

Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices - Estonia

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Introduction

The Estonian [Lifelong learning strategy](#) 2020 (LLL2020) addresses the most important challenges in lifelong learning. The general goal of drafting the Lifelong learning strategy is to provide all people in Estonia with learning opportunities that are tailored to their needs and capabilities throughout their whole lifespan, in order for them to maximise opportunities for dignified self-actualisation within society, in their work and in their family life.

The overarching strategy includes lifelong guidance and stresses the most crucial issues, including access to guidance for all, quality of service provision and professional practitioners. The strategy sets five strategic goals, of which two are closely tied to lifelong guidance:

- a. correspondence between opportunities for lifelong learning and the needs of the labour market: easy access to lifelong learning and high-quality career services contribute to increasing the level of qualifications of citizens of all ages and their participation in lifelong learning across Estonia;
- b. equal opportunities for lifelong learning and growth of participation in learning: the Estonian State must ensure all people equal opportunities to get a quality education in accordance with their abilities (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

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Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

According to the LLL2020, the [Ministry of Education and Research](#) and the [Ministry of Social Affairs](#) are responsible for the development of lifelong guidance. The aim is to keep a comprehensive, sustainable and user-friendly guidance system in operation. It helps people to pursue further education, learn a new profession or implement changes in their professional life. The main institution in the provision and development of lifelong guidance, both in education and in the employment sector is, starting from 2019, the Unemployment Insurance Fund (*Eesti Töötukassa*), the public employment service, the national PES (Archimedes, 2019). Together with the Ministry of Education and Research, [Foundation Innove](#) is responsible for developing and coordinating the provision of career education in schools and related services.

Coordination at national level is sector and programme-based. At regional and local levels both [Rajaleidja](#) (Pathfinder in English) centres and PES centres located in all 15 counties collaborate closely with general education and VET schools. Currently the Estonian career services system is going through a reform, as the career counselling and career information services that were previously provided separately in the education system (by Innove and its Rajaleidja Centres) and in the labour market system (by national PES), were joined in January 2019. Since then, career counselling and career information is provided by the Estonian unemployment insurance fund (PES). Estonian career guidance rests on three pillars or services including career counselling, mediation of career information and career education. Accordingly, PES is now responsible for counselling and information, while responsibility for career education lies with the education sector (including Foundation Innove and education institutions at all levels).

There is also cooperation with various counterparts, in order to have common ground for different interests, in the National Guidance Forum. Members of the National Guidance Forum include the Ministry of Education and Research,

Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonian Association of Career Counsellors, Estonian Youth Work Centre, Estonian Schools Heads Association, Estonian Students Union, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Foundation Innove and Foundation Archimedes/Euroguidance Estonia. A wider circle of experts and representatives will be involved when it comes to decision-making in more specific areas (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

International co-operation in lifelong guidance has been reorganised; the new stakeholder in the field is [Archimedes Foundation](#). [Euroguidance Estonia](#) is the Estonian National Resource Centre for Guidance, providing a range of services to Estonian guidance professionals and to professionals abroad. As a member of the [European Euroguidance Network](#), the centre provides support in learning mobility and lifelong guidance development within education, training and employment at international level. Euroguidance Estonia has been part of the Archimedes Foundation since January 2019 (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

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Access to guidance

According to the LLL2020, the [Ministry of Education and Research](#) and the [Ministry of Social Affairs](#) are responsible for the development of lifelong guidance. The aim is to keep a comprehensive, sustainable and user-friendly guidance system in operation. It helps people to pursue further education, learn a new profession or implement changes in their professional life. The main institution in the provision and development of lifelong guidance, both in education and in the employment sector is, starting from 2019, the Unemployment insurance fund (*Eesti Töötukassa*), the public employment service, the national PES (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019). Together with the Ministry of Education and Research, [Foundation Innove](#) is responsible for developing and coordinating the provision of career education in schools and related services (see sections [Career guidance for school pupils](#), [Guidance for VET participants](#), [Guidance for higher education students](#), [Guidance for the employed](#), [Guidance for unemployed adults](#), [Guidance for NEET](#) and [Guidance for special needs and disabled](#)).

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Quality assurance

Quality assurance in the PES

In the PES, focus is put on providing services according to the needs of the target groups. The main target groups of career services of the PES are the unemployed, the employed and the young aged seven to 26: special attention is given to third school stage (classes from seven to nine), upper secondary education level, students in vocational education and the NEET. Quality assurance is done through the following activities:

- a. assessment of the summaries of career counselling;
- b. assessment of the process of finding out the need of the client for career counselling;
- c. feedback to the process of a career counselling session.

An electronic client feedback system was launched by PES in March 2019 to allow quick feedback collection and

customer satisfaction evaluation. Within two weeks after the counselling session, the clients are sent the following three simple questions:

- a. Would you recommend career services to peers? Scale of 0-10;
- b. What did you like and what should we change? Free answers;
- c. How useful was the guidance for you? Scale of 1-5 (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Award of occupational qualifications

The occupational qualifications system is a link between the labour market and the lifelong learning system, enhancing the development, assessment and recognition of a person's occupational competence. The occupational qualification standard describes occupational activities and provides the competence requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels (see section [Training and Qualifications](#)).

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Career management skills

A cross-thematic approach is used for the development of career management skills in schools. In 2014, the national general education curricula were adjusted, with more specific study goals in connection with career planning included. The national curriculum does not prescribe to the school precisely what actions are to be taken to achieve the goals set; each school is able to select the best ways, methods and means based on the characteristics and abilities of the school. The school is obliged to ensure the availability of career-related services (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019). Further information may be retrieved from:

- a. [Pre-school, basic and secondary education](#)
- b. [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#)
- c. [Consolidated texts of English translations of Estonian legislation](#).

The national basic school and national upper secondary school curricula include eight compulsory central topics, one of which is Lifelong learning and career planning. The curricula are also accompanied by the syllabi of the elective subject and elective course in career education, which increase the topic's importance in the school curriculum.

The development of career management skills (CMS) is a priority throughout Europe. Both national and international policy and research point to the need to teach people the skills that help them navigate the complex educational landscape and the changing labour market. In Estonia, a model has been developed in cooperation with various stakeholders to define the skills necessary for career management.

As detailed in Euroguidance (2019), the development of the [Estonian CMS model](#) has been a long process with the participation of schools promoting career education. The original version of the model concentrated on national curricula, including career management skills in school settings, general education goals, and the learning outcomes and content of the cross-curricula theme. The [model was then refined](#) in light of research findings, expert opinions and career management theories. Today, the model is based on the guiding principle of constructivism.

Several agreements, including national curricula, occupational qualification standards for career professionals, and service standards for career services, are the cornerstones of the service quality, availability and the CMS development framework. The main structure of the model consists of four competence areas: development of self-awareness, analysis of opportunities, planning, and taking action (further information can be found [here](#)).

Since there are no curricula, the Estonian PES adopt the constructivist principles. One of their key focus points in offering career services is also to support the career management skills of the clients in a way that they can be more successful in the process of finding a suitable learning opportunity and/or job. There is a clear link between the model and the occupational qualification standards which are followed by PES.

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Evidence, monitoring and assessment

The monitoring process of career services is under reconstruction due to the [career services reform](#) launched on 1st January 2019. It is one of the main tasks of the National Guidance Forum (also relaunched with the career services reform), to agree on and monitor career services development goals, to propose further actions necessary to widen the access to and increase the quality of career guidance.

There is no joint approach to gathering data on career guidance services at national level covering both education and employment sector. The Estonian PES monitors access to career guidance services to different target groups. In 2019, PES launched the instant client feedback system for their clients in career services (see section [Quality assurance](#)).

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Career information, ICT in guidance

Estonia appears to be progressing towards the development of a digital economy and society, as evidenced by the results of the country in the [Digital economy and society index](#). Estonians are considered to be among the most well-skilled Europeans in online and digital public services in terms of using digital technologies and various internet activities.

E-governance is a strategic choice for Estonia to improve the competitiveness of the state and increase the well-being of its people, while implementing hassle-free governance. The modern infrastructure has made it possible to build a safe e-services ecosystem. An important part of this ecosystem is flexibility and the ability to integrate its different parts, while improving e-services and allowing government systems to grow. Citizens can select e-solutions from among a range of public services at a time and place convenient to them, as 99% of public services are now available to citizens as e-services. Every Estonian resident has an electronic ID, and, in most cases, there is no need to physically visit an agency providing a service (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Digital solutions in lifelong learning are also in strategic focus (see [here](#)). The objective is to apply modern digital technology in learning and teaching in a more efficient way and with better results, to improve the digital skills of the population and to guarantee access to the new generation of digital infrastructure.

The Ministry of Education and Research has launched a [new portal](#) which will be the main portal for education and labour market information and career development issues. EUIF hosts a practical web page for career planning called [Minukarjäär](#) (my career).

There have been also some new and exciting tools for career development:

- a. [Estonian youth work centre](#) has made the first virtual reality videos of occupations (medical workers, youth workers). These aim to make this a new way of introducing different occupations and work environments alongside more common texts, photos and videos;
- b. Foundation Innove has opened [virtual tours of all vocational education institutions](#) in Estonia);
- c. thematic e-courses for career practitioners are provided by Euroguidance Estonia.

In its service provision, Estonia is taking the maximum of [X-Road](#), a system which ensures the direct and secure exchange of data between various information systems. This means that the clients of PES, adult or the young, have to present the minimum amount as possible on paper; instead the gathering of background information concerning the client is done automatically in the information systems.

The daily work of the guidance practitioners is intertwined with the use of various ICT solutions. The use of ICT here is multi-faceted: practitioners are both ICT users and the creators of career information through their use of ICT solutions.

The ICT solutions can be broadly divided into the following two groups:

- a. for service provision, including web pages, databases, educational software, games, social media channels, and e-tests;
- b. for internal processes, including documentation management, customer management, feedback solutions, information exchange in cloud-based solutions, and e-learning environments (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Practitioners of career services use a variety of electronically administered tests and evaluation tools, including personality tests and career choice tests. The online tests have been standardised based on representative groups of Estonian school children and adults. Versatile technical environments for information exchange and group counselling are in use.

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Training and qualifications

In Estonia, there is no academic training available for career professionals. Most professionals have a higher education degree in social sciences (psychology, anthropology, personnel management). The occupational qualifications system connects the labour market and the lifelong learning system by improving the development, assessment and recognition of a person's occupational competence. The system is developed and administered by the [Estonian Qualifications Authority](#). According to the [Professions Act](#) (2008), the Estonian qualification framework has eight levels (level one being the lowest and level eight the highest). The descriptions of the qualification levels are identical with the European Qualifications Framework (see [here](#)).

The occupational qualification standard describes occupational activities and provides the competence requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels. Part A of the standard provides an overview of the nature of work, major parts of work and tasks, necessary tools, work environment, including the specificities of work, and describes the personal characteristics and skills enhancing occupational activities. This is a source of information for a person on selection of an occupation and shaping his or her career path. This also contains useful information for career guidance professionals, labour market consultants, human resources managers and trainers (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

The competence requirements presented in part B of the standard serve as a basis for the assessment of the applicant for the occupational qualification. These requirements are presented as descriptions of mandatory and optional competences. Competence is an ability to perform a specific part of work or a task together with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for that. Proceeding from the nature of the occupation, its specificity and traditions, attesting competences related to a specialisation or optional competences, may be the prerequisite for being awarded the occupational qualification (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

In the field of lifelong guidance, the occupational qualification standards are available on two levels, including career specialist on EQF level 6 and 7. The current standards were defined and the requirements on knowledge, skills, experience, values and personal characteristics necessary for the career specialists were established in close co-operation with the main stakeholders in the field in 2017 (further information can be found [here](#)). For example, the [Association of Estonian Career Counsellors](#) is a certified organisation for awarding and recertifying occupational qualifications of career specialists.

Practitioner training and development in the PES

The development of practitioners' professional competences, on the basis of the requirements of the occupational qualification standard, is important, and training courses as well as peer-coaching are available for this purpose. The range of training topics is broad; for example, characteristic features of teenagers with special educational needs, characteristic features of various health-related issues, psychological evaluation tools, personality and career testing, motivational interviewing, ICT skills. To ensure international exposure, speakers and trainers from other countries, are invited and Estonian practitioners have opportunities to travel in Europe for training purposes (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

When compiling the set of training courses for its career specialists, PES, the data (the skills set) of the occupational qualification standards is used. All career specialists who start working at the PES, first need to participate in a set of preparatory training courses and later in a supplementary set of training courses. Since it is not possible to obtain tertiary education in career guidance in Estonia, the PES provides its new career specialists with basic skills training course (bought-in, not offered by the PES itself). The PES supports its career specialists in the process of applying for obtaining career specialists' vocation (both career specialist's vocation).

In the field of lifelong guidance there are occupational qualification standards available for five specialist groups, including career specialist (EQF level 6 and 7), social pedagogue (level 6 and 7), special education teacher (level 7 and 8), speech therapist (level 7 and 8) and psychologist (level 7 and 8). Professional associations generally have the role of the awarding body, awarding occupational qualifications in the given field. The [Association of Estonian Career Counsellors](#) is a certified organisation responsible for awarding and recertifying occupational qualifications of career

specialists. When providing career specialists with specialised continuous training courses, their employers follow the competence requirements for occupational qualifications and their levels described by the occupational qualification standards.

In the Estonian occupational qualifications system, the labour market is divided into 14 sectors, each managed by a professional council. Institutions represented in the councils are nominated by the Government and persons representing these institutions are nominated by the Minister for Education and Research. Typically, institutions represented in professional councils are: employer organisations of the sector; trade unions of the sector; professional associations of the sector; education and training institutions; and responsible ministry (Kutsekoda, 2020). Professional councils are responsible also for giving right to awarding bodies to award occupational qualifications and approve the procedure for awarding occupational qualifications. An overview of the Estonian occupational qualifications system is available [here](#).

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Funding career guidance

Career services offered by the PES are financed from unemployment insurance contributions (paid by employees and employers), as well as the European Social Fund.

According to the [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#), school running costs are covered by the school manager. In most cases, this means local governments, meaning that activities related to career studies at schools are financed by central and local authorities. Local governments are authorised to establish, rearrange and close general education schools. Local governments keep account of the number of children obliged to attend, ensure school attendance control, make arrangements for school transport and the provision of school meals and perform a number of related functions (for further information please see [here](#)).

The number of the students in municipal schools will be used to calculate the subsidies allocated from the State budget to municipalities. The State subsidy is used for covering expenses on teachers' salaries, social taxes, training and textbooks. Similar subsidies are also made available to private general education schools as prescribed by the Private Schools Act. In doing this, the State will refrain from prescribing guidelines on the use of the funds allocated. The local government reserves the obligation and right to finance schools based on their actual needs (Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, 2020).

Development of career education in schools is also supported by public funding led by Foundation Innove.

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Career guidance for school pupils

In the education sector, guidance is provided both as a part of youth work and as a part of formal education. The development of career management skills is supported from kindergarten. Children are helped to discover the labour market and education in a general sense: that their parents go to work and what this work is. Development of such

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competences is supported during the entire time of study, throughout all education levels.

The **Education Act** of the Republic of Estonia stipulates that career guidance for children and the young as the responsibility of local governments. The **national curriculum for pre-school** sets out the establishes the bases of the schooling and education of pre-school child care institutions regardless of the legal status of the child care institution. The curriculum indicates the goals and content of study and upbringing and the expected results regarding the development of children aged six to seven. In 2014 the **national general education curricula** were adjusted and more specific career-related studies were included. The national curriculum does not prescribe to the school precisely what actions are to be taken to achieve the set goals: each school is able to select the best ways, methods and means based on the specifics and abilities of the school. The school is obliged to ensure the availability of career-related services. The national basic school and national upper secondary school curricula include eight compulsory central topics, one of which is the topic which supports pupils' career planning: Lifelong learning and career planning. In addition, the curricula are accompanied by the **syllabi of the elective subject and elective course in career education**, which enhances the use of this possibility in the school curriculum.

Innove's regional youth guidance centres, called *Rajaleidja* (Pathfinder in English) centres, provide psychological, socio-pedagogical, special educational counselling and speech therapy. The services are focused on children and the young (age 18 months to 18 years) with special educational needs; the practitioners' main direct target group is school personnel and parents. These activities, in line with career services, provided by the PES, play an important role in supporting the young in making the right decisions about choices of further study, career formation, and entering the labour market.

Career counselling and career information services at schools are provided by PES career specialists, based on the needs of the school/its students. Either the school reports to the PES, what kind of career services are needed in the school in addition to what is covered within the school curriculum; or the PES does 'promotion-work' in order to inform the schools about the possibilities that PES can provide to students in the field of career counselling and career information services. This means that teams of suitable specialists (either career counsellors or career information specialists, or both) are put together for each school depending on the needs of its students.

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Guidance for VET participants

The goal of the **Vocational Educational Institutions Act** is to set out the basics of organisation of studies in vocational education institutions. The task of a vocational education institution is to create opportunities for students to obtain knowledge, skills and ethical guidance necessary for life and work, including professional training and retraining, considering the needs of society, students and the labour market. Vocational training curricula in basic schools and upper secondary schools aim at transmitting basic vocational and professional knowledge and skills. The obligation of schools regarding vocational training applies with regard to those who lack basic education (primary and upper secondary schools); it is a form of study that takes place on the basis of vocational education standards and the vocational or professional national curriculum; it must be noted that there are no restrictions on education level for the commencement of studies and the nominal duration of the curriculum is up to 2.5 years (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Development of career management skills takes place in vocational education both through vocational training and generic skills modules; career topics are integrated with entrepreneurship competences as an obligatory part of every VET curriculum. Materials are available in a Foundation Innove web-page of vocational curricula development centre under the section "**Implementation of lifelong learning key-competences in VET curricula**". The module is developed for levels of curricula from second to fifth. The goal of learning is the self-efficacy of the student in the modern economic, entrepreneurship and work environment, while designing her/his career based on the lifelong learning principles. The module helps students to perceive specialised studies as a step on the career path and take responsibility for further learning and development (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are described in the curriculum; schools are free to choose the precise implementation of the module. Competences in career planning are developed throughout the whole learning period. Direct feedback from the supervisor helps the student to obtain deeper understanding about his/her studies, to set goals and explain the needs of development. Reporting the practice also reflects the development of career planning competences during it.

VET schools have option to include elective courses about career planning in their curriculum. Some VET schools have hired guidance professional to provide individual support for learners from admission to the school and throughout the studies.

Starting from autumn 2019, VET schools have possibility to implement a curriculum of professional choice, the target group of which is young people who need additional support for making career choices or entering the labour market. The main focus of the curriculum is career planning competences and their development. Furthermore, since January 2019 career counselling and career information is available free of charge for all VET students in *Eesti Töötukassa* (PES).

Please see the description of VET system in Estonia [here](#).

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Guidance for higher education students

The goal of the [Universities Act](#) is to set the procedure for the organisation of studies and the graduation in universities as well as for the conditions for obtaining a higher education qualification. The Universities Act applies to six public-law universities (University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Academy of Arts and Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre). The Act applies to private universities unless the Private Schools Act states otherwise. The Private Schools Act applies to private-law legal persons who may consequently obtain pre-school, primary, secondary or higher education in a private school.

The [Private Schools Act](#) also applies to self-employed persons and private-law legal persons to provide for obtaining hobby-based education or organising professional or voluntary training for adults, where the organised studies last longer than 120 hours or six months a year (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

Guidance support is available for students in four public universities. The overall aim is to support students in their studies, to offer a number of services that help students develop personal life skills and achieve success in the labour market.

Career counselling provides students with support in career planning, making decisions related to their job and study choices, and develop their job-seeking skills. Career counsellors support students to make career choices and career plans, do self-analysis, search and apply for a job, to write a CV and cover letter and, to prepare for a job interview. Both individual counselling and services in groups involve university staff and external experts. Tutoring by student volunteers is also available, e.g. for first-year students and international students who are starting their studies. Students are supported if problems arise during studies or in personal life (psychological counselling). Students with special needs get help if they need to change or adapt the content of studies arising from the curriculum, organisation of work or study environment in order to guarantee an opportunity for maximum participation in the study process and individual development. Universities help students with special needs upon entering the university, participating in studies, doing exams and tests, obtaining study materials, as well as in creating a suitable social and physical environment. Estonian students are advised on numerous student exchange options and incoming exchange students are supported throughout their application process and during studies (Sihtasutus Archimedes, 2019).

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Guidance for the employed

In the employment sector, providing career guidance is regulated in the [Labour Market Services and Benefits Act](#) (*tööturuteenuste ja -toetuste seadus*) of 2006. Employed people can access career guidance free of charge since 2015 (European Social Fund funds the programme increasing accessibility to career guidance); everyone can access career guidance free of charge from the PES, since 1st January 2019, as a result of the career services reform. It is available individually and in groups; approximately 40% of sessions are provided for groups. Clients can reach the service also via telephone, e-mail or Skype. Career information has been provided free of charge to all people, employed and

unemployed, in the labour market system, by the PES, starting from 2009.

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Guidance for unemployed adults

In order to improve employability and prevent unemployment, including long-term unemployment, a **Study and career counselling programme** (*Õppe- ja karjäärinõustamise programm*) has been initiated, which provides counselling services that support learners in shaping informed lifelong learning and career choices.

The Estonian lifelong learning strategy's **Adult education programme** (*Täiskasvanuhariduse programm*) aims to bring back adults who have interrupted their educational path and improve their access to high quality non-formal education based on their interests and abilities, supporting their development and taking into account the needs of the labour market.

Since 2016, the services offered under the **Work ability reforms** aim to change attitudes in society towards people with reduced working ability and to help them find and secure a job, through assistance at job interviews, peer support, working with a support person, work rehabilitation, commuting benefits and assistive work equipment. The same year, the Government revised **The Employment programme for 2017-20**, with the goal to prevent unemployment, especially for workers older than 50 with no professional/vocational education, whose skills are outdated or whose knowledge of Estonian is poor.

The Estonian unemployment insurance fund (Eesti Töötukassa, the PES) provides employment services to jobseekers, employers and, in some cases, also to people currently in employment, in order to prevent them from falling out of the labour market due to health issues or outdated skills (by covering the expenses of skills training or also supporting studies in vocational or higher education). The PES is responsible for implementation of active labour market policies, management and payment of unemployment and workability benefits and conducting workability assessments.

Since May 2017, PES Estonia has been providing unemployment prevention measures. These services are targeted at employees who need support to change jobs or to remain employed (low or outdated skills) under the **Work and study programme**. They also support employers in finding and training a skilled workforce and restructuring their companies. Available services include:

- a. a study allowance for employed and registered unemployed people to obtain vocational, professional higher education or bachelor studies;
- b. labour market training with a training card for employed people at risk of unemployment;
- c. support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit;
- d. training grant for employers for improving the skills and knowledge of their employees on recruitment and helping them to adapt to changes in the employer's economic activities (Eesti Töötukassa, 2018).

Participation in a career counselling session beforehand is mandatory in the first two situations. In specific, participation in a career counselling session is mandatory in order to analyse together with a specialist (career counsellor) whether the person is eligible for the measures, what kind of measure and on what field is/are most suitable. The career counsellor discusses with the person whether the training supports the acquisition of all the necessary skills. However, the third service includes support for obtaining qualifications for employed persons who have undergone labour market or other training with the support of the training benefit. For this service participating in a career counselling session is not needed.

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Guidance for NEET

The [Estonian Youth field development plan 2014-20](#) outlines the strategic objectives in the youth field for 2014-20. The overall goal of the development plan is to establish a coherent and creative society by providing young people with ample opportunities for self-development and self-realisation.

To lower the risk of young people's exclusion by improving their employability, The Ministry of Education and Research has launched different programmes specifically targeting young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). In specific, as part of the youth guarantee, the Ministry of Education and Research launched an initiative to support young people aged 15-26 entering the labour market, as well as young people not in education or work (NEETs). [Youth prop-up](#) is an action plan for young people who are not enrolled or employed. The plan is led by the Estonian Youth Work Centre.

In addition, the Estonian unemployment insurance fund offers the [My first job](#) measure that helps find work for young people with no professional education or little work experience who have been unemployed for at least four months. [Wage subsidy](#) also aims to support the hiring of young people in the 17-29 age group without professional education or long-term work experience by subsidising employees whose recruitment is targeted at young people.

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Guidance for persons with disabilities

In Estonia, teaching students with special educational needs (SEN) is based on the principle of inclusive education. Every child has the right to study at a school near home. To make learning meet capacity and provide an experience of success, it is necessary to support the student according to his or her individual development and needs. Innove offers counseling and methodological support for families, teachers and schools for helping them support students with SEN.

Innove's regional youth guidance centres, called [Rajaleidja](#) (Pathfinder in English) centres, provide psychological, socio-pedagogical, special educational counselling and speech therapy. The services are focused on children and the young (age 18 months to 18 years) with special educational needs; the practitioners' main direct target group is school personnel and parents. These activities, in line with career services, provided by the PES, play an important role in supporting the young in making the right decisions about choices of further study, career formation, and entering the labour market.

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Coronavirus Update

Estonia has been providing career services online (via telephone, e-mail and Skype) for several years as an alternative to person-to-person meetings, so maintaining a certain level of provision was less of a challenge (Holland and Mann, 2020). It is a way to overcome obstacles that prevent people from reaching PES offices and to provide guidance to those who wish to remain anonymous. While physical meetings are mostly preferred by both clients and counsellors, preparing the PES's counsellors to move their work online has now proved its necessity. While the coronavirus pandemic has closed all PES offices until the end of the crisis (which is currently undefinable), Estonians are still able to access high-quality guidance services. As in the case with guidance delivered in education settings, employed adults seeking individualised support on career development can schedule a meeting on the PES self-service portal for counselling via Skype video or telephone. Receiving guidance via e-mail or Microsoft Teams (which is used for both individual and group consultations) are also available options.

Currently, no large educational policy changes are planned neither long- nor short-term. One exception is an amendment to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act that is currently under discussion in the Parliament. The aim of this amendment is to provide flexibility in organising the final examinations and if necessary, providing a possibility to graduate from both basic school and upper secondary school without final exams (except for two Upper Secondary Schools exams that will be voted by the Government on 16.04). The second amendment concerns the students' assessment during an emergency. Schools are encouraged to use descriptive verbal assessments rather than numerical to better adapt to remote learning. The amendment to the law creates an opportunity in all three basic school stages and upper secondary schools to use descriptive verbal assessments (without the need of converting them to a five-point scale), during the emergency period, based on the school curriculum. Schools may also use the descriptive verbal assessments in the summative assessment, i.e. in the presentation of quarterly, semester, course and annual grades.

In the current emergency, the role of the Ministry of Education and Research is to provide teachers, heads of schools, students, parents and the public with information on examinations, assessment and graduation. Different institutions provide supportive guidelines and information on how to organise remote learning for different target groups. The ministry provides advice to different interest groups with the aim of supporting student's well-being, while teachers, heads of schools and parents have all been approached separately. In general, the ministry has recommended that currently more emphasis should be laid on the development of general competences such as communication, as well as social and civic competences. The Ministry of Education and Research is providing and regularly updating

information, including guidelines to parents, teachers and school managers, on coronavirus measures in the education system (in English).

For several years, digital competence has been prioritised as one of the most critical competences in Estonia. Therefore, many supportive materials have already been developed in digital form. In addition, there are several online platforms to facilitate communication between schools/teachers, students and parents such as e-school, stuumium, etc. In general education, the majority of the learning materials are both on paper and online and students have access to online-based study materials (e-schoolbag; opiq.ee; hitsa.ee; foxcademy.com, etc.).

Schools and municipalities have also provided the equipment needed for ensuring learning and teaching. There are community-based initiatives that bring people in need and donors together, such as the Facebook group “Every Computer for Schoolchildren”. A positive fact is that the private sector is active in supporting schools and in cooperation with the public sector organises free webinars to assist educators in achieving the best possible results. Currently, companies like 99math.com, Lingvist.com, Clanbeat.com, Speakly.me, ALPA Kids, and DreamApply.com have joined the initiative to offer their solutions for free. The list of tools that are internationally available may be accessed here: <http://education-nation.99math.com/>.

Schools have also sent clear instructions to students and their parents on how to organise their remote learning, as well as contact details from which parents may find further information. For example, parents and teachers may find help for solving problems, related to e-learning, in the website of the Information Technology Foundation for Education’s (HITSA). Additionally, a public Facebook group, “Home-Based teaching through technology”, has been set up to support teachers and seek advice from educational technologists if needed. Parents and education enthusiasts created a Facebook group “Remote learning at home” (in Estonian) in order to bring parents and educators together, provide support to each other, help tackle problems and share success stories related to remote learning.

Foundation Innove has put together a series of practical webinars (in Estonian) for the heads of schools in order to help them lead their team better and ensure effective communication during this emergency. Teachers are supported with different materials (in Estonian and in English) regarding the development of assessment guidelines, tips on how to organise remote learning and how to use different digital platforms. Parents are supported with advice (in Estonian) on how to help organise remote learning and maintain mental health. Special attention has been paid to parents with children with SEN (information and materials in Estonian). The Rajaleidja (direct translation is Pathfinder) network provides free educational counselling to adults who support children with SEN in education –parents, teachers, support specialists, etc.– through video chat, online chat, email and phone on workdays 09:00-17:00. In addition, managers of the Rajaleidja provide advice to schools on how to organise remote learning for students who need extra support. A citizens' initiative Tagasi Kooli (direct translation – Back to School) is organising online guest lectures that give students the opportunity to develop a variety of general competences such as money wisdom, media literacy, healthy eating, digital wisdom and more (in Estonian). The Estonian Youth Work Centre’s Teeviit (direct translation – Signpost) webpage gathers information for youth on how to cope with the period of emergency (in Estonian and Russian).

Support systems in vocational education institutions are reorganised and offered via virtual platforms. The results of the study in VET schools, carried out from 2-6 of April 2020, pointed out that the personnel’s workload has grown remarkably. Support and guidance concerning studies, has been offered by group leaders, teachers, social pedagogues and psychologists working at school level. Regular phone calls and several online platforms, apart from the e-school systems mentioned earlier, have been used such as Zoom, GoogleMeet, FB messenger, FaceTime etc. Students with special educational needs are at greater risk as their digital competences and access to technology might be hampered. However, all teachers, IT managers, support personnel and educational technologists of the VET institutions offer digital aid where needed. In addition, webinars to share Estonian positive experiences within the crisis are published by Education Nation Facebook channel on a regular basis.

Where there is evidence of a reduced spread of the COVID-19 virus, the Minister of Education and Research eases the restrictions on the activities of educational institutions from June 1st to the end of the school year, but in a freer format (including the development of communication, values, social and civic competences, conducting development interviews, organising study days, etc.). These activities will only be permitted if the overall safety of students can be assured. The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research recommends schools to monitor students’ progress and to provide tutoring as needed, either individually or in small groups.

In Estonia, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, a public employment service (PES), provides career guidance services free of charge to everyone, regardless of age or economic activity. COVID-19 has made face-to-face contacts impossible, but different online tools are being used to continue providing support at a time when it is needed most. However, the Estonian experience reveals that having only one remote channel as a solution (i.e. providing services only via telephone) might not provide clients with enough choices that would take into account their varied abilities, skills and infrastructure and provide access to all users. Therefore, PES provided Microsoft Teams as an additional channel for individual and group career counselling.

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