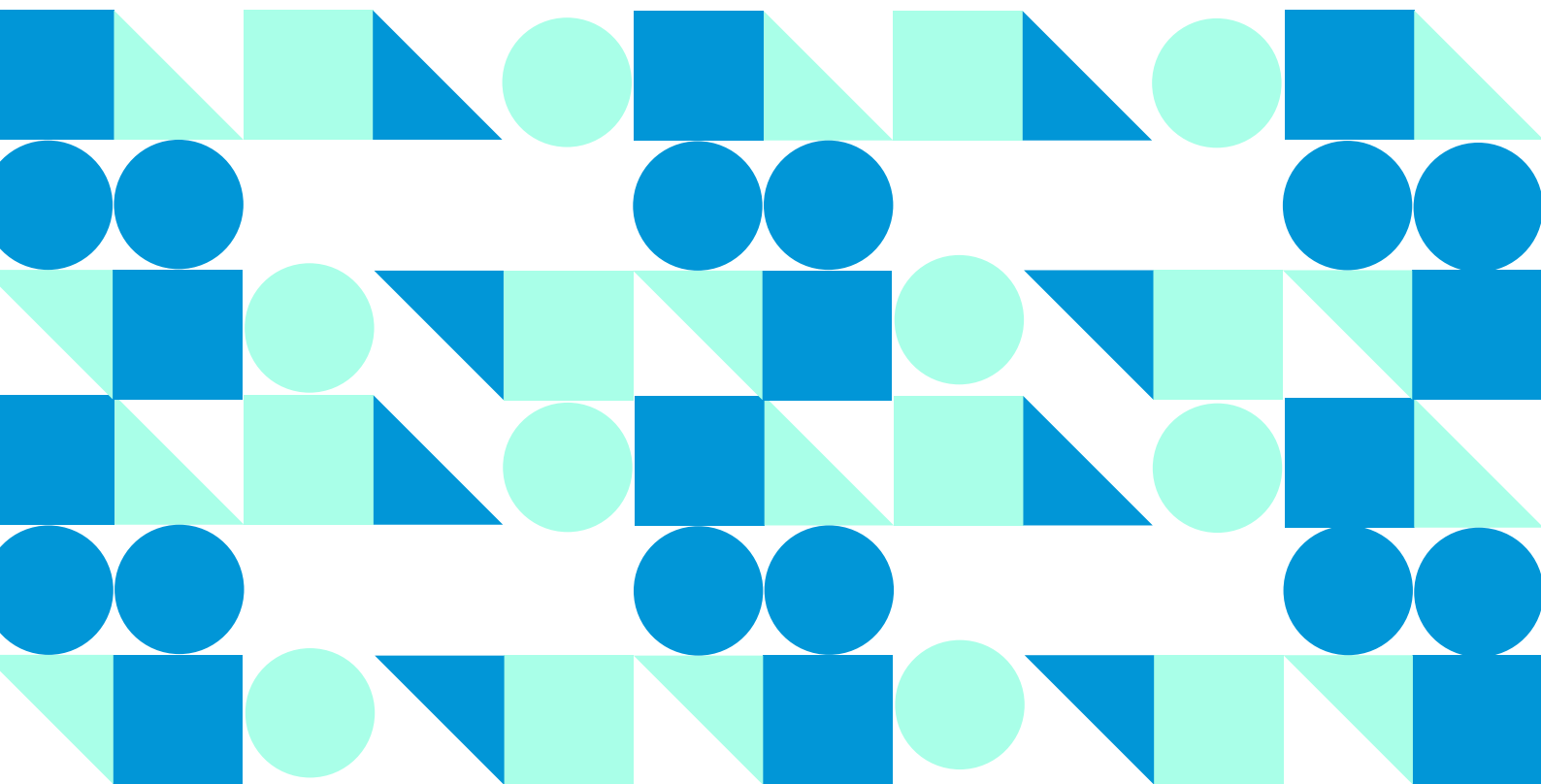




Research paper

Entrepreneurship competence in vocational education and training

Case study: Latvia





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Please cite this publication as:

Cedefop (2022). *Entrepreneurship competence in vocational education and training: case study: Latvia*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 85. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/342203>

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

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PDF	ISBN 978-92-896-3429-8	EPUB	ISBN 978-92-896-3428-1
	ISSN 1831-5860		ISSN 1831-5860
	doi:10.2801/342203		doi:10.2801/887538
	TI-BC-22-002-EN-N		TI-BC-22-002-EN-E

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

Modern society is changing rapidly: the way we live, work and learn. Technological developments, climate change, demography, crises (pandemic, humanitarian) and other factors require adapting to new realities, including in education and training. To manage these changes, we need the right skills and competences. Resilience, flexibility, adaptability, acting on opportunities and ideas are just a few elements of entrepreneurship competence, a key competence for all.

European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) has an important role in promoting entrepreneurship competence, as reflected in policy documents. In 2020, the [European Skills Agenda](#) – a 5-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills – stressed the importance of fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills. The [Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#) calls for adapting and expanding VET by supporting the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills together with digital and green skills. The [Osnabrück Declaration on VET](#) as an enabler of recovery and just transitions to digital and green economies sets an objective, by 2025, of promoting resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive, and flexible VET that includes entrepreneurial education empowering learners to open new businesses.

Responding to this EU priority, and as part of the key competences project, in 2021 Cedefop launched a study to provide VET stakeholders with new evidence on how entrepreneurship competence is embedded in VET. This report presents findings of the pilot research carried out in Latvia as part of a series of eight national case studies (Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Austria, Finland and Sweden) underpinning the dimensions of entrepreneurial learning ecosystems that nurture entrepreneurship competence in VET.

The Latvian study shows how understanding of entrepreneurship competence changes gradually from a broad definition (a must-have key competence for all) at the policy level to a rather narrow definition focusing mainly on start-up creation by those who teach VET. While an agreed strategy of entrepreneurial learning at VET provider level is still rare, schools and companies offering VET seem to have all the appropriate resources and intellectual potential for creating an effective entrepreneurial development ecosystem. The report also highlights interesting examples of embedding the entrepreneurship competence in the country's VET – a topic that is currently under-researched.

We hope that this case study and the forthcoming country cases from the series will help policy-makers, social partners and VET providers continue their successful cooperation to nurture entrepreneurship competence in VET and make sure all learners are equipped with it.

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Acknowledgements

This research paper was produced by Cedefop, Department of VET and qualifications, under the supervision of Loukas Zahilas, Head of department. The paper is part of the project *Key competences in vocational education and training*. Dmitrijs Kuļšs, in collaboration with Iraklis Pliakis and Jeļena Muhina, was responsible for the publication and research conducted under the project.

Cedefop wishes to acknowledge the research and services of its contracted institution, the Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (FGB) (contract No 2021-0089/AO/DSI/DKULSS/Entrepreneurship-competence-VET/001/21) and thank Līga Baltiņa (project leader at FGB) and the following experts for their contribution to drafting the paper: Līga Peiseniece and Sandra Kraže supported by Iván Diego Rodríguez, Terence Hogarth and Slavica Singer. We are also grateful to all the participants in the 2022 Cedefop workshop 'Entrepreneurship competence in VET' for their contributions to the research methodology and discussion of early findings of the study.

The publication was peer-reviewed by Cedefop expert Philippe Tissot.

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Executive summary

The definition of entrepreneurship competence as a key competence in Latvia is aligned with the 2018 European reference framework for key competences in lifelong learning: the capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, and to transform them into values for others (European Commission, 2019).

The national education strategy (referred to as Education development guidelines) covers all types and levels of education and training, including VET. The former education strategy (2014-20) promoted the development of competence-based content, including entrepreneurship competence in VET (Latvia. Saeima, 2014; Latvia. Saeima, 2014). The current education strategy (2021-27) emphasises the development of entrepreneurship competence along with learner capacity for innovation, digital literacy, and creativity through learner-centred education (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2021). It also supports embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET through workshops and business incubators. National and EU funding supports transition to competence-based learning but not explicitly the development of entrepreneurship competence in VET.

General education is an integral part of all initial VET (IVET) programmes. It is based on the secondary education standard and includes 'creative activity and entrepreneurship' among six transversal skills.

Recently introduced modules show the importance of entrepreneurship competence in VET curricula. 'Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 1)' ⁽¹⁾ is a mandatory module for each learner in IVET since 2020. A more advanced module (level 2) is also available for learners at EQF level 4 (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2020). However, it is too early to evaluate how these modules nurture the competence.

The concept of an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem is not used by VET providers, irrespective of type. However, policy documents envisage the development of several key ecosystem elements: curriculum, teacher training and employer engagement. Overall, VET providers have the appropriate resources to create an effective entrepreneurial learning ecosystem but there is room for improvement.

⁽¹⁾ Difficulty level.

Latvian VET providers can adapt the way learners acquire entrepreneurship competence in each VET programme. This study presents several examples of how entrepreneurship competence can be systematically developed in VET ⁽²⁾.

VET providers offer a wide portfolio of curricular and extra-curricular entrepreneurship-related activities: establishment of student training companies, business plan competitions, fairs and hackathons. Participation in student training companies and contests is voluntary but strongly encouraged in VET. Digital technologies also support embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET curricula and assessment.

The description of professional modules demonstrates that the evolving competence-based approach uses active teaching and learning methods that promote learners' creativity, initiative, critical thinking, and collaboration. These are all elements of entrepreneurship competence.

⁽²⁾ A full collection of tools and practices is not included in this report.

CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

The literature on VET in Latvia (Džeksone, 2019; Kinta, 2013; Zeiberte, 2019) reflects little upon issues related to entrepreneurship competence; it is an under-researched domain at national level. This may be due to a long-standing but gradually changing view that main objective of VET is to equip learners with occupational skills.

This report provides new evidence for policy-makers, social partners, VET providers and researchers of how entrepreneurship competence is embedded in VET in Latvia. It complements existing knowledge of methods, tools and approaches that support learning, teaching and assessing the competence.

The findings of the report are based on the pilot research of Cedefop's study *Entrepreneurship competence in VET*, carried out in 2021. It is part of a series of eight national case studies (Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Austria, Finland and Sweden) and the final report that is due in 2023.

1.1. Research questions and core terms

The study aims to answer the following main research questions:

- (a) to what extent, and how, do the dimensions of entrepreneurial learning ecosystems facilitate acquiring entrepreneurship competence in VET?
- (b) which policies, methods, tools and approaches best support embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET?

For this study, entrepreneurship competence is defined ⁽³⁾ as a key competence which applies to all spheres of life: from nurturing personal development, to actively participating in society, (re-)entering the job market as an employee or as a self-employed person, and starting new ventures. The study seeks to explore entrepreneurship competence from this wider perspective rather than as a competence for business creation only.

The concept of entrepreneurial learning ecosystem paves the way towards embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET as an interplay between elements at policy-making, provider and learning environment levels.

⁽³⁾ The field research also found other operational definitions of entrepreneurship competence.

1.2. Methodological note

This country case study report describes existing policy and practice within the entrepreneurial learning ecosystem, including VET provision and learning environments in Latvia. It investigates activities that take place at each of these levels, how they interact and what are the reasons behind the findings. The case study contributes to answering the research questions through:

- (a) literature review/desk research at national level;
- (b) field research at policy and stakeholder levels, including VET providers.

The research departs from a literature review to trace progress in embedding the entrepreneurship competence in VET, and to identify methods, tools and approaches that support this process.

For each selected VET provider, field research includes:

- (a) interviews with school management (or, in the case of apprenticeships, company managers or owners, or human resources managers) and VET teachers/trainers (company trainers/mentors in apprenticeships);
- (b) focus groups (or interviews in apprenticeships) with VET learners;
- (c) interviews with former graduates;
- (d) where possible, observations of class interactions during the delivery of entrepreneurship programmes.

In Latvia, the desk research was carried out between September and December 2021, and the field research was carried out from November to December 2021. 0 lists the VET providers participating in the study. Case-sampling was purposive and is by no means representative of the population of VET providers. The aim was to gain valuable insights into how entrepreneurship competence is embedded in VET. 'Information-rich' cases were selected: VET providers with advanced understanding of the competence and a diverse portfolio of activities (curricular and extracurricular) delivered in collaboration with other stakeholders in the entrepreneurial learning ecosystem.

CHAPTER 2.

Overview of the Latvian VET system

This chapter briefly presents the main features of the Latvian VET system, providing contextual information for the study findings. More detailed information about VET in Latvia is available at [Cedefop's VET in Europe database](#) (Cedefop; Ministry of Education and Science, 2022).

In the country, VET is offered at three levels:

- (a) lower secondary: part of the national 'basic' education, integrated primary and lower-secondary education (*profesionālā pamatizglītība*, EQF levels 2 and 3);
- (b) upper secondary: secondary education (*profesionālā vidējā izglītība*, EQF level 4);
- (c) tertiary: professional higher education (*profesionālā augstākā izglītība*, EQF levels 5, 6 and 7).

The Ministry of Education and Science is the main body responsible for the VET legal framework, governance, funding and curricula. Employers are involved in the development of VET via advisory bodies. Most VET learners are at upper-secondary level and their share has increased in recent years (Cedefop, 2021).

IVET is centralised and highly regulated. Most VET schools are owned and run by the State; approximately half have the status of competence centre (*profesionālās izglītības kompetences centrs*). The competence centres have been receiving substantial investment in infrastructure and equipment, with the support of EU funds, since 2007 (Cedefop, 2021). General secondary education curriculum is an integral part of all IVET programmes (Cabinet of Ministers, 2020).

Continuing VET (CVET) providers are mainly private. IVET providers are increasing their post-initial education offer for adults to provide an opportunity for them to acquire a professional qualification (Cedefop, 2021; Daija, 2018)

The term 'trainer' is not widely used in the context of Latvian VET. Teachers provide both theory and practical learning at school and VET at national level is referred to as 'vocational education' (without 'training').

VET is currently undergoing reform, including modernisation of governance, infrastructure and curricula, better social security and career development activities for learners, and improved cooperation with employers and trade unions.

The modernised VET curricula promote the use of modular programmes (since 2020) and learning-outcomes approach based on new occupational standards (Cedefop, 2021). Work-based learning (apprenticeship-type scheme)

allows learners to acquire skills in a real work environment during at least half of the programme duration (Latvia. Ministry of Education and Science, 2016).

According to the national VET standard (adopted in 2020), all VET programmes must contain a description of learning outcomes, as well as standards for the assessment and recognition of the learner's achievement. These programmes develop general, vocational and research skills, thus promoting the emergence of innovative business ideas and supporting the transition to a sustainable economy.

CHAPTER 3.

Entrepreneurship competence

3.1. Understanding the competence

The definition of entrepreneurship as a key competence in Latvia is aligned with the 2018 European key competences framework for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2019; Eurydice, 2018).

Education development guidelines (*pamatnostādnes*) are a national education strategy covering all types and levels of education, including VET. The former guidelines (2014-20) defined the development of competence-based content in secondary education (Latvia. Saeima, 2014). The current 2021-27 guidelines (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2021) articulate the need to develop learner capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship competence, digital literacy, and creativity, as well as a learner-centred approach. The guidelines support the development of entrepreneurship competence in VET. The State general secondary education standard sets a high priority for the development of entrepreneurship competence, one of six 'transversal skills' agreed at national level:

- (a) critical thinking and problem solving;
- (b) creative activity and entrepreneurship skills;
- (c) self-directed learning;
- (d) cooperation;
- (e) civic participation;
- (f) digital literacy.

All these transversal skills need to be developed through languages, social and civic awareness, cultural awareness and self-expression in art, natural sciences, mathematics, technologies, health, and physical activity (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2019).

'Creative activity and entrepreneurship skills' are defined as follows:

'[...] the pupil, upon viewing the situation with an interest and from different points of view, notices new possibilities and offers different, original solutions, proactively seeks possibilities to improve his or her own quality of life and that of others, knows how to manage a process from the creation of an idea until the implementation thereof, uses mistakes as the possibility for growth, remains calm and open in atypical situations [...]'.

This applies to VET programmes, given that general education curricula are an integral part of initial VET (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2020).

During the field research, policy-makers emphasised that entrepreneurship competence includes a wide range of knowledge and skills: theoretical knowledge, skills and ability to start a business, as well as personal competences. For example, theoretical knowledge and skills cover aptitudes such as finding a business idea, applying the law, creating a business, marketing plans, financial management and administration. Personal competences include taking responsibility, working in teams, being creative and taking risks.

At VET provider level, all interviewees could name the activities offered by VET providers that develop entrepreneurship competence; yet management, teachers and learners differed on its definition with three main elements with similar weight across IVET and CVET:

- (a) ability to start a business;
- (b) ability to turn ideas into action;
- (c) ability to run an enterprise.

While IVET and CVET providers have a more comprehensive understanding of entrepreneurship competence than companies offering apprenticeships, they still focus on a rather narrow definition, linked to starting a business.

In-company training allows learners getting to know the principles of the company's operations from an employee's perspective. Apprenticeship providers stressed that apprenticeship focuses on developing occupation-specific competences.

This signals that the definition of competences included in the State general secondary education standard (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2019) has not yet become fully operational among all VET providers.

Policy-maker interviews indicated that entrepreneurship competence as a key competence for lifelong learning is included in all VET curricula, both initial and continuing. They would like to see entrepreneurship learning not just as a separate module but as a transversal topic that is systematically acquired through all professional subjects. Positive results from systematic development of transversal skills, including entrepreneurship competence, could be expected 4 or more years after the education system gradually implements a new competence-based approach, which was rolled out in 2021.

VET teachers believe that entrepreneurship competence is best assimilated in the last 2 years of a VET programme, when learners have already had some work experience. It may as well be included in different subjects, but there is usually a lack of time for such adjustments.

Digital, inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship in VET is promoted mainly through projects at national and local level. The 3LoE project (2021) is one example.

Box 1. **Three-level centres of professional excellence: qualification, entrepreneurship and innovation in the green economy**

3LoE is an Erasmus+ funded project in which the comprehensive provision of green skills is a key priority. Addressing the challenges of energy, climate and environmental protection, 3LoE establishes centres of vocational excellence for the green economy and implements a wide range of vocational education, training and higher education measures for the green economy, digitalisation and entrepreneurship.

The main objectives are sustainably to upgrade skills; secure the need for young professionals/managers and entrepreneurs; strengthen the competitiveness of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) in the green economy; realise energy savings; use renewable energies; and protect the environment and climate through qualified and innovative SMEs.

Source: 3LoE, 2021.

A well-known promoter of digital and sustainable entrepreneurship is Junior Achievement Latvia (JAL). JAL has developed a contest for student training companies and special prizes for innovative technological solutions and sustainable enterprise.

VET providers are active participants in the above-mentioned activities. They also carry out their own local-level projects that support the development of digital and sustainable entrepreneurship. Interviews and observations of VET providers show that the availability of technologies, materials and teachers play a key role in promoting digital and sustainable entrepreneurship. However, this opportunity is not yet fully exploited as a competitive advantage over other education types. The apprenticeship providers interviewed could not confirm whether companies promote digital, inclusive and sustainable entrepreneurship.

3.2. Embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET

Upon graduation, each VET learner is expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes for innovation and entrepreneurship skills:

- (a) demonstrate interest in new findings and innovations, look in a proactive way for opportunities to improve own wellbeing or wellbeing of others, put forward suggestions for solving problems, keep emotional balance and openness, such as taking unprecedented, complex decisions in times of uncertainty;
- (b) when looking at the situation from different viewpoints, see new opportunities, be target-oriented and use or develop one's own strategy to find new and useful solutions, effectively organise resources (human, knowledge, capital,

- infrastructure), seek, evaluate and use ideas suggested by others, and submit own ideas to inspire others;
- (c) tackle sustainability issues, both at individual level and within the group, make use of errors and difficulties as an opportunity for growth (Cabinet of Ministers, 2019).

Entrepreneurship competence is also acquired implicitly through other professional modules. Currently, each occupational standard defines requirements for general competences, including entrepreneurship competence as a set of skills and knowledge, considering the specific occupational profile.

Following extensive testing and piloting in 2020, two lifelong learning competence modules on entrepreneurship were introduced in VET:

- (a) Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 1);
- (b) Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 2) ⁽⁴⁾;

These modules are based on the education standard and allow learners to acquire entrepreneurship competence in VET.

3.2.1. Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 1)

The module Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 1) is compulsory for all VET learners (IVET and CVET). It aims to develop learner abilities to create a business idea independently, evaluate the preconditions for entrepreneurship, and develop a business plan and the necessary information, promoting the learner's interest in starting a business, their initiative, creativity and critical thinking. The module concept corresponds to a narrow definition of entrepreneurship competence (starting a business) given its objectives to develop learner skills, so that they can:

- (a) explain the basic concepts of entrepreneurship;
- (b) develop a business idea;
- (c) choose a product for a specific customer group;
- (d) identify the unique features of the product;
- (e) use the most important product distribution channels;
- (f) choose the most effective relationship format with the customer;
- (g) predict income flow;
- (h) determine the resources required;
- (i) calculate taxes for self-employed people;
- (j) choose the most effective activities for product creation and marketing;
- (k) choose the most appropriate cooperation partners;

⁽⁴⁾ The modules were developed in the framework of the European Social Fund project *Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education*.

- (l) calculate the costs;
- (m) fill in the documents to register as a self-employed person;
- (n) perform basic accounting.

To assess the performance, learners of the module create and present a portfolio about their business idea: product developed, distribution channels, cashflow, required resources, business partners, applicable taxes, documents required for registration as a self-employed person, and basic accounting. This mandatory module creates a platform or theoretical background for the practical implementation of learning outcomes in the sector-specific and occupation-specific modules.

The module provides learners with the opportunity to model the establishment of a company but does not give them the practical experience of running a business. It can be integrated into other modules, given that curriculum overlaps with the professional programme modules. After mastering it, a learner can proceed to level 2 module.

3.2.2. Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 2)

The module Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 2) is available for learners in all secondary VET programmes at EQF level 4. It is implemented as a lifelong learning module in VET, including continuing and non-formal education programmes.

The module aims to promote the learner's ability to develop a business plan independently, choosing the appropriate legal form of business and the most optimal sources of financing, promoting initiative, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

In some programmes, the module can be integrated into occupation-specific modules. The objectives of the module are to develop learner skills, so that they can:

- (a) choose the most suitable form of business for the business idea, sources of financial resources, to collect the necessary information;
- (b) prepare a cashflow schedule, plan a profit and loss statement;
- (c) carry out market research and data analysis and develop ideas to implement the marketing event plan;
- (d) make decisions on problem solving in specific situations in one's professional activity;
- (e) prepare a presentation, present a business plan, and argue opinion on the results;
- (f) establish and operate a learner training company (at the choice of the learners).

To assess the level of acquisition of entrepreneurship competence, the learner submits and presents at the end of the module (individually or in a group) the business plan developed, following the specified business plan structure (Latvia. National Centre for Education, 2020). The module provides learners with the opportunity for direct connection with a certain sector and the chosen occupation.

VET providers introduced the two modules in their curricula as a compulsory requirement in 2020. While it is too early to estimate their value and impact, it is already clear that they promote a rather narrow (business start-up) understanding of entrepreneurship competence.

3.2.3. Free-choice modules

Each VET programme offers free-choice modules, which deepen and expand learning outcomes acquired in transversal competence modules and occupation-specific and sector-specific ones. For example, programmes for the beauty sector offer a 'small business management' module.

The structure of a modular programme is flexible, and the development of entrepreneurship competence is not limited to one module. Employers are customers of VET and, therefore, are involved in all processes from the development of occupational standards and modular curriculum to qualification examinations and assessment of acquired competences.

Considering the transversal nature of entrepreneurial learning (education through entrepreneurship, focusing broadly on personal development, mindset, and skills to become entrepreneurial), the structure of learning in modular curricula is tailored to allow delivery through the combination of three main approaches: as a separate module, integrated into profession/sector-specific modules, and as a cross-curricular activity involving learners from multiple courses.

The modular structure of VET curricula with synergy across all modules (transversal, sector-specific and occupation-specific) significantly boosts the opportunity for the development of entrepreneurship competence.

CHAPTER 4.

Entrepreneurial learning ecosystem

This section describes to what extent the main elements of the entrepreneurial learning ecosystem are in place in Latvia and how they help embed entrepreneurship competence

4.1. Policy intervention

Policy intervention comprises principles and policy decisions that influence the development of entrepreneurship competence, including regulations governing the operation of education systems.

At national level, entrepreneurship education is supported by policy initiatives. In Latvia, the highest national-level, medium-term policy planning document is the national development plan.

Developing entrepreneurship competence in education has been one of the priorities of the national development plans since 2014. The 2014-20 plan (Latvia. Saeima, 2012) introduced innovative forms of curricula in secondary education (including VET) to promote creative and entrepreneurial ability.

Based on this overarching national plan, an entrepreneurship education strategy was embedded in the education development guidelines 2014-20 (Latvia. Saeima, 2014), developed by the Ministry of Education and Science, for all pathways, including VET. One of the objectives of the guidelines was to promote the development of individuals' professional and social skills based on values for life and employability.

More specifically, the objectives of entrepreneurship education were to:

- (a) further develop entrepreneurship education as one of the competences to be strengthened through improved education curricula for EQF levels 1-4;
- (b) develop modular programmes in IVET and CVET, including one on initiative and entrepreneurship (see Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2);
- (c) develop teacher/trainer professional competences including entrepreneurship;
- (d) develop non-formal and extra-curricular education provision for various competences, including entrepreneurship (Latvia. Saeima, 2014)

The current national development plan (2021-27) (Latvia. Saeima, 2020) aims to introduce new curricula and approaches, and to improve the dissemination of best practice, with an emphasis on entrepreneurship and digital skills. The 2021-

27 national education guidelines (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2021) suggest reinforcing the investment in availability, modernisation, and digitalisation of VET providers, to strengthen learner capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship competence, digital literacy, and creativity, as well as a learner-centred learning approach. This includes:

- (a) modernising training facilities and workshops;
- (b) making available technology and solutions for digitising curricula and the learning process (and developing an e-learning environment);
- (c) developing business incubators and student training companies (to expand training companies for the majority of VET providers).

In analysing VET modular curricula as one of the elements of an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem, six indicators need to be considered. Each curriculum:

- (a) is designed to allow learners to test and use their entrepreneurship competence;
- (b) explicitly highlights the value of entrepreneurship competences to learners;
- (c) brings real-life relevance to learning;
- (d) is delivered through practical pedagogical approaches;
- (e) involves external partners or stakeholders (design, delivery, and/or assessment);
- (f) has a focus on formative assessment for learning (such as teacher-learner feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, or community/stakeholder feedback).

The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Latvia. Saeima, 2014) propose to allocate EUR 13.96 billion to the development of competence-based curricula, which includes the development of entrepreneurship competence in secondary education, including VET. However, the guidelines do not earmark funding specifically for developing the curricula related to entrepreneurship competence.

By the same token, the guidelines earmarked EUR 4.99 billion to develop the competence of teachers involved in VET in the workplace in cooperation with employers, including improving entrepreneurship competence and skills in information and communications technology. Again, the guidelines do not state what part of the funding is intended to increase teachers' competence in teaching entrepreneurship. By the time of drafting this paper, the report on the extent to which the objectives set in the education development guidelines 2014-20 have

been met, was not published ⁽⁵⁾. The field research indicated that the specific objectives of the guidelines related to entrepreneurship education were achieved: new curricula for EQF levels 1-4 and modular programmes in IVET and CVET were developed and implemented in IVET and CVET. There are also indications of teachers mastering entrepreneurship competence through continuous professional development. However, it is difficult to gauge the actual impact of the guidelines (e.g. on actual learning outcomes, increased teaching competence and the impact of funding measures) as no research on policy impact is yet available.

4.2. VET provision

VET providers are part of the national entrepreneurial ecosystem, but they may also have their own entrepreneurial learning ecosystem established. Changes within the national ecosystem will affect systems nested within it. The entrepreneurial learning ecosystem at VET provider level consist of teachers, learners, curricula, assessment, monitoring, recognition, and other elements such as vision, culture and values. Cooperation with stakeholders, for example industry, is also key.

In Latvia, VET provider operations are determined by the statute developed under the Education Law and the Vocational Education Law. Neither law explicitly requires VET providers to form an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem, but it offers stimuli for developing an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem at local level, for example through an obligation for VET providers to cooperate with industry.

During the interviews, when asked about the elements of entrepreneurial learning ecosystems, VET provider management and teachers often asked for an explanation of the term. This shows that the concept of the entrepreneurial learning ecosystem *per se* is unknown and not used in the Latvian VET. The most common answers to the paraphrased question ‘What promotes the development of entrepreneurship competence in VET?’, are captured in this statement:

‘Important elements are teachers, who set an example and support students. Cooperation with enterprises in providing internships and work-based learning. Various competitions, events, excursions that develop young people. It is difficult to say the degree of influence of each of them.’

An interesting example of an entrepreneurial learning ecosystem at VET-provider level is VET provider in Ogre, with a wide range of local, national and

⁽⁵⁾ By the time of preparing this report, the progress report by the government was pending.

international stakeholders networking to support the development of learners' entrepreneurship competence. The support includes:

- (a) career education centres, a cooperation network with employers and associations, for developing VET learner careers;
- (b) cooperation with Junior Achievement Latvia supporting business simulations;
- (c) international student training company contests;
- (d) the Dare to win conference, including opportunities for learners to job-shadow in enterprises, and a hackathon with enterprises;
- (e) the Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre's business contest, with a scholarship for the best idea; and Latvia's State Forests scholarship for excellence in entrepreneurship;
- (f) a VET convention, where government, industry and municipality representatives work together to develop entrepreneurship skills for learners;
- (g) opportunities for graduates to share their experience on how they have developed their enterprises.

CHAPTER 5.

Nurturing entrepreneurship competence in VET

5.1. Methods, tools and approaches

Regulations do not prescribe developing methods, tools and approaches for embedding entrepreneurship competence in VET other than standards and curricula that have been discussed in the previous chapters. VET providers can choose the most appropriate methods and tools. This section provides insights from the field research at VET provider level, offering examples of interesting practices.

Box 2. Development and investment strategy of VET provider in Liepāja

The development and investment strategy actively nurtures entrepreneurship competence among learners through:

- (a) education programmes include business plan development as part of the study process; in 2016-21, 115 student training companies were established and were operational for at least the school year; since 2017/18, the VET provider has been organising nationwide and regional student training company fairs;
- (b) leading the methodological centre of the 'business' industry and supporting other VET providers with their methods;
- (c) active participation in the project *Three-level centres of professional excellence: qualification, entrepreneurship and innovation in the green economy*: sustainably upgrading skills, securing the need for young professionals/managers and entrepreneurs, and strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs in the green economy;
- (d) objectives for 2021-27, to establish a student business incubator to develop entrepreneurship in cooperation with State and regional partners.

Within the Initiative and entrepreneurship module, a teacher uses the concept of 'Understand, learn, take on', which she created. It includes three steps for gaining entrepreneurship competence:

- (a) understanding: how and what to do, how to develop your ideas, how to organise and lead an enterprise, how to communicate and cooperate, how to realise your potential, how to learn by doing;
- (b) learning: to be creative, to be active, to be persistent and patient, to be a leader or team member, to come up with solutions in non-standard situations, to be in harmony with oneself and others (solve conflicts, accept differences), to overcome failures and be successful;

(c) taking on: responsibility and risk, challenges and opportunities, successes and failures, realising your ideas, extending your knowledge. Resume: take risks and gain success by realising your idea.

Source: Liepāja State Vocational Technical School.

Teachers of a VET provider in Ventspils city use group work as the most common method for promoting entrepreneurship competence, while role play, digital technologies and other methods help make the lessons more attractive; an example is trying different kinds of food products to compare the taste and discuss how the price difference arises. At the beginning of each economics lesson, learners talk about the news in Latvia. Each prepares and shares something that is currently happening; learners complement each other. They also search for information about successful Latvian enterprises to generate business ideas.

Teachers of a VET provider in Riga involve learners in activities such as contests outside of classes, business plan contests, shadowing activities and business conferences. In the classroom, they use fun elements, involving learners in discussions, using diverse teaching methods and digital platforms. Teachers of professional modules guide the learners and help them see how their products/services will be useful for people.

Analysing the descriptions of various professional modules reveals that the new approach envisages the use of active teaching and learning methods that promote learner creativity, initiative, critical thinking, and collaboration.

The methods proposed most often are presentations and practical work, individually, in pairs or groups. The Initiative and entrepreneurship (level 2) module provides learners with the opportunity to model the establishment of a company and get practical experience of running a business.

For more than 30 years, general and vocational education learners at secondary level have been gaining practical experience by participating in the activities of an external partner, Junior Achievement Latvia (JAL) ⁽⁶⁾. JAL has been one of 40 Junior Achievement Europe and 118 worldwide network members since 1991. The European Commission has recognised JAL in Latvia providing business education for youth over a long period and in a standardised format (Junior Achievement Latvia, 2021). Each year, JAL provides practical business education programmes to approximately 120 000 learners across the country and at all

⁽⁶⁾ The mission of the organisation is to promote the development of the Latvian economy by engaging in youth education, promoting entrepreneurship and building a new generation of entrepreneurs, linking theoretical knowledge with practice in accordance with the economy in Latvia, Europe and the world.

education levels, including VET. The programmes are tested in schools across Europe and adjusted to the needs of Latvia.

According to the head of JAL, approaches differ by VET provider: in some, it is totally voluntary to join JAL programmes, in others the commitment is included in the programmes. A VET provider in Liepāja supports establishing student training companies as part of the module Initiative and Entrepreneurship (Level 1).

VET providers also participate in Erasmus+ funded projects to develop learners' entrepreneurship competences together with international partners. Participation in such projects demonstrates the ability of VET providers to work in an international environment, to offer learners an international experience, and, most important, to create curricula and environments in which learners acquire entrepreneurship by linking current business trends, such as digitalisation.

Box 3. Example of Erasmus+ project supporting the development of entrepreneurship competence in VET

In 2019-21, a VET provider in Ogre, together with five international partners from, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Turkey carried out the Erasmus+ project Young entrepreneurs sustaining the earth (YES: The earth). This was a multifaceted and innovative project dedicated to rebalancing the overlapping areas of sustainability, economy and entrepreneurship with a strong focus on STEAM education, renewable energy usage, career orientation and building self-awareness skills.

The main objectives of the project were to

- (a) develop entrepreneurial skills;
- (b) increase learners' understanding of their character and abilities; improve their digital and STEAM skills by working on different projects;
- (c) create innovative learning ecosystems by promoting the use of practical business experience in education, promoting the responsible use of digital technologies and strengthening the capacity of formal and non-formal education systems;
- (d) to provide learners with the entrepreneurial and innovative skills, attitudes and values to address these issues.

Throughout the 2 years of cooperation between six schools, several carefully planned activities were carried out to achieve the objectives of the project.

Source: Ogre Vocational Technical School, 2021.

5.2. Teacher training and support

Distinct VET characteristics support the embedding of entrepreneurship competence in Latvia. VET is practical, giving the opportunity for learners to develop and carry out their ideas. The study also showed that, in VET, learners come with considerable practical motivation and often an entrepreneurial mindset. At the same time, as discussed in Section 4.2, teachers, who set an example and

support learners, are at the core of embedding the entrepreneurship competence in VET.

Latvia's education development guidelines 2014-20 (Latvia. Saeima, 2014) set the goal to implement professional development for teachers in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, leadership, digital competence and foreign languages. The target to involve 80% of teachers in continuing professional development activities did not specify the share of VET teachers.

Between 2014 and 2020, the pedagogical competences of VET teachers in the workplace were improved in cooperation with employers. Support was provided for the development of the general skills of educators in vocational education (including entrepreneurial and digital skills) and the development of professional competences: providing appropriate work-based learning / apprenticeship facilities; ensuring support for training activities in companies and organisations in Latvia and abroad; ensuring international cooperation between professional education and industry representatives; and developing the pedagogical competence of apprenticeship tutors.

Teachers' competences improved both at national level and at municipal level. A specific programme was established focusing on the development of competences for young educators, including business-related competences.

The 2016-23 project *Competence approach to curriculum* (supported by ESF) offers a professional development programme and methodological tools for all teachers on changes in the curriculum and teaching methods. These materials are available in the form of e-learning modules, and the programme can be used by the project's partner universities that implement teacher training programmes. A digital learning website is being set up to provide all teachers with easy access to curriculum documents and digital teaching and learning materials in every school. Since the spring of 2018, good practice regional seminars have been held; schools shared their experience with those pre-schools and schools that are not involved in the project (Latvia. National Centre for Education, 2016).

Vocational education teachers had the opportunity to learn the methodology of teaching in the social and civic fields; however, this learning was not focused on the specifics of vocational education (Latvia. National Centre for Education, 2016).

Since 2016, other projects have also been implemented to ensure efficient management of VET institutions and improve professional competences of the personnel involved. Participating in internships in companies and organisations in Latvia and abroad provided support for mentoring process and the professional development of teachers involved in vocational education, directors of institutions and other representatives of administration, practice managers, work-based learning managers and craftsmen by, as well as for the practical use of

pedagogical and management skills of young teachers (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2016b).

Reinforcing entrepreneurship competence and building close links between education and entrepreneurship has been carried out in line with the European Commission's report *Europe 2020: a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (European Commission, 2010).

The education development guidelines 2021-27 (Latvia. Cabinet of Ministers, 2021) envisage the continuing training of teachers with three goals in mind:

- (a) establish a uniform system for the development of professional competence of teachers, including strategically coordinating all stakeholders involved to provide high-quality methodological and advisory support to educators throughout Latvia;
- (b) develop sustainable networks for exchanges of professional experience and cooperation;
- (c) strengthen networks for the exchange of professional experience and cooperation for the transfer of teaching and learning good practices and the development of educational innovation.

However, the guidelines do not reflect the emphasis on the development of teacher competences in the business area.

While teachers generally receive support for the development of entrepreneurship competence, there is a lack of significant and specific support schemes for VET teachers to improve entrepreneurship competence teaching and learning in VET curricula.

During interviews, policy-makers emphasised that training on issues related to entrepreneurship competence is offered to all teachers, regardless of their field of teaching. VET is complicated because there are so many qualifications and different areas. There are fields where teachers are well taught in this; others are focused on specific work, and entrepreneurship competence is less needed.

Teachers admitted that it is much harder for them to work in VET compared to general education, mainly because the methodological materials of entrepreneurship education are only gradually developed. The teachers themselves need to invest a lot of time preparing. It has been hard work to introduce the modular programme on entrepreneurship competence, because the VET providers have been sceptical, being used to specific subjects and modules that identify the skills that should be developed.

JAL has also made a significant contribution to teacher education over 30 years, organising yearly teacher training related to the development of student training companies for learning purposes, reporting on updates in business, and developing practical teaching skills that could be applied to the development of

entrepreneurship competence in VET. Quite a few VET providers are actively participating in the programme with good results in the training company competitions among learners, indicating the ability of VET teachers to inspire and support learners and their entrepreneurship competence development.

During the interview, the head of JAL explained that each year they organise 2-day training sessions for experienced teachers and those who have no experience with a student training company. There are also different international experiences/events for teachers that are intended as an uplifting and celebratory environment to help them feel valued. Their methodology also allows teachers to take ready-made materials that can be used by them.

Interviews with VET teachers show that there is support from VET provider management to participate in activities such as contests. Various internship programmes are available for teachers; some have attended the National Centre for Education internship programme, meeting with entrepreneurs and getting to know the most recent trends. VET providers also organise seminars and courses (internal and external), giving feedback to teachers, and cooperating with places of internship and with universities. International experience has been beneficial for VET teachers acquiring entrepreneurship competence.

Teachers of another VET provider agreed that, currently, teacher training is widely focused, and there are many opportunities, such as in communication and entrepreneurship. However, teacher motivation is key to success along with time available, given that they described their workload as being enormous.

In another region, teachers said that several times a year there are excellent seminars about student training company experiences for both teachers and learners, organised by Junior Achievement Latvia. Once a month, the VET provider organises meetings for all teachers to share their expertise with all colleagues, for example with contests and exchange programmes for learners and teachers/trainers. At first, these meetings were mandatory, but now teachers are joining voluntarily.

From the interviews, it can be concluded that each VET provider has its own approach and intensity for in-service teacher training. There are six forms of teacher continuing training – self-education, internal and external courses, exchange programmes for learners and teachers, projects, experience exchange, and training in companies. All are crucial for getting new experience and knowledge, exchanging experiences and learning from industries, supporting the development of entrepreneurship competence.

5.3. Assessment of entrepreneurship competence

Assessment and recognition of the learner's achievement is required for each VET programme and module. State VET standards based on the competence approach were adopted only in 2020 and now VET providers are in a transition period, updating programmes according to these regulations.

The basic principles of assessment, including entrepreneurship competence, comprise one-time evaluation (evaluate once, recognise previously obtained evaluations), flexibility (assess regardless of the place, duration, form and type of learning), priority to practical demonstration, and other principles. In addition, in VET, two types of assessment are used: formative (in-process evaluation by learner and teacher) and summative (assessment at the conclusion of a specific instructional period by teacher/ professionals).

During the interviews for this study, teachers admitted that it is hard to evaluate creativity and entrepreneurship competence as opposed to assessing whether a learner has improved (added value to) the product/service and analysed own mistakes. Making evaluation criteria known to learners from the beginning is important. Evaluation takes account of many factors, including the process (how much work is invested in achieving the result) and skilful argumentation.

Learners added that teachers evaluated their initiative and noticed it, but also noted that the grades were not higher, for example, for leading a group work that is crucial element of entrepreneurship competence.

Learners appreciate self-assessment and evaluating each other, claiming being 'quite objective'. Often, they need to present their ideas, qualification works, and describe the project along with risks and benefits. They need to know how to work in teams and demonstrate their planning skills.

Learners are continuously informed about how they will be evaluated. Teachers also assess leadership skills and learner involvement; and assessment methods are standardised. They use case studies and combine them with an assessment to see what learners have learned and what progress they have made. One assessment method is to help learners learn from their mistakes. In business management, teachers do not use the traditional tests; they rather facilitate thinking through analysing the pros and cons, case studies, and posing and answering open questions.

In the Initiative and entrepreneurship modules, learners develop a business plan and present their business idea. Then, several teachers assess it. This is a general requirement for all VET providers.

To conclude, it is essential to use different assessment methods as different entrepreneurial learning outcomes are achieved. However, assessment is not only to show the outcome but, in the case of entrepreneurship competence, to help

acquire the competence. Self-assessment and learning from mistakes and achievements are at the core of this process.

5.4. Digital technologies and COVID-19

Teachers have differing opinions on whether digital technology supports the embedding of entrepreneurship competence in the teaching, learning, and assessment process in VET. Many are optimistic, some are less so.

Teachers of a VET provider in Riga (7) noted that the opportunities to nurture entrepreneurship competence have decreased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic because of lack of physical presence; learners are more passive. Well-organised and responsible learners thrive, but others do not. The pandemic has taught learners how to use digital platforms, but activities in person are also needed to develop entrepreneurship competence. People need to grow in a social environment; physical presence is essential. It is easier to plan time with distance learning, but soft skills are still relevant, and after the pandemic it will be crucial for learners to upgrade their soft skills. Employers consider these the most critical skills.

In Ogre, VET teachers mentioned that learners are tired of working remotely and that, as a result, the number of student training companies where learners desire to get involved has decreased. Teachers try to motivate those who are still willing to participate; they emphasise the benefits. Each learner and teacher who actively participates is appreciated. Not all learners feel the same: some begin to develop ideas due to inactivity, others are more pessimistic and lack motivation. Some projects have stopped at national level or changed their approach. Before the pandemic, learners planned to go abroad to present their student training companies. With this now being hard to implement, learners may be less motivated to create enterprises where the opportunities are limited to computer use. Learners from each profession are now more connected with digital tools, for example in marketing. This is something that teachers did not observe much before the remote learning period. The focus is not so much on physical work; rather, how to create something and how to sell it online, looking not just at the local market, but also internationally, and seeing the e-environment as an opportunity.

One learner has summarised the pros and cons of the effect of COVID-19 on the development of entrepreneurship competence:

(7) Vocational Education Competence Centre Riga State Technical School is the winner of VET Excellence Award 2022 in the category Entrepreneurial School.

‘It [online learning during the pandemic] has both hindered and helped me. On the one side, it is harder to find motivation. On the other side, it has been an ideal time to collect information. Now I am much more into accounting and business management than before. I enjoyed distance learning; the most challenging part was being removed from life outside home, but the studies went well for me. That is when I created my enterprise. Nobody was able to change my mind or make me be afraid of doing it. We could still do the same [design] things at school, and I was more creative when I wasn’t distracted by other people. It was easier for me because my future profession – designer – will be remote work.’

Acronyms

Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQF	European qualifications framework
EU	European Union
IVET	initial vocational education and training
JAL	Junior Achievement Latvia
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
VET	vocational education and training

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Annex 1

VET providers selected for the field research

Vocational education competence centres

Name	Region and number of learners	Type of VET (fieldwork focus)	Curricula addressed by the research
Riga State Vocational Technical School	Capital city Riga, smaller departments in the towns of Krāslava and Limbaži 2 300 learners	IVET vocational education competence centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • road transport; • administrative and secretary services; • construction work; • computer systems, databases and computer networks; • railway services; • energetics and electrotechnics; • catering services; • accounting; • engineering mechanics; • manufacture of wood products; • commerce; • chemistry technologies; • programming; • printing technologies and production; • sewing production technology; • telemechanics and logistics. <p>VET also implements continuous education programmes.</p>
Ogre Vocational Technical School	City of Ogre as well as smaller departments in Ranka and Vecbebri 1 300 learners	CVET vocational education competence centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forestry and forestry technology; • mechanical engineering; • hotel and restaurant services; • administrative work; • computer science and electronics; • design and arts; • manufacture of wood products; and • construction work. <p>VET also implements continuous education programmes, which are related to obtaining professional qualifications [forestry technician, beekeeper, carpenter, woodworking plant operator, confectioner, computer systems technician, arborist], professional development education, non-formal education programmes and training programmes for unemployed persons.</p>

Name	Region and number of learners	Type of VET (fieldwork focus)	Curricula addressed by the research
Ventspils Vocational Technical School	City of Ventspils 782 learners	IVET vocational education competence centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> networks and automated systems; information and communication technologies; metalworking; mechanical engineering; road transport; hospitality and tourism. <p>VET also implements continuous education programmes.</p>
Liepāja State Vocational Technical School	City of Liepāja 1 288 learners	CVET vocational education competence centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> energy and electrical engineering; metalworking and mechanical engineering; aviation transport; construction and manufacture of wood products; business; finance; accounting; administration and logistics; beauty and textiles; information technologies; catering and hotel services. <p>VET also implements continuous education programmes, which are related to obtaining professional qualifications [welder, confectioner], professional development education and non-formal education programmes and training programmes for unemployed persons.</p>

Apprenticeship providers

- (a) A limited company: one of the largest retailers in the Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), employing over 12 000 people across the Baltics. The company cooperates with several VET institutions and offers apprenticeships.
- (b) Joint stock company: one of the leading production companies in the printing industry in the Baltics, employing over 100 people. The company works in close cooperation with several VET institutions, providing apprenticeships to learners.

Entrepreneurship competence in vocational education and training

Case study: Latvia

This report describes how entrepreneurship competence is embedded in vocational education and training (VET) in Latvia. It complements existing knowledge with examples of methods, tools and approaches that can help policy-makers, VET providers and other stakeholders build better entrepreneurial learning ecosystems.

The report is based on the pilot research of the Cedefop study *Entrepreneurship competence in VET*. It is part of a series of eight national case studies (Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Austria, Finland and Sweden) and a forthcoming final report.

5585 EN -TI-BC-22-002-EN-N - doi:10.2801/342203



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