



spotlight on VET ESTONIA

VET in Estonia

Vocational education and training (VET) in Estonia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research and is crucial to ensuring a flexible and skilled workforce, capable of adapting to changes in the labour market. Professional standards in the eight-level Estonian qualifications framework are all outcomes-based and are the basis for VET curricula. Social partners are involved in VET policy development and implementation, helping respond to labour market needs. They participate in national professional councils and are involved in drafting VET-related legislation, including curricula. At school level, their representatives belong to VET institution advisory bodies.

Recognition of prior learning and work experience has improved accessibility to VET for learners from diverse education and professional backgrounds. The VET infrastructure has recently been upgraded.

VET institutions offer both, initial and continuing programmes. Initial VET is offered at the second, third, fourth and fifth levels of the Estonian qualifications framework (and the European qualifications framework, EQF). Learners can choose between full-time studies (self-learning is less than one half of the study volume) and those where the emphasis is on self-study and contact hours are fewer (referred to as 'non-stationary' studies in the national context). Full-time studies are available as (a) school-based tracks, with up to 70% work-based learning, and (b) apprenticeship. Financial assistance is available for VET learners to guarantee equal access to education, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances.

There are no minimum admission requirements at second and third levels but learners must be at least 17 years old to enrol. Curricula are designed to meet labour market needs in elementary occupations. Entry to fourth level studies usually requires completed basic education but there are exceptions ⁽¹⁾ for those over 22 without basic education. Programmes at this level give learners the skills needed to perform more complicated jobs.

It is possible to follow vocational programmes at ISCED levels 351 and 354, the latter referred to as upper secondary vocational education. The qualification achieved in vocational secondary education gives graduates access to higher education provided the entry requirements are met. This may require learners to pass state examinations that are compulsory for general education graduates: an optional additional year of general education is available for vocational secondary education graduates (ISCED 354) to help prepare. Upper secondary education gives access to EQF level 5 initial VET programmes (ISCED 454). These post-secondary programmes prepare learners for technical and associate professional occupations.

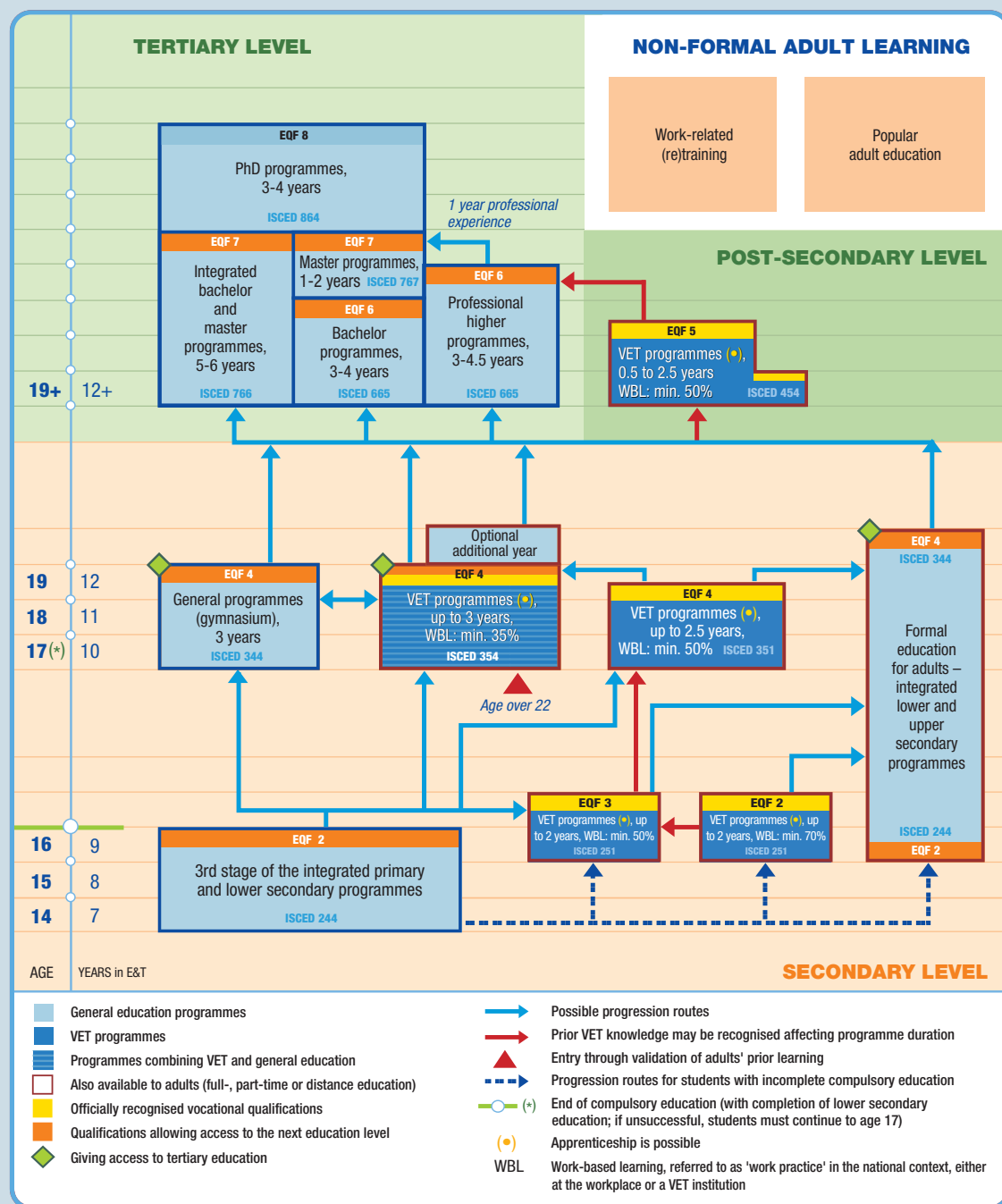
Continuing VET is offered at EQF levels 4 and 5. To enrol, learners need to have a VET qualification or relevant competences in addition to completed upper secondary education.

Tertiary VET does not exist in Estonian legislation, though the first cycle of tertiary education comprises both academic and professional branches. These are accessible to all graduates of both general and vocational secondary education, as well as graduates of post-secondary VET.

Non-formal continuing VET is part of adult learning regulated by the Adult Education Act. Its forms, duration and content vary. Learners or employers usually cover the costs, though ESF-financed adult courses are free for learners. Participation in these is approximately 50% higher. Training can be provided by VET institutions appointed via public procurement.

(1) For ISCED 354 programmes.

VET in Estonia's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Estonia.

Distinctive features of VET

VET programmes are offered not only in Estonian but also in other languages. In 2016/17, 78.92% of VET learners studied in Estonian, 21.0% in Russian, and 0.08% in English. Estonian language classes are mandatory for foreign-language curricula. To complete upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 354), foreign language learners must pass the state examination in Estonian as a second language or take a vocational or professional examination in Estonian. The aim is to equip graduates with language skills sufficient for professional activity in an Estonian-language working environment.

Although the number of VET learners has been decreasing, the share of adult learners (age 25 and over) in initial and continuing VET has more than doubled since 2010/11, reaching 35.1% of the total VET population in 2016/17. This reflects demographic trends but also changing labour market needs. Since 2010, the proportion of adult university degree holders entering VET has also been increasing.

Shares of work-based learning in VET programmes vary between 35% and 70% depending on the type of training. It is usually divided equally between school workshops and workplace learning; featuring work and study assignments with specific objectives.

Most basic education graduates pursue general secondary education but the government has a goal to increase the share of learners enrolling in VET by 2020. Preferences in education paths vary greatly by region and gender.

Challenges and policy responses

In 2016, 28.5% of adults aged 25 to 64 had no VET or higher education qualification; the objective is to reduce this share to less than 25% by 2020. Several measures have been launched to encourage adults without a prior professional or vocational qualification to return to formal education.

There is a high level of skills mismatch. A labour market needs monitoring and forecasting system (OSKA) was launched in 2015 to improve alignment between education and the labour market. Results are available online and used in curriculum development, career counselling, and planning of State-funded education.

Early leaving from VET is a significant problem. Compared with 10.9% of early leavers from education and training, the rate in the first year of initial VET was 22.4% in 2016; the goal is to reduce it to less than 20% by 2020. There are career-counselling services and several other measures to prevent early leaving. Schools are also expected to take more responsibility in this area. Keeping the most vulnerable learners in VET programmes is a challenge.

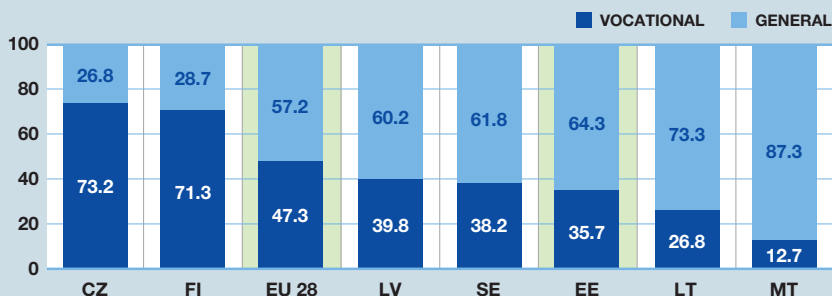
Participation in lifelong learning increased from 6% in 2005 to 15.7% in 2016. The goal is to increase it to 20% by 2020 and VET has been playing a greater role in achieving this. Age appears to have a substantial impact. The share of people aged 55 to 64 who participated in lifelong learning in 2016 has doubled (9.5%) compared with 2015, though this is low compared with 23.5% in the 25 to 34 age group. There is a focus on broadening access to non-formal education, training courses for developing key competences, career services, and facilitating the participation of adults in formal education, aiming to increase participation rates.

Participation in apprenticeships is low (5% of all VET learners). The number of participants started to increase gradually in 2015 following the education ministry's effort to develop a functioning and sustainable work-based learning system with stronger employer involvement, including more ESF investments.

Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes

% of all students in upper secondary education, 2015

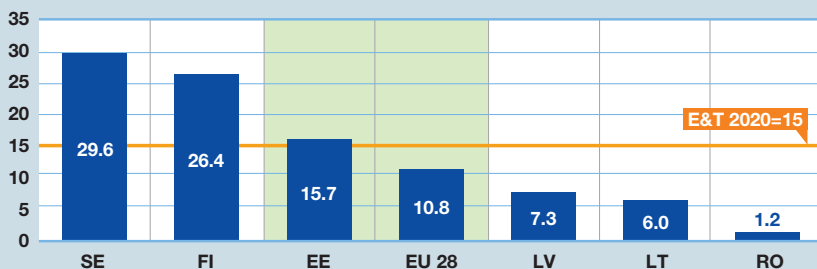


NB: Including programmes that do not give direct access to tertiary education (ISCED 351).

Source: Cedefop calculations, based on Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 2.6.2017.

Lifelong learning

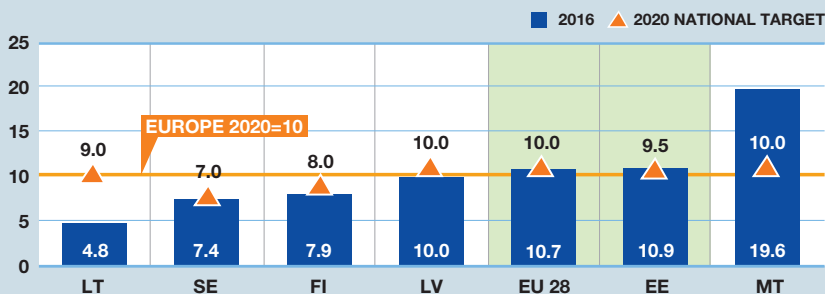
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2016



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 2.6.2017.

Early leavers from education and training

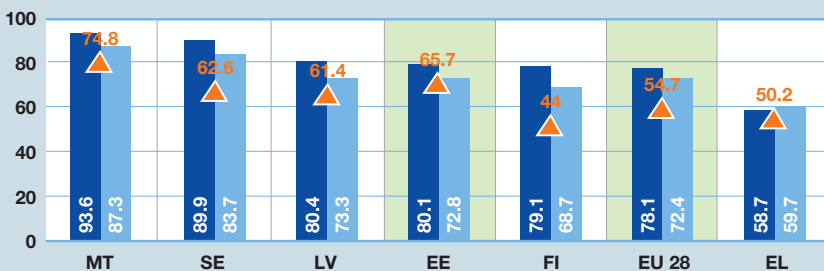
% of the population aged 18 to 24 with at most lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the last four weeks prior to the survey, 2016



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 2.6.2017.

Employment rates of young graduates

% of 20 to 34 years old no longer in education and training, 2016



■ Upper vocational secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

■ Upper general secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)

▲ Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 2.6.2017.



Further information

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www.archimedes.ee	Foundation Archimedes
www.stat.ee	Statistics Estonia
www.eakl.ee	Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions
www.employers.ee	Estonian Employers' Confederation
www.tootukassa.ee	Unemployment Insurance Fund (public employment service)
www.ekka.archimedes.ee	Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education
oska.kutsekoda.ee	labour market needs monitoring and forecasting system (OSKA)
www.ehis.ee	Estonian education information system

This Spotlight is based on input from the Ministry of Education and Research (ReferNet Estonia 2017).



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