAKING DECISIONS OF STUDENTS

During the economic boom, many dropped out of education and preferred working and earn money instead of studying. After the global economic collapse, it became more difficult even to find a job without being properly qualified and without having a formal certificate, education. In response, the ministry launched a programme to upskill and reskill people who discontinued their studies. Thus, it allowed to lift their competitiveness on the labour market after the crisis, e.g. to increase their chances of finding a job and even more, finding an appropriate job. Among the activities was to inform, improve and advance the career-making decisions of people who once discontinued their studies and to motivate them to obtain a qualification. Another aspect was to give a second chance to school dropouts who were in danger of losing their jobs or already had lost their jobs due to economic crisis. The state support for the provision of free study places encouraged educational institutions to provide additional study places for popular specialities among the learners. In this regard the instrument did not take into account the needs of the labour market and employers` opinions but focused on the interest of the learner. For the first time, this programme acknowledged the need to target adults on the labour market and to activate them in obtaining a proper and renewed qualification. In response, educational institutions have increased the share of adult learning-training possibilities to equip them with relevant skills on the labour market. Under this programme there was also tight cooperation with the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF) to inform their consultants on the possibilities of KUTSE and to encourage them to share information among their clients. No specific LMSI instrument was used to inform the decisions.

Financial schemes

The essence of the programme is to provide free study places for applicants meeting the application criteria, meaning the applicants do not have to pay for continuing their studies, and the ministry finances their study places. The learners falling under this programme have the right to receive the same study support, travel/transport benefits and free school lunch as the other learners. In 2012, the KUTSE learners received the right to apply for partial reimbursement of their accommodation/dormitory costs.

Frequency of updates

Currently, the instrument is no longer operating, but during the implementation phase the instrument was modified/updated several times.

Development

During the implementation period the approach and instrument have been adapted in several ways:
In 2011 the admission criteria were alleviated, including widening the time period from 01.01.2000 to 01.09.2010 and alleviating the required share of completed studies firstly to 35%, then to 0%.
In 2011/2012 separate study groups/courses/classes were created for 25+ learners (adult learners) - an attractive solution.
From 2012 the education institutions can apply to reimburse their qualification exams costs (for KUTSE learners).
The need to adjust the application criteria came from low interest and competition among the potential applicants and the difficulty to find suitable applicants. Some modifications of the instrument did not match the actual needs of KUTSE learners. For example, in 2012 they started to partially reimburse the accommodation costs for KUTSE learners, but since most of them did not use school provided accommodation, it was not useful modification of the instrument. In addition, money for study grants was spent less than planned due to the modest number of suitable learners (study grants for the KUTSE learners and other learners were treated equally, no exceptions). Thus, the instrument was not developed accordingly on the study grant side. The instrument should have been modified differently for younger and adult (25+) learners to better match the opportunities of the instrument with the needs of the learners. It is important to emphasise that the needs of younger and adult learners are different. Usually, adult learners already have a job and income and thus do not need study grants, school provided accommodation etc. Furthermore, although the possibility to reimburse the costs (to the education institution) related with managing and conducting the qualification exam was created, the reimbursement was lower than planned because not all learners used the opportunity to take the exam.

Barriers

The implementation of the instrument was delayed, because the formation and confirmation of the legitimate guidance note (a guidance note for schools for admitting these learners) was finished at the end of the school year. Thus, it was only possible to start the admission after the summer. The delay was due to several reasons, e.g. the topic was new; lack of previous experience; great number of vocational and professional higher education institutions to notify and to cooperate with; and a lot of time was invested into preliminary coordination activities.

In the beginning, vocational and professional higher education institutions were passive in using the instrument, due to low awareness about the possibilities of the instrument and low interest and competition among possible applicants, which in turn was related with low awareness and the difficulty in finding suitable learners (matching the criteria). For example, less money than planned was spent on study grants, due to the modest number of suitable learners (for study grants the KUTSE learners and other learners were treated the same, no exceptions). As the share of adult learners was high, their needs for study support were a bit different. As it was more difficult to bring back discontinued learners, more emphasis and more study places were given to adult (25+) learners. Although the instrument was not well modified to better match the instrument with the needs of adult learners.

In general, the programme budget was underspent in regards to, for example, study grants and reimbursement of different costs. In addition, the incorrect consideration of adult needs and expectations led to educational institutions recruiting learners to, on average, more popular specialities that have shorter curricula and study periods, and are therefore less expensive for the state to manage.

These barriers were overcome by the ministry actively engaging and communicating with school contacts and sharing information and raising awareness about the instrument among education institutions, potential learners and social partners. Also the application criteria were alleviated.

Success factors

Increasing the flexibility of the instrument during the implementation phase. For example:

- In 2011, the admission criteria were alleviated, including widening the time period from 01.01.2000 to 01.09.2010 and alleviating the required share of completed studies firstly to 35%, next to 0%;
 - In 2011/2012, separate study groups/courses/classes were created for 25+ learners (adult learners) - an attractive solution;
 - Constantly raising awareness about the programme among education institutions and the general public and potential learners through media and advertisements.
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Monitoring

The progress was measured annually and after the end of the programme. The total number of students who finished their studies was at least 400, including 200 successful graduates who previously had discontinued their studies.

Innovativeness

SLIGHTLY INNOVATIVE

The policy instrument was well timed, slightly after the economic collapse, providing a rational motive for continuing studies in a changed economic and work environment. It was also innovative in a way, as it improved adult learning. The programme gave the opportunity to complete one`s discontinued studies free of charge (important for those who previously had to pay for their studies). As the same programme was also applied in the higher education system, called "TULE", it was more successful in the higher education system than vocational education. The reason was that the share of learners who pay for their studies is much higher in higher education than in vocational education.

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Sustainability

Evidence of effectiveness

The general impact of the instrument is considered positive in the final report of the programme: the goal was to have 400 graduates, in total 469 completed their studies.

First indicator: the goal was to have 200 successful graduates, who previously had discontinued their studies, but only 53 managed to come through. There were many learners who discontinued their studies.

On this side, the programme was unsuccessful.

Second indicator: the goal was to have 200 (25+) successful graduates, which was achieved. In total, 416 adult learners finished and received a new qualification. Again, there were many learners who discontinued their studies.

Third goal: the goal was to conduct a survey on the reasons for opting out of vocational education, which was achieved. The 2012 survey showed that the reasons for discontinuing are multifaceted, related to wrong choice of specialty, lack of study motivation, school conflicts with class mates and teachers, financial issues etc. Several meetings were held with education institutions to work out measures to reduce drop-out. This research and results has also pushed for another programme to improve study counselling and career guidance and to provide educational support services for all learners.

The general impact of the instrument on national and area level strategies and action plans is considered positive in the final report of the programme. In total 652 study places were created to upskill their competitiveness in the labour market and to support the policy goal of lifelong learning. The running of the programme enabled to turn attention on the vocational and professional education dropout phenomena and to find solutions to reduce it. Among the target groups, the relevance of a proper qualification and a formal certificate was advertised and disclosed. Another impact mentioned in the final report of the programme is the importance of adult education and learning, its characteristics (e.g. need for flexibility) and potential.

At first, the emphasis was on attracting learners who in the past had discontinued their studies, then during the programme, it became clear that it was difficult to find and bring back those people, thus more emphasis and more study places in the programme were given to adult (25+) learners. The adult oriented side of the programme was successful.

On the other hand, as the focus of the programme changed during the implementation phase and the instrument was modified several times, the planned and actual costs were different. The budget was underspent, mostly due to the modest use of study grants and other benefits, which were not that relevant with adult learners.

Engagement of stakeholders

As the instrument was a ministerial order, it is quite specific about the roles and tasks of the ministry (including specific departments) and the so called implementation unit SA Innove. At the start of the programme, the ministry and its various departments, in cooperation with education institutions, had to assemble a legitimate guidance note, which is a guideline for schools for admitting these learners (rules and procedures in filling study places). This enabled to engage all essential stakeholders from the start of the programme and keep them motivated and interested in the programme.

Transferability**EASILY TRANSFERABLE**

When there is strong emphasis on the career guidance counselling and study support measures (study grants, free study places, travel benefits etc), and also flexible study arrangements (to combine work and school life), then there is no acute need for this kind of programme. On the other hand, when the aim is to train certain amount of people within a specified time period, then it may prove to be successful. But it is important that the learners are kept motivated e.g. with a grant, other benefits or a future job. Also, the creation of additional free study places is beneficial and motivating for those who previously have had to pay for their studies.

Sustainability

According to the ministry representative, there is no need for such a programme in the vocational education system, currently and in the near future, because all candidates can apply for a free study place. Thus, all people who would like to study can do so. Furthermore, the number of times an individual can study is unlimited in the vocational education system.
