

VET in Latvia



Vocational education and training (VET) in Latvia is offered at three (¹) levels: lower secondary (part of the national ‘basic’ education; integrated primary and lower secondary); upper secondary (secondary); and tertiary (professional higher) education. It includes practical training (50% to 65% of curricula) at schools and enterprises. In 2015, an apprenticeship scheme (called ‘work-based learning’ nationally) was introduced with alternating study periods at school and in an enterprise. The scheme is available for all VET programmes at EQF levels 2 to 4. To acquire a VET qualification at these levels, all VET learners take a State qualification exam at the end of the programme.

Basic VET programmes (one to three years, ISCED 254) lead to qualifications at EQF level 2 and involve around 1% of the VET population (2018/19 data). Learners must be at least 15 years old to enrol. Those without completed basic education are admitted to three-year programmes (ISCED 254) that include a compulsory basic general education course.

At upper secondary level, VET enrolls 42% of all learners in:

- three-year programmes (ISCED 353) leading to a qualification at EQF level 3 and involving 2% of VET learners. To enrol in higher education, graduates should attend an additional one-year follow-up programme;
- four-year programmes (ISCED 354) leading to a secondary VET qualification at EQF level 4 and involving 67% of VET learners. Graduation from the programme requires both the VET qualification and success in four State exams in general subjects, giving access to higher education;
- one- to two-year programmes (ISCED 351 and 453) leading to a qualification at EQF levels 3 and 4. These programmes are designed for 17 to 29 year-olds with or without completed upper secondary education. They involve 30% of VET learners and focus on vocational skills, so they are shorter.

Professional higher education programmes are provided at two levels:

- first-level college (short cycle) programmes (two to three years; ISCED 554, EQF 5) targeted mainly at the labour market, though graduates can continue their studies in second-level professional higher education;
- second-level higher education programmes (two to six years) (ISCED 655, 656, 657, 756 and 757, EQF 6 and 7) leading to a professional qualification and either professional bachelor or master degree or a professional higher education diploma.

Formal continuing VET (CVET) programmes enable adults with education/work experience to obtain a State-recognised professional qualification in 480 to 1 280 hours, depending on the field of study. Shorter professional development programmes (at least 160 hours) enable learners to acquire or upgrade their professional knowledge and skills regardless of their age, education and professional background but do not lead to a qualification.

Craftsmanship (not part of apprenticeships) exists on a small scale, separate from the rest of the education system.

The Ministry of Education and Science is the main body responsible for the VET legal framework, governance, funding and content. Social dialogue and strategic cooperation are arranged through the national Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment. Twelve sectoral expert councils ensure that VET provision is in line with labour market needs; they participate in developing sectoral qualifications frameworks, occupational standards, qualifications requirements, education and training programmes and quality assessment procedures. Since 2015, collegial advisory bodies, including representatives from employers, local governments and the supervising ministry – conventions – have been established at each VET school contributing to strategic development and cooperation with the labour market.

Distinctive features of VET

Initial VET is centralised and highly regulated by the State. Most vocational schools are owned and run by the State; half have the status of vocational education competence centres, receiving substantial investments in infrastructure and equipment with the support of EU funds since 2007. In addition to provision of vocational programmes, they validate non-formal and informal learning and offer lifelong learning and continuing teacher training.

Comprehensive reforms of VET content – the introduction of modular vocational education programmes, new occupational standards and sectoral qualifications frameworks – increase the responsiveness of VET to labour market needs and support the use of learning outcomes.

CVET providers are mainly private. IVET providers are increasing their educational offer for adults.

Most vocational education learners (92%) are at upper secondary level (2019/20 data). This share has increased in recent years.

VET provides learning opportunities for early leavers from education and training. With more investment in infrastructure and the development of new programmes, VET attractiveness is increasing.

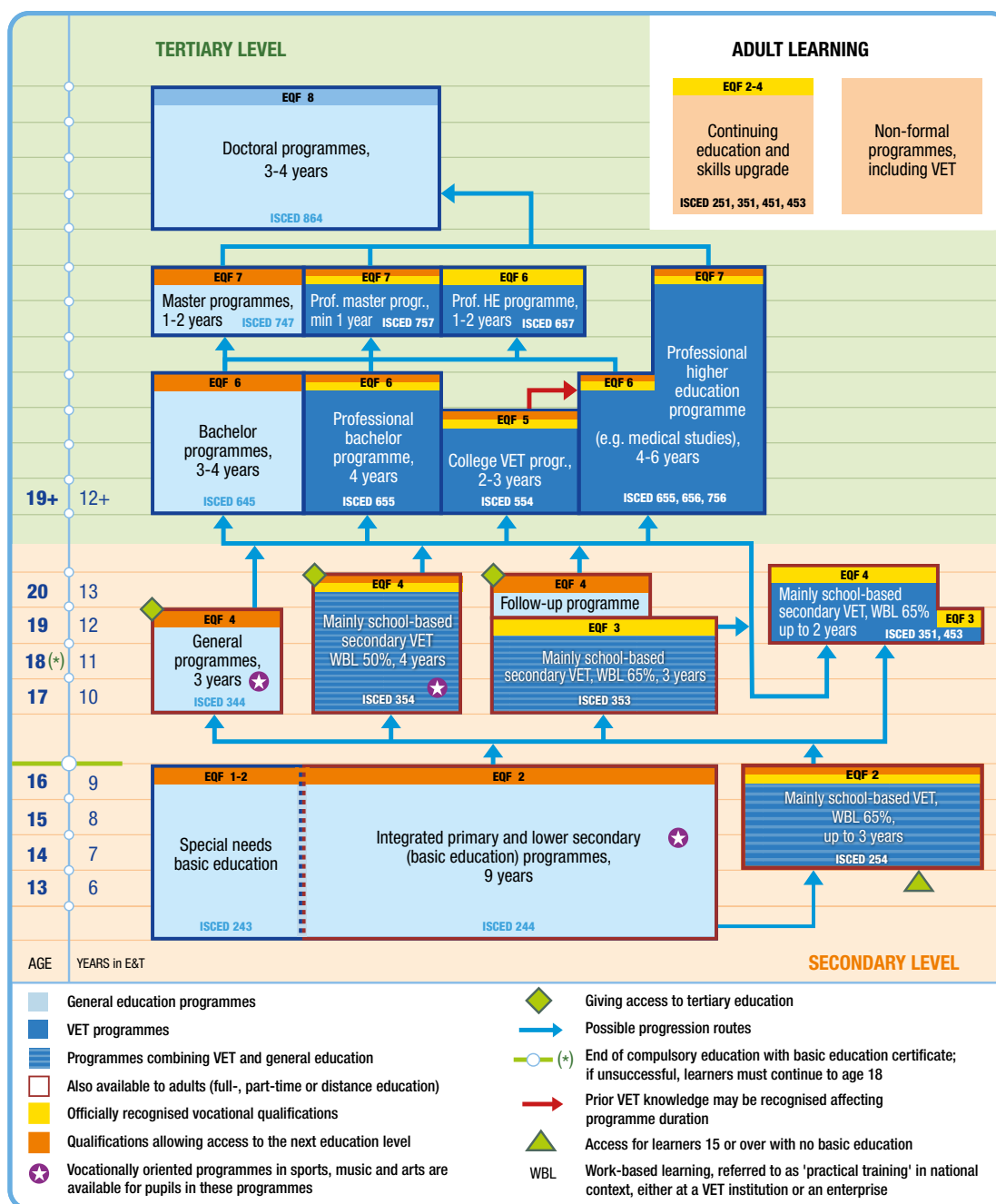
A validation system for professional competences acquired outside formal education has been available since 2011, allowing direct acquisition of professional qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 4. Procedures for assessment and criteria for validation of prior learning were set up for higher education in 2012.

Challenges and policy responses

Reforming VET and adult learning are national policy priorities. Recent reforms aim at:

- promoting VET quality;
- ensuring its relevance to labour market needs;
- efficient use of resources to raise VET attractiveness.

(¹) Arts, culture and sports programmes (referred to as ‘vocationally oriented education programmes’ nationally) are implemented concurrently with basic and secondary general education, but do not lead to a vocational qualification.



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Latvia, 2020.

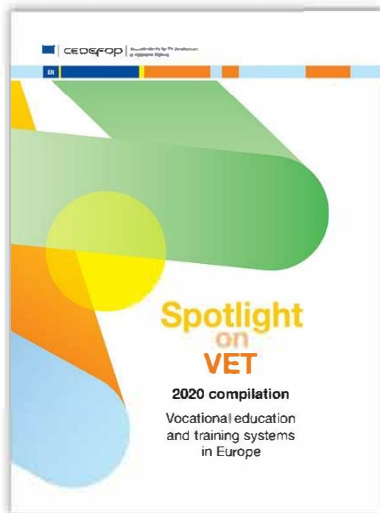
Policy strives for a balanced (equal) distribution of students choosing VET and general education after completing basic education. It also aims to double adult participation in learning from the current 7.4% (2019).

In order to improve the responsiveness of VET to labour market needs, modularisation of programmes is being implemented. Content for modular programmes is being developed and gradually introduced.

Limited access to guidance and counselling for young people, and the need to put in place ECVET and EQAVET principles for better quality and permeability, are challenges that require

aligning stakeholder opinions and extensive promotion. Other challenges include motivating employers to cooperate with VET providers, for example, by offering training at the workplace and promoting continuing training for employees.

In order to address these challenges, the education development plan (Future skills for the future society 2021-27) was submitted for consultation in October 2020. The priorities for VET include developing the education offer according to labour market needs, modern, digital, and green VET schools, competent educators, international cooperation and involvement of employers in VET.



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