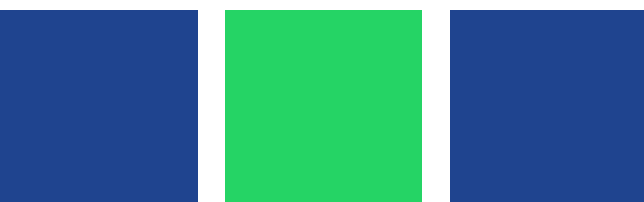

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,
flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality assured

LATVIA



Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality-assured:

Latvia

Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2023.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

In Latvia, ‘[Guidelines for the development of education: future skills for the future society 2021-27](#)’ is the national education strategy, including vocational education and training (VET) (Cabinet of Ministers, 2021). Its main goal is to ensure quality education for all residents, promoting development and implementation of their potential throughout their life, facilitating their ability to change and to lead constant changes in society and economy. The strategy comprises three main priorities:

- (a) highly qualified, competent, and excellence-oriented teachers, academic and scientific personnel,
- (b) modern, qualitative, and labour market skills demand oriented education and training,
- (c) sustainable and effective management of the education system.

In addition, two horizontal priorities – digitalisation and green transition – are embedded across all activities and address inclusion. VET policies of the strategy resonate with most of the EU priorities on VET, including the 2020 [Council Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience](#).

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

VET activities have focused on completing the major VET reform of the past decade based on the 2022 [amendments of the VET Law](#) (Saeima, 2022). The reform addresses the transition to agile, resilient, attractive, flexible, innovative, and inclusive VET that is adaptive to labour market developments, with learning outcomes-based curricula relevant to the labour market needs.

In 2023, more than 20 government regulations on VET were revised or drafted supporting the reform implementation. Strengthening of flexibility, excellence, and inclusion of VET as part of the VET reform included:

- (a) [referencing the professional qualifications](#) to the Latvian and European qualifications frameworks (LQF, EQF) and increasing their comparability and transparency;
- (b) introducing micro-qualifications in initial and continuing VET allowing for partial qualifications to be recognised;
- (c) allowing enrolment to VET through assessment of competences, enabling flexibility and individual solutions for learners;
- (d) introducing a distinction between documents certifying vocational education (which requires passing general education exams) and a professional qualification; each of them can now be obtained separately;
- (e) transition from accreditation of programmes to accreditation of an education provider, including VET providers, which will be able to implement the elsewhere licenced continuing VET or in-service training programmes or their parts without the need for obtaining additional licence;
- (f) elaborating and extending functions of the [Sector Expert Councils](#) and financing their coordination from the State budget;

- (g) revising and [further developing and implementing the concept of work-based learning \(WBL\)](#) with the support of the EU funds and in collaboration with German and Swiss counterparts

The 2023 activities also focused on the improved adult education coordination mechanisms and the development of the concept of individual learning accounts.

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

There are several more specific measures contributing to the above mentioned developments. VET in Latvia envisages strategic specialisation for every VET provider. The specialisation is a thematic area of education and training, in which VET institutions offer programmes and has a particularly strong profile. It is determined considering the labour market needs and other factors.

In September 2023, the education ministry assigned methodological responsibility to all VET providers based on their [strategic specialisations](#). Each VET provider has a leading role in at least one thematic area and coordinates the joint methodological work of other VET providers, including the design and revision of the VET curricula and upskilling of VET teachers and trainers. This approach also bears relevance to uniform content and quality assurance.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

The 2023 Government regulation No 52 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2023b) ensures that learners can now receive a State-recognised document not only for the acquisition of the entire professional qualification, but also for its part(s). In case of dropping out of the education and training system, learners can receive a document certifying their learning outcomes and improving their chances of finding a job. This modular approach has strong links with the concept of microcredentials, facilitating flexibility in VET, lifelong learning and faster response to changes in the labour market.

As mentioned above, since 2023 VET graduates can receive two documents: a diploma of vocational secondary education and a certificate of a professional qualification. This allows a distinction between documents certifying vocational education (which requires passing general education exams) and a professional qualification, and each of them can now be obtained separately. According to Article 6 of the [VET Law](#) two documents are issued to graduates, who have successfully completed the vocational education programme and passed the national final examinations based on the national vocational education standard.

It is also possible to receive a diploma of vocational secondary education only. It is awarded to those graduates who are unable to sit the professional qualification examinations (not the same as national final examinations) due to a health condition or has not obtained a satisfactory mark in the professional qualification examination. In this case, professional qualification is not awarded.

If learners don't complete a secondary education curriculum, but only a professional part of the VET programme and passes a professional qualification examination, they receive a

professional qualification certificate only.

The 2022 amendments to the [Education Law](#), support a better quality assurance in non-formal adult education. The 2023 [Government regulation No 395](#) ensures that non-formal education programmes provide a description of achievable learning outcomes and determine the language of instruction, the content, materials, and human resources necessary for the implementation of the programme. A certificate (apliecība) is also issued at the completion of such programmes. This government regulation also envisages the use of the EU DigComp framework for formulating digital skills in non-formal education programmes.

The implementation of the ESF project 'Improvement of professional competences of the employees' (Cabinet of Ministers, 2016) was completed in 2023. The project supported the acquisition of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes and upskilling courses, as well as the assessment of professional competence acquired outside formal education system for employed adults 25+, including those having a low level of education. Ten rounds of the project helped 66 592 employees, including 14 327 low-skilled to complete education programmes; some attended more than once since 2016.

2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

Innovation and excellence in VET are linked to green transition, digitalisation, and [internationalisation of VET](#) in Latvia. Stronger collaboration with stakeholders at national and local levels, and international networks featured in 2023. Overall, business incubators in VET providers, collaboration with higher education institutions, participation in research and excellence projects has been slowly but steadily increasing in Latvia.

Technical schools (1) now implement EQF level 5 programmes, in addition to levels 2-4.

In 2023, Latvian VET developments on green transition and sustainability approaches, the implementation of knowledge triangle and permeability in collaboration with higher education were shared as examples of best practice with international partners, including at the international Skills conference within the European Year of Skills.

In collaboration with the German-Baltic Chamber of Commerce (AHK), an agreement was reached in 2023 about introducing the annual VET excellence award in three nominations – social responsibility, green transition and active SME. The first award ceremony took place in June 2024.

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

Recovery and resilience facility has supported the digital transformation in Latvia, including education and training. Examples include better digital infrastructure and connectivity in schools, 100% of teachers use digital technologies in the teaching process, and 95% of schools use learning analytics solutions to monitor learner individual growth.

In 2023, State Education Information System ([VIIS](#)) was modernised to ensure the implementation of the functions of the State, municipalities and educational institutions. The

(1) VET provider types include technical schools, competence centres for arts education, 3) a vocational secondary schools, vocational further education centres, and colleges. See more information in [Cedefop's VET in Europe database](#).

system allows to obtain data on all levels of education, all types of formal education and partially covers non-formal education. Currently, more than 70 institutions exchange the data within the system. The system also makes the education data accessible to public, including indicators and analyses. Since 2023, the gradual transition to electronic delivery of VET education documents has been implemented. The certificates of professional qualifications are now issued electronically. The licensing of VET programmes has also been improved. To license a VET programme, a VET institution doesn't need to submit the whole programme to the State Education Quality Service anymore, but only its implementation plan.

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

Inclusion in VET in Latvia means mainly the improved access to learning, and [prevention of early leaving and social exclusion](#).

The access to learning in the perspective of lifelong learning is ensured via the 2023 Government Regulation No 70 on recognition of competences for admission to the later stages of VET (Cabinet of Ministers, 2023a). The regulation stipulates that individuals can be accepted in later stages of a VET programme, e.g., after a break or after obtaining another professional qualification, after their professional competences acquired outside the formal education system are recognised through a formal process. This also enables a smoother transfer from one VET school to another or from one VET programme to another. The new regulation promotes a gradual learning results' accumulation mechanism for professional qualifications.

Early leaving from education and training in Latvia is being addressed by targeted measures. In 2023, the State Education Quality Service (IKVD) finished the implementation of the European social fund project 'Support for the reduction of early school leaving' (PUMPURS) (The State Education Quality Service, 2017) to prevent drop-outs and render a broad spectrum of support to VET students at the risk of social exclusion. During the 5-year project implementation, more than 95% of municipalities were involved, as well as 584 general education and VET providers. The target groups were general education and VET learners.

The project promoted development of a system for sustainable cooperation between municipalities, education institutions, teachers, support staff and parents to identify learners who are at risk of dropping out or become socially excluded and provide them with personalised support.

The [PUMPURS project supported learners at risk of leaving VET](#) due to lack of money to support their living, by covering their travel costs, meals, accommodation, etc. However, the focus of the project was not solely on temporary financial support. Most importantly, it addressed the design of a sustainable, comprehensive mechanism that creates a supportive and inclusive environment for every learner. On May 21, 2024, the Parliament Committee on Education, Culture and Science discussed the possibility to continue the project and to introduce a new project of adding to the system the support year programme.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

To ensure the quality of VET curricula, 102 State approved sample programmes for 187 professional qualifications (National Centre for Education, 2024) were designed and published on the National Centre for Education (VISC) homepage. Introducing the state approved curricula helps VET providers, which can use modular and outcome-based sample programmes in designing their programmes. This process is now usually about creating programme implementation plans.

Another important aspect for **VET quality assurance** is the shift from programme accreditation to VET provider accreditation. This reduces the administrative burdens for VET providers and allows them to spend more time and resources on innovation, improved performance, and overall capacity building. An integral part of the process is self-evaluation and reporting. In 2023, a lot of attention was paid to improve these processes.

In 2023, **VET graduate tracking digital tool** was made available on the State Education Information System (VIIS) portal, supporting quality assurance in VET.

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

Sectoral Expert Councils (SECs) are important national level stakeholders that take part in the development and revision of the sector qualifications frameworks and in the development of VET curricula and final examination to obtain a qualification. The overall coordination of SECs is the responsibility of the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK), the official national level social partner.

Every VET provider is required by law to establish a Convention – an advisory body consisting of representatives of its administration, local government, employers, and other local and regional stakeholders. Currently all VET providers have established the conventions. Conventions ensure a continuous discussion and planning of the strategic development of the VET provider and promote innovation and international cooperation.

As part of further development of apprenticeships, an ESF project supporting participation in work-based learning (WBL) in companies was completed in the end of 2023. The project was coordinated by the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK) and involved 40 VET providers and more than 4150 companies in the implementation.

In 2023, reconsideration of the approaches to the implementation of WBL and the organisation of the work of SECs started. To implement a broader and best practice informed approach, collaboration with the German and Swiss ministries gained momentum. Currently, two WBL projects in collaboration with these ministries are in the pipeline.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

The gradual increase in the prestige of VET has been the major achievement in Latvia in the past few years, especially in 2023. Even though it is not always reflected in the increase of the share of the VET students (partly due to the methodological issues in statistics), there is a substantial change in attitude among young people and their parents confirmed by the increased enrolment competition [reported by VET schools](#).

Policy-wise, the key achievement in VET in Latvia has been the finalisation of the comprehensive VET reform through translating major VET developments of the last decade into the legal framework – through the Amendments to the VET Law and the development or revision of the respective government regulations. The adoption of the VET Law Amendments of 2022 has had a strong impact on the actual implementation of the reform since legal framework is a precondition for mainstreaming the new developments. Not only the VET system in Latvia has become more flexible, resilient, and inclusive but also the thinking paradigms of the VET providers at all levels are changing in a similar way.

A breakthrough regarding green transition and digital approaches can be observed in 2023, since most of the VET institutions have become aware of the short- and longer-term benefits of these developments and have been investing in them. VET excellence and innovation are increasingly being seen as driving forces for development in VET.

A major achievement has been a successful completion of the ESF project PUMPURS for preventing early leaving from education and training and mitigating the risk of social exclusion. Latvia's best practice in this regard has been shared in broader international contexts, since there are relatively few examples of similar systemic approaches at EU level and there has been interest from several EU and non-EU countries on this.

In adult education, inter-ministerial discussions have started in 2023 regarding improved and more comprehensive approaches towards human capital development. It is planned to diminish fragmentation and increase the effectiveness and labour market relevance of the processes. The development of the individual learning accounts concept has been moved forward in 2023, but major decisions still need to be taken.

To promote Latvia's VET internationally an international conference - Skillman International Forum (SIF) 2023 'The Planet of Skills. Renewed Perspective on Networking Potential' (SIF, 2023) was organised by the education ministry on 26-27 September 2023.

The conference provided a platform for discussion of for a broad range of VET professionals coming from 72 countries of the world – with 200 on-site participants and around 500 on-line participants. As part of the conference, five study visits to Latvian VET institutions were organised. The aim of the study visits was to present several successfully Implemented concepts or approaches. For example, how knowledge triage can be implemented in a VET institution (in collaboration with higher education, how teachers, including hybrid teachers can be attracted to the VET system, with a special emphasis on the attraction of former VET students, how a VET institution promotes green transition as a new culture of the education institution, or how excellence in a particular sector (catering) can contribute to a successful integration and recognition into broader international networks. As a result of the conference

several collaboration agreements were signed between the Latvian VET institutions and their counterparts in other countries.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

Several major ESF supported piloting projects ended in 2023. In this regard, challenges arise. One of these is the need for a critical evaluation of the achieved results in order to take further policy decisions, including the mainstreaming of the piloted practices where found relevant and useful or initiating further discussions regarding revision of approaches. This challenge is primarily true regarding the WBL concept, since no ESF financial support to employers in WBL will be available further on and the further commitment of the employers to WBL needs to be discussed in various formats. Challenges are also related to the ownership of the WBL processes by sectors. The sectors and the SECs might assume a stronger role in enhancing the commitment of the employers to take more responsibility for WBL developments in the future. Awareness still needs to be promoted regarding the benefits for sector stakeholders in preparing their workforce in collaboration with VET providers through WBL.

Another major challenge in Latvian VET is providing teachers and trainers with adequate support system for keeping up and supporting the changes in the system. Every novelty takes time and effort, but additional difficulties arise also from the overload of the teachers and trainers. Therefore, additional emphasis needs to be put on the optimisation of various administrative procedures using also the possibilities offered by digitalisation.

Adult education reforms need more impetus. The capacity and motivation of VET institutions regarding adult education provision needs to be strengthened. One of the hindering factors is the teachers' work overload. Additional effort needs to be made to diminish the administrative burdens in teachers work on the one hand, and to develop approaches for raising a new generation of teachers. A lot of effort has been made in 2023 to reform the teachers' remuneration model, and the results are still to be seen.

The VET reform needs to be promoted and explained to various stakeholders, including the social partners and the society, to obtain maximum results.

Internationalisation in VET is still a challenge, with a gradually increasing awareness among VET providers that internationalisation as well as innovation are key for increased competitiveness. The very understanding of the internationalisation concepts gradually changing. From the more traditional understanding it as collaboration with other countries, including mobility periods to the awareness that internationalisation implies integrating global education perspective and achievements into our knowledge resource – for personal and professional development and for raising the overall competitiveness of VET institutions and individuals.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

Latvian VET system is becoming increasingly competitive, and 2023 marks a traceable increase in the prestige of VET at a national level. Also, internationally the Latvian VET system and its achievements have been noted – Latvia's VET best practice has been shared in

broader international contexts.

In 2023, the major achievement was the development of the supporting legal framework to the substantial VET Law Amendments of 2022, enabling the practical implementation and mainstreaming the comprehensive changes in the VET system.

The reforms take time, and it is the year 2023 that marks a substantial breakthrough after considerable investment in optimisation processes, infrastructure, and skills development over the past decade. Since the prestige of VET in Latvia is also gradually growing, this can be considered as one of the real indicators of the overall success of the VET reform. The increasingly active involvement of Latvia in broader international networks within EU and beyond creates a precondition for further level of development. The future tasks involve a continued investment in green and digital transition, innovation, and excellence with subsequent international competitiveness of VET.

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