
Latvia

VET in Europe – Country report

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Authors: Zinta Daija, project assistant
Gunta Kinta, head of Projects Department
Baiba Ramiņa, head of Academic Information Centre

The information for this report was collected with the help of Ms Anita Āboliņa, Ms Ilze Buligina, Ms Valda Krēsliņa, Mr Dmitrijs Kuļšs, Ms Jeļena Muhina, Ms Ina Vārna (Ministry of Education and Science), Ms Aleksandra Joma, Ms Baiba Kārkliņa, Ms Antra Meņģele, Ms Elīna Purmale-Baumane (State Education Development Agency), Ms Ruta Ančupāne, Ms Helga Kaukule, Ms Sarmīte Valaine (National Centre for Education), Mr Māris Stinkulis, Ms Kristīne Strūberga (State Education Quality Service), Ms Diāna Karaša (Latvian Chamber of Crafts), Ms Ilze Bērziņa, Ms Eva Lossane, Ms Jeļena Šaitere (State Employment Agency), Ms Anita Līce (Employers' Confederation of Latvia), Ms Ilze Trapenciere (Education and Science Workers Trade Union).

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Table of contents

CHAPTER 1	4
1. External factors influencing VET	4
1.1 Structure and development of the population	4
1.2 Structure and development of the labour force	4
1.3 Economy structure/the relative weight of different industries and their dynamics.....	5
1.4 Degree of regulation of the labour market, labour supply/labour demand, mismatches	6
1.5 Degree of regulation of access to occupations/professions.....	7
1.6 Main features of welfare/employment policies relevant to VET	8
1.7 Value of VET qualifications in the labour market – the labour market situation of the VET graduates	9
CHAPTER 2	11
2. Providing vocational education in a lifelong learning perspective	11
2.1 Diagram of the national education system	11
2.2 Government-regulated VET provision.....	12
2.2.1 Vocational education pathways.....	12
2.2.2 VET provision for target groups.....	19
2.2.3 Specific financial and governance issues.....	21
2.2.4 Education and training providers.....	25
2.2.5 Teachers and trainers	26
2.2.6 Implementation of the Latvian Qualifications Framework.....	28
2.2.7 Any particular national challenge, difficulties or success concerning this topic.....	28
2.3 Other forms of learning	29
CHAPTER 3	32
3. Shaping VET qualifications	32
3.1 Methods for anticipating labour market needs and applying the results in VET	32
3.2 How and by whom qualifications are designed	34
3.3 Ensuring the labour market relevance of knowledge, skills and competence development in VET.....	35
3.4 Quality assurance of the process.....	36
3.5 Validation of non-formal and informal learning and whether it leads to qualifications.....	37
3.6 Any particular national challenge, difficulties or success concerning this topic	39
CHAPTER 4	40
4. Promoting participation in vocational education and training	40
4.1 Types and characteristics of incentives for individuals, enterprises and providers.....	40
4.2 Guidance and counselling, structures and services.....	41
4.3 Current key challenges	43
Appendix	45
Tables.....	45
Definitions.....	51
Sources, bibliography, acronyms and abbreviations	53
Sources, references and websites	53
List of acronyms and abbreviations.....	57

CHAPTER 1

1. External factors influencing VET

1.1 Structure and development of the population

Latvia covers 64,589 km² and, according to Census 2011 provisional results, has a population of 2.07 million people, while CSB data (www.csb.gov.lv) show that in 2012 total number of inhabitants has decreased to 2.04 million. The number of inhabitants decreases due to long-term negative demographic tendencies (-0.39% in 2009, -0.52% in 2010 and -0.48% in 2011) and long-term migration (-1.52% in 2009, -1.60% in 2010 and -1.13% in 2011 of total population). During the period from 2000 to 2011, number of emigrants in total constitutes around 230 thousands inhabitants. Mainly inhabitants at working age migrate abroad, and major reason is job seeking in other countries.

The share of the population below working age comparing to 2000 (18.0%) has sharply fallen, but during the last years a slight increase may be observed (13.8% in 2010; 14.2% in 2011 and 14.3% at the beginning of 2012). However, the proportion of the schooling age population is expected to decrease further until at least 2015. Proportion of population above working age shows steady increase during the last years, i.e. 20.2% in 2010, 21.6% in 2011 and 22.1% at the beginning of 2012.

The proportion of economically active inhabitants in the population increased due to an increase in the pension age (58.9% in 2000 and 66.0% in 2010), yet in the recent years the proportion of these inhabitants has decreased (64.2% in 2011 and 63.6% in 2012).

The most of population in 2011 lived in urban area (67.7%), of which 46.9% lived in Riga and its region. The urban/rural ratio in the total number of population has not changed during last 5 years. The majority of social and economic facilities are concentrated in Riga and in big cities, therefore, availability of education and other services in rural regions should be particularly promoted. The main inhabitant inland migration stream may be observed from rural regions to Riga.

1.2 Structure and development of the labour force

The employment rates (for 15-64 years old inhabitants) have changed slightly comparing the years 2009 (61.1%), 2010 (59.3%) and 2011 (60.8%). For males employment rate was slightly higher – 61.5% than for females – 60.2% in 2011.

Referring to the employment rates by age groups and the highest level of education attained (see Appendix Table 1), the highest employment rate in Latvia is for age group 25-49 having education of ISCED 5-6, i.e. on average 87.9% in 2011, which is similar to average EU-27 87.1%. The lowest rate is for young people (age group 15-24) with a low-level education (ISCED 0-2) – 10.9% in 2011 that is evidently lower than average EU-27 – 20.7%.

The unemployment rate (i.e. proportion of job seekers at age of 15-64 in total number of economically active inhabitants) has increased twice during the last years from 7.8% in 2008 to 19.0% in 2010 and 16.5% in 2011.

The unemployment rates by age groups and highest level of education attained (see Appendix Table 2) indicate that the greatest unemployment rate in Latvia is observed among the unemployed with education of 0-2 ISCED in the age group 15-24. This rate has decreased during the last years – from 49.9% in 2009 to 37.0% in 2011; the average rate of EU-27 is lower, but shows an opposite – growing – tendency. The lowest unemployment rates may be observed among the unemployed with education of ISCED 5-6 in the age group 25-49 (6.2% in 2011), while in EU-27 the lower rate was 3.6% in the age group 50-64. Generally, in Latvia for all age groups regardless education level unemployment rates show decreasing tendencies during the last years.

The registered unemployment rate at the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA) from the lowest point in 2007 at 6% (52.3 thousands inhabitants) started to increase, reaching 17.3% in March 2010, when the rate started to fall by 11.3% in August 2012. The total number of the unemployed people at the end of 2011 was 130 296, which is less comparing to 2010 in the same period (162 463 unemployed).

Gradually the unemployment rate of young people decreases – at the end of 2009 the rate for young people at age of 15-24 constituted 14.5% of total number of registered unemployed, while in 2011 during the same period it was 11.8%.

Women tend to use the services of SEA more (57.4% at the end of 2011) than men (42.6%). Proportions in the rates of registered unemployment among the regions of Latvia remain quite stable – at the end of 2011, the lowest unemployment rate was in Riga region 8.3%, which is twice as less than in Latgale region 19.8%, i.e. eastern part of Latvia where the unemployment rate is usually higher than in other regions.

Speaking about the education of the unemployed, the greatest group (36.3%) of the registered unemployed (end of 2011) has vocational upper-secondary education (ISCED 3B or ISCED 4), which is followed by inhabitants having general upper-secondary education (ISCED 3A) – 27.8%, inhabitants having basic education (ISCED 2) with 20.0% and higher education (ISCED 5) with 12.4%. However, it should be noted that almost half of the registered unemployed (47.8%) has only general upper-secondary or basic education. The proportions among the groups are rather stable – comparing to 2010, the differences in rates are less than 1%.

1.3 Economy structure/the relative weight of different industries and their dynamics

During the crisis, the GDP decreased by 25%, yet in the 4th quarter of 2009, development in Latvia resumed, and, in 2010, a gradual increase of GDP could be observed. As the development started from very low point, in 2010 GDP was smaller by 0.3% comparing to the previous year. In 2011, the development was already 5.5%, which was one of the most rapid in Europe. At the end of 2011, successfully three-year-long international loan programme was concluded.

The structure of the economy (see Table 1) has changed during the last years in favour of industry and energy, trade and transport sectors. With the opportunities for export, in 2011, development in manufacturing industry continued – production level in the sector exceeded by 11.7% the level of 2010. The greatest contribution to the development of manufacturing industry was provided by wood processing, metalworking, as well as electric and optic producing sectors. Evident development may be observed in trade (by 8.0%) and construction (by 12.4%) sectors

comparing to 2010. A slight increase was experienced by the sectors of agriculture and forestry (by 2.8%) and public services (by 0.6%).

SECTOR \ YEAR	BY GDP			BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHING	3.6	4.6	4.5	8.8	8.8	8.9
INDUSTRY AND ENERGETIC	13.2	16.3	19.2	16.2	16.9	15.8
CONSTRUCTION	6.5	5.0	6.1	7.8	7.1	7.1
TRADE	16.6	17.7	18.6	19.1	19.0	18.7
TRANSPORT	11.4	12.5	13.0	11.4	11.8	11.4
PUBLIC SERVICES	17.1	15.6	13.8	22.3	21.8	23.2
OTHER COMMERCIAL SERVICES	31.6	28.3	24.8	9.2	9.9	10.6

Source: *The National Economy of Latvia: Macroeconomic Review. 2010, 2011, 2012; CSB*

1.4 Degree of regulation of the labour market, labour supply/labour demand, mismatches

Labour market is regulated by the Labour Law (*Darba likums*, 2002) that stipulates legal work relations, by the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (*Bezdarbnieku un darba meklētāju atbalsta likums*, 2002) that aims at providing support for the unemployed, job seekers and persons at the unemployment risk in order to promote their competitiveness in labour market, as well as by the Law On Unemployment Insurance (*Likums "Par apdrošināšanu bezdarba gadījumam"*, 2000) that regulates procedures for ensuring support to the individuals at unemployment risk.

Employment strategies are developed by the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*) together with the agency under its direction – the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA). In 2010, the Ministry of Welfare elaborated the "Strategy for the shift from short-term active labour market policy measures for combating consequences of crisis to the traditional active labour market policy measures" (*Stratēģija pārejai no īstermiņa krīzes sekas mazināšanai aktīvās darba tirgus politikas pasākumiem uz tradicionālajiem aktīvās darba tirgus politikas pasākumiem*) that foresaw to extend lifelong learning measures for the unemployed and persons at the unemployment risk.

Education policy strategies are elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*, MoES). According to the "National education development guidelines for 2007-2013" (*Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013.gadam*, 2006), modernisation of vocational education and strengthening cooperation with the labour market are mentioned among the directions of actions.

According to the “National reform programme of Latvia for implementing strategy “EU 2020”” (*Latvijas nacionālo reformu programma „ES 2020” stratēģijas īstenošanai*, 2011), one of the Latvian macro-structural challenges for development and employment is combating structural unemployment by ensuring a better correspondence of qualifications and skills to the requirements of labour market. The major policy direction for combating the structural unemployment are: improving active labour market policy measures by gradually shifting from measures dealing with the consequences of crisis to the traditional active labour market policy measures; efficient returning of economically inactive inhabitants to the labour market and support to the regional mobility; promoting efficiency of employment services; introducing lifelong learning principle.

1.5 Degree of regulation of access to occupations/professions

The Vocational Education Law¹ (*Profesionālās izglītības likums*, 1999) states that the content of vocational education is regulated by the following basic documents: the state vocational education standards; occupational standards and vocational education programmes. The occupational standards are part of the Classification of Occupations (*Noteikumi par Profesiju klasifikatoru, profesijai atbilstošiem pamatuzdevumiem un kvalifikācijas pamatprasībām un Profesiju klasifikatora lietošanas un aktualizēšanas kārtību*, 2010) and define the basic tasks and obligations for the respective professional activities, the basic requirements of professional or vocational qualifications, and the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences needed to fulfil them. The Cabinet of Ministers Regulations “Procedure of developing occupational standards” (*Profesiju standartu izstrādes kārtība*, 2007) stipulate that MoES (for professions of the Latvian professional qualification level 4-5, i.e. the LQF/EQF levels 5-7) and the National Centre for Education (for professions of the Latvian professional qualification level 1-3, i.e. the LQF/EQF levels 3-4) in cooperation with the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment arrange designing and expertise of draft occupational standards engaging also representative from sectoral ministries and professional organizations and providing organizational and methodological support in the development of draft occupational standards.

Special requirements for access to regulated professions are stipulated by the Law on the Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications² (*Par reglamentētajām profesijām un profesionālās kvalifikācijas atzīšanu*, 2001), and relevant Cabinet Regulations for each of the regulated profession. The purpose of this law is, first, to ensure the conformity of professional activities with specific quality requirements and criteria if these activities are related to the protection of public interests, the safety and the protection of health; second, to protect individual socially important professions from the involvement of unqualified persons by determining higher requirements for these professions; third, to ensure the opportunity for professional qualifications obtained in Latvia to be recognised in foreign states and the professional qualifications obtained in other countries to be recognised in Latvia; and, fourth, to promote free movement of persons in the EU and the member states of the European Free Trade Association.

¹ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

² <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=26021>

The Law determines the regulated professions, as well as the basic requirements to be observed for the recognition of the qualifications obtained in these professions in Latvia and in other countries.

Regarding this law, the Cabinet has approved the lists of specialities, sub-specialities and additional specialities for the regulated professions indicated in the law, as well as has determined the minimum requirements for education programmes or the requirements in relation to the professional knowledge and skills in those regulated professions and specialities. These requirements should be included in the relevant occupational standards and education programmes. As an additional requirement for some of the regulated professions is a regular repeated professional re-certification or evaluation. Usually this evaluation is conducted by the NGO certification centres of the relevant sector, e.g., Certification Centre of the Latvian Railwayman Society, Certification Commission of the Latvian Nurse Association. According to the Cabinet “Regulations regarding professions regulated by lists of specialities, sub-specialities and additional specialities” (*Noteikumi par specialitāšu, apakšspecialitāšu un papildspecialitāšu sarakstu reglamentētajām profesijām*, 2006), at present (September 2012), 68 professions, 164 specialities and 87 sub-specialities are recognized as regulated.

1.6 Main features of welfare/employment policies relevant to VET

According to the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (*Bezdarbnieku un darba meklētāju atbalsta likums*, 2002), the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science provides vocational education, re-qualification and professional improvement for the unemployed and job seekers, non-formal learning and qualification improvement for the self-employed and the employed persons who are at the unemployment risk, as well as the organization of career guidance and counselling. Ministries in line with their competence prepare proposals for the development of state policy in the field of employment promotion and unemployment reduction, as well as provide support for the involvement of the unemployed, job seekers, and self-employed in state and foreign financed programme projects, including foreign technical assistance projects and the ESF projects.

The national policy about reducing unemployment and providing support for the unemployed, job seekers and persons at risk of unemployment is implemented by the State Employment Agency that is a state administration institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare. The agency cooperates with the state and local government institutions, NGOs, as well as with other private and legal persons. The measures are implemented in line with the Cabinet “Regulations regarding the procedures for organising and financing active employment measures and preventative measures for unemployment reduction and principles for selection of implementing bodies of measures” (*Noteikumi par aktīvo nodarbinātības pasākumu un preventīvo bezdarba samazināšanas pasākumu organizēšanas un finansēšanas kārtību un pasākumu īstenotāju izvēles principiem*, 2011).

Regarding the “Strategy for the shift from short-term active labour market policy measures for combating consequences of crisis to the traditional active labour market policy measures” (2010), its measures included the introduction of education voucher system, new activities for promoting youth employment, e.g., providing an opportunity for young people to try out three professional fields (three weeks per each) in cooperation with education establishments to help the participants in their choice of further career development.

The State Employment Agency selects the education establishments that implement educational activities for the unemployed according to the public procurement procedure stated in laws and regulations. At least once a year the occupations and skills to be provided through the unemployed education are proposed by a commission established by the Ministry of Welfare, which includes representatives from the ministries (Welfare, Economy, Education and Science), the State Employment Agency, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (*Latvijas Pašvaldību savienība*), the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (*Latvijas Brīvo arodbiedrību savienība*), the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (*Latvijas Darba devēju konfederācija*), as well as other institutions if necessary.

1.7 Value of VET qualifications in the labour market – the labour market situation of the VET graduates

When comparing rates of the employed and unemployed by their education (see Table 2 below), it is evident that in both groups, i.e., the employed and unemployed, individuals with vocational education (vocational upper-secondary and vocational education) dominate. The proportion of individuals with higher education among the unemployed is smaller, while the rate of those persons with general upper-secondary and particularly basic education among the unemployed is higher than among the employed. This shows that inhabitants with vocational education are in more favourable situation in labour market comparing to the inhabitants with general education.

EDUCATION \ YEAR	EMPLOYED *		REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED (AT THE END OF YEAR)**		GRADUATES - REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED**
	2010	2011	2010	2011	2011
HIGHER	30.7	32.5	12.3	12.4	21.1
VOCATIONAL (UPPER-SECONDARY LEVEL)	35.8	35.3	36.3	36.3	37.1
GENERAL UPPER-SECONDARY	23.9	22.7	28.1	27.8	31.8
BASIC	9.3	9.0	20.0	20.0	10.0

Source: * CSB, www.csb.gov.lv; ** SEA

According to the data analysis of the State Employment Agency (see table above), at the end of 2011, the greatest part of the graduates/registered unemployed are those with vocational education (37.1%). Yet the rate of graduates/registered unemployed is similar to proportions in total employed and unemployed groups (CSB's data). The proportion of general upper-secondary (31.8%) and higher (21.1%) education graduates in the category of graduates/registered unemployed is higher than among the unemployed in total. As result, the graduates of higher education and general secondary education are in the most unfavourable situation regarding their employment.

Since until now such data about the graduates' integration in labour market were not regularly collected, in September 2012, the Ministry of Welfare has asked the State Employment Agency to introduce a new section on the unemployed registration that would allow identifying the education establishment graduated by the young unemployed. This information, together with the Ministry of Education and Science, would allow evaluating the quality of education programmes and their correspondence to labour market requirements.

In 2011, in the state budget expenses by functions education was in the third place with 16.9%, following the expenses for social protection (30.6%) and the expenses for economic activity (17.4%). Yet funding for education constitutes only 4.6% of GDP, which is less than in the previous years, i.e., 8.4% in 2009, and 7.1% in 2010.

Regarding the laws on the state budget for 2010, 2011, 2012, the state subsidies for education expenditures (for teacher salaries including general education) allocated to the local governments have decreased, i.e., in 2011 – around EUR 219.92 million and in 2012 – around EUR 215.83 million. The expenses for maintaining schools are covered by the budgets of local governments. Similarly, subsidies allocated to the Ministry of Education have decreased – in 2011 around EUR 412.89 million and in 2012 around EUR 367.37 million. Yet in terms of the ministry's budget, there is an increase in funding allocated to vocational education establishments under the direction of MoES (from around EUR 54.07 million in 2011 to around EUR 56.45 million in 2012). However, the amount of allocated funding to vocational education establishments was larger in 2008 and 2009 – accordingly around EUR 77.65 million and around EUR 60.53 million.

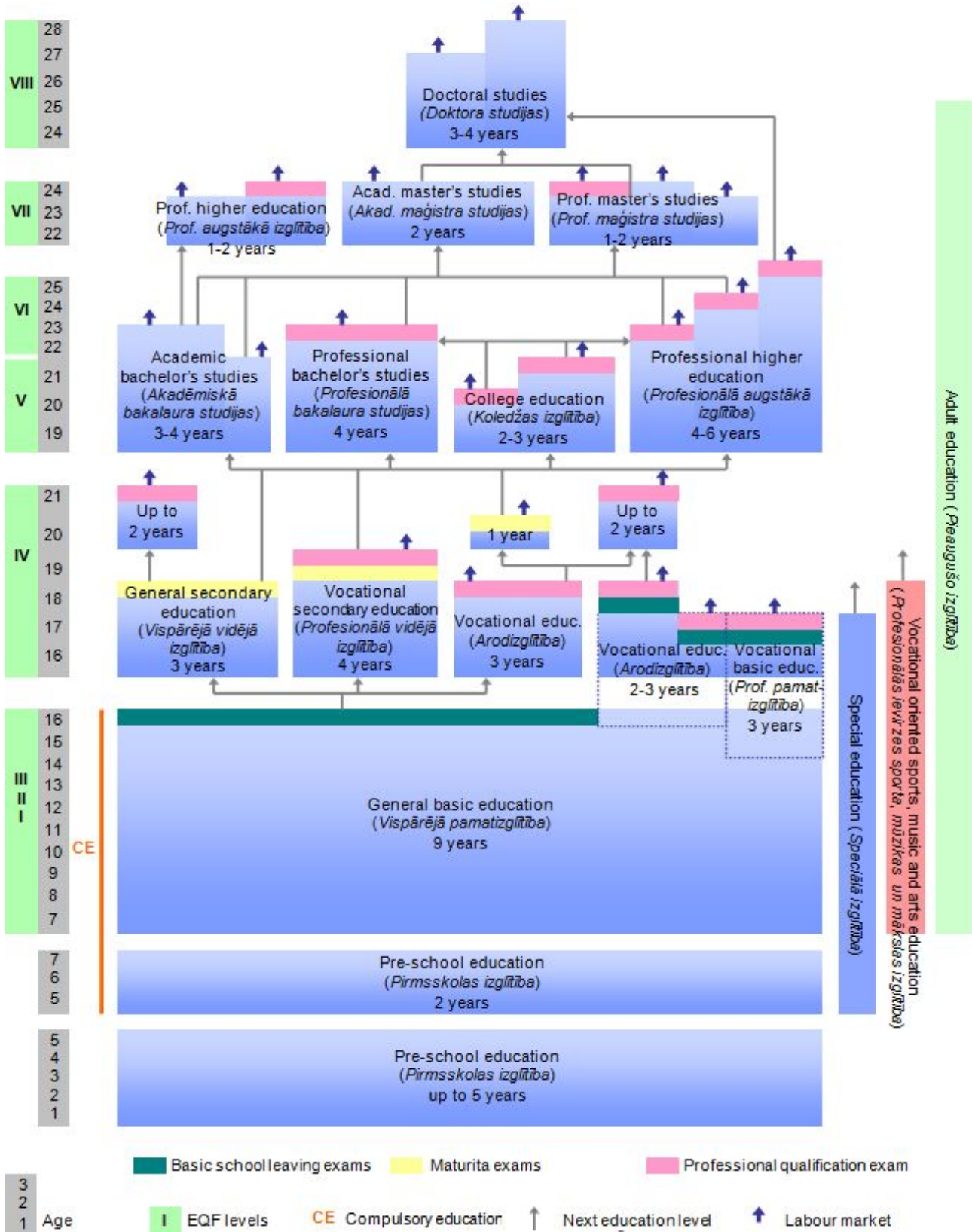
Both in vocational education and in general education funding is allocated according to the principle "money follows student". However, in vocational education this principle is applied to entire funding, and in general education – only to teachers' payment. The costs of vocational education students are stipulated by the Cabinet "Regulations on the expenditures minimum per one student for implementing vocational education programmes" (*Noteikumi par profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošanas izmaksu minimumu uz vienu izglītojamo, 2007*), yet the amount of actual state funding is smaller than determined in the legal regulations. The state budget completely (according to the legal regulations) provides funding only to staff's payment, students' scholarships, and expenditures for cultural education and sports. The difference in funding is partly compensated by vocational schools themselves using their own income. Average expenditures per student in the vocational education establishments under the direction of MoES were EUR 1877 in 2011 and EUR 2089 in 2012.

In general education establishments, according to the principle "money follows student", subsidiary for teachers' payment is calculated regarding the funding allocated on average to one student per year, which in 2011 was EUR 965 and in 2012 – EUR 995.

CHAPTER 2

2. Providing vocational education in a lifelong learning perspective

2.1 Diagram of the national education system



The Latvian education system consists of pre-school education, basic education, secondary education and higher education. General education in Latvia in total lasts 12 years consisting of compulsory 9-years basic education and 3-years secondary education. Additionally pre-school education at age of 5-6 is compulsory in Latvia. Basic education stage comprises general basic education (grades 1-9) and vocational basic education. Secondary education stage comprises general secondary education, vocational secondary education and vocational education. Higher education comprises both academic and professional study programmes.

2.2 Government-regulated VET provision

The legal basis for vocational education is ensured by the Vocational Education Law³ (*Profesionālās izglītības likums*, 1999) that also regulates continuous vocational education and by the relevant Cabinet of Ministers Regulations. According to the Cabinet of Ministers Order (August 2012), by 1st January 2014, the Ministry of Education and Science has to elaborate and submit to the Cabinet a new Vocational Education Law project.

Current education policy priorities are defined in the “National education development guidelines for 2007-2013” (*Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013.gadam*, 2006), which were worked out by the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES).

The main LLL policy planning document is the “Guidelines for lifelong learning policy for 2007-2013” (*Mūžizglītības politikas pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013.gadam*, 2007) and relevant implementation programmes prepared by the MoES.

The major policy document in vocational education at present is the concept “Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance” (*Profesionālās izglītības pievilcības paaugstināšana un sociālo partneru līdzdalība profesionālās izglītības kvalitātes nodrošināšanā*, 2009) developed by the MoES. The Concept aims at outlining solutions for key challenges in vocational education policy and reaching agreement between state and social partners regarding most appropriate solutions for the problems.

2.2.1 Vocational education pathways

2.2.1.1 Initial vocational education

Vocational education establishments offer education programmes in all the lines of economic activities. The Vocational Education Law (1999) defines three levels of vocational education: vocational basic education; vocational secondary education; professional higher education (first level professional higher education (college education) and second level professional higher education). In Latvia, vocational education and professional higher education programmes are mainly school-based, with practical learning periods at schools or enterprises.

Students in state vocational schools are admitted according to the annual enrolment plans, which are elaborated by the Ministry of Education and Science on basis of labour force forecasts and agreed with the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and

³ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

Employment. In recent years, there have not been limitations to the number of students to be enrolled.

Vocational education at lower secondary level is implemented through vocational basic education programmes (see Appendix Table 3). Pupils are admitted to vocational basic education programmes (ISCED 2A, 2C) without consideration of their previous education but not earlier than in the year in which they turn 15. Vocational basic education programmes lead to a certificate of vocational basic education (*apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*) and the Latvian professional qualification level 1 (theoretical and practical readiness, which allows fulfilling simple tasks in a specific sphere of practical activities, for example, a cook's or a carpenter's assistant – ISCED 2A, 2C), i.e., EQF level 3. Those without basic education are admitted to vocational education programmes which include pedagogical correction (this is targeted at early school leavers and those with a low level of basic knowledge and skills – the aim of the programme is to integrate young people back into the education system).

At upper secondary level, there are vocational education and vocational secondary education programmes for students who have graduated basic school (see Appendix Table 3). The content of these education programmes is defined by relevant state vocational education standards through the Cabinet "Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard" (*Noteikumi par valsts profesionālās vidējās izglītības standartu un valsts arodizglītības standartu*, 2008) and the relevant occupational standards (*profesijas standarts*). Vocational education programmes lead to a certificate of vocational education (*atestāts par arodizglītību*) and Latvian professional qualification level 2 (theoretical and practical aptitude for carrying out qualified executive work independently, e.g., carpenter, hairdresser, cook, tailor, welder – ISCED 3C), i.e., EQF level 4. These programmes do not give the rights to directly continue studies at HE level. For the students, who want to continue their studies, a 1-year intermediate course in general secondary education is available. Vocational secondary education programmes lead to a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) and Latvian professional qualification level 3 (increased theoretical readiness and professional mastery, which allows performing certain duties of an executor, which comprise the planning and organisation of work, for example, various technicians, car mechanics, modellers, and hospitality service specialists – ISCED 3A, 3B), i.e., EQF level 4. Additionally vocational secondary education students take four state centralized examinations in Latvian, Math, foreign language and one in optional study subject; thereafter, students are awarded with a certificate of general secondary education (*vispārējās vidējās izglītības sertifikāts*), which gives right to enter HEIs.

In Latvia, post-secondary education programmes (see Appendix Table 3) belong to upper-secondary level. This type of vocational programmes is designed for general secondary school graduates at age of 18-20 and is more oriented towards acquisition of vocational knowledge and skills. Therefore, the duration of the programme is shorter. Generally, other characteristics and features are the same as for upper-secondary level.

The higher education programmes (see Appendix Table 4) are divided into academic (lead to a degree) and professional programmes (lead to a degree and professional qualification). HEIs and colleges provide various forms of studies – full-time, part-time and distance studies – which are available for all study levels and almost all study fields; thus, contributing to promotion of lifelong learning.

To acquire professional qualification, students have to take state qualification exam at the end of the education programme. The development of qualification exam content and procedure at basic and secondary education level is determined by the Cabinet Regulations “Procedure of professional qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes” (*Profesionālās kvalifikācijas eksāmenu norises kārtība akreditētās profesionālās izglītības programmās*, August 2011).

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AT THE BEGINNING OF STUDY YEAR						
LEVEL \ YEAR	VALUES			SHARE OF TOTAL (%)		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
BASIC EDUCATION	630	487	450	1.7	1.4	1.3
SECONDARY EDUCATION	34206	33149	31206	93.3	92.7	90.1
POST-GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION	1564	1857	2782	4.3	5.2	8.0
GENERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	260	274	200	0.7	0.8	0.6
TOTAL	36660	35767	34638	100	100	100

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

As illustrated in the Table 3 above, similar to the number of inhabitants in the last years, the number of students in vocational schools has decreased. Vocational basic education is not attended on a large scale, since general basic education is compulsory and after graduating pupils tend to choose an education programme at secondary level. Yet it is necessary to provide this type of programmes as an option for pupils who have not completed basic education. More than 90% of students acquire vocational education at secondary education level, but their proportion in total number of students show falling tendency. Meanwhile, vocational education programmes after general secondary education are becoming more popular, although the number of students is small, and the number of students in these programmes has almost doubled during the last three years.

The distribution of students by types of programmes (initial general and vocational secondary) has been rather stable for last five years, i.e., 64:36 in favour of general education. Promoting vocational education prestige and parity of esteem has been set as priority in several policy documents, e.g. concept “Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance” (*Profesionālās izglītības pievilcības paaugstināšana un sociālo partneru līdzdalība profesionālās izglītības kvalitātes nodrošināšanā*, September 2009), as well as fostering parity of esteem is an issue included in the “Guidelines for

optimisation of vocational education establishments network for 2010-2015” (*Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu tīkla optimizācijas pamatnostādnes 2010.-2015.gadam*, 2010).

Speaking about vocational students’ distribution by fields of study (see Appendix Table 5), during the last three years the distribution ratios vary within 1-2%, but some tendencies may be observed. Slightly but gradually the rate of students acquiring engineering, manufacturing and construction decreases (from 44.1% in 2009 to 42.4% in 2011), but proportion of students acquiring services increases (from 21.1% to 24.0% in the same period), which may be explained by the development of this sector.

Secondary education graduates’ preferences about their further education/career were quite steady until 2009, when the tendencies changed – less graduates continued in HE (from 75% in 2008 to 58.3% in 2011) and more graduates discontinued their education (from 22.2% in 2008 to 36.4% in 2011).

2.2.1.2 Continuing vocational education

In Latvia, initial and continuing vocational education shares the legal and governance framework, although education pathways are different. The Vocational Education Law⁴ (*Profesionālās izglītības likums*, 1999) regulates two formal types of continuing education:

- Vocational continuing education – 1) minimum duration of programme is 960 hours (to acquire Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4) and with vocational secondary or vocational education as previous education); 2) 480 or 640 hours depending on the relevant occupation standard (to acquire the Latvian professional qualification level 2 (EQF level 4) and with no limitations for previous education), and 3) 480 hours (to acquire the Latvian professional qualification level 1 (EQF level 3) and with no limitations for previous education).
- Professional improvement – minimum duration of programme is 160 hours (professional qualification level is not awarded, no limitations for previous education).

Vocational continuing education enables adults with previous education and work experience to obtain professional qualifications. Programmes are always concluded by a specific qualification for a specific profession acknowledged by the state. Professional improvement enables people regardless of their age and previous education or professional qualifications to master systematized professional knowledge and skills corresponding to the requirements of the labour market. They also lead to a formal qualification if they are at least 160 hours long.

Participation rates in education of adults (Table 4) are lower than EU-27 rates, but dynamics of both rates are similar, i.e., slightly decreasing. Still, the Latvian political ambition is to increase education participation rate of adults (25-64) from 5.3% in 2009 to 12.5% in 2013, which has been reflected in the “National reform programme of Latvia for implementing strategy “EU 2020”” (*Latvijas nacionālo reformu programma „ES 2020” stratēģijas īstenošanai*”, 2011). Participation rates in continuing vocational education may have been influenced by the provision of education courses for the unemployed arranged by the State Employment Agency: in 2007, totally 3893 unemployed participated in vocational education, re-qualification or qualification promotion, while in 2010 – 8297 unemployed and in 2011 – 8666 unemployed. The other motivating aspect to

⁴ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

participate in adult education programmes is learning activities supported by ESF through various projects, which provided (and provide) education courses for free or for reduced fee.

YEAR	2008	2009	2010	2011
EU-27	9.4	9.3	9.1	8.9
LATVIA	6.8	5.3	5.0	5.0

Source: Eurostat, last update: 2.04.2012

Education stages of continuous education programmes are included in education programme classification outlined in the Cabinet “Regulations on the classification of Latvian education” (*Noteikumi par Latvijas izglītības klasifikāciju*, 2008, 2010). Continuous education programmes belong to basic, secondary (lower and upper) and higher education stage; legally no comparison with ISCED levels is provided, but continuous education programmes may belong to the Latvian professional qualification levels 1-4, i.e., EQF levels 3-5 (see Appendix Table 6).

Education providers elaborate continuous vocational education programmes – similar to initial vocational education – according to the occupational standards, which are designed by working group including social partners, and state vocational education standards. Regarding the Vocational Education Law⁵ (1999), continuous vocational education programmes have to include minimum 30% of content stipulated by the state vocational or vocational secondary education standards. Thus, the rest of content depends on the interests of providers or clients, which also can be employers. In case of learning for the unemployed, before preparing the plan for the provision of the necessary learning activities, the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA) arranges regular surveys of employers to explore the most demanded occupations.

The duration and content of professional improvement and professionally oriented education are stated by particular education programme.

The accreditation system is based on standards determined in the Vocational Education Law (1999). Providers can only offer courses in programmes, which have been licensed, and programmes must meet both educational and occupational standards. All publicly provided continuing vocational education programmes longer than 480 hours and professional improvement programmes longer than 160 hours must be accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science. Providers must also be certified by MoES. If professional improvement programmes are shorter than 160 hours, provider must acquire a license from their local government for implementing such programmes. Publicly owned providers can also offer informal/non-formal learning programmes without obtaining license.

Participants completing a vocational continuing education programme take a final state centralized qualification examination, which is organised by the Ministry of Education and Science. They aim to ensure that all the graduates, obtaining a certain profession, have identical knowledge, competencies and skills. Social partners are also involved in evaluating examination performance.

⁵ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

At the end of professional improvement programmes, an examination following centralised procedures and methodologies are taken, which are stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations “The Procedure of professional qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes” (*Profesionālās kvalifikācijas eksāmenu norises kārtība akreditētās profesionālās izglītības programmās*, 2011). To issue a certificate of professional improvement, the programme must be at least 160 hours long.

Distance learning is provided both by private and state education institutions. Education institutions may provide both full-time and part-time extramural studies. Mainly higher education institutions offer distance learning programmes. For example, Distance Education Centre of Riga Technical University, which was formed in 1997 in frameworks of Phare programme, offers several study courses (computers, business planning, languages etc.). Also private education providers offer e-learning courses, for example, learning centre Buts Ltd at present (October 2012) implements 35 e-learning courses (160 or 320 hours long) regarding quality leadership, computers, qualification promotion for accountants etc., and courses (480, 640 or 960 hours long) for acquiring professional qualification, e.g., accountant, clerk, computer system technician etc.

The most popular continuous vocational education courses are in social sciences, business and law and services (see Appendix Table 7).

Participation of low- and medium-qualified adults (ISCED 0-2 and 3-4 respectively) in formal adult education is lower than the EU average, whereas adults with university degrees (ISCED 5-6) participate in non-formal training in higher numbers than in the rest of the EU.

Table 5 shows that in Latvia, as in the rest of the EU, the lower education level people have, the less they participate in formal or non-formal education activities during their working lives, but participation in adult education is lower than the EU average.

EDUCATION	ISCED 0-2		ISCED 3-4		ISCED 5-6		TOTAL	
	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL
EU-27	1.2	2.9	3.0	5.0	5.1	12.2	3.1	6.4
LATVIA	:	1.1 ^(u)	1.9	1.8	3.5	6.5	2.2	3.0

Source: Eurostat, last update: 18.10.2012. Special values – : not available; (u) unreliable.

According to Eurostat data, participation rate in formal adult education of employed inhabitants (25-64) is almost the same than EU-27 average, while inactive population participation rate was obviously lower than EU-27 average (see table 6 below).

EDUCATION	POPULATION		EMPLOYED PERSONS		UNEMPLOYED PERSONS		INACTIVE PERSONS	
	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL
EU-27	3.1	6.4	2.6	7.5	3.5	6.2	4.5	3.0
LATVIA	2.2	3.0	2.5	3.4	0.9 ^(u)	3.2	1.6	1.5

Source: Eurostat, last update: 18.10.2012. Special values – (u) unreliable.

There is a number of private education providers (education centres) located in all regions or having branch offices throughout the country, which implement both continuing vocational education and informal/non-formal education programmes. Furthermore, these private providers cooperate with the State Employment Agency, which supervises the learning for the unemployed people and which works on regional basis (28 regional offices), as well.

Since 2010, in terms of ESF project “Acquisition of vocational education programmes, basic skills and competences for continuing career” (*Profesionālās izglītības programmu, pamatprasmju un kompetenču apguve izglītības un profesionālās karjeras turpināšanai*), which is implemented by the State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra*) in cooperation with vocational schools, for young people at age of 17-25, who do not receive the unemployed benefits or do not participate in the ESF funded learning or employment activities, 1-1.5 years-long vocational education programmes are provided. In 2012, it was stated that also young people with previously obtained professional qualification, who at least one year after acquisition of professional qualification have not been employed or self-employed, can apply for these education programmes. In 2012, greatest part of education programmes offered to the secondary education graduates lasted 1.5 years and led to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4). The provided one-year long programmes ensure acquisition of simpler occupations of the Latvian professional qualification level 2 (EQF level 4). In 2012, additional ESF funding was allocated for the implementation of these education programmes.

2.2.1.3 Apprenticeship system

The Latvian apprenticeship system exists on a small scale mainly in the crafts sector in traditional professions, e.g. builder, potter, lathe operator, carpenter. It is implemented quite separately from other education sectors, and is not included in education programme classification (no relevant ISCED level). The Law on Crafts⁶ (*Par amatniecību*, 1993) stipulates the organisational basis for crafts, basic regulations for apprenticeship and the procedure for stating craftsman qualifications. The main organisation involved is the Latvian Chamber of Crafts (*Latvijas Amatniecības kamera*) which is a self-governing organisation.

Apprenticeship is implemented through apprenticeship programmes, as well as journeyman and master craftsman testing programmes. Apprenticeship programmes include both school- and work-based learning for apprentices; testing programmes focus more on examinations for

⁶ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=63052>

journeymen and master craftsmen, which are described below. Apprenticeship programmes are drafted by the corresponding craft professional association and approved by the Council of the Chamber of Crafts. Duration of the programmes depends on the particular craft association; therefore, a great variation exists. The theoretical courses for master craftsman candidates usually last for two months and are offered by the Chamber.

Apprentices are admitted regardless of their previous education but not earlier than the year in which they turn 16 (unless they have permission from parents or tutor). To apply for the examination of the journeyman, the candidate, who is not student, has to attend education course on crafts history. To apply for the examination of the master craftsman, the candidate has to have eight years work experience in the field. Both candidates of journeymen and master craftsman have to be members of the Chamber's sectoral or territorial craft association.

Apprenticeship qualifications do not provide access to regulated professions nor do they give access to continue in the formal education system. There are no mechanisms in place for those, who dropped out from apprenticeship before completing training, to continue in another form.

Through the apprenticeship system it is possible to obtain the journeyman qualification (*Amata zēļa diploms*) and, thereafter, master craftsman qualification (*Amata meistara diploms*). The journeyman qualification is awarded after passing journeyman examination, which comprises two parts: presentation of qualification work and techniques used and theoretical knowledge. The master craftsman qualification is awarded after passing master craftsman examination. The master craftsman, who has obtained relevant higher education, is considered to be academically educated master craftsman.

2.2.2 VET provision for target groups

Nationally as vulnerable groups are considered: young job-seekers aged 15-24; those of pre-retirement age (aged 55-64); long-term unemployed (seeking work for more than 12 months); individuals during six months after parental leave; individuals with disabilities; ex-prisoners and ex-drug addicts (*Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers*, 2002).

Involving these vulnerable groups into the active employment measures to foster their inclusion in the labour market is the strategic aim of the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA). The SEA functions on a regional basis (28 offices).

In 2011, the SEA enlarged the variety of activities and implemented the following measures, of which the greatest part is focused on acquisition and improvement of skills and competences.

1. Preventive employment measures include:

- Career services – impart career counselling (individual career counselling, individual self-assessment career counselling, individual diagnostic career counselling, group career counselling). These services were received by 47 721 persons, of them 39 882 unemployed and job seekers and 7 839 other persons at unemployment risk.
- Career information – focuses on informative materials about the education opportunities after general, secondary and higher education that include self-assessment system; catalogues “Descriptions of occupations” (part 1 and 2); informative materials for the SEA information stands placed in general education establishments in Latvia; e-consultations and information about professional choice and job search issues.

- Lifelong learning measures for the employed – aimed at providing opportunity for the employed persons to improve their knowledge and skills necessary for their work in terms of informal/non-formal learning or professional improvement. 10 923 persons were involved in learning.

2. Active employment measures include:

- Measures for raising competitiveness – focus on raising competitiveness of inhabitants subjected to unemployment risk, and impart individual consultations and group activities (lectures, seminars, courses) for acquiring work seeking methods, psychological support and for acquisition of basic skills required in labour market. 52 472 persons participated.
- Measures for starting business or self-employment – aims at providing consultations and financial support that help the unemployed with the previous experience in business to initiate their business or self-employment and to operate successfully in the chosen sector at least two years. From a start, 272 unemployed were involved in this activity.
- Learning at enterprises – is arranged on basis of employer's suggestion to prepare necessary specialist for particular company (max. duration 3 months); the employer has to employ programme participants after graduation at least for six months. 1094 unemployed were involved.
- Measure for particular social groups (unemployed with special needs, persons without regular paid work for last six months, persons without secondary education or professional qualification, persons older than 50, single parents, representatives of ethnical minority who need to improve their state language and professional skills, persons unemployed longer than 24 months) – includes employing these persons in work places co-financed by state for 24 months (persons with special needs) or for 12 months (for other groups). 1 577 persons started participating.
- Vocational education, re-qualification and qualification promotion – 8 666 unemployed were involved to improve their professional knowledge and skills.
- Informal/non-formal learning activities – 26 256 unemployed and job seekers were engaged.
- Complex support activities – include consultations and workshops (motivating, solving personal problems, individual/group career consultations) and developing work skills (testing a work place for 6 months). 12 023 persons participated; in the activity "Work practice for young people" 381 persons were involved.
- Work practice at local governments with scholarships – intended to provide support for the unemployed who do not receive unemployed benefits and cannot find work due to lack of vacancies. Individuals perform low-qualified jobs (physical work) receiving a monthly scholarship of EUR 142.3 (max. 6 months per year). 30 818 work practice places were created, and 50 628 unemployed were involved.
- Support to youth voluntary job – aims at promoting the activity of the young unemployed (18-24 years old) through the work for society (up to 6 months), and popularising voluntary job opportunities in Latvia and fostering its development. 1255 unemployed were involved.

The Social Integration State Agency (*Sociālās integrācijas valsts aģentūra*, SISA), under the direction of the Ministry of Welfare, implements the national policy in the field of social integration for persons with special needs. The agency provides services of professional and social rehabilitation for persons with special needs or persons with potentially special needs.

2.2.3 Specific financial and governance issues

At present (2012), the vocational education system is managed by the following state institutions:

The **Cabinet of Ministers** (*Ministru kabinets*) determines the state's political and strategic areas in vocational education, funds vocational education providers established by the Ministry of Education and Science according to certain criteria, sets the framework for issuing state recognised qualifications and determines the recognition of foreign qualifications.

The **Ministry of Education and Science** (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*) develops the framework regulations for vocational education and accredits providers, creates and updates the register of occupational standards and makes proposals about the allocation of funds from the state budget, supervises guidance and counselling services and researches skills demands of the labour market, employs the heads of vocational education institutions under its supervision.

The **National Centre for Education** (*Valsts izglītības satūra centrs*) is under the direction of the MoES. In vocational education the Centre carries out such functions as providing the development of content for vocational basic (lower-secondary), vocational, vocational secondary (upper-secondary), continuous vocational education, professional improvement and vocationally oriented education regarding state standards; providing the development of content and procedure for state centralized examinations; coordinating the development of study literature corresponding to vocational education standards; coordinating and implementing the professional improvement of vocational teachers.

The **State Education Quality Service** (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*) is also under the direction of the MoES. In vocational education the Service performs the following functions: licenses education programmes (except leisure education, informal/non-formal education for adults and higher education programmes); evaluates quality of vocational education (except professional higher education).

Implementing labour market policies and programmes for the unemployed is the main function of the **State Employment Agency** (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA, 1991), which is under the supervision of the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*). Furthermore, the Ministry of Welfare and its Labour Department are responsible for managing active and passive labour market policy.

The social dialogue and strategic cooperation is arranged (at institutional level) through:

- 1) The National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*, 2000) which was founded by the ministries (Welfare, Economy, Finance, Justice, Agriculture, Education and Science, Regional Development and Local Government Affairs), the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia and the Employers' Confederation of Latvia. The tasks of the Sub-Council are as follows:

- To review drafts of state development plans, concepts and normative acts concerning vocational education, human resource development and employment and draw up proposals for improvements;
- To evaluate proposals and submit suggestions to state and non-government organisations dealing with vocational education and employment concerning vocational education funding and structure management, the organisation of vocational guidance and counselling, elaboration and update of educational programmes and occupational standards;
- To coordinate the funding and activities of Regional Councils for cooperation between vocational education and employment.

2) Four Regional Tripartite Cooperation Councils (*Reģionālās trīspusējās sadarbības padomes*, 2005) that review students' enrolment plans in vocational education establishments, form qualification exam commissions, attract regional experts for the accreditation of vocational schools and programmes, as well as provide support to vocational education establishments in ensuring students' practical learning in enterprises.

3) 12 Sectoral Expert Councils (*Nozaru ekspertu padomes*, 2011), which have been established as a part of the ESF project "Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education" (2010-2013) that is implemented by the State Education Development Agency. In the Councils along with the representatives from the relevant sectors, representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economics, Employers' Confederation of Latvia, Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia participate; as well as, on basis of voluntary principle, representatives from the Ministry of Welfare and the State Employment Agency are engaged.

As a reaction to the negative demographic indicators, which result in decrease of the number of students, and to the limited financial resources, the Ministry of Education and Science designed the "Guidelines for optimisation of vocational education establishments' network for 2010-2015" (*Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu tīkla optimizācijas pamatnostādnes 2010.-2015.gadam*, 2010). The Guidelines are aimed at providing further implementation of the vocational education system structural reforms by optimising the number of vocational schools and their geographical coverage and by differentiating vocational schools. The optimisation imparts the reduction of the number of vocational schools (from 59 in 2009/2010 to 30 schools under direction of the Ministry of Education and Science in 2015), and at the same time their modernisation. The schools are differentiated by their functions and management. Five types of schools are formed:

- Vocational education competence centre (14 centres planned) – vocational school having relevant material facilities for acquiring qualifications within all basic occupations of a particular sector; and additional educational functions. Since September 2011, 6 vocational schools were granted the status of competence centre.
- Vocational education establishment with specialisation (14 schools planned) – vocational schools providing qualification specialisation of basic occupations in a certain education programme.
- Vocational education establishment for acquiring basic competences (2 schools planned) – vocational school providing education programmes, in which basic competences of one or several occupations are acquired.

- Affiliate of vocational education establishment – structural unit of another school, which is territorially separated from the education establishment.
- Integrated education establishment (10 schools planned) – school providing various general and vocational education programmes, as well as adult and continuous education.

Education funding procedures are stipulated by the Education Law⁷ (1998), which is supported by the General Education Law⁸ (1999) for general education and by the Vocational Education Law⁹ (1999) for vocational education.

Education institutions according to their ownership are financed from State budget, local government budget or private sources (see table below).

TABLE 7. SOURCES OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FUNDING			
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ACCORDING TO THEIR FOUNDERS	TEACHERS' SALARY	FIXED EXPENSES*	NON-FIXED EXPENSES**
STATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	State budget funding	State budget funding	State budget funding
LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	State budget funding	Local government budget funding	Local government budget funding (except teachers' salary)
PRIVATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS	Private funding	Private funding	Private funding

* Fixed expenses – the expenditures of missions, payment for services, energy and water, as well as costs from purchasing learning aids, equipment and modernising equipment.

** Non-fixed expenses – scholarships, maintenance costs of student dormitories, rehabilitation measures and catering for persons with special needs, expenditures of qualification practice organization, costs for culture education and sports, as well staff's salary (wages and compulsory state social security contributions of employer).

One of the sources also can be students' fees. State and local government schools implementing pre-school, basic and secondary education are for free; private schools may set tuition. In HE state covers study fees for a certain number of study places according to relevant annual state's demand; for other study places HEI may set tuition. Local governments may set a partial fee as co-financing for acquiring education in vocationally oriented education establishments founded by local governments (Education Law, 1998).

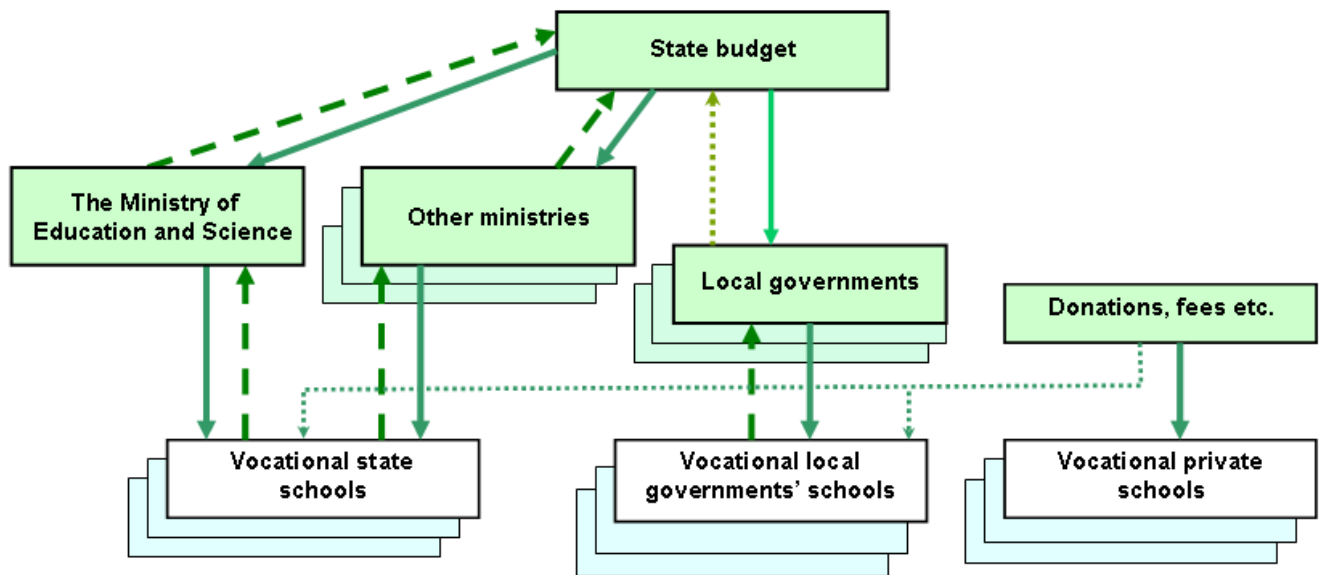
The majority of vocational schools are state-owned and run; therefore, the national budget is the main source of funding. Subsidies for vocational education come as well from the local governments and private sources. Education institutions (both vocational and general schools) may receive additional funding in form of donations, provision of paid services and other incomes, which have to be used for institutional development, for purchasing learning aids and equipment; for stimulating students materially and for teachers' payment implementing vocational basic, vocational secondary or vocationally oriented education programmes in sports, music and art at state and local government schools. A single education institution may implement education programmes, which are funded from different sources.

⁷ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=50759>

⁸ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20243>

⁹ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

DIAGRAM: FLOW OF FUNDS FOR INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION



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Initial vocational education students receive monthly scholarships, which are funded by the state budget and the ESF. The ESF funding is allocated according to the Action Programme “Human resources and employment” supplement sub-activity “Promoting the attractiveness of vocational education” (Cabinet Regulations, 2008, 2012).

Teacher payment at state and local government education establishments (including pre-school) is provided from state budget and state budget subsidiaries. Local governments may participate in funding teacher payment at state, local government and private schools. State may fund private school teacher salaries, if these education establishments offer pre-school, accredited basic and secondary education programmes.

According to the Cabinet “Regulations regarding the Guidelines for optimisation of vocational education establishments network for 2010-2015” (*Par Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu tīkla optimizācijas pamatnostādņēm 2010.-2015.gadam*, 2010), it is planned to fundamentally change funding system, i.e. to introduce funding system providing a common financing principle “money follows student” at all education institutions with the aim to motivate local governments to perform a complex planning concerning the work of all education establishments in their territory, and to optimise the network of school. These activities are aimed also at promoting cooperation with enterprises that are interested in supporting vocational education and participate in the optimisation of school network with their co-financing.

According to the Education Law¹⁰ (1998), adult education may be funded from the state and local government budget, employers’ resources, students’ resources, donations and other sources. Some local governments allocate a fixed percentage from the budget to adult education. Important source of funding is the EU, Swiss and Norwegian financial assistance instruments, including structural funds and the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013, which through various projects opened more learning opportunities for adults.

¹⁰ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=50759>

Nationally data on continuing vocational education funding are not collected anymore (latest data are only about 2005). Partly information about adult education funding is available on learning activities supported by ESF, state budget and partly – local governments. Statistics about employers' and individuals' funding are not regularly collected.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science conducted survey of local governments about their support to adult informal/non-formal education in 2010. 80% of local governments participated. Only 55.3% of local governments have financially supported the coordination and implementation of adult informal/non-formal learning; the amount of funding has decreased by 41% (in total EUR 761 273 in 2010, and EUR 1 288 814 in 2009). The number of adults involved in informal/non-formal learning has also decreased – 24 958 adults in 2010, and 29 069 adults in 2009. There are evident differences in support between regions and local governments. Meanwhile, the local governments have developed other support tools: 1) funding or co-funding education establishments in their territory that offer adult informal/non-formal learning (adult education centres, folk schools, culture centres, general education establishments etc.); 2) providing rooms or offering discounts for room rent to implement adult informal/non-formal learning programmes; 3) implement of co-finance projects of foreign financial instruments that focus on implementation and development of adult informal/non-formal learning; 4) offer subsidies for NGOs that ensure the availability of relevant services for inhabitants; 5) use resources of other, neighbouring local governments for ensuring adult informal/non-formal learning. In 2010, significantly the number of education establishments that with the support of local governments offer adult informal/non-formal learning programmes has increased – from 65 establishments in 2009 to 165 establishments in 2010. However, these activities in general cannot ensure the achievement of the stated objective, i.e., that 13.5% of adults take part in educational activities by 2020.

2.2.4 Education and training providers

Vocational education establishments may be divided according to their ownership: state, local government and private schools. In 2012, amendments to the Vocational Education Law¹¹ (*Profesionālās izglītības likums*, 1999) changed the titles of vocational education establishments regarding education programmes and professional qualification that may be obtained at the relevant school.

According to the law, there are the following vocational education establishments:

- 1) Vocational basic school (*profesionālā pamatskola*) – education establishment that implements vocational basic education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 1 (EQF level 3);
- 2) Vocational school (*arodskola*) – education establishment that implements vocational education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 2 (EQF level 4);
- 3) Vocational secondary school (*profesionālā vidusskola*) – education establishment that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4);

¹¹ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

- 4) Technical school or technicum (*tehnikums*) – education establishment that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4) and that has gained the status of vocational education competence centre;
- 5) College (*koledža*) – education establishment that implements first level professional higher education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 4 (EQF level 5).

Vocational education establishment that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4), and additionally performs the functions of regional methodological centre, teacher further education centre, and the centre for evaluating professional competences acquired outside formal education may obtain the status of vocational education competence centre according to the criteria determined by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In 2011, the reorganization of vocational education establishments was concluded – of 69 vocational schools under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Science 38 schools have been established. Initial vocational education programmes may be obtained also in 11 colleges under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES, 1.09.2012). It is planned to continue optimizing the school network and differentiating remaining vocational schools by their functions, which also would promote access to vocational education for adults. Since September 2011, 6 vocational schools were granted the status of competence centre.

At present (2012), there are five vocational education establishments under the direction of local governments. Regarding the “Action plan of government for implementing “Declaration of the intended activities of the Cabinet of Ministers led by Valdis Dombrovskis”” (*Valdības rīcības plāna Deklarācijas par Valda Dombrovskā vadītā Ministru kabineta iecerēto darbību īstenošanai*, 2011), the Ministry of Education and Science has to ensure pre-conditions for assigning vocational education establishments to local governments or sectoral professional organizations by 1st September 2014. Thus, a qualitative education offer of all kinds would be concentrated in jurisdiction of regional governance and regarding regional needs. Yet according to the “Guidelines for optimisation of vocational education establishments network for 2010-2015” (*Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu tīkla optimizācijas pamatnostādnes 2010.-2015.gadam*), it is planned to assign vocational education establishments to local governments gradually, but not later than after six years on principle voluntary basis.

2.2.5 Teachers and trainers

Within the vocational education system, vocational education teachers are both teachers and trainers. Teachers implement a range of programmes: vocational basic education; vocational education; vocational upper-secondary education; and professional development and continuing vocational education programmes. All vocational education teachers can teach both in initial and continuing vocational education at basic and secondary level.

Vocational education teachers’ work involves:

- Implementation of education programmes according to national vocational education standards and occupational standards. Syllabi are developed by teachers and are approved by the head of education institution;

- Assessment and analysis of the knowledge and skills of students acquired during the learning process;
- Fostering development of creative attitudes and independence in learners;
- Search for and application of new ideas, technologies, and methods.

In September 2010, essential amendments were introduced in the Cabinet “Regulations on demands for necessary teacher education and professional qualifications” (*Noteikumi par prasībām pedagogiem nepieciešamajai izglītībai un profesionālajai kvalifikācijai*, 2000, 2010), which determine education requirements and education acquisition procedures also for vocational education teachers. According the mentioned amendments in the Regulations, vocational education teachers without a pedagogical qualification need to acquire 72 hours long pedagogy courses in a higher education institution instead of 320 hours long courses of various themes and arranged in different institutions. To clarify the education acquirement procedures, new Cabinet Regulations “Procedure for the improvement of teachers’ professional qualification” (*Pedagogu profesionālās kvalifikācijas pilnveides kārtība*) were adopted in June 2011. These Regulations determine the procedure how the improvement of teachers’ professional qualification is implemented; as well as what credentials are issued. Teachers are responsible for obtaining the relevant professional improvement in a certain amount of hours (at least 36 hours during three years).

At present (2012), all vocational education teachers must be in one of the following situations:

- Having vocational upper-secondary education or master crafts level qualification awarded by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts and teacher education – for basic education level;
- Having professional higher education and teacher education or having higher education acquired through programmes 1) which lead to professional qualification in the relevant field if teacher practical training is included in the programme or teacher work experience is six years, or the course of pedagogy or psychology is mastered; or 2) which lead to master’s or doctor’s degree in pedagogy or relevant field – for secondary education level;
- Having vocational upper-secondary education or master crafts level qualification awarded by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts and higher teacher education (in vocational education programmes or relevant subjects and practical training of vocational secondary education programmes – teacher education) – for secondary education level.

The most of vocational education teachers have higher education (see Appendix Table 8).

Requirements for HEI and college teacher education and professional qualification are stipulated by the Law on Higher Education Institutions¹² (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995).

¹² <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967>

2.2.6 Implementation of the Latvian Qualifications Framework

At present (September 2012), the Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) has been established and Latvia has officially presented the referencing results to the EQF Advisory Group meeting in October 2011. The LQF consists of eight levels, which descriptors are based on learning outcomes, and the framework includes the formal Latvian education of basic, secondary and higher education stages, i.e. general and vocational education sectors.

The LQF level descriptors were included in the CoM Regulations “Regulations on the classification of Latvian education” (2.12.2008) with the amendments of October 2010. Similar to the EQF, the Latvian level descriptors are expressed in three dimensions: knowledge (knowledge and comprehension), skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication, general skills), and competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment). The amendments also placed all formal education programmes of all education stages on relevant LQF/EQF level. The placement of the Latvian formal education qualifications on eight LQF/EQF levels is illustrated in the Appendix Table 9.

In February 2008, the Academic Information Centre, which also supervises the Latvian representation of ENIC-NARIC network, Europass and ReferNet, was appointed as the national coordination point (NCP) for EQF to promote introduction of the framework and organize national consultation process. As result of consultation process, the decision was taken to arrange referencing in two steps since this process is time-consuming and requires reforms of large scale.

The phases are as follows:

1. Phase (2009-2011) – included the establishment of the LQF; and the referencing of the formal Latvian education system to the EQF for lifelong learning and the QF-EHEA.
2. Phase (2013-2015) – foresees the review of the self-assessment report, on the basis of the new Vocational Education Law, Higher Education Law and the results of several ongoing projects, e.g. ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013).

2.2.7 Any particular national challenge, difficulties or success concerning this topic

The concept "Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance" (2009) foresees to improve types and programmes of vocational education. This action direction is implemented through the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013), which among other activities imparts the development of modular approach to vocational education. The National Centre for Education (project manager) has developed the template of module according to the current EU guidelines. In terms of the project, the development of five modules for the acquisition of lifelong learning competences has been initiated. These modules include expected outcomes, topics and content, recommended teaching/learning methods and indicators for learning achievement levels.

2.3 Other forms of learning

Learning providers, typical programmes and target groups

There are a number of organisations involved in informal/non-formal vocational education and professional improvement. A network of providers includes: ministries; employers' organisations; trade unions; university continuing education departments and their distance learning centres; local education centres; chambers of commerce; adult education centres; State Employment Agency and other educational organisations and associations, as well as private providers.

See information about continuing vocational education in section 2.2.

Sectoral education programmes

Sectors, particularly those including regulated professions or having certain professions with special certification requirements, organize corresponding education courses. For an instance, the Latvian Doctors' Association provides several informal/non-formal further education courses that can be with or without tuition.

Professional improvement of teachers (seminars, courses etc.) is provided by the National Centre for Education. At present, the Centre implements such ESF projects as "Further education of general education teachers" (*Vispārējās izglītības pedagogu tālākizglītība, 2010-2013*) that is intended for raising various competences of teachers, heads of schools, librarians, and "The improvement of theoretical knowledge and practical competences for vocational subject teachers and for supervisors of practical training" (*Profesionālo mācību priekšmetu pedagogu un prakses vadītāju teorētisko zināšanu un praktisko kompetenču paaugstināšana, 2009-2012*).

Sectoral associations widely use the support provided through the ESF funded programme "Support to the employed training for promoting competitiveness of businessmen – support to training organized in terms of partnerships" (*Atbalsts nodarbināto apmācībām komersantu konkurētspējas veicināšanai – atbalsts partnerībās organizētām apmācībām*) administered by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (*Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra*). The projects should include skill development activities for employees to raise competitiveness of the enterprises. As these projects are implemented through partnerships, various associations provide learning activities for enterprises that are their project partners. In 2011, the agency concluded 16 agreements with associations regarding the implementation of learning projects that were intended for involving 16 000 employees from more than 900 enterprises. Around 97% of learning was conducted in the fields of computer, engineering sciences and technologies, production, design, creative industries, physical sciences, mathematics and statistics.

"The national strategy plan for rural development of Latvia for 2007-2013" (2006) and "The rural development programme for 2007-2013" among other activities foresee the improvement of knowledge and skills for persons working in agriculture and forestry in terms of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) measures, as well as development of entrepreneurship. The support of EAFRD is targeted at ensuring vocational learning activities for representatives of agriculture, forestry and food procession sectors.

Workplace learning

A type of informal/non-formal vocational education is enterprise provided learning, which can assist employees in adapting to new tasks or re-qualifying to improve their career chances. Legally learning in the enterprises is addressed only in the Labour Law (*Darba likums*, 2002). However, in most cases, learning in enterprises depends on enterprise initiative and resources, since learning is a voluntary activity.

Learning also provides an opportunity to acquire completely new skills or to add certain competences (e.g. teamwork skills). Education providers are free to produce a study programme of different courses. Teachers may be employed by an education provider or may be contracted to provide a certain course directly by the employer. It is usually the responsibility of the provider to design their own education programmes but for certain regulated professions other bodies may be consulted to ensure that relevant occupational standards are met. The quality of provision is not otherwise monitored. Education courses would usually be funded by the enterprise although employees may have to contribute.

Enterprises tend to provide learning through external or internal courses. Other means such as job rotation within the organisation may also be used. Study groups and participation in conferences can also constitute learning provision. The data on learning in enterprises is collected by the Central Statistics Bureau only in terms of European Survey (1999, 2005).

In terms of the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšanai*, 2010-2013), the study of 14 sectors was conducted including vocational education offer and further education opportunities in the sectors. The study results indicate that part of occupations necessary in the sectors are not provided in vocational schools; therefore, large enterprises ensure work-based learning for their employees at the enterprise. In some cases, re-qualification of employees is ensured when an enterprise completely or partly cover tuition for employee’s education.

For example, at the JSC “Rīgas Siltums”, there is a learning centre since 1999 that ensures education in the specialities of sector (heating services). The company cooperates with other sectoral enterprises and once a month in its learning centre there are educational activities for employees from other enterprises. In addition, JSC “Latvijas Gāze” employs staff in the simple occupations without a special qualification, and ensures necessary learning in their education centre, as well as work-based learning under the guidance of more experienced colleagues. Generally, these learning activities focus on specific technical skills, e.g. performing dangerous work operations. According to the sectoral study, large enterprises consider that the best way for their employees to obtain necessary skills is through work-based learning at their enterprises. Meanwhile, many medium and small enterprises cannot provide such learning opportunities. The greatest part of enterprises is ready to finance the improvement of qualification for their employees, but more often this opinion is expressed by large enterprises.

In 2011, 1 094 unemployed (1 129 in 2010 and 441 in 2009) participated in work-based learning in enterprises (in total, 8 666 unemployed were involved in vocational education, re-qualification and professional improvement, and 26 256 unemployed – in informal/non-formal learning activities in 2011) (SEA, 2012).

Funding mechanisms

Enterprises are responsible for arranging learning activities for their employees. At present, statistics are not collected nationally on funding in enterprises. The tax system does not promote employer investment in learning. Only large, stable enterprises may have a learning budget. Smaller enterprises tend to invest less in employees' education.

The Investment and Development Agency of Latvia coordinates the implementation of projects supported by EU funds (regulated by the relevant Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations). Enterprises have showed great interest about these measures.

The State Employment Agency also coordinates learning activities for the employed or for those at unemployment risk (since May 2008). The measures are implemented in line with the Cabinet "Regulations regarding the procedures for organising and financing active employment measures and preventative measures for unemployment reduction and principles for selection of implementing bodies of measures" (2011).

For example, preventive employment measures include vocational education for employed individuals subjected to unemployment risk (part-time officially employed persons receive voucher of a certain sum EUR 426.9-711.4 to pay for their learning plus monthly scholarship of EUR 99.6 for six months) and lifelong learning measures for the employed.

Any particular national challenge, difficulties or success concerning this topic

During the last years, in terms of the ESF project "Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education" (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšanai, 2010-2013*), there are ongoing discussions and work concerning the development of sectoral qualifications frameworks. Largely, these activities are conducted thanks to the Sectoral Expert Councils.

Yet topical issues are how to motivate employers to cooperate with vocational education establishments (as there are no legal provisions), how to motivate employers to ensure further education for their employees. The other range of issues is related to the lack of general statistics regarding adult informal/non-formal learning and learning at enterprises that does not allow obtaining overview about the national situation and tendencies.

3 Shaping VET qualifications

3.1 Methods for anticipating labour market needs and applying the results in VET

The responsibility of providing labour market forecasts rests with the Ministry of Economics and the State Employment Agency, which is under the direction of the Ministry of Welfare.

The Ministry of Economics (*Ekonomikas ministrija*) ensures middle-term forecasts. The Ministry of Economics set up the Advisory Council for Labour Market Forecasting (*Darba tirgus prognozēšanas konsultatīvā padome*) to deal with relevant issues and to establish a platform for dialogue between the state (Unit of Economical Development and Labour Market Forecasting of the ministry), employers (Employers' Confederation of Latvia), employees (Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia), and the local municipalities (Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments). This Council has annual meetings to discuss the middle-term labour market forecasts proposed by the ministry. Along with other measures, the ministry prepares reports on economic development (*Report on Economic Development of Latvia*) twice a year, in which previous period is reflected and some forecasts are provided. Additionally, since 2009, this ministry prepared the "Informative report on forecasts for compliance of labour force demand and offer in middle-term" (*Informatīvais ziņojums par prognozēm darbaspēka pieprasījuma un piedāvājuma atbilstībai vidējā termiņā*). The report comprises the overview regarding labour force supply and demand, its correspondence to education level, education thematic groups, and educational development of the employed (including vocational education). The data is used by the Ministry of Education and Science to design vocational education provision plans.

The instruments for labour market forecasting are based on the dynamic optimization model (DOM) of labour market forecasting that was elaborated in terms of the ESF project "Research of the long-term forecasting system of the labour market demand and the analysis of its improvement possibilities" (*Darba tirgus pieprasījuma ilgtermiņa prognozēšanas sistēmas izpēte un pilnveidošanas iespēju analīze, 2007*). DOM structure was developed using system-dynamic approach grounding on the concept of labour market balance and taking into account aging and professional mobility of labour force. Demand of labour force by sector is determined by scenarios of national economy development – growth of economy sectors and expected changes in productivity. The demand of occupations emerges from demand of labour force in a sector and expected changes in occupation structure within the sector. The demand of education is stated by skills or education necessary for performing professional activities in the demanded occupations. Labour market forecasts are based on international classification systems adapted in Latvia; thus, the forecasts may be internationally comparable.

In forecasts, evaluation of experts is used concerning education that corresponds to occupations; it is based on the international occupational classification (ISCO-08) and its assumptions about occupational skill levels and relevant education. In 2011, to improve the aggregation system of labour market forecasts, inter-institutional working group (Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science) was established. The working group elaborated an occupation-education matrix, which develops assumptions regarding

necessary education for performing professional tasks. For example, according to the “Informative report on forecasts for compliance of labour force demand and offer in middle-term” (2012), almost 2/3 of total increase in the demand of labour force until 2020 will be stated by three sectors – manufacturing industry, trade and business services. Meanwhile, contribution to such traditional sectors as wood processing and food production will decrease. As result, the demand for high-qualified specialists (with higher and vocational secondary education) will increase more rapidly. Insufficient offer is forecast in the education thematic groups of engineering, production and construction (mainly metalworking, mechanical engineering and wood processing sectors), natural sciences, mathematics and information technologies, as well as services (mainly hotels and restaurants, transport, and protection of persons and property).

The State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*) carries out short-term labour market forecasting and twice a year conducts express employers’ surveys to clarify planned changes in number of employees during the next half year, the reasons for these changes, as well as demanded and unclaimed occupations by employers. The results of these surveys are applied to design and arrange learning for the unemployed during the following half of year.

However, these reports and surveys do not ensure sufficient anticipation of skill needs to implement long-term economy and business planning strategies. Thus, information on skill needs is collected partly at sector level or in terms of some projects, but not systematically at national level.

In accordance with the ESF Action Programme “Human Resources and Employment”, the project “The development of the labour market forecasting and monitoring system of the State Employment Agency” (2010-2013) is implemented. The project activities impart several studies including one sociological study about the unemployed graduates and two studies about particular unemployed target groups

The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (*Centrālās statistikas pārvalde*, CSB), which functions are regulated by the Official Statistics Law (*Valsts statistikas likums*, 1997) and the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Statistics (2009), each quarter conducts a labour force survey including data on education levels, type of economic action, and occupational groups. The Ministry of Economics on basis of provided data prepares the annual “Informative report on forecasts for compliance of labour force demand and offer in middle-term”.

Since 2012, the Latvian statistics system has completely shifted to the new classification of economy sectors and occupations (NACE 2nd edition, ISCO-08). Therefore, the Ministry of Economics reviewed previous aggregation of labour market forecasts, and initiated the elaboration of forecasts of economy sectors and occupations regarding the new classifications.

Data about the graduates of HEIs and vocational education establishments are gathered by the institutions themselves and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science and the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (CSB) for further analysis and publication. According to the amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions¹³ (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995) of August 2011, now HEIs have to ensure that information about graduates’ further employment is collected and analysed; thus, more data will be available in the next years. Various aspects of graduates professional activities are explored in the Labour Force and Profession Survey conducted by the CSB, as well as within other studies (usually on small scale) performed by various institutions.

¹³ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=37967>

3.2 How and by whom qualifications are designed

Skill needs are taken into account when drafting vocational qualifications through the definition of occupational standards for different professions. Standards are developed by representatives of educational institutions and social partners through working groups organized by the National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības satura centrs*) for the Latvian professional qualification levels 1-3 (EQF levels 3-4) and the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*, MoES) for levels 4-5 (EQF levels 5-7). Occupational standards are confirmed by the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*) and by the Ministry of Education and Science. Standards usually are updated and reviewed as necessary but not often than every 5th year. Thus, every 5th year standards are assessed and updated by education providers, employers, students, government organisations, quality assurance agencies and external experts. Representatives of the MoES and other ministries, the Latvian Union of Local Governments, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, non-governmental field organizations, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, and vocational education providers take part in developing and reviewing occupational standards.

Occupational standards comprise a description of specific tasks and employee duties as well as the abilities and skills, professional competence (necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain working situations) necessary to carry out those tasks. Standards also outline place of occupation in sectoral qualification system including description of employability, and determine to which level of professional qualification each specific profession corresponds. When developing educational programmes, educational institutions have to ensure the acquisition of all the knowledge, skills and professional competence mentioned in the occupational standards.

In May 2010, new Cabinet "Regulations regarding the Classification of Occupations, the basic tasks appropriate to the occupation and the basic qualification requirements, and the procedures for the use and updating of the Classification of Occupations" (*Noteikumi par Profesiju klasifikatoru, profesijai atbilstošiem pamatuzdevumiem un kvalifikācijas pamatprasībām un Profesiju klasifikatora lietošanas un aktualizēšanas kārtību*) were adopted. The regulations determine that occupational standards are included in the Classification of Occupations as appendices. The Classification of Occupations is maintained and updated by the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*).

The content of vocational education programmes is defined by the state vocational education standards that are stipulated by relevant Cabinet regulations, e.g. the "Regulations on the state vocational secondary education standard and the state vocational education standard" (*Noteikumi par valsts profesionālās vidējās izglītības standartu un valsts arodizglītības standartu* 2008). The state vocational education standards outline the strategic aims of education programmes, the mandatory content of education, and the basic principles and procedure for evaluating the acquired education. The standards determine the ratio of theory and practice, the ratio of subjects of general education and vocational subjects, the division of general education subjects etc.

Vocational education programmes comprise: objectives, content and implementation plan of vocational education programme; requirements regarding previous education; and personal, financial and material resources necessary for its implementation. Vocational education programmes are elaborated by education establishments in line with state education standards, occupational standards as well as with recommendations set by the National Centre for Education

(*Valsts izglītības satura centrs*). Thereafter, programmes are evaluated by the Centre and licensed by the State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*). Thus, if an education programme does not reflect relevant knowledge, skills and competences included in the standards, it is not licensed or accredited and education establishment may not issue state recognized education documents.

In addition, the content of final qualification examinations, which conclude vocational education programmes and consist of theoretical and practical part, is drafted in line with occupational standards. In the examination commission representatives from relevant sectoral organization (employers, workers) are represented.

Since 2010, sectoral research and development of sectoral qualifications frameworks has been initiated; in this process wide range of sector representatives has been involved. The State Education Development Agency together with partners implements the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšanai, 2010-2013*). The project includes such activities as sectoral research and elaboration of sectoral professional qualifications frameworks (by September 2012, the agency had published 14 sectoral qualifications frameworks and descriptions); elaboration or improvement of 80 occupational standards in basic professions; as well as elaboration or improvement of 20 initial vocational education programmes and 35 continuing vocational education programmes etc.

3.3 Ensuring the labour market relevance of knowledge, skills and competence development in VET

The Ministry of Education and Science uses the data on forecasts for compliance of labour force demand and offer in middle-term (summarized by the Ministry of Economics) as one of the sources in vocational education planning, e.g.:

- 1) When designing vocational education provision plans for every study year (stating the number of potential students, types of programmes);
- 2) When developing vocational education policy documents, e.g., the “Guidelines for optimization of vocational education establishments network for 2010-2015” (2010);
- 3) When implementing the sub-activities of ESF Action Programme “Human Resources and Employment”, e.g., “Development of sectoral qualifications system and restructuring of vocational education” (2010), “Raising competence of teachers involved in vocational education” (2009), and “Support to the quality improvement and implementation of initial vocational education programmes” (2009).

Since study year 2010/2011, vocational schools may enrol unlimited number of students in the occupations necessary for the national economics.

Revision of occupation standards, on which education programmes are based, is an ongoing process; the standards are updated at least every five years. Since 2007, the standards besides knowledge and skills have to include professional competence, i.e. necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain work situations; therefore, all standards designed before had to be updated. In case standards (occupation or education) are altered, the education programmes have to be adapted accordingly; otherwise, these programmes would not be accredited. With the

adoption of new Cabinet “Regulations regarding the Classification of Occupations, the basic tasks appropriate to the occupation and the basic qualification requirements, and the procedures for the use and updating of the Classification of Occupations” in 2010, the occupational standards approved prior the date need to be reviewed and adopted, as well.

To respond to the high rates of unemployed youth, vocational education standards were amended in August 2010 to introduce 1-1.5 year long education programmes (post-secondary level) for individuals younger than 25 within initial vocational education system. Previously these programmes lasted for 2 years requiring more time for young people to become involved in the labour market. These short programmes are implemented through ESF project “Support to the quality improvement and implementation of initial vocational education programmes” (*Atbalsts sākotnējās profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošanas kvalitātes uzlabošanai un īstenošanai*). The State Education Development Agency cooperates with 25 vocational education establishments that have developed and are implementing the mentioned education programmes that were harmonised with the sectoral organizations and the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment. First students were enrolled in October 2010, and in August 2011 one-year programmes were graduated by 387 students (81% of enrolled). It is planned (by 2013) to involve in these programmes 2000 young people at regular vocational schools and 300 young prisoners during the project.

Regarding higher education level, in spring 2011, the ESF project “Evaluation of higher education study programmes and suggestions for the improvement of quality” (*Augstākās izglītības studiju programmu izvērtēšana un priekšlikumi kvalitātes paaugstināšanai*) was launched for evaluating higher education programmes (including higher professional education programmes). In the assessment procedures, the use of learning outcomes and qualifications level descriptors when developing and providing higher education programmes was taken into account. 237 experts (also international) evaluated 860 study programmes grouped in 28 study directions, and provided suggestions for the improvement of the study programmes.

3.4 Quality assurance of the process

The competence of the Ministry of Education and Science includes full responsibility for the political aspects and strategy in ensuring the accessibility and quality of education, but several institutions under the Ministry have responsibility for the quality of education. There are quality assurance policy and procedures in the education programmes on all levels.

Education quality is assured and maintained by: elaborating education policy and adopting strategic decisions; developing education content; registering education establishments; developing and licensing education programmes; accrediting education establishments and programmes; ensuring supervision of education process.

National vocational education quality control is ensured through education programme and establishment accreditation, which is outlined in the Cabinet Regulations “Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education establishments and examination centres” (*Kārtība, kādā akreditē vispārējās un profesionālās izglītības programmas, izglītības iestādes un eksaminācijas centrus*, 2010). The principle of accreditation ensures that programme content meets the required standards of publicly provided vocational education. It also assists in the transparency of learning; thereby, fostering the ability to recognise Latvian qualifications in

other countries. The State Education Quality Service among other functions organises licensing and accreditation of vocational education programmes, as well as accreditation of vocational education institutions and examination centres regardless their ownership (state, local government and private). Only accredited local governments' and private vocational education establishments may apply for state funding for implementing vocational further education, vocational improvement and vocationally oriented education programmes. To ensure the improvement of assessment system for vocational education quality, since 2010 the State Education Quality Service has joined the working group of European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQA-VET).

When licensing education programmes or during the accreditation process, the external experts from the State Education Quality Service, as well as representatives of the sectoral associations, societies, employers' representatives delegated by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, evaluate the correspondence of education programmes to the state education standards, occupational standards, the Classification of Occupations, as well as to requirements of legal regulations regulating education content and process, also making sure that the planned content of education programmes would allow students to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and competences, i.e. whether the content and outcomes of education programme corresponds to the relevant qualification level description.

The functions of the National Centre for Education in this field are: to ensure the development of education content for vocational basic education, vocational education, vocational secondary, continuing vocational education, professional improvement and professionally orientated education in compliance with the state standards; to ensure development and implementation of a uniform content of vocational education state examinations; to coordinate the development of study aids complying with the general and vocational education standards; to coordinate and deliver teachers' professional improvement.

At higher education level, Higher Education Council (*Augstākās izglītības padome*) is responsible for education quality. Yet the licensing and accreditation of institutions and programmes are coordinated by the Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (*Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes novērtēšanas centrs*) in line with the Law on Higher Education Institutions (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995). In September 2012, new Cabinet "Regulations for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study direction" (*Augstskolu, koledžu un studiju virzienu akreditācijas noteikumi*) were adopted. As result, new procedure for accreditation was introduced – instead of accrediting study programmes, now study directions have to undergo accreditation, which assists in optimizing resources. Furthermore, the evaluation of HEIs and colleges will be arranged by an institution assigned by the Ministry of Education and Science, and selected in an open competition.

3.5 Validation of non-formal and informal learning and whether it leads to qualifications

The development of system for validating skills and competences acquired through informal/non-formal education had been set as one of policy objectives, e.g. within the "Programme for implementing the Guidelines for lifelong learning policy for 2007-2013 in the period of 2008-2013" (*Programma mūžizglītības politikas pamatnostādņu 2007.-2013.gadam ieviešanai 2008.-2013.gadā*, 2008).

The system of the recognition of professional competence acquired outside formal education was established at the beginning of 2011. The latest amendments (July 2010) in the Vocational Education Law¹⁴ (1999) included a paragraph stating that validation of professional competence acquired outside the formal education system is carried out according to relevant occupational standards; validation may be assigned to accredited education establishment or examination centre; and procedure how the validation is conducted is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers. In February 2011, the Cabinet Regulations “Procedure how professional competence obtained outside formal education system is assessed” (*Kārtība, kādā novērtē ārpus formālās izglītības sistēmas apgūto profesionālo kompetenci*) were approved stipulating the procedure how professional competence (except regulated professions) that corresponds to the Latvian professional qualification level 1-3, i.e. the EQF level 3-4, obtained outside formal education is assessed. The institutions assessing professional competence may be accredited education establishments or examination centres, which have been assigned by the State Education Quality Service.

The procedure on validating professional competence obtained outside formal education includes the following steps:

- 1) Individual's application for assessment of their professional competence;
- 2) Professional qualification exam;
- 3) Awarding the document that certifies a professional qualification.

The institution assessing professional competence must provide to the candidate consultations free of charge regarding the requirements set in the concrete occupational standard and the procedure of professional qualification exam. Up to the point of deciding to take the exam, the procedure is free of charge for the candidate. The validation process of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education is for a fee. The applicant, who has successfully passed professional qualification exam (grade no lower than “5 – satisfactory”), is awarded with a state recognized document certifying the Latvian professional qualification of level 1-3 (EQF level 3-4) by the institution for assessing the professional competence in line with procedure stated by laws and regulations, i.e., the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations “The procedure of professional qualification examinations in accredited vocational education programmes” (August 2011).

Regarding the HE level, on 10 January 2012, the Cabinet “Regulations of recognizing the learning outcomes acquired in the previous education and professional experience” were approved. These Regulations were issued in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995, amendments in force since August 2011). The Regulations determine the procedures for the assessment and recognition of learning outcomes (for higher education level) obtained during the previous education or professional experience, as well as criteria for recognition. The learning outcomes achieved through professional experience may be recognized only within the part of study programme including practice; furthermore, these learning outcomes should be obtained in a profession relevant to the education thematic field of particular study programme. The mentioned type of learning outcomes may be also recognized in a study course or module of a study programme, which ensures the acquisition of practical knowledge, skills and competence.

¹⁴ <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=20244&mode=KDOC>

3.6 Any particular national challenge, difficulties or success concerning this topic

The greatest challenge is a successful elaboration and introduction of sectoral qualifications frameworks and drafting occupational standards for basic professions. These activities are conducted in terms of the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013). This would allow strengthening links between sectoral needs and development tendencies with professional qualifications and vocational education programmes.

During the same ESF project, the National Centre for Education develops modular vocational education programmes, which provide opportunity to acquire lifelong learning competences in any education field both within initial and continuing vocational education. The analysis of occupational standards showed that entrepreneurship is one of the competences defined in lifelong learning context. The lifelong learning competences are mentioned in the state education standards, occupational standards and EU policy documents (e.g. Education and Training 2020); therefore, they should be obtained both in initial and continuing vocational education. In the project, the structure of education content is changed to promote acquisition of lifelong learning competences in vocational education. Five lifelong learning modules (including expected outcomes, topics and content, recommended teaching/learning methods, assessment criteria) are developed in the project.

CHAPTER 4

4. Promoting participation in vocational education and training

4.1 Types and characteristics of incentives for individuals, enterprises and providers

Promoting participation in initial vocational education and reduction of dropouts has been listed as one of the policy priorities in several planning documents. The latest one – the concept “Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance” (*Profesionālās izglītības pievilcības paaugstināšana un sociālo partneru līdzdalība profesionālās izglītības kvalitātes nodrošināšanā*, 2009) – foresaw to improve types and programmes of vocational education; implementing the sectoral qualifications frameworks; differentiating vocational schools; balancing requirements for obtaining vocational and general secondary education; and promoting the participation of social partners in developing and implementing education policy.

State subsidies for vocational education providers are determined by the Cabinet of Ministers regarding the number of students and the relevant per capita costs. Providers annually submit their budget projects to the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Once the state budget is confirmed, schools receive funding and spend it to implement their education programmes according to legislation. Furthermore, in accordance with Vocational Education Law (1999), accredited local governments' and private vocational education establishments may apply for state funding for implementing vocational further education, vocational improvement and vocationally oriented education programmes.

The legal basis for tax incentives is formed by the Law on Enterprise Income Taxes (*Par uzņēmumu ienākuma nodokli*, 1995, 2011) and the Law on Personal Income Tax (*Par iedzīvotāju ienākuma nodokli*, 1993, 2011). The former concerning tax allowance for donors stipulates that tax is reduced for residents by 85% of sums donated to education institutions that have been granted public benefit organisation status. Regarding reimbursed expenses, the law and regulations state that expenses (both payer's and their family members') related to professional development, acquisition of speciality, and education are reimbursed and deducted from the amount of annual taxable income, before taxing particular inhabitant's year incomes. The term of education imparts higher education, all stages of vocational education, acquisition of occupation in state accredited Latvian, EU, EEA education establishments, or, when participating in state accredited education programmes, learning in enterprises or occupation for acquiring or improving necessary skills and broadening knowledge, promotion of qualification level.

Speaking about tax allowances for private persons, any taxpayer who has submitted their annual personal income tax declaration is eligible for refunding of their education (and health care) costs. However, the amount individuals are paid back is comparatively small – EUR 213.43 before 2009, when it was doubled (EUR 426.86), and since 2010, this sum has been decreased to the previous amount. Expenses may be requested to be reimbursed in three years period.

The State Revenue Service (*Valsts ieņēmumu dienests*) is the institution responsible for monitoring progress on the use of the tax incentive and taking corrective actions.

Unlike general secondary education students, vocational education students receive state monthly scholarships. Scholarships in initial vocational education are stated by the Cabinet "Regulations on scholarships" (*Noteikumi par stipendijām*, 2004, 2011). Vocational basic education, vocational education (*arodizglītība*), and vocational secondary education students, who have been admitted regarding the number of places financed by state (or local governments), receive scholarship from the scholarship fund of education establishment. This fund constitutes contributions from state (or local governments) budget, i.e. subsidies from general income. Minimum scholarship is EUR 10 per month, but elevated scholarship may be up to EUR 71 per month. The elevated scholarship is allocated when student is: 1) an orphan or a child left without parental care, who is not at children care institution or foster family; 2) at least 18 years old student with good marks, but left without parental care or an orphan. The elevated scholarship may be also allocated due to good or excellent learning achievements, and active involvement in the social life of vocational school.

According to the Cabinet of Ministers "Regulations on the expenditures minimum per one student for implementing vocational education programmes" (*Noteikumi par profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošanas izmaksu minimumu uz vienu izglītojamo*, 2007, 2010), there are normative and non-normative costs. The non-normative costs include: scholarships and transport compensations (EUR 45.53 per year for one student), student hotel maintenance (EUR 282.23 per year for one hotel guest), rehabilitation measures and catering services for persons with special needs (for one student with special needs living in student hotel, who needs rehabilitation activities regarding their functional disorders – EUR 495.66 per year; catering costs – EUR 694.36 per year for one student – are allocated only Alsiviķi Vocational School); expenditures for culture education and sports (for one student EUR 22.77 per year); expenditures for organizing qualification practice learning at practice place (for one student EUR 7.11 per day).

Only tertiary education students can apply for study loans. Study loans are allocated from funds of credit institutions with the State guarantee. Tertiary education students may receive two different study loans: to cover study programme expenses and for personal expenses during studies.

According to the Vocational Education Law (1999), students studying in accredited first level professional higher education programmes may receive student loan from the state budget or credit institution with the warranty from the government. The procedure of the allocation, repayment, and clearance of the loan is defined in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995).

4.2 Guidance and counselling, structures and services

The present career development support system was initiated in 2006 with the approval of the "White paper on the improvement of the career guidance system" (*Koncepcija „Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas pilnveidošana”*), which was developed by the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with three other ministries (Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economics, Ministry of Regional Development), with the Association of Local Governments, the social partners' organisations and the guidance practitioners. The Paper covers all aspects of lifelong guidance including the mechanisms to ensure better cooperation and coordination between key players in guidance and counselling at different levels.

Since 2007, the National Forum on guidance and counselling (*Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas sadarbības padome*), in which the policy makers from relevant ministries, guidance providers, social partners and clients are represented, serves as an advisor on necessary improvements of guidance and counselling policy and system at national and local levels, contributing to the development of guidance and counselling policy and system. The Forum also cooperates with the Latvian European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) delegation.

The Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*, MoES) and the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*, MoW) are responsible bodies for career guidance and counselling.

The Education Law (*Izglītības likums* 1998) stipulates that the local governments ensure the provision of guidance and counselling for children and young adults while the Vocational Education Law (*Profesionālās izglītības likums*, 1999) stipulates that the MoES organizes introduction of guidance and counselling in vocational education. This division is because primary and secondary schools are under the management of local governments, while the MoES administers vocational schools. According to the Cabinet Regulations “Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education establishments and examination centres” (*Kārtība, kādā akreditē vispārējās un profesionālās izglītības programmas, izglītības iestādes un eksaminācijas centrus*, 2010), one of the criteria for quality assessment is the support in career education provided by a school to their students. Moreover, in 2012, the MoES prepared amendments to the Cabinet Regulations “Procedure for the allocation and nullification of vocational education competence centre status” (*Profesionālās izglītības kompetences centra statusa piešķiršanas un anulēšanas kārtība*, 2011), which foresee additional requirements for such education establishments. It is planned that among other functions vocational education competence centres (in the relevant economic sectors) should provide support measures for career education to acquire career management skills, as well as individual career consultations for the choice of further education and career. This is a new step in promoting guidance and counselling at vocational schools.

The Ministry of Education and Science delegated the State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra*, SEDA) to represent Latvia in the Euroguidance Network. The SEDA supports implementation of career education policy within education sector. Information and Career Guidance Department of SEDA provides information on education opportunities in Latvia and other EU countries. It is partly financed by the Ministry and partly by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme. Before the Latvian administrative territorial reform (December 2008), in each of education boards there was a coordinator responsible for guidance and counselling, with whom the Department cooperated in information distribution and exchange. Because of the reform, the number and the functions of bodies (education boards or units, education expert) responsible for education issues in administrative territories has changed. Meanwhile, the reduction of funding during the economic recession has forced local governments to limit the functions and human resources of these bodies; thus, this information distribution channel lost its previous efficiency and needs to be re-established.

The SEDA has developed and still develops various types of information materials both to provide methodological support for career guidance practitioners working at schools and guidance materials for young people and adults. The Agency maintains and updates an education opportunities database (www.niid.lv), which includes information about general, vocational and higher education institutions and education programmes they offer, as well as information about

informal/non-formal learning possibilities. In cooperation with Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs*), SEDA maintains and updates website (www.studyinlatvia.lv) that is intended for foreign students, and it comprises information about education opportunities provided in foreign languages and some practical information.

The Ministry of Welfare's policy is implemented by the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, SEA). The SEA operates in accordance with the Labour Law (*Darba likums*, 2002), the Law on Social Security (*Par sociālo drošību*, 1995) and the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (*Bezdarbnieku un darba meklētāju atbalsta likums*, 2002). The latter states that one of the functions of SEA is ensuring free career consultations for the unemployed, job seekers and others. The SEA is the only state institution providing career counselling. The SEA provides: individual career consultations – exploration of vocational aptitude, individual career planning, analysis of life and work values, exploration of personal and professional characteristics, preparing for work interview (writing CV and work applications); individual diagnostic career consultations – exploration of psychological features and their compatibility with professional goals, motivation assessment prior involving in active employment measures; group career consultations – education and career development opportunities, labour market requirements; informative group career consultations and online career consultations – information about choice of occupation, education and work seeking issues through the SEA website (www.nva.gov.lv).

The counselling methods are selected according to the needs of the clients. The first consultation is devoted to clarifying the aims of the visit and selecting the most appropriate working method, which may be focused on exploring professional interests, vocational aptitude, exploring clients' knowledge, skills and competences, values (by using relevant methodology or tests). If need be, a psychological support is ensured in form of a structured conversation for discussing possible solutions. SEA web portal "Career Services" (*Karjeras pakalpojumi*, <http://www.nva.gov.lv/pkiva/>) provides information about education establishments, self-assessment tests, descriptions of occupations, as well as opportunity to receive e-consultations.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (*Augstskolu likums*, 1995), students of HEIs have right to receive information on issues regarding their studies and potential career. In many HEIs there are career centres specifically designated for providing information on education and career opportunities, while in other HEIs these duties are performed by faculty staff.

With some exceptions, in the private and NGO sector, the provision of guidance services is underdeveloped yet. For example, Youth Consultations maintains web portal www.prakse.lv (since 2008), which is considered to be the largest in Latvia providing information on career and education development issues.

4.3 Current key challenges

Current discussions include the assigning of state vocational education establishments to the local governments, thus, also altering the flow of funding. This reform was proposed through the "Guidelines for optimization of vocational education establishments network for 2010-2015" (*Profesionālās izglītības iestāžu tīkla optimizācijas pamatnostādnes 2010.-2015.gadam*, 2010) prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science. The other reform is related to the shift towards the principle "money follows students".

One of the challenges is ensuring access to guidance and counselling for young people. Prior economic recession the State Employment Agency ensured career consultations also for school students, but with the increase in the unemployment rates, the focus shifted to the unemployed. In the meantime, in 2009, because of the limited resources two activities related to career guidance and counselling were postponed:

- 1) The development of career guidance and counselling within education system; and
- 2) Promoting availability of career guidance and counselling for young people, development of vocationally oriented education.

Therefore, at present (2012), measures need to be taken to re-establish system of career counsellors in schools.

Appendix

Tables

	TIME	2009			2010			2011		
	ISCED/ AGE	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64
EU 27	0-2	22.7	64.1	43.3	21.4	62.8	43.1	20.7	62.1	43.3
	3-4	46.2	80.3	59.4	44.9	79.7	59.6	44.3	79.8	60.4
	5-6	58.1	88.0	74.5	56.9	87.4	74.5	55.5	87.1	74.8
	No A.	5.5	75.6	63.8	5.0	73.1	61.7	5.6	74.5	61.6
	TOTAL	35.0	78.6	56.5	34.0	78.1	56.7	33.6	78.0	57.5
LV	0-2	10.7	55.1	40.0	10.9	55.8	35.2	10.9	56.2	39.0
	3-4	42.1	73.5	61.1	37.7	72.4	55.0	38.1	74.3	57.4
	5-6	65.7	86.8	74.5	71.4	84.4	73.0	69.5	87.9	77.8
	No A.	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	TOTAL	27.7	75.0	60.9	26.4	74.0	56.7	27.2	76.1	59.9

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey); last update: 26.07.2012. Special values – : not available; No A. – no answer

	TIME	2009			2010			2011		
	ISCED / AGE	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64
EU 27	0-2	26,1	14.8	9.1	27.5	16.3	10.2	28.2	17.0	10.8
	3-4	17.1	7.5	6.2	18.1	8.2	6.7	18.7	8.1	6.5
	5-6	15.5	5.8	3.4	16.3	5.3	3.6	16.7	5.5	3.6
	No A.	22.0	7.6	:	:	8.2	:	:	8.4	:
	TOTAL	19.9	8.2	6.3	20.9	8.9	6.9	21.3	9.0	6.9
LV	0-2	49.9	26.7	20.6	45.6	27.8	27.1(u)	37.0	27.5	20.5(u)
	3-4	29.0	17.9	15.6	33.2	18.6	18.8	30.2	15.6	16.7
	5-6	21.8	7.8	7.2	:	10.4	8.1(u)	:	6.2	7.0(u)
	No A.	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
	TOTAL	33.6	15.8	14.0	34.5	17.0	16.7	29.1	13.9	14.3

Source: Eurostat (LFS); last update: 26.07.2012; Special values: u – unreliable ; : – not available; No A. – no answer

TABLE 3: INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AT BASIC AND SECONDARY LEVEL (MAINLY SCHOOL-BASED)

NAME OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME	ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS	MAIN ECONOMIC SECTORS	CORRESPONDING ISCED LEVEL AND ORIENTATION/ DESTINATION	BALANCE BETWEEN GENERAL AND VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS	BALANCE BETWEEN SCHOOL- AND WORK-BASED TRAINING (SHARE IN %)	AVERAGE DURATION OF STUDIES	ACCESS TO (HORIZONTAL/ VERTICAL) TO OTHER PATHWAYS
vocational basic education programme (including pedagogical correction programme)	1) basic education 2) without basic education, but not younger than 15 y.o.	primary sector, manufacturing, construction; business and other services	2A, 2C	60:40	35:65	1-2 (or 3 years with ped. correction)	Vocational secondary education programmes
vocational education programme	general or vocational basic education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	3C	60:40	35:65	2-3 years	vocational secondary education, intermediate general education programmes
vocational secondary education programme	general or vocational basic education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	3A, 3B	60:40	50:50	3-4 years, 2 years after vocational programme	higher education programmes
inter-mediate programme in general secondary education	vocational education programme	---	3A, 3B	100:0	---	1 year	higher education programmes
vocational education programme	general secondary education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	4B	60:40	35:65	1 year (2 years in programmes licensed before 2009)	Labour market

TABLE 4: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AT TERTIARY LEVEL (MAINLY SCHOOL-BASED)						
NAME OF EDUCATION PROGRAMME	ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS	MAIN ECONOMIC SECTORS	CORRESPONDING LEVEL OF STUDY	BALANCE BETWEEN GENERAL AND VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS	BALANCE BETWEEN SCHOOL- AND WORK-BASED TRAINING (SHARE IN %)	AVERAGE DURATION OF STUDIES
first level higher professional education programmes (college programmes)	secondary education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED 5B Latvian professional qualification level 4 EQF level 5	36:64	70:30	2-3 years
second level higher professional education programmes (university programmes)	secondary education or (academic) bachelor's degree		ISCED 5A professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6-7	17:83	70:30	4-5 years not shorter than 4 years after secondary education and not shorter than 2 years after college education
<u>University programmes:</u>						
short cycle study programmes	first level professional higher education or academic bachelor's degree	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED 5A professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total 40 Latvian CP (1 Latvian credit =1.5 ECTS), of which: - 4 CP theoretical courses in the branch - 26 CP work-based learning - 10 CP state exam (including final thesis)	min. 4 years	1-2 years Total duration of HE studies - at least 4 years
professional bachelor's studies or professional higher education programmes	secondary education		ISCED 5A professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which: - min. 20 CP general courses - min. 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and IT courses - min. 60 CP courses of occupational speciality - min. 6 CP free choice courses - min. 26 CP work-based learning - min. 12 CP state exam (including final thesis)		
professional master's studies	bachelor's degree		ISCED 5A professional qualification level 5 EQF level 7	Total at least 40 Latvian CP, of which: - min. 14 CP theoretical courses - min. 6 CP work-based learning - 20 CP state exam (including final thesis)		1-2 years Total duration of HE studies - at least 5 years

FIELDS OF STUDY / YEAR	VALUES (NUM)			SHARE OF TOTAL (%)		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
TOTAL	36660	35767	34638	100	100	100
GENERAL EDUCATION	260	274	200	0.7	0.8	0.6
HUMANITIES AND ARTS	3064	3093	3057	8.4	8.6	8.8
SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND LAW	5677	5193	4867	15.5	14.5	14.1
NATURAL SCIENCES, MATHEMATICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES	2203	2085	1963	6.0	5.8	5.7
ENGINEERING, MANUFACTURING AND CONSTRUCTION	16155	15526	14675	44.1	43.4	42.4
AGRICULTURE	998	928	840	2.7	2.6	2.4
HEALTH AND WELFARE	581	630	727	1.6	1.8	2.1
SERVICES	7722	8038	8309	21.1	22.5	24.0

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

EDUCATION STAGE	LQF/EQF LEVEL	PROF. QUALIFICATION LEVEL	PROGRAMME
1. BASIC EDUC.	3	1	continuous vocational education without limits for previous education
2. LOWER-SECONDARY EDUC.	4	2	continuous vocational education for students with completed or unfinished basic education
	-	-	professional improvement after basic education
3. UPPER-SECONDARY EDUC.	4	2 or 3	continuous vocational education for students after general or vocational upper-secondary education
	-	-	professional improvement after upper-secondary education
4. HIGHER EDUC.	5	4	continuous vocational education implemented in colleges or HEI for students with at least first level professional higher education

	FORMAL EDUCATION	INFORMAL/ NON-FORMAL EDUCATION
TOTAL	100	100
GENERAL PROGRAMMES	2.4	0.2
TEACHERS' EDUCATION AND EDUCATION SCIENCE	6.9	8.1
HUMANITIES AND ARTS	6.4	12.6
SOCIAL SCIENCES, BUSINESS AND LAW	55.5	25.4
NATURAL SCIENCES, MATHEMATICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES	7.7	11.5
ENGINEERING, MANUFACTURING AND CONSTRUCTION	3.6	7.9
AGRICULTURE	1.1	3.8
HEALTH AND WELFARE	9.7	8.9
SERVICES	4.9	20.5

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

SCHOOL YEARS	TOTAL NUM.	EDUCATION LEVEL								
		SECONDARY					HIGHER			
		TOTAL	INCL. GEN. SEC.	INCL. VOC. SEC.	INCL. WITH PED. ED.	STUDENTS	TOTAL	INCL. HIGHER PED. ED.	INCL. OTHER TYPE PED. (>320 H)	PH D
2009/10	3228	349	28	321	185	143	2879	2113	670	25
2010/11	3164	276	29	247	130	100	2888	2109	694	20
2011/12	3102	251	29	222	124	91	2839	2000	781	12

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2012

TABLE 9: THE PLACEMENT OF THE LATVIAN FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS IN THE LQF AND EQF	
LQF/ EQF LEVEL	LATVIAN EDUCATION DOCUMENTS (QUALIFICATIONS)
1	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)
2	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes for students with mental development disorders)
3	Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education
4	Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education (without rights to enter HE) Diploma of vocational secondary education (with rights to enter HE)
5	Diploma of first level professional higher education (1st level professional higher (college) education. The length of full-time studies 2-3 years)
6	Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2nd level professional higher education, the length of full-time studies - at least 4 years)
7	Master's diploma Professional Master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2nd level professional higher education, the total length of full-time studies - at least 5 years)
8	Doctor's diploma

Definitions

APPRENTICESHIP (*mācekļu apmācība*) – in the Latvian context, the term has very similar explanation as in the international definition: systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace; the apprentice is contractually linked to an employer and may receive remuneration. The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation according to education programmes developed by the Chamber of Crafts and the Ministry of Education and Science.

COMPETENCE (*kompetece*) – regarding the national framework, the term is expressed as analysis, synthesis and assessment. In Vocational Education Law (1999, with amendments in July 2010) only “professional competence” is defined: necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain working situations. However, the international definition could be applied: the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/ or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (CVET, *profesionālā tālākizglītība*) – a special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for adults with previous education and professional experience to acquire a specific level vocational qualification (Vocational Education Law, 1999). Thereby, the term is interpreted similarly to the international definition, i.e. CVET can be broadly defined as professional or vocational development through education and training undertaken typically after one has completed initial vocational education and training. It is provided and undertaken at the initiative of public authorities, social partners, sectors, enterprises, individuals as well as a range of voluntary and community organisations. However, all recognised CVET programmes lead to certification; it is not considered daily education.

FIRST STAGE OF TERTIARY OR HIGHER EDUCATION (ISCED 5, *augstākā izglītība*) – an educational level, which is acquired after upper-secondary education, in science or art; development of the individual in a selected academic or professional field of science or art, or in an academic or professional study stream in preparation for scientific and professional activity (Education Law, 1998).

FORMAL LEARNING (*formālā izglītība*) – a system which includes basic education, secondary education and higher education levels the acquisition of the programme of which is certified by an education or professional qualification document recognised by the State, as well as an education and professional qualification document (Education Law, 1998).

GENERAL EDUCATION (*vispārējā izglītība*) – the definition of “general education” in Latvia does not differ noticeably from the international definition, i.e. education mainly designed to lead participants to a deeper understanding of a subject or group of subjects, especially, but not necessarily, with a view to preparing participants for further education at the same or a higher level. These programmes, which are with a general orientation and do not focus on a particular specialization, are typically school-based. After a successful completion of these programmes the participants are not provided with a labour market relevant qualification at this level. However, the term “general education” is mostly used to refer to upper-secondary education, while the term “academic education” is used for higher level education programmes.

INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (*sākotnējā profesionālā izglītība*) – formally organised vocational education, mostly at upper-secondary education level, which is similar to the international definition, i.e. education undertaken after full-time compulsory education (mainly 9 years long primary and lower-secondary education) to promote the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to enter an occupation. The management and legal basis of initial vocational education are not separated from continuous vocational education; therefore, frequently initial vocational education is referred as “vocational education”.

LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION (ISCED 2, *pamatizglītības otrais posms*) – the division of lower- and upper-secondary education is not used in Latvia; therefore, this stage of education belongs to basic education level and is called the 2nd stage of basic school (grades 7-9) including both general and vocational education programmes.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING (*neformālā izglītība*) – in the Latvian system more “informal learning” is used, which is educational activities in conformity with interests and demand organised outside of formal education (Education Law, 1998).

OCCUPATION (*profesija*) – see profession.

POST-SECONDARY (NON-TERTIARY) EDUCATION (ISCED 4, *pēcvidējā izglītība*) – in Latvia the programmes (ISCED 4) lie between the upper-secondary and tertiary levels of education, as well. However, nationally they are qualified as upper-secondary programmes. The further vocational programmes (1-3 years long) and professional improvement programmes (at least 160 hours long, which may be as a part of qualification) fall in this category. These programmes are oriented only to acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. Educational process and assessment is organised likewise to other upper-secondary education programmes. The students are usually older than those in upper-secondary education.

PROFESSION (*profesija*) – a type of occupation of a natural person in the field of the production of goods, distribution or services, as well as in education, culture and art which requires a certain preparedness (Vocational Education Law, 1999).

QUALIFICATION (*kvalifikācija*) – evaluation of educational and professional skills with respect to a particular profession confirmed by documentary evidence (Education Law, 1998). This term raises ambiguity in the Latvian context: the English term “qualification” in Latvian means “education document” or “diploma”; while the Latvian term “kvalifikācija” refers only to vocational education. The national definition is similar to the given international one: a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process, which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

SKILLS (*prasmes*) – the Latvian context for the term is similar to the international definition, i.e. the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (ISCED 3, *vidējā izglītība*) – the division of lower- and upper-secondary education is not used in Latvia; upper-secondary education level refers to secondary education after 9-year basic school; it lasts 3-4 years and includes both general and vocational education programmes.

Sources, bibliography, acronyms and abbreviations

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www.aic.lv Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs*)

www.aiknc.lv Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (*Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes novērtēšanas centrs*)

www.csb.gov.lv Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Centrālā statistikas pārvalde*)

www.em.gov.lv Ministry of Economics (*Ekonomikas ministrija*)

www.ikvd.gov.lv State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*)

www.izm.gov.lv Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*)

www.lak.lv Latvian Chamber of Crafts (*Latvijas Amatniecības kamera*)

www.ddd.lv Employers' Confederation of Latvia (*Latvijas Darba devēju konfederācija*)

www.lizda.lv Education and Science Workers Trade Union (*Latvijas Izglītības un zinātnes darbinieku arodbiedrība*)

www.lm.gov.lv Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*)

www.muzizglitiba.lv website for Lifelong Learning Latvia

www.niid.lv National database on learning opportunities

www.nva.gov.lv State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*)

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<http://visc.gov.lv> National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības saturs centrs*)

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu> Eurostat Statistics Database

List of acronyms and abbreviations

AIC – Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs*)

CoM – Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (*Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets*)

CP – credit points (*kreditpunkti*)

CSB – Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia (*Centrālās statistikas pārvalde*)

EQF – European Qualifications Framework (*Eiropas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra*)

ESF – European Social Fund (*Eiropas Sociālais fonds*)

LQF – Latvian Qualifications Framework (*Latvijas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra*)

MoES – Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*)

MoW – Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*)

NCP – National Coordination Point (*Nacionālais koordinācijas punkts*)

NEC – Latvian National Europass Centre (*Latvijas Nacionālais Europass centrs*)

NF – National Forum on guidance and counselling (*Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas sadarbības padome*)

NQF – National Qualifications Framework (*Nacionālā kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra*)

SEA – State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*)

SEDA – State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra*)

SIVA – Social Integration State Agency (*Sociālās integrācijas valsts aģentūra*)