

Detailed Thematic Analysis: Initial Vocational Education and Training in Estonia

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Initial Vocational Education and Training in Estonia

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04 - Initial vocational education and training

0401 - Introduction to Initial Vocational Education and Training (Incl. Statistics)

Vocational education and training (VET) is an integral part of the Estonian education system. The objective of the Estonian initial VET (IVET) system is to ensure the social and vocational preparedness of young people for commencement of their applied life and to prepare skilled workers who would be competitive both in the Estonian as well as international labour market. IVET includes all forms of vocational education and training in the formal education system and outside it, at level of upper secondary vocational education, post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education, and applied higher education.

The educational system as a whole/Scope of IVET within it

International education level		Estonian education level + ISCED category	
	Age group	Age group	
Primary – grades 1.-6.	7-12	7-12	1 st – primary education (grades 1.-6.)
Secondary – grades 7.-12. and vocational education	13-17	13-15	2 nd – lower secondary education (grades 7.-9.)
		16-18	3 rd – upper secondary general (grades 10.-12.) and vocational education
		18-20	4 th – post secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education
Tertiary – higher education (applied and academic)	18-22	18-22	5 th -6 th – higher education (5 th applied higher education, bachelor study, masters study, 6 th doctor's study)

Source: Estonian National Observatory, 2001.

LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION (ISCED 2A)

Pursuant to the Education Act, a child shall attend school if s/he will have attained 7 years of age by 1 October of the year in question. The obligation to attend school – compulsory education – lasts until s/he has graduated from basic school (põhikool), or until s/he has turned 17, even if s/he has not finished the 9th grade. The basic level covers categories 1 and 2 of the ISCED classification. For students who are acquiring lower secondary general education prevocational training is provided within the

framework of elective subjects in vocational education institutions. The students receive a certificate proving the completion of lower secondary general education that also includes a list of vocational courses completed by the student. Completed vocational training is taken into account if a student continues his/her studies in the same field in upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B).

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (ISCED 3A, 3B)

After graduation from a basic school, a young person has the opportunity to continue studies at upper secondary general school (ISCED 3A) to acquire upper secondary general education or at a VET institution to acquire upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B). As of December 2004, there were 68 vocational education institutions in Estonia, 47 of which were public – 44 in the area of government of the Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium), 1 in the area of government of the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sotsiaalministeerium), 1 in the area of government of the Ministry of Defence (Kaitseministeerium), 1 in the area of government of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; 18 private and 3 municipal VET institutions. Upper secondary vocational education can be acquired in 41 of 68 VET institutions. In 2003/2004, there were 17,130 students acquiring upper secondary vocational education.

POST-SECONDARY (NON-TERTIARY) EDUCATION (ISCED 4B)

After acquiring upper secondary general education (ISCED 3A) or upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B) students may continue their studies at the post-secondary VET level. Post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education is focused on those professions, which require greater responsibility and social maturity from people entering the labour market (e.g. management and administration, hairdressing and barber's services, beauty services, etc.). The duration of a course is 1-2.5 years. Post-secondary (non-tertiary) vocational education can be obtained in VET institutions - 60 vocational education institutions of a total 68 are providing this type of training. In addition to VET institutions, applied higher education institutions may provide post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education programmes with emphasis on applied skills and competences. In 2003/2004, the number of students at the post-secondary (non-tertiary) education level was 10,787.

TERTIARY EDUCATION (ISCED 5A, 5B)

Students who have completed upper secondary education, either vocational or general, are eligible to acquire higher education.

In Estonia, higher education comprises two branches: academic higher education and applied higher education. Applied higher education study, ISCED 5B, is the first level in the higher education system and is equivalent to the bachelor's study of the academic branch. According to the renewed Higher Education Standard (Kõrgharidusstandard, entered into force 19 August 2002), applied higher education is the only form of non-university tertiary education in Estonia. Pursuant to the previous Higher Education Standard that was valid until the admissions of the 2002/03 academic year, applied higher education study is developed on the basis of previous vocational higher education study (kutsekõrgharidus) and diploma study

(diplomiõpe). Nevertheless, diploma and vocational higher education studies are still continued for students who commenced their studies before 2002.

Applied higher education (depending on the curricula) is provided in the following institutions:

1) University (ülikool) - academic higher education and applied, professionally oriented diploma-study programmes (until the 2002/2003 admission) and applied higher education programmes (since the 2002/2003 admission). In 2003/2004, 9 of 12 universities provided applied higher education.

2) Applied higher education institution (rakenduskõrgkool) - applied, professionally oriented diploma-study and vocational higher education programmes until 2002/2003. Starting from 2002/2003, students are no longer admitted to vocational higher education and diploma-study programmes. Instead, both higher education programmes have been implemented as applied higher education programmes. (The differences between the programmes of applied higher education and vocational higher education are: the duration of the program 4 vs 3 years, the duration of enterprise practice 15% vs 35% of programme volume and the requirements for the teaching staff). In 2004, there were 25 applied higher education institutions, 7 of them public and 18 private.

3) Vocational education institution (kutseõppeasutus) – 10 vocational education institutions of a total of 68 (9 of them public, 1 private) provided applied higher education programmes in 2004.

In 2004, the number of students at the applied higher education level (ISCED 5B) was 24,401 and the number has been growing during past years. People who have upper secondary general education can continue studies at applied higher education institution. A student who has completed a vocational education institution and who would like to continue his/her studies at the level of higher education, usually need to take state examinations. The nominal duration of study is 3 to 4.5 years. Students are usually at the age between 18 and 23 years.

In 1995-2003, the share of vocational students among 15-19 years old young people has not changed significantly. However, the aim is to direct more students to vocational studies and to promote vocational education among young people.

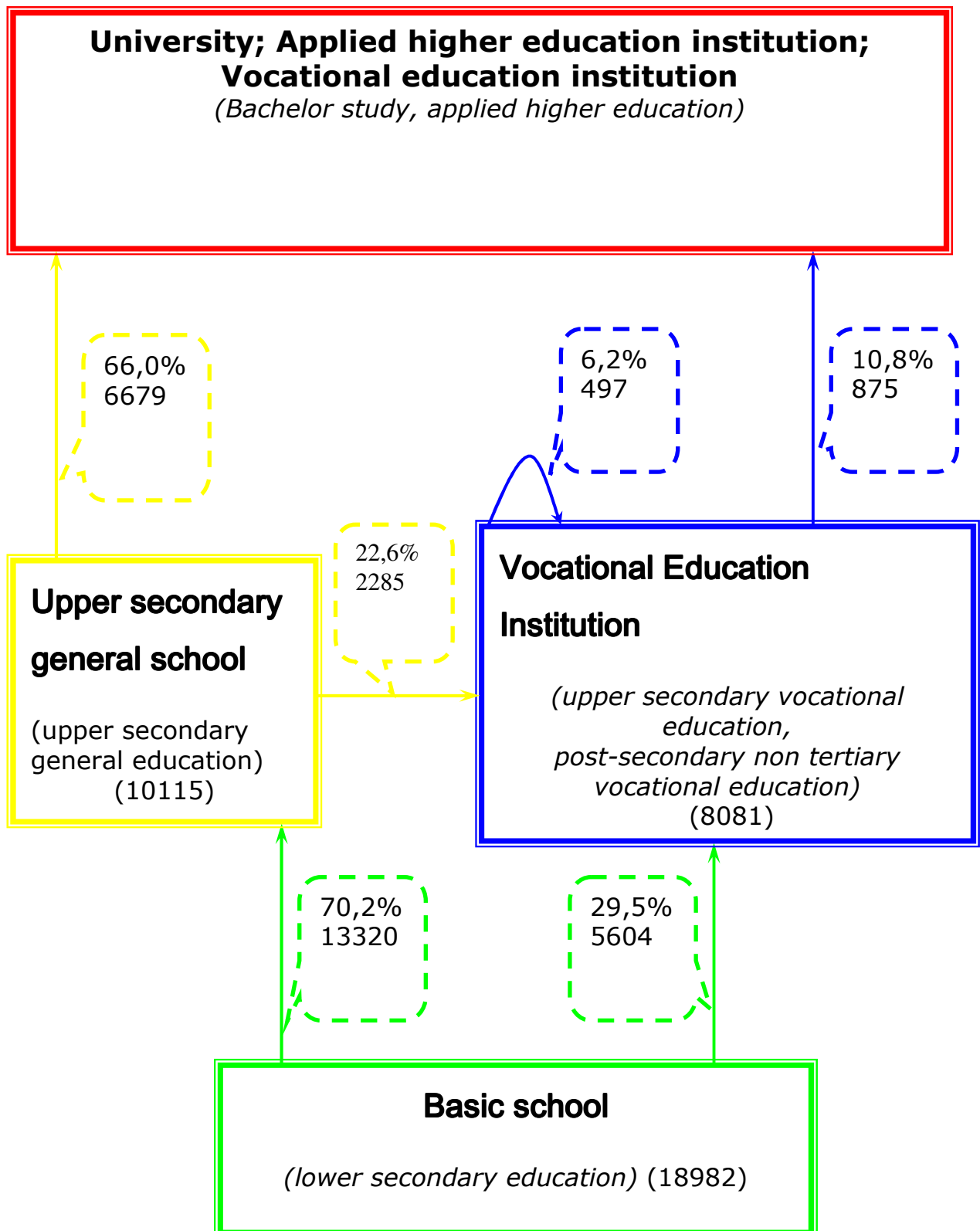
IVET as proportion of the total of young people aged 15-19

1995	2000	2003
23,0%	20,8%	20,9%

Source: Estonian National Observatory, 2004.

The graph below shows that majority of students tend to continue their studies at upper secondary schools in order to proceed to the university upon graduation. Although progress to third level education is likewise open to VET institutions' graduates, education provided by general upper secondary schools corresponds better

with admission requirements to the universities (due to a larger quantity of general subjects), and is therefore more attractive.



040101 - Development of IVET

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

UPPER SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY (NON TERTIARY) VET (ISCED 3B and 4B)

One of the first vocational institutions established in Estonia was a navigation school operating in Tallinn and Narva in the 18th century. Until 1935, males were trained in 3-year industrial schools, females were trained in women's vocational institutions. After a new vocational training institutions' act of 1937, more attention was paid to vocational training: on the basis of the already existing institutions, 15 vocational institutions with study duration from 1 to 4 academic years were established.

At the beginning of the Soviet occupation in 1940, a Law on Secondary Schools was adopted, which restored comprehensive school and abandoned the basic school (põhikool). At the beginning, upper secondary general school was planned to last 4 years, but it was later reduced to 3 years. Due to repressions in the cultural field, Latin and other elements of classical humanities education were abandoned at the beginning of 1950s. In the 1960s, polytechnic manual training and production training were emphasised in the school curriculum. Starting from the year 1970, the compulsory upper secondary education was established.

After the independence was restored, the Education Act (1992) (EV Haridusseadus) and the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary General Schools Act (1993) (Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus) established the obligation of lower secondary education. In June 1995, the first Vocational Education Institutions Act (Kutseõppeasutuse seadus) was passed. In 1997, the Tiger Leap Foundation was founded for the development of information and communication technology in the Estonian educational institutions. The same year, the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus) was founded, one of the main objects of which, apart from the development of a system for external assessment of study results, is the development of the curricula for vocational education.

The initiative to carry out the reform of vocational education dates from the second half of the 1990s. In the years 1996 to 2000, a social agreement was reached on the ways of reforming vocational education; a constructive dialogue was started between trainers and social partners; a legislative basis and conditions were created for directing the development of the system according to the changes taken place in Estonia, for a more efficient application of available resources, developing new curricula and educating the personnel of VET institutions (kutseõppeasutus).

In January 1998, the Government of the Republic endorsed the conceptual bases of vocational education in the educational policy and reform program and the amended Vocational Educational Institutions Act was passed, establishing new stages: upper secondary and post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education and vocational (applied) higher education.

In June 2001, the Government endorsed the Action Plan for Developing Estonian Vocational Education and Training System for 2001–2004, the objective of which was to determine the main courses of development in the vocational education system, inform the public, training providers and social partners.

The Action Plan for Developing Estonian Vocational Education and Training System for 2001–2004 (Tegevuskava kutseharidussüsteemi arendamiseks Eestis aastatel 2001-2004) identifies the following objectives:

- to guarantee the learning opportunities for young people up to age 18, providing programmes which meet the interest and abilities of the young, in order to ease transfer from school to working life;
- to organise continuous training for adults, enabling them to acquire higher qualification levels;
- to modernise the learning environment in VET institution and updating the content of programmes so that the teaching quality shall be in accordance with the requirements of the labour market;
- to develop and implement VET institutions' monitoring system - efficiency evaluation accreditation, self-assessment;
- to develop contemporary initial and complementary teacher/trainer training system.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: APPLIED HIGHER EDUCATION (ISCED 5B):

After Estonia regained independence in 1991, the Republic of Estonia Education Act (EV haridusseadus) was adopted in 1992 as the most important legal act in the field of education. Higher education was reformed step by step by adopting the Universities Act (1995) (Ülikooliseadus), the Private Schools Act (1998) (Erakooliseadus) and The Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act (1998) (Rakenduskõrgkooli seadus). Starting from 1999, also some VET institutions were given the right to offer applied higher education curricula. In 2000, the Standard of Higher Education (Kõrgharidusstandard) was adopted that established the uniform requirements for study at higher education level in Estonia and that serves as a source document for issuing education licences to institutions that offer higher education curricula and for accreditation of their curricula. Institutions that offer higher education curricula may be public institutions, legal persons in public law, or legal persons in private law. Because of the liberal higher education politics, the number of private institutions offering higher education grew very fast.

For the application of the Bologna Declaration, signed by the European Ministers of Education in 1999, in Estonia, a working group consisting of the representatives of academic circles, employers and students, was formed under the leadership of the Minister of Education and Research. The amendments to the valid legislation, concurrent with the implementation of the Declaration, were authorised by the approved reform plan for higher education of the Government of the Republic from 12 June 2001. Proceeding from the principles agreed upon, all relevant acts of the Parliament regulating higher education – the Universities Act, The Institutions of Applied Higher Education Act, and the Standard of Higher Education were amended in one year. Transfer to the new system of study stages took place in 2002/2003 academic years upon the amendment of the Universities Act and the acts in

conjunction with it in the Riigikogu in June 2002. At the same time, the implementation of the uniform form of Diploma Supplement (akadeemiline õiend) commenced. Several other topics mentioned in the Bologna Declaration did not foresee profound amendments for their application in Estonia as the practice of determining of the volume of curricula on the basis of the study load of a student had already begun at the beginning of the 1990s, by the example of the Scandinavian countries. An accreditation system based on the collegial assessment in which external experts are engaged in order to guarantee the increase of objectivity has been put into use. The state shall also support the mobility of Estonian students and professors within the framework of European programmes.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: ADULT EDUCATION

In 1940 when Soviet occupation was established in Estonia, the Soviet government closed the operation of all popular institutions, including educational societies and folk universities. After World War II, hobby schools and amateur theatre, art, and music groups were the only forms of informal adult education in Estonia. The first folk universities were reopened as late as 1958 in clubs, libraries, higher education institutions, etc.

In formal education, all workers had the right and the guarantees to study as well as work on any level of education. Privileges were granted to evening and part-time students of higher education institutions, VET institutions' students, and people who, without interrupting productive work, studied in working and rural youth institutions.

CURRENT TRENDS, DEBATES AND PERSPECTIVES

UPPER SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY (NON TERTIARY) VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (ISCED 3B and 4B)

A number of important documents and development plans on which the further development of vocational education is based, were prepared by the end of 2004. The most important of those are:

- Vocational Education Development Plan 2005-2008 (Eesti kutseharidussüsteemi arengukava aastateks 2005-2008);
- State Vocational Education Institutions Network Development Plan 2005-2008 (Riigikutseõppeasutuste võrgu arengukava aastateks 2005-2008);
- Vocational Education Standard (Kutseharidusstandard).

Vocational Education Development Plan 2005-2008

The Vocational Education Development Plan 2005–2008 is being completed and will be submitted for approval to the Government of the Republic in the beginning of 2005.

The purpose of the development plan is to set goals for the development of vocational education in Estonia up to 2008 and to plan necessary measures, activities, and resources.

The development plan is based on positions achieved by the implementation of the Action Plan for Developing Estonian VET System in 2001-2004 (Tegevuskava kutseharidussüsteemi arendamiseks Eestis aastateks 2001-2004). Two priorities were set in the action plan:

- to ensure learning opportunities;
- to ensure the quality of learning.

The development plan was prepared on the basis of the following values, which tie vocational education up with the development of the Estonian society and the education system as a whole and help to modernise vocational education:

- **Quality** – education must create preconditions for coping and self-actualisation of people and the development of economy.
- **Accessibility** – good education must be accessible to all people, irrespective of their place of residence, means, or abilities.
- **Efficiency** – resources must be used efficiently.
- **Competitiveness** – education must ensure the competitiveness of a person in the labour market and provide enterprises with adequately competent employees.
- **Cooperation** between the state, local governments, employers and employees and other social partners is essential for every level and type of education.
- **Comprehensiveness** – Education must be a comprehensive and life-long process. General, vocational and higher education as well as formal education acquired within the adult education system, continuing education and retraining must form a whole. Educational dead-ends should be avoided.
- **Transparency** – the system of education must be in line with the European educational context and its content and functioning must be transparent.
- **Purposefulness** – vocational education must comply with the needs of society, economy, and labour market.

For the years 2005–2008, **three main strategic goals** have been set for the development of vocational education:

- Vocational education is in compliance with the needs of the development of the Estonian economy and labour market;
- The level and image of vocational education will improve and students who have completed vocational education will find their place in the labour market;
- The vocational education system is optimal and based on cooperation.

State Vocational Education Institutions Network Development Plan 2005-2008

The State Vocational Education Institutions Network Development Plan 2005-2008 was approved by Government of the Republic in February 17th, 2005. The network of vocational education institutions (VET institutions) was developed in Estonia for decades in the conditions of the soviet era when VET institutions were preparing staff mainly for big industries, including agriculture. This network did not comply with the radical changes in the fields of population, economy, and social life in the independent Republic of Estonia. Since 1990, the network of VET institutions has been transformed (mainly by merging different institutions) in nearly all counties.

Besides, VET institutions, which were in the area of administration of the Ministry of Agriculture (Põllumajandusministeerium), were transferred to the area of administration of the Ministry of Education and Research and some were transformed into applied higher education institutions.

The purpose of the plan of transformation of the network of state vocational education institutions is to distribute vocational education institutions across Estonia so that their location would:

- be based on the needs of society;
- guarantee the high quality of education;
- guarantee the accessibility of education;
- be based on the possibilities of society and as efficient and optimal use of resources as possible.

Along with the planned measures to change the content of vocational education, the measures taken to organise the network of VET institutions must create preconditions for the modernisation and qualitative renewal of the Estonian vocational education in the near future.

Upon implementation of the changes under the development plan, the number of independent public VET institutions will decrease from 49 to 25 (at least by 45%) and the number of institutions with less than 500 students will decrease from 20 to 5 (by 75%).

Vocational education standard

A draft vocational education standard has also been prepared (to be approved during the first half of 2005). The standard is a set of single requirements for upper secondary and post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational and professional education and vocational and professional training of persons who have passed the minimum school-leaving age without completing lower secondary education and for vocational and professional education provided in basic school and upper secondary general school.

The Vocational Education Standard is a source document on which the preparation of national curricula, curricula for institutions providing vocational education, registration of curricula, education process and the issue of education licences are based.

A new quality system of vocational education is being prepared. The key words of the quality system are:

- Teacher training and qualification system (training and in-service training of vocational teachers, including practical training in the professions the teacher is going to teach, professional standards and qualification of a vocational teacher);
- The system of curricula (national curricula, teaching resource materials, development of curricula);
- State supervision (thematic supervision, self-assessment by institutions);

- Accreditation (a complex assessment of a school by an independent party).

The quality system of vocational education will be prepared in 2005-2006 and implemented in 2007-2008.

APPLIED HIGHER EDUCATION (ISCED 5B)

The important courses of action in the higher education policy are connected with the supervision of the application of the new two-staged curricula and the evaluation of the efficiency of the schemes for financing and administering educational institutions. The transfer to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) not later than by 1 September 2006 has been agreed upon. The regulation of issuing joint degree (diplomas) and the promotion of the mobility of students and professors have similarly important roles in the development of the policy of higher education. Domestic discussions primarily concentrate on the issues of quality, efficiency, and access. Resulting from the decrease in the number of students and the limitedness of resources, the peculiarities of the objectives and the acquired qualifications of two branches of higher education, the academic and the applied higher education, are under discussion. The issues concerning the rights and equality of students call attention to the development of the private sector. As the positions of private higher education institutions become stronger, the creation of more equal opportunities for being admitted to state financed student places may become a common topic.

A new strategy of higher education is being prepared for 2005-2008. The strategy sets forth the main development directions and changes in higher education, including applied higher education.

The strategy states that...

- The activity of applied higher education institutions is directed to the preparing of highly motivated specialists who have very good professional skills and positive attitude towards work at the first level of higher education, taking into account the needs of the labour market. The curricula must be flexible and focused on practical training. The aim is to work in close cooperation with enterprises, professional associations and other social partners.
- Applied higher education study is a higher education professional study, which provides the students with practical skills and differently from vocational education, introduces the bases of scientific world-view, thus enabling the students to acquire general knowledge during the whole life. The aim of applied higher education is to create, in cooperation with other educational institutions, enterprises and professional associations, more opportunities for lifelong learning and to develop the field according to regional and sectoral development plans and strategies. Quality standards were prepared on the basis of international cooperation and the results of applied research.

ADULT EDUCATION

The creation of a generalised vocational and career counselling system, which would provide relevant and up-to-date information to both young and older people

facilitating the access to education and promoting motivation to study, is under discussion. The regional information and counselling centres, financed by the Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium), are focused on the youth, the employment agencies– on the unemployed. In 2004, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Sotsiaalministeerium) started negotiations for the possible reorganisation and partial merging of the two networks.

The system of in-service training shall be reformed, owing to which the development of a common political framework is necessary. Amendments to the Adult Education Act (Täiskasvanute koolituse seadus) are planned, with a view to creating additional stimuli for increasing the interest of employers and employees in in-service training. Also broadening the access to in-service training and supporting the consolidation of regional vocational education centres (kutsehariduskeskused) are set out as objectives.

There is a need for a systematic analysis of individual needs (incl. the analysis of the special needs of the unemployed) and the development of policy and measures, aimed at satisfying the needs of an individual.

The project of the Adult Education Development Plan 2005-2008 (Täiskasvanuhariduse arengukava project aastateks 2005-2008) has been prepared in the Ministry of Education and Research on the basis of the Strategy of Life-long Learning (Elukestva õppe strateegia) drawn up at the end of 2002. After the development plan has been co-ordinated with social partners, it will be presented to the Government of the Republic for ratification. The project of the development plan provides strong measures for improving the accessibility and quality of adult education, and the development of a common financing scheme.

The National Priorities of Adult Education 2004-2008 (Täiskasvanuhariduse riiklikud prioriteedid aastatel 2004-2006), which supports the application of the principles of lifelong learning and from which the Ministry of Education and Research, co-operation partners and parties concerned should continue developing the field of adult education, has been presented for ratification to the Government of the Republic.

040102 - Relationship Between IVET And General Education (Incl. Statistics)

UPPER SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY (NON TERTIARY) EDUCATION (ISCED 3A, 3B, 4B)

Upper secondary education is divided into upper secondary general education (ISCED 3A), which is acquired in upper secondary general schools, and upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B), which is acquired in VET institutions. In addition there is post-secondary vocational education (ISCED 4B), which is also acquired in VET institutions.

The division of student places between upper secondary general schools and VET institutions is, to certain extent, based on regional priorities and interests are taken into account. The state guarantees places of upper secondary general school to 60% of the students of the age group. However, the Conceptual Basis for the Modernisation

of the Vocational Education and Training System in Estonia (Kutsehariduse kontseptuaalsed lähtekohad, 1998) stipulates the aim that there should be student places for 50% of basic school graduates and for 50% of students with upper secondary general education to continue their studies at the upper or post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education level.

The objective of the Estonian vocational education system is to ensure the social and vocational preparedness of young people for commencement of their applied life and to prepare skilled workers who would be competitive both in the Estonian as well as international labour market. Both students who acquire upper secondary vocational education and students who acquire upper secondary general education are usually in the age of 16-18.

The standard period of study for students who study at upper secondary VET level is at least three years. The period of study at upper secondary general school, according to the syllabus, is three years (Grades 10 – 12), at the end of which the students have to take five examinations, three of which are state examinations (riigieksamid).

Curricula

Upper secondary general education is determined by the state curricula for basic and upper secondary general schools; upper secondary and post-secondary vocational education is determined by the state curricula for certain professions.

Vocational education curricula is based on modules. A module is a content unit of a curriculum that consists of subjects or parts of subjects and in exceptional cases of only one subject. Using modules provides flexibility of curriculum and enables to take into consideration students' and regional needs as well as quick changes on the labour market. The capacity of modules in terms of time is not limited. A module is measured in weeks. One study week consists of 40 hours of any kind of training undertaken by a student.

A school/institution curriculum is the source document for studies related to the corresponding vocations, professions and occupations, which sets out the list of subjects, together with the extent and general outline of the subjects, the possibilities of and conditions for choosing subjects, and the requirements for the commencement of studies and graduation from the VET institution, including the requirements for the preparation of final papers. A VET institution shall prepare a curriculum for every vocation, profession, and occupation, which can be acquired in this VET institution. Practical training is an integral part of a vocational education curriculum. Upon organisation of the practical training of students the relations between a VET institution, student or his/her legal representative and a state agency, a legal person in public law, legal person in private law or a sole proprietor shall be regulated by a contract entered into them. A contract shall be entered into at least ten days before commencement of the practical training.

The standard period of study for students who study upper secondary vocational education is a minimum 3 years, i.e.120 study weeks of which vocation, profession, and occupation related studies (incl. practical training) must account for at least 50%. Students shall complete at least 50 weeks of study of general educational subjects, of

which 32 weeks are compulsory and common to all curricula and the other 18 weeks should be devoted to general educational subjects most relevant to the specialisation, and teaching must be integrated with the vocational subjects. The table below illustrates the difference of the volume of compulsory general subjects between upper secondary vocational education and upper secondary general education. As due to a larger quantity of general subjects the education provided by upper secondary general schools corresponds better with admission requirements to higher education level. This is the main reason why only small percentage (a bit less than 10%) of upper secondary vocational education graduates continue their studies at higher level.

Compulsory volume of general subjects in upper secondary education (ISCED 3B vs ISCED 3A)

Group	Subject	Compulsory volume by subjects for upper secondary vocational education (study weeks)		Compulsory volume by subjects in the upper secondary general education program (study weeks)
		Instruction lang.: Estonian	Instruction lang.: Russian	
I	Mother tongue	5	4	12
	Estonian		4	
	Foreign language	6	4	6+6
II	Mathematics	4	4	9
	Physics	3	3	6
	Chemistry	2	2	4
III	Biology	2	2	4
	Geography	1	1	3
IV	History	3	3	7
	Civics	2	2	3
	Philosophy			
V	Arts	1	1	3
	Music	1	1	3
	Physical education	2	2	6
	Total common compulsory	32	33	72
	Elective compulsory subjects	18 (chosen from the list of compulsory subjects)		24
	Total	50	51	96

Source: Ministry of Education and Research

The requirements concerning upper secondary general education (i.e. the educational standards), are established in the state curriculum. The state curriculum determines the study objectives, the duration of studies, the relationships of the state curriculum to

the school curriculum, the list of compulsory subjects, including the number of lessons and their contents, the options and conditions for the selection of subjects, as well as the requirements to students in terms of different study periods and graduation. The Government approves the state curriculum.

The new state curriculum of lower and upper secondary general education provides more freedom for schools in choosing the direction of studies, makes it possible to consider the students' interests and abilities, co-ordinates the development of the system of external evaluation, decreases the study load, leading to the implementation of knowledge into practice and emphasises the importance of the integration of different subjects and the importance of competencies, as the basis of life-long learning. The new state curriculum has been in force since 1 September 2002.

The state curriculum establishes compulsory subjects and the minimal scope of their treatment (compulsory courses and compulsory topics). The authorised minimum weekly course workload at the upper secondary general school is 32 lessons.

It is possible to intensify the treatment of compulsory subjects in a school's curriculum by adding topics or by offering mandatory subjects to be chosen by students. The number of alternative subjects and courses is determined by the state curriculum, but the school, taking into consideration students' wishes and opportunities, determines their content. A school may have more than one field of specialisation. Within the scope of alternative courses, a upper secondary general school may offer preliminary vocational training in cooperation with vocational training establishments.

Marking system

There is a unified marking system used at upper secondary general schools, upper and post-secondary VET institutions: "5" – very good, "4" – good, "3" – satisfactory, "2" – unsatisfactory (fail) and "1" – poor (fail). The grades qualifying for passing are "5", "4", and "3". This scale is used throughout the school year as well as in school examinations.

Qualification

After completing upper secondary vocational education, the graduates receive a Certificate on Acquiring Upper Secondary Vocational Education (lõputunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta). After completing post-secondary vocational education the students will receive Certificate on Acquiring Post-Secondary (non-tertiary) Vocational Education (lõputunnistus keskhariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta). Both certificates are awarded by the institution in the state format that is regulated by The Statute, Format and Regulation on Issuing Vocational Institution Certificate (Kutseõppeasutuse lõputunnistuse vorm, statuut ja väljaandmise kord) (1998).

The graduates from upper secondary general schools (ISCED 3A) are issued a Upper Secondary General School Leaving Certificate (gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus) and a State Examination Certificate (riigieksamitunnistus). A State Examination Certificate is issued by the State Examination and Qualifications Centre (Riiklik Eksami- ja

Kvalifikatsioonikeskus). The school issues the Upper Secondary General School Leaving Certificate. A State Examination Certificate is valid only with a Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate and vice versa.

The formats and statutes of the Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate and the State Examination Certificate have been approved by the Government of the Republic of Estonia and are regulated by the Statute and Format of Basic School and Upper Secondary General School Leaving Certificates and State Examination Certificate (Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi lõputunnistuse ning riigieksamitunnistuse statuut ja vorm). Beginning with 2003 graduation there is a new format for basic and upper secondary general school leaving certificates. The certificate and a list of subjects with marks are issued as two separate credentials.

A graduate from upper secondary general school may be commended at the end of the study period or at the graduation ceremony by being awarded a gold medal “for excellent results” or a silver medal “for very good results”.

Pathways

If a student drops out of an upper secondary general school or a VET institution, s/he may continue studies in either an upper secondary general school or a VET institution. The student gets a certificate from the previous school/institution about the completed subjects that are taken into account in further studies. Persons who have passed the minimum school-leaving age may continue their studies in an adult upper secondary general school. These schools offer more flexible opportunities for studying for those people who work (evening courses; the teaching staff has received a special training in teaching adults, etc.). After acquiring upper secondary general education, the student has an opportunity to acquire post secondary (non tertiary) vocational education (ISCED 4B).

After finishing upper secondary general or vocational education or post secondary vocational education, a young person can choose between applied higher education or academic. Acquisition of upper secondary education gives the right to continue studies in higher education (kõrgharidus). A graduate may also start working.

Ownership form

While general education schools are mainly owned by local government, vocational education institutions are mainly state-owned and there are also many private vocational education institutions. At the end of 2004, there were only three vocational education institutions, which were owned by local governments. As general education schools and VET institutions have different owners, it is sometimes difficult to cooperate. However, in the last years, the cooperation has become tighter – for example, basic schools and upper secondary general schools provide more preliminary vocational education within the framework of elective subjects and courses. Students may acquire preliminary knowledge about one specific profession and if they choose to continue in a VET institution in the same speciality, the subjects learned in the general education school are taken into account.

Distribution of participants between IVET and general education

1995, 2000, and 2003 (ISCED 3A vs 3B)

	1995/96	2000/01	2003/04
Vocational education	17476	17518	17132
General education	31848	32954	35821
Vocational education %	35%	35%	32%
General education %	65 %	65 %	68 %

Source: Estonian National Observatory, 2004.

The majority of students who have completed lower secondary education prefer to continue in an upper secondary general education school because this gives better opportunities to continue at the level of higher education and to find a job later. As upper secondary vocational education has become a dead end in education, mainly due to smaller share of general education subjects in the curriculum, then starting from the autumn of 2005, it will be possible to study in a VET institution for an extra year during which the students can study general education subjects in order to continue their studies in a higher education institution. One aim is to make vocational education more popular and to increase the number of students in vocational education institutions.

Access to labour market of the young is not easy, as the number of jobs is decreasing and the pension age is increasing. A consistent system of follow-up of graduates after graduation is missing in Estonia. There is an overview of those who continue studies (figure in subchapter 0401) and those who register at an Employment Office as unemployed after graduation (please see the table below). Registration has increased over years because registration provides access to social guarantees for the unemployed (e.g. medical insurance).

Graduates who registered as unemployed by October at the year of graduation

	1995/1996	2000/2001	2003/2004
Basic school	96	143	42
Upper Secondary General School	332	519	122
VET institution	261	906	396
TOTAL	727	1752	694

Source: Estonian Labour Market Board, 2004

HIGHER EDUCATION

Institutional structure and responsibilities

In 2004 there are 9 universities, 25 applied higher education institutions (7 public, 18 private), 10 VET institutions (9 public, 1 private) offering applied higher education programmes in Estonia.

Applied higher education institutions (rakenduskoõrgkoolid) are legally more restricted in their activities and the approval of the Ministry of Education and Research is required to open new study programmes and to establish the terms and conditions for admission. Unlike universities, with whom the state enters into an agreement of state commissioned education, appropriations from state budget funds to applied higher education and vocational educational institutions are made under the directive of the Minister of Education and Research.

The applied higher education institution offers applied higher education and may additionally offer post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education programmes with emphasis on applied skills and competencies.

Public applied higher education institutions are financed by the state. Private applied higher education institutions provide study programmes mainly in the field of social sciences (economics, international relations, and law), business administration and theology, but also fine arts.

There is a Rectors' Council for universities and for applied higher education institutions. The Rectors' Council and the Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium) discuss and exchange information in all areas of higher education and research policy. The Rectors' Council discusses all the normative documents prepared by the Ministry and expresses their opinion about the matter. In addition, the questions of financing higher education and the appropriate strategies are prepared in cooperation.

Qualifications

Applied higher education is the first stage of higher education the purpose of which is to acquire the competence necessary for working in the relevant profession or for continuing studies at master's level. The nominal length of studies is 3...4.5 years, the capacity of studies is 120 – 180 credits (180 – 270 European Credit Transfer System - ECTS credits).

Curricula

The academic year at the higher education institutions is divided into two semesters: the autumn and the spring semester. The academic year begins in September and ends in the first half of June. Generally, it contains 40 weeks of lectures, seminars, practical training, and independent work and an examination period. The higher education institutions operate a five-day week for full-time studies. Normally, full-time studies consist of approximately 50% of contact hours (16-26 hours per week) and 50% of

independent work, but it varies depending on the individual choice of subjects per term.

All study programmes are registered in the Curriculum Register (Õppekavade register) of the Ministry of Education and Research.

Pathways

The persons who have completed applied higher education studies are awarded an applied higher education diploma (rakendus kõrgharidusõppe diplom) certifying the completion of the corresponding study program. A diploma of applied higher education corresponds to a Bachelor's degree awarded by universities in the academic branch. The graduates have the right to continue reading for a Master's degree on the conditions laid down by the university council.

040103 - Qualifications Structure

In Estonia, initial vocational training is provided mostly in VET institutions. VET institutions have the curriculum for every vocation, profession, and occupation they offer. The curriculum is based on professional standard. Prior education and work experience are not accredited in VET institutions yet, but the development strategies plan on creating a validating system for prior learning and working experience. Students, who complete courses at IVET institutions, are awarded a certificate. At present, however these certificates do not represent a formal qualification as such, but merely evidence that the holder has covered a certain program, at a certain level in a given institution. A vocational education institution is deemed to be finished after its curriculum is completed to the full extent, including the taking of a final examination. A graduate may demonstrate his/her professional qualification by taking a professional examination. The taking of a professional examination is optional; a person may take an exam upon submitting a relevant application to an awarding body. This system has been begun to change already, with implementation of an employee competence based qualification system and more thorough assessment of qualifications. There are trends to join for students' qualification examination issued by the Bodies awarding professional qualifications and institutions' issued graduating examinations. The VET institution graduates are entitled to sit for state examinations in general education subjects and can therefore continue studies at a university or at a applied higher education institution.

Graduates from IVET institutions can apply for the accreditation of their professional qualification according to the Professions Act (Kutseseadus). The first professional qualifications to IVET graduating cooks, welders were awarded at 2003. At the end of 2004, there were already 641 graduates from VET institutions, from 22 specialities who had applied to sit for the professional qualification examination (approximately about 10% from the graduates who had the option, i.e. the Body awarding professional qualifications was constituted and has been approved by Professional Council). VET institutions graduates are entitled to sit for professional qualifications examinations on the lowest level of the relevant professional standard. The initial level for professional qualification for "blue-collars" is in most cases described on the I level. For applying qualification certificate on higher (II or III levels), working experience is mandatory. The highest level achievable through IVET system depends

on given speciality, but could not be higher than on the III level. One can apply for professional qualification examination (i.e. professional certificate) on lower qualification levels without previously passing IVET system, but a professional certificate as so, without the IVET certificate, does not grant the assess to further studies but relieves the entry to labour market.

The Estonian Professional Qualifications System (Riiklik kutsekvalifikatsiooni süsteem) was launched in 1997. In 2001 in order to continue developing the system, the Estonian Qualification Authority (Kutsekvalifikatsiooni Sihtasutus) was established. The objectives of the Authority are facilitating the establishment and development of an integrated and organized professional qualifications system, and establishing prerequisites for achieving comparability of the qualifications of Estonian employees as well as acknowledgement of other countries. To achieve these objectives, the Estonian Qualification Authority organizes activities of professional councils as well as the development, supplementing and improvement of the professional standard, and establishment of evaluation criteria; works out methods for developing and implementing the employees' qualifications system, and the qualification evaluation system; organizes performance of tasks given by professional councils, and manages the state register of professions as an authorized processor of the register. The Professional Authority Criteria proposed that all vocational qualifications should meet standard quality criteria in their design and operation and be clearly located in the five-level framework for professional standards. In order to co-ordinate the requirements of society and the labour market, the government establishes vocational councils of employers and employees. The government determines the number, membership, and mandate of these councils. In 2004, there are 15 vocational councils in Estonia.

The Profession Act (Kutseadus) entered into force in 19. Jan 2000. The Act provides the base for the development of the requirements for professional qualifications and the conditions and procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications. The Act does not apply to professions in the case of which other Acts regulate the development of requirements for professional qualifications and the attestation and award of professional qualifications.

Attestation and award of professional qualifications

According to the Professional Act the award of professional qualifications is a process in the course of which a person attests the level of his or her professional competence and a body, which awards professional qualifications, assesses the correspondence thereof to the professional qualifications applied for and issues a professional certificate. The methods of attestation of professional qualifications are written or oral examination, test assignment, attestation on the basis of documents or a combination of methods specified above. Awarding body sets the concrete method and form of attestation for certain professional qualification. Generally, for professions on the lower levels of professional standard the qualification attestation does not demand a formal education certificate as prerequisite. The professional standard in higher levels (IV, V) is setting up the demands of higher education diploma. Professional qualifications are attested on the basis of an application submitted by the person on a voluntary basis. Bodies, which award professional qualifications, shall develop and establish the procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications.

The approval of the professional council shall be obtained for the procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications.

By the Act, the professional qualification is defined as the level of competence required in a given profession, which is recognised on the basis of regulated requirements that have developed historically or internationally. Holding professional qualifications serves as a basis for the pursuit of a given profession.

Professional qualifications are divided into five levels where level I is the lowest and level V is the highest as follows:

- level I – an employee performs his/her duties in similar situations, has acquired the professional knowledge and skills mainly in the course of professional training, may need guidance during work, is responsible for the performance of his or her duties;
- level II – an employee performs his or her duties in different situations, in addition to the knowledge and skills acquired mainly in the course of professional training has experience, works independently, is responsible for the performance of his/her duties;
- level III – an employee performs his/her duties in different and changing situations, in addition to the knowledge and skills acquired mainly in the course of professional training is masterly, ready to pass on his/her professional skills and knowledge, organises the distribution of funds and the work of others and is responsible therefore;
- level IV – an employee performs duties requiring analysis and decision-making in changing situations, has professional knowledge and skills; organises the distribution of funds and the work of others and is responsible therefore;
- level V – an employee performs duties requiring the expansion of knowledge, resolution of problems, application of scientific theories and definitions, analysis, systematisation and improvement of the existing knowledge and teaching in changing situations, has extensive professional knowledge and skills, organises the distribution of funds and the work of others and is responsible therefore.

Not all vocations require the fixation of qualification levels I-V. The professional council shall determine the qualification levels of each specific vocation, including the requirements for education if necessary.

The requirements for the knowledge, skills, experience, values, and personal characteristics arising from professional qualifications are contained in professional standards. Professional councils shall approve professional standards.

Professional council is a co-operative body between confederations of employers/employees of the respective field of economy, professional and vocational associations, and the authorized representatives of the ministry. The objective of the professional council is registering the viewpoints and suggestions of different institutions, and achieving a consensus upon working out, implementing, and developing the systems for employee qualification and award of professional qualifications. The professional council shall appoint experts in the field. These

experts shall map (in work groups) the main vocations of the profession; develop the professional standard, grades of qualification, as well as the scheme for awarding professional qualifications. In an area of activity for which a professional council is not formed, the appropriate ministry designated by the Government of the Republic performs functions related to the award of professional qualifications. The Minister of Education and Research submits the names of the members of a professional council to the Government of the Republic for approval.

Bodies awarding professional qualifications could be legal persons in private law or public law or agencies whose activities include the development of the corresponding professional activity or corresponding vocational, professional, and occupational training by license for the grant of professional qualifications.

Procedure for attestation and award of professional qualifications

Bodies that award professional qualifications shall develop and establish the procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications. The approval of the professional council shall be obtained for the procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications.

Professional standard (Kutsestandard) is a document, which establishes the requirements on knowledge, skills, experience, values, and personal characteristics necessary for the professional qualification. Professional qualification means a level of competence required in the given profession. This level shall be acknowledged based on regulated requirements, or historically or internationally developed requirements. Representatives of over 1,500 different institutions (companies, training providers, professional and vocational associations) have participated in active development of professional standards between 1998 and 2003, in addition to the above, every tenth company in Estonia expressed their opinion upon the opinion poll conducted in order to test the professional standards. At the end of 2004, professional councils have approved about 350 professional qualifications as professional standards.

Professional certificate (Kutsetunnistus) is a document certifying professional qualifications. The Government of the Republic establishes the statute, format, and procedure for the issue of professional certificates. Professional certificates are registered by Qualification Authority and entered in the register of professions. The holder of a professional certificate has the right to use a professional title or an abbreviation thereof associated with the profession.

State supervision

Ministry of Education and Research exercises state supervision over the activities of professional councils upon compliance with the requirements provided for in Profession Act.

Register of professions (Kutseregister)

The register of professions is a state register that contains information on professional councils and professional standards and other requirements established in professions,

professional titles, professional qualifications and the levels thereof, professional certificates and the conditions of and procedure for the attestation and award of professional qualifications and bodies that award professional qualifications.

040104 - Schools/Training Centres/Providers

UPPER SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY (NON TERTIARY) VET (ISCED 3B ja 4B)

The function of vocational education institution is to provide opportunities for students to receive professional, vocational, and occupational training and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and moral values necessary for life and work. VET institutions are divided into public, municipal, and private.

As at the end of 2004, Estonia had a total of 68 VET institutions, of which 47 were public (including 3 special VET institutions), 18 private and 3 municipal.

VET institutions are divided into vocational education centres (kutsehariduskeskused) and sectoral education institutions (spetsialiseerunud kutsekoolid).

A vocational education centre is a study and development centre that:

- provides initial vocational education and training both at the upper secondary and post-secondary (non tertiary) education level and if necessary according to the applied higher education curricula;
- provides training for adults;
- provides training for people with special needs;
- ensures opportunities for students of other schools to receive vocational training and use the practical training facilities of the centre;
- is involved in the development of professions and vocations taught in the centre;
- is involved in methodological development and organises in-service training for teachers.

A sectoral vocational education institution is a VET institution specialising in one or several related fields of study.

Public VET institutions are funded from the state budget. In the case of municipal and private institutions, the study is commissioned by the state only in certain professions and the institutions are self-sufficient.

Formal education acquired within the adult education system provides opportunities for adults to acquire lower and upper secondary general education in upper secondary general schools for adults and on evening courses distance education courses organised by general education schools. Estonia has more than 30 educational institutions providing education for adults.

Vocational training for adults is provided by applied higher education institutions, universities, and vocational education institutions, as well as by professional associations who organise training pursuant to the Private Schools Act

(Erakooliseadus). The role of professional associations is not big in the general education landscape. However, with regard to professional examinations awarding of qualifications, the training organised by a professional association is of great importance.

All regions of Estonia have training centres that provide informal education for adults. These are mainly folk high schools (rahvavälikool), informal education centres, or cultural centres. The most popular courses offered by these centres are courses on art and culture, language courses, and courses on economic and computer studies. Formal education acquired within the adult education system, vocational training, or informal education is also offered by many private schools. Pursuant to the Private Schools Act, all private schools providing training that lasts longer than 120 hours or six months in a year must apply for an education licence from the Ministry of Education and Research.

The Vocational Education Institutions Act prescribes at the state level the requirements for curricula and qualification requirements for teachers. A vocational education institution prepares its own rules for the organisation of studies and internal procedure rules on the basis of which the everyday studies are organised. Within the state commissioned education, the Government commissions from vocational education institutions a certain number of study places which are financed from public funds; however, institutions may provide fee-charging studies if their curricula comply with the requirements.

APPLIED HIGHER EDUCATION (ISCED 5B)

Applied higher education may be acquired in institutions of applied higher education, VET institutions, and universities. Applied higher education is provided both by private and public education institutions.

As at 2004, 9 universities, 25 applied higher education institutions, (including 18 private), 10 VET institutions (including 1 private), provided applied higher education.

The minister of education and research approves the curriculum of an applied higher education institution. The curricula must be accredited. The result of the accreditation may be the following: accredited, not accredited, conditionally accredited (up to two years are allowed to remove the discovered omissions). A positive accreditation decision is not valid for all time; according to law, the curricula of applied higher education institutions must be accredited at least once in every seven years.

Public applied higher education institutions are funded from the state budget. The state also commissions study places from private applied higher education institutions.

040105 - Role Of Social Partners And Enterprises

Social partners are involved in the activities of various working groups and in the preparing of development plans in order to guarantee good cooperation between education and the labour market.

According to the amendment in Vocational Education Institutions Act (Kutseõppeasutuse seadus) in 2004, the number of social partners involved in the work of the supervisory boards of VET institutions was increased. The supervisory board of a VET institution directs the activity of the institution and decides on issues related to the development, assets, and budget of the institution. The supervisory board comprises at least seven members. In the case of a public VET institution, the minister in whose area of government the institution is located forms the supervisory board; in the case of a municipal VET institution, the relevant rural municipality government or city government forms the supervisory board. The supervisory board is formed for a term of three years of the representatives of the ministry in whose area of government the school is located, relevant rural municipality government or city government, local government association, registered associations of employers and employees and professional associations related to the relevant professions or vocations, and regional employment offices of the Labour Market Board. The representatives of registered associations of employers and employees and professional associations related to the relevant professions or vocations must form more than half of the composition of the supervisory board.

At national level, the social partners hold the majority of representatives in the following influential bodies:

The School Network Bureau of the Ministry of Education and Research (Koolivõrgubüüroo - www.hm.ee/kvb/) is a state agency administered by the Ministry of Education and Research, which services the Ministry in connection with the issues of management of basic and upper secondary general schools, VET institutions and applied higher education institutions. The task of the Bureau is to implement the education policy developed by the Ministry at the level of public education institutions, to provide the Ministry with analyses necessary for economical and efficient organisation of the network of state institutions and with assessments and evaluations necessary for making education policy decisions and to ensure the support services necessary for establishment of an optimum environment of operation for institutions.

National Examination and Qualification Centre (Riiklik eksami- ja kvalifikatsioonikeskus - www.ekk.edu.ee) is in division of the Ministry of Education and Research. The mission of the Centre is to provide students, teachers, public general education schools, VET institutions, education managers and the public with information about the level of learning and teaching in educational institutions (incl. VET institutions) and to contribute to the implementation of curricula and the development of the teachers' training system. The Centre is engaged in the substance of education, and its main duties include the preparation and development of national curricula, ensuring the implementation of vocational and general education curricula, counselling in preparation of curricula, development of the system of external evaluation of academic performance and development of the teachers' training system.

Innove (www.innove.ee) The Foundation of Lifelong Learning Development Foundation Innove (until 2004 known as the Estonian Vocational Education Reform Foundation) is a foundation in the field of education. The objective of Innove is to provide support and partnership for development of lifelong learning and vocational education in Estonia.

Pathfinder (Rajaleidja - www.rajaleidja.ee) is a portal which contains information about career planning.

The Estonian Qualification Authority (Kutsekvalifikatsiooni Sihtasutus - www.kutsekoda.ee) was established in August 2001 in order to continue the creation of a applied qualification system initiated by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 1997. The objectives of the activities of the Authority include the promotion of the establishment and development of a uniform and organised applied qualification system and creation of the preconditions for ensuring the comparability of the qualifications of Estonian employees with the qualification of other countries so they can be recognised in other countries.

Estonian Vocational Training Association (Eesti Kutseõppe Edendamise Ühing). The association unites people related to vocational education both from VET institutions and among social partners. The Association has an important role upon suggesting solutions for reorganisation of the VET system.

Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECCI) (Eesti Kaubandus-Tööstuskoda - www.koda.ee) is a non-profit association operating on the basis of voluntary membership. The objectives of the ECCI include the development of entrepreneurship and trade. The ECCI represents the interests of its members upon shaping the Estonian economic policy, participates in making proposals for improvement of legislation to the state agencies and authorities.

040106 - Planning and Forecasting

With regard to state commissioned education, Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium) cooperates with the Ministry of Economy and Communication (Majandus- ja Kommunikatsiooniministeerium) who has prepared a Forecast of the Demand for Labour Force up to 2010 (Tööhõive prognoos aastani 2010). The forecast highlights trend by areas of activity (e.g. in which area more employees are needed in the immediate future and in which the demand for labour force is declining). The forecast of the demand for labour force is also an important source document, which is taken into account when commissioning education by the state. The priority fields of study in applied higher education are technical sciences, computer studies, production, and processing, health care and personal service. In addition, cooperation is tight with professional association who are actively involved in commissioning education.

The curricula of vocational education must comply with professional standards which state what are the required skills and competencies of graduates of certain professions. The curricula of vocational education must be accredited (see also 040104).

ADULT EDUCATION

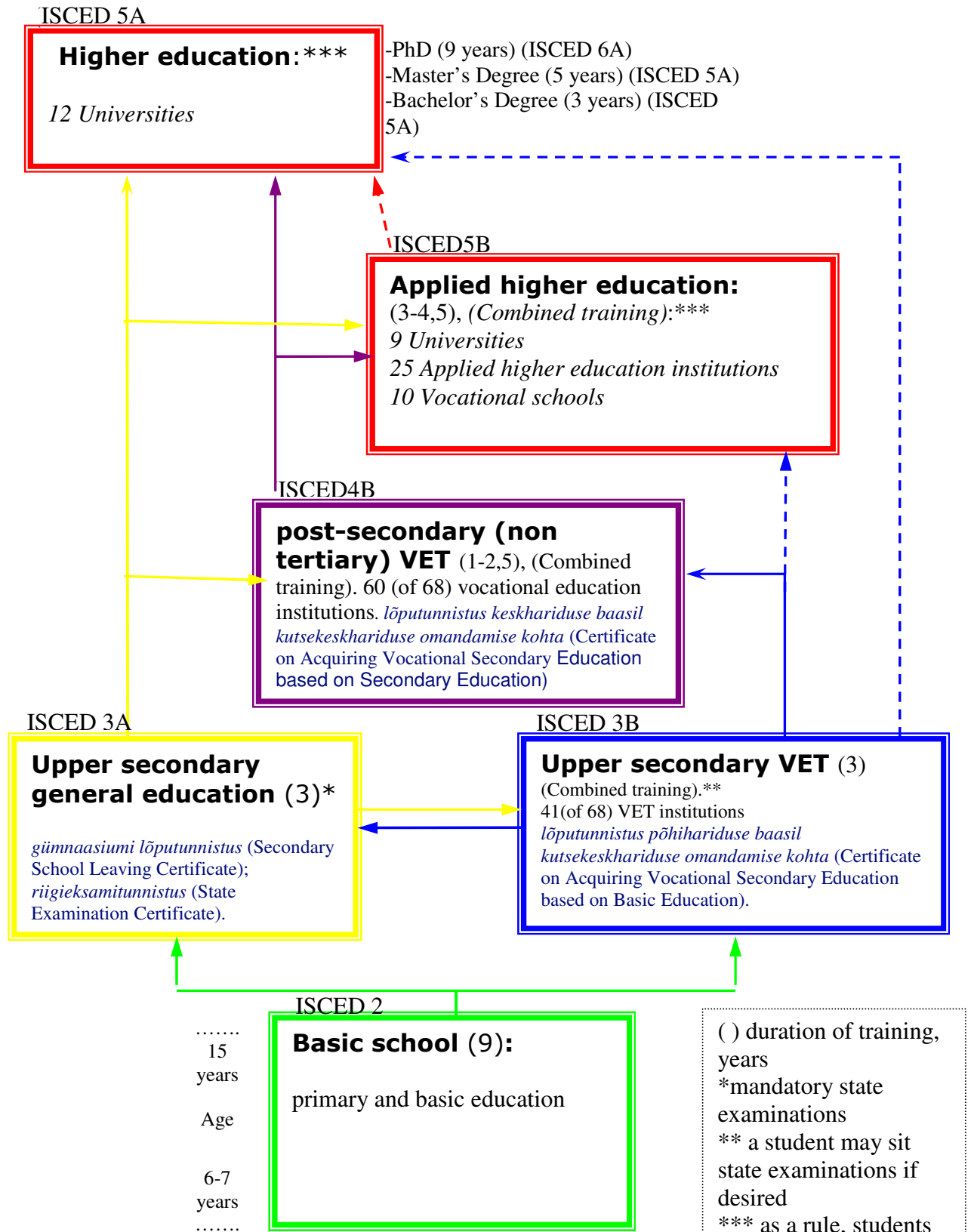
In order to provide adults with an opportunity to acquire upper or post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education outside the daytime form of study, the distant education student places in VET institutions are funded from the state budget. Lower and upper secondary education is provided within the framework of formal education acquired within the adult education system in the form of both evening courses and distant

learning as well as in the form of external study for everybody. The study is funded from the state budget. A certain number of study places for acquiring upper or post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education are funded from the state budget.

Flexible study forms for adults are offered both by applied higher education institutions and universities. Students who acquire higher education in part-time study must pay for it.

040107 - Diagram Of Main Pathways Within IVET

Diagram of main pathways within IVET is provided as a separate graph below. It includes the whole system of education. The education begins from basic school and through vocational education it is possible to reach higher education.



-----▶ A dead-end on the way to acquiring higher education, because the share of general secondary education is at the ISCED 3B level is smaller than in upper secondary general school. A solution is an amendment to be made on 1 September 2005 – an extra year for studying general education subjects necessary to enter a higher education institution..

-----▶ Although people who have acquired applied higher education may put up their candidate for Master's study, it is complicated as the curricula are not always in compliance with each other

0402 - IVET at Lower Secondary Level (Incl. Statistics)

Initial vocational education and training does not exist at lower secondary level.

0403 - IVET at Upper Secondary Level: School-Based and Alternance (Incl. Statistics)

The objective of a upper secondary vocational curriculum, for graduates from basic school (põhikool), is to prepare them for starting work or for continuing at a applied higher education level. It aims at encouraging development of the knowledge, skills, experience and attitudes required to perform independent skilled work, on the assumption that trainees have enough general education and ability to apply this know-how, in both large and small firms, after they have qualified.

Persons who have completed lower secondary education may commence studies in upper secondary vocational education institution. The public and municipal authorities must provide learning opportunities for all young people who wish to commence studies on the basis of lower secondary education.

Students, who acquire upper secondary vocational education are usually in the age range 16-18.

There are following training programmes in upper secondary vocational education:

- Horticulture
- Architecture; architectural urban design and planning
- Computer use
- Computer science
- Audio-visual techniques and media production
- Design
- Building and civil engineering
- Electronics and automation
- Electricity and energy
- Wholesale and retail sales
- Fisheries
- Domestic services
- Hotel, restaurant and catering
- Materials (wood, paper, plastic, glass)
- Mechanics and metal work
- Forestry
- Motor vehicles, ships and aircraft
- Music and performing arts
- Agriculture, forestry and fishery
- Crop and livestock production
- Craft skills

- Textiles, clothes and footwear; leather processing
- Food processing
- Transport services

A compulsory part in all curricula of vocational education institutions is a module of general skills, including the bases of economy, entrepreneurship, labour laws, communication, occupational safety, computer study, and administration.

Estonia has some vocational education institutions which are specialising in certain fields, such as forestry, gardening, maritime industry, agriculture and arts. These vocational education institutions operate on the same basis as all other institutions.

The number of students in upper secondary vocational education has not changed significantly in 1995-2003, and there are more boys acquiring vocational education than girls. This is due to the choice of professions, which are mainly targeted to boys, and the performance of girls in basic school is better so they can continue in an upper secondary general school (gümnaasium).

Reference year 1995/1996								
Age								
	Total	14 (and less)	15	16	17	18	19	20 (and more)
Male	12164	92	1929	3051	3056	2273	986	777
Female	6907	85	1125	1719	1798	1253	499	428
Total	19071	177	3054	4770	4854	3526	1485	1205

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

Reference year 2000/2001								
Age								
	Total	14 (and less)	15	16	17	18	19	20 (and more)
Male	11716	4	403	2287	3137	3013	1858	1014
Female	5998	4	224	1152	1659	1473	860	626
Total	17714	8	627	3439	4796	4486	2718	1640

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

Reference year 2003/2004								
Age								
	Total	14 (and less)	15	16	17	18	19	20 (and more)
Male	11596	0	192	2508	3288	2924	1638	1046
Female	5800	1	154	1196	1635	1346	861	607
Total	17396	1	346	3704	4923	4270	2499	1653

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

040301 - Access Requirements

Everybody who has completed lower secondary education (finished basic school) may start studies in upper secondary VET level. A student may continue his/her study in a different VET institution if there are vacant study places in the same profession, speciality or vocation. If a student transfers to a different profession, speciality, or vocation, he/she must sit all examinations and assessments required in the curriculum if these were not included in the curriculum of the previous school/institution. A student may also continue in an upper secondary general school in order to acquire upper secondary general education.

The general access requirements are partially laid down by Minister of Education and Research Regulation "The Procedure for Admission of Students to a Vocational Education Institution" (Õpilaste kutseõppeasutusse vastuvõtu kord). In addition, a VET institution may set additional access requirements, if necessary.

An admission committee is formed to admit student to the VET institution. The committee must comprise at least five members. The admission committee informs the public about the access requirements and procedure, curriculum, practical training opportunities, documents required for admission and other issues related to the VET institution and study. Pursuant to the above-mentioned regulation, candidates must submit the following documents: a certificate proving the completion of lower secondary education and a health certificate. VET institutions may set additional requirements for candidates.

An average number of persons applying for a study place in upper secondary vocational education (ISCED 3B) was 1.26 in 2003 (1.18 in 2002). 18.5% of applications or 1595 applications were not satisfied. At the same time there were study groups which were not opened because of the lack or small number of applicants. A total of 73 study places were not filled, mainly in the professions related to production and technology (sewing, textile manufacturing, electronics and automation, building), and also in the professions related to service (home economics). This happened mainly in small VET institutions. Larger VET institutions which are located in cities did not have any problems with filling study places and forming study groups.

In 2003 the competition was the tightest in professions related to *information technology (1.71 applications per study place); art (2.45), architecture and building (1.35); food processing and production (1.42) and motor vehicles (1.37)*. Competition was smaller in professions related to *applied art and handicraft; agriculture; textile and clothes industry and material processing*.

04030101 - Promoting Participation

The main mechanism of promoting vocational education is the implementation of more flexible study forms. For example, as from autumn of 2005, vocational education without the subjects of general education will be provided for the students without lower secondary education in some specialities (mainly for those students who have difficulties in acquiring general education subjects).

As from autumn 2005 an extra year of study is offered for those upper secondary vocational education students who wish to study general education subjects in bigger volume in order to continue in a higher education institution. While at the higher education level, popular study forms are part time study and e-study, in vocational education these flexible study forms cannot be used due to the specifics of vocational education.

As concerns social guarantees, as from autumn of 2005, vocational education is supported by a new system of scholarships – about one third of students will receive a scholarship based on their performance. Earlier, scholarships were not paid in upper secondary vocational education.

040302 - Curricula

Currently, Estonia does not have a national curriculum for vocational education institutions. In order to teach a certain profession, a VET institution has to prepare a curriculum in compliance with the relevant professional standards. The National Examination and Qualification Centre approves the curriculum. After experts have reviewed and approved the curriculum, it is given a code number and registered in the register of curricula. In order to amend curricula, a vocational education institution must file a relevant application.

A draft legislation is under way laying down general requirements for the curricula of vocational education institutions. Instruction in VET institutions shall be carried out according to curricula prepared on the basis of the national curricula for vocations, professions and occupations. The national curricula for vocations, professions, and occupations shall determine the functions of vocational, applied and occupational training, the general and level requirements for the commencement of studies and graduation from institutions, the list of compulsory subjects and the total extent of studies. The national curricula for vocations, professions, and occupations shall be prepared on the basis of the applied standards approved by a applied council and the general requirements established for the national curricula for vocations, professions and occupations.

04030201 - Content And Delivery

Approval and registration of a curriculum is strictly regulated. A curriculum must comply with professional standard(s) (the contents of professional study and general skills are determined by a list of competencies) and law and in the future with the national curriculum. Employers in the field or organisations representing the employers, local government or county government and the VET institution supervisory board approve curricula. The headmaster of the institution approves the curriculum and submits it for registration to the register of curricula through the National Examination and Qualification Centre. It is not specified how often a curriculum must be reviewed. However, VET institutions are interested in amending their curricula if necessary and in registering the curricula according to the established procedure.

A vocational education institution prepares its own curriculum and it is not laid down at the state level who the institution involves in the development of the curriculum.

Therefore, the parties involved in the development of curricula differ from institution to institution. Some institutions cooperate with the professional associations of the relevant fields, others rely on their own staff.

04030202 - Assessment

The knowledge, skills and experience of students are evaluated on a five-point scale. The participants are assessed with written, oral, practical exams. The rules and principles of assessment are laid down in the curricula.

In general, assessment is carried out following the completion of a subject; interim assessments and tests are also carried out. In the case of final examinations, the examination board includes experts from outside the institution, e.g. representatives of professional associations and enterprises, etc.

Different assessment systems are used in vocational education and training and applied higher education. In order to guarantee smooth transfer from one study to another, it is planned to unify the vocational education assessment system with that of higher education (see chapter 040702 “Curricula”).

04030203 - Quality Assurance

One of the means of guaranteeing and measuring the quality of study are final examinations. Currently the procedure for organising final examinations is not regulated by the state. However, VET institutions believe that examination boards must be representative and include employers. In the future it is planned to replace final examinations with professional examinations that are supervised by examination boards (all members come from outside the VET institution, single examination procedure).

Issues related to curricula (including the contents of curricula and the quality of study) are mainly the responsibility of the experts of the National Examination and Qualification Centre who have relevant information about the curricula and their development.

At present, VET institutions and their curricula are not accredited but it is planned to implement the accreditation of vocational education.

Quality is also assessed by state supervision that is at present thematic (e.g. completion of the curriculum) and case based (if somebody informs that something is wrong in the VET institution).

Supervision is performed by both local governments and the Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Education and Research. However, supervision is based on single cases rather than carried out on a regular basis. Supervision is performed on the basis of a work plan or if a vocational education institution fails to provide high quality education. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Research has performed supervision mainly in private VET institutions which are financed from public funds. In the course of inspection, the institution’s documents, curriculum, practical training facilities, teachers’ compliance with the qualification requirements are checked. If any

non-compliances are discovered, the institution is given approximately one month to remove the deficiencies. If necessary, the term is extended because it is difficult to bring the teachers' qualifications into line with the requirements just in one month.

040303 - Learning Outcomes

A student, graduating from an upper secondary VET curriculum, gets a Certificate on Acquiring Upper Secondary Vocational Education (Tunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta). On the basis of this certificate, the main jobs are those of a skilled worker, craftsman and service personnel. In addition to the school leaving examinations, a student may sit a professional examination which determines with which qualifications the student's professional skills comply with.

Students who have completed vocational education may continue their studies at the level of higher education. As a rule, they choose an applied study field, few continue in an academic field.

Those who have discontinued vocational education may later continue in an upper secondary general school or a VET institution whereas the subjects they have studied earlier are taken into account.

04030301 - Qualifications/Certification

A graduate, from a VET institution, has the right to take a qualification examination upon graduation. If the graduate passes the examination, s/he will be attributed an applied qualification. An applied qualification certificate proves applied qualification. The owner of an applied qualification certificate has the right to use the name of the vocation or the respective abbreviations. The applied qualification certificates are registered by the issuing organisation and will be inserted in the vocational register according to the rules set by the statute of the vocational register.

A student is considered a graduate from a VET institution if the student has covered the full curriculum, meaning that s/he has acquired all the material knowledge foreseen in the curriculum, has taken all necessary tests and passed all required assessments, practical training and the final paper.

Students who have completed vocational education may continue their studies at the level of higher education. However, as the volume of general subjects is smaller in vocational education institutions, then it is difficult to compete with those who have finished an upper secondary general school. In order to avoid the dead-end in education, as from autumn 2005 the students who have completed upper secondary vocational education may, during an extra year, study the general education subjects necessary for studying in a higher education institution.

04030302 - Progression and Transition (Incl. Statistics)

A large majority of those who complete upper secondary vocational education enter the labour market directly and do not continue studies at higher education level (please see the graph in chapter 0401 illustrating further studies of students in 2003).

There is no comprehensive information available about if and how many students continue working in companies where they completed their practical training. Despite that many VET institutions take interest in their students' lives after they have finished the institution and in general most people do find a job (often not in their profession) or continue studying. In general, people who have completed vocational studies find jobs quite easily; the unemployment rate among them is approximately 11-12%. It is more difficult to find a job in rural areas and areas, which have high unemployment rates.

No study programmes within upper secondary vocational education do provide access to regulated occupations. In fact, very few occupations are subjected to formal regulation and these are primarily related to higher education for the health sector.

There are no specific mechanisms for assisting IVET graduates to enter the labour market, except the general services provided by the employment offices.

Each county has an information and counselling centre. The services provided by the centre are the following:

- Collecting and relaying information on youth; creating information relaying channels (mailing lists, websites, information days, etc.).
- Compiling and relaying information on career planning (introducing study opportunities, organising vocational guidance, etc.).
- Counselling (on psychology, sexual health, health behaviour, etc.)

0404 - Apprenticeship Training (Incl. Statistics)

An apprenticeship project as a pilot project was started in Estonia in 2002 under the EU's Phare programme. On its basis it is planned to develop and implement a country-wide apprenticeship training system. A working-group, including representatives of the state and VET institutions, has been established to develop the system. The first concept was ready by October 2004 by which time negotiations with different parties, including trade unions, started.

The aim of the pilot project was to develop and implement apprenticeship training programmes in order to contribute to the integration of young people with vocational skills into the labour market. More detailed aims included:

- improving the flexibility of the VET system thus enabling young people to have a wider choice of study pathways;
- creating new, additional opportunities to ensure young people are both socially and vocationally ready when they start working life;
- reducing youth unemployment;
- launching the co-operation of trainers and social partners;
- supporting business development, primarily in regions with a high unemployment rates and regions with high economic activity, through higher involvement of adults in training and retraining.

The major target groups are:

- young people who have dropped out of school without lower secondary education;
- young people, with general upper secondary education (üldkeskharidus) but without vocational skills.

The aim was to involve approximately 200 young people towards the end of their training period in the project. As of September 2004, 160 people were participating. Training programmes, developed within the project framework, comply with current vocational standards, take into account already obtained education levels and allow individual approach to the trainee's skills and knowledge. The emphasis, of the training process, is on hands-on training in companies and on experiencing real working processes. The share of hands-on part is around 65%, depending on the sector and speciality. This means that more time is spent in a working environment than in schools which should improve the students' opportunities for starting a full time employment at the end of the training period, either in the companies where they did their training or in other companies.

The apprenticeship training started in May 2004 with the involvement of 7 vocational education institutions and 25 companies. The training period is 60 weeks and will end with qualification examinations in September 2005.

The project operates in the following sectors:

- accommodation and catering services (housekeeping attendant);
- construction (general builder, assembler of buildings);
- timber and furniture industry (machine-tool operator-fitter, joiner, upholsterer, builder of log houses);
- trade and services (cleaner, seller-cashier);
- clothing and textile industry (dressmaker, sewer of footwear uppers);
- electronics (maintenance operator of electrical equipment, installer of security devices);
- metal industry (machine tool operator, assembly fitter, welder);
- plastics industry (operator of plastics industry).

Absolute number of participants

	Reference year 2004							
	Age							
	Total	14 (and less)	15	16	17	18	19	20 (and more)
Male	124	0	2	14	34	17	14	43
Female	53	0		10	11	6	7	19
Total	177	0	2	24	45	23	21	62

Source: VET institutions participating in the project

More men than women participated in the Apprenticeship project, mainly due to the professions included in the project.

0405 - Other Youth Programmes and Alternative Pathways (Incl. Statistics)

In Estonia 100-1400 young people drop out of basic school every year. Most of them are deleted from the lists of students after they reach the minimum school-leaving age. At least two thirds of them are boys. For various reasons, these students have lost motivation, have no habit to study and discipline problems which makes it difficult to continue in the ordinary education system.

The project "A New Opportunity" (Uus võimalus) is offered in Estonia by Vana-Vigala Tehnika- ja Teeninduskool (Vana-Vigala School of Technology and Services). The project started in 2004. Patterned after similar American schools, a training model with elements of military discipline and strict internal rules is offered to 17 years old and older dropouts from basic school. The model enables young people to continue lower secondary education and acquire basic professional skills in the form of preliminary vocational education.

In order to guarantee order and discipline, study groups have military internal rules, which include active sports, cultural and other recreational activity. Students must adhere to half-military rules but they do not wear uniforms. Fully military order is used only if the students participate in a military event.

Currently, 43 students are involved in the project. 18 of them are 8th year students (2 girls) and 25 are 9th year students (including 5 girls).

Seven students have dropped out from the project; new students replaced them.

On 1 September 2004, 21 8th year students and 25 9th year students started their studies within the framework of the project.

It was planned to admit 40 students but as there were more applicants, the groups were made bigger. The students are from 17 to 19 years old.

Four teachers instruct the students. Two of the teachers are also class teachers.

040501 - Access Requirements

Requirements for an applicant for participating in the project "A New Opportunity" are defined by school and are following:

- Estonian;
- Aged 15-19;
- Has completed 8 years in a basic school or dropped out from the 9th form; is healthy; complies with the health requirements for a person eligible to be drafted (determined on the basis of a decision of the medical committee of a national defence department);

- May have committed an offence but the court has not imposed on him the provisions of sections 73-75 of the Penal Code (is not on probation or subjected to supervision of conduct);
- Is neither physically nor mentally addicted to narcotic substances (may have a history of drug use);
- Participates in the project voluntarily and with the consent of his parents.

040502 - Curricula

Study is carried out in cooperation between the vocational education institution and the local basic school. Lower secondary education is acquired in the basic school, 16 hours in a week in the 8th year (distant learning curriculum) and 24 hours in a week in the 9th year (evening courses curriculum).

The 8th year students acquire within preliminary vocational education basic skills in cooking, timberwork, and car repair. 9th year students learn information technology and car painting. Education and living is organised on the basis of internal rules which are of half military nature.

The rules determine a schedule of the day and evening and weekend activities by weekdays.

Monday – participation in hobby groups;

Tuesday- cleaning of the dormitory;

Wednesday- sports;

Thursday- military and patriotic education;

The schedule also determines time for homework and leisure time.

The rules are adjusted continuously according to the added experience.

040503 - Learning Outcomes

A student gets a Certificate on Acquiring Upper Secondary Vocational Education (Tunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta). On the basis of this certificate the student may continue his/her studies at an applied higher education institution or in another vocational education institution on the basis of a post-secondary curriculum or to enter the labour market. The students begin working as skilled workers or craftsmen or as service personnel.

0406 - Vocational Education and Training at Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary) Level (Incl. Statistics)

60 out of the 68 VET institutions offer post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education and training. The objective of a post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational curriculum is to prepare workers for complicated skilled work, service personnel, and

clerks. It should provide the student with knowledge, skills, experiences and attitudes for performing independent, complicated skilled work, assuming upper secondary-general education background and maturity, ability to understand technological processes and analysis at graduation.

After acquiring post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education it is possible to continue studies in some other VET institution, in applied higher education institution or university.

The share of girls acquiring post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education is bigger than the share of boys mainly due to the nature of professions offered (service, social care). The number of students has increased mainly on the account of private vocational education institutions.

Absolute number of participants

1995/1996									
Age									
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22-25	26-29	30-...
Male	575	6	200	148	91	48	42	20	20
Female	1965	23	695	615	283	143	146	42	18
Total	2540	29	763	763	374	191	188	62	38

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

2000/2001												
Age												
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26-29	30-...
Male	4322	19	569	807	676	438	256	213	161	131	486	566
Female	7495	30	978	1608	1177	649	447	339	238	232	602	1195
Total	11817	49	1547	2415	1853	1087	703	552	399	363	1088	1761

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

2003/2004												
Age												
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26-29	30-...
Male	4053	3	276	754	756	509	284	173	128	71	451	648
Female	6734	7	491	1341	1071	652	378	224	175	147	555	1693
Total	10787	10	767	2095	1827	1161	662	397	303	218	1006	2341

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

040601 - Access Requirements

Persons, who have completed upper secondary general education, or upper secondary vocational education, may commence studies in a VET institution that offers post-

secondary (non tertiary) VET curriculum. The people, who have not previously acquired vocational education, are preferred at admittance.

In 2003, the admission competition at the post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education (ISCED 4B) was 1.4 applicants per study place (1.56 in 2002). 27% (or 2,252) applicants were not admitted (3,372 in 2002). As a rule, after finishing upper secondary education, people submit applications to several educational institutions, the number of those not admitted cannot be estimated correctly. There is no information about how many applicants were actually not admitted and how many chose another educational institution. The competition was the greatest in the following study fields: *arts* (3.19); *security* (1.87); *environmental protection* (1.78); *agriculture, forestry and fishery* (1.69); this can be explained by a relatively small number of students admitted to those specialities. Besides, for example in agriculture, the greatest competition was in the specialities of gardening and landscape architecture, not the traditional specialities. In *technical study fields* and those related to *production and processing* (mainly the specialities related to clothes and textile industry) the competition was more or less similar – 1.2 and 1.1 applicants per study place.

In general, every applicant is admitted to a vocational education institution. Competition is intense in some professions because students apply for several professions simultaneously.

040602 - Curricula

The length of studies, to acquire post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational secondary education, is 1-2 years, i.e. 40-100 study weeks of which the vocation, profession and occupation related studies (incl. practical training) must account for at least 85% and students shall complete at least 6 weeks of study of general educational subjects.

Currently, Estonia does not have a national curriculum for vocational education institutions. In order to teach a certain profession, a VET institution has to prepare a curriculum in compliance with the relevant professional standards (please see chapter 040302 for additional information about curriculum). The National Examination and Qualification Centre approve the curriculum.

There are following mechanisms regulating quality assurance in VET institutions like final examinations and state supervision (please see chapter 04030203 for more information). The responsible body for assuring quality of curriculum is National Examination and Qualification Centre.

The curriculum comprises different modules: general, basic, and selective modules. The modules of basic skills are a set of knowledge and skills necessary for acting in a certain vocation or profession. The part of general subjects includes labour law (rights of employees in labour relations) computer study, foreign languages (mainly English, but also French, Finnish, and Russian), introduction to entrepreneurship, communication psychology, etc. Within the framework of selective modules, students may support or extend their qualifications or acquire an additional qualification.

The following fields of training can be studied only at post-secondary (non tertiary) level: management and administration, economy, accounting and taxation, hair and beauty services.

040603 - Learning Outcomes

A student is considered a graduate from a VET institution if s/he has covered the full curriculum, meaning that s/he has acquired all the material foreseen in the curriculum, has taken all necessary tests and passed all required assessments, practical training and the final paper.

Passing state general education examinations are not compulsory. But it is necessary if the student wishes to continue studies in applied higher education study or Bachelor's study, in an institution of applied higher education or university that require passing these examinations. These examinations need to be taken and they must be passed on the same grounds as graduates of general secondary schools pass them. The state examinations (incl. those of upper secondary general education) do not replace any VET institution examinations and vice versa.

A student, who graduates from a VET institution from a post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational education curriculum gets a Certificate on Acquiring Post-Secondary Vocational Education. The certificates do not give an access to regulated jobs (except maritime).

0407 - Vocational Education and Training At Tertiary Level (Incl. Statistics)

In 2004 there were 9 universities 25 applied higher education institutions (18 private, 7 public), 10 vocational education institutions (kutseõppeasutus) (9 public, 1 private) offering applied higher education programmes (ISCED 5B) in Estonia. The system is binary, consisting of an academic branch and a applied higher education branch.

Since 2002/2003, applied higher education studies have developed from vocational higher education studies and diploma studies. The nominal length of both these studies was 3 to 4 years and they differed in their requirements for teaching staff and the scope of work-place training. This transition is meant to contribute towards clarity and simplicity.

According to the Standard of the Higher Education (Kõrgharidusstandard), during applied higher education study a student acquires the competence necessary for an employment in a particular profession and can continue his or her studies towards a Master's degree.

The academic year is divided into two semesters: autumn and spring, beginning in September and ending in June. As a rule, it includes 40 weeks of lectures, seminars, work-place training, and independent work and an examination period. Normally, full-time studies consist of approximately 50% of hours spent at the institutions (16-26 hours per week) and 50% of independent work, but it varies depending on the individual choice of subjects per term.

The national system of credit points calculates credits (ainepunkt, or AP) based on the workload of a student. One credit corresponds to 40 hours or one week (5 x 8 = 40h) of studies performed by a student. Student work input includes lectures, seminars, workplace training, independent study and research, or other assignments. A full transfer to the European Credit Transfer System, as the national credit system, will be completed by 1 September 2006.

The number of female students has increased during the 1995-2004 years, probably due to the new choices on offer (health care and welfare, service, etc.). The overall number of students has grown firstly because the number of education institutions has been increased and secondly, the average duration of studies is increasing because in order to be competitive in the labour market, people need to be better educated.

(Absolute number of participants)

Reference year: 1995/1996									
Age									
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22-25	26-29	30-...
Male	5345	48	813	1019	877	695	1212	372	309
Female	8492	132	1546	1759	1539	967	1573	481	495
Total	13837	180	2359	2778	2416	1662	2785	853	804

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

Reference year: 2000/2001												
Age												
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26-29	30-...
Male	8582	17	735	1134	1259	1036	761	592	464	356	1075	1153
Female	15518	50	1525	1975	2024	1764	1175	781	689	587	2039	2909
Total	24100	67	2260	3109	3283	2800	1936	1373	1153	943	3114	4062

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

Reference year: 2003/2004												
Age												
	Total	...-17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26-29	30-...
Male	9049	7	364	1037	1320	1303	1067	735	514	394	1025	1283
Female	15352	7	623	1666	2000	1922	1264	760	587	502	1799	4222
Total	24401	14	987	2703	3320	3225	2331	1495	1101	896	2824	5505

Source: Estonian National Observatory, Foundation INNOVE.

040701 - Access Requirements

According to the Estonian legislation for admission to higher education institutions there are general and specific requirements giving access to higher education. The general requirements are approved by the Ministry of Education and Research

(Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium) and are binding on all higher education institutions and study programmes.

The general admission requirement for higher education studies is the Upper Secondary General School Leaving Certificate (gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus) or a corresponding recognised qualification attesting the completion of upper secondary level education. The Upper Secondary General School Leaving is awarded after 12 years of study, including 9 years of basic (primary+lower secondary) education and 3 years of upper secondary general education.

Upper secondary general education can also be obtained at the vocational education institution (kutseõppeasutus) combined with vocational education. Until 1997 the students graduated with a Leaving Certificate on Upper Secondary and Vocational Education (lõputunnistus kutse- ja keskhariduse omandamise kohta). After the adoption of the new Vocational Education Institution Act (Kutseõppeasutuse seadus, 1998), those who have finished basic school and completed the program leading to upper secondary vocational education will graduate with a Certificate on Acquiring Upper Secondary Vocational Education (lõputunnistus põhihariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta).

The post-secondary (non tertiary) vocational certificate, Certificate on Acquiring Post-Secondary (non tertiary) Vocational Education (lõputunnistus keskerihariduse kohta) gives also access to higher education. Until 1995 the name of the post-secondary VET institution leaving qualification was a diploma (diplom). After the adoption of the new Vocational Education Institution Act (1998), those who complete the post-secondary vocational program will graduate with a Certificate on Acquiring Post-Secondary (non tertiary) Vocational Education (lõputunnistus keskhariduse baasil kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta).

Generally, in admission to higher education both the State Examination Certificate (riigieksamitunnistus) and the upper secondary general school/vocational institution leaving certificate are required.

There is a selection procedure for most higher education institutions and programmes. The most important selection criterion is the results of state examinations (riigieksamid). The specific requirements are set by the higher education institutions and depend on the chosen field of study. Specific requirements may include a number of entrance examinations, an interview or a certain upper secondary school achievement standard based on the State Examinations Certificate (riigieksamitunnistus) and on the upper secondary level school-leaving certificate – (gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus) or the corresponding certificates from vocational institutions.

Entrance examinations are most commonly set by faculties and approved by the boards of universities (ülikool) or by applied higher education institutions (rakenduskõrgkool). The required subjects are usually those relevant to the course of study. The basis for the admission decision is usually a combination of state examination results of general subjects and entrance examination results in the subject relevant to the course of study and may include aptitude tests.

The higher education institution administers admission to the higher education study programmes. The candidates apply directly to the higher education institution. The candidate can apply for admission to different higher education institutions and to different fields of study at the same institution. The higher education institution determines the number of study fields that can be applied to at the same time. The applicant is required to state his/her first, second, etc. choice when submitting the application.

At the state level, the number of study places is controlled through state-commissioned education that assigns a certain number of study places to each vocational education institution. At the same time, fee-charging study places form about one half of all study places. This means that everybody who can pay for their studies, can acquire higher education. In order to improve the situation, the stricter quality requirements were introduced (e.g. accreditation of curricula).

040702 - Curricula

Applied higher education is the first stage of higher education, established from the admission of the academic year of 2002/2003, which aims at acquiring the competencies necessary for work in a certain profession or further study at the Master's level.

All study programmes are to be registered in the Curriculum Register (Õppekavade register) of the Ministry of Education and Research (Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium).

The nominal length of study is 3-4.5 years. The study load is from 120 to 160 credit points. During one academic year, a student has to collect 40 credit points (20 in a semester). Upon implementation of the European credit transfer system, the number of credit points to be collected in order to complete a curriculum will be from 180 to 240. The European Credit Transfer System will be implemented by 1 September 2006 at the latest. Practical training forms at least 30% of the study load. Practical training in a working environment under the supervision of a supervisor forms at least 50% of the total practical training.

Students may study full time or part-time on the basis of the curricula of the applied higher education institutions. Part-time studies provide for working people an opportunity to study and acquire higher education.

All courses taught at higher education institutions must end with an examination (eksam) or a pass/fail assessment (arvestus).

In the institutional structure of higher education assessment the leading role is performed by the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council - HEQAC (Kõrghariduse hindamise nõukogu) with its final decision-making powers and the Higher Education Accreditation Centre – HEAC (Kõrghariduse Akrediteerimiskeskus) that organises accreditation procedures. The HEQAC was founded by the Government in 1995 and operates under the administrative jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Research. The main activities of the HEQAC include the accreditation of universities and other educational institutions that provide higher education, the accreditation of their study programmes, making accreditation

decisions public, elaborating, and giving recommendations on the basis of accreditation decisions.

An active assessment of study programmes (accreditation) began after the foundation of the HEAC in 1997.

There are three accreditation categories:

- Accredited. Indicates that the higher education institution or the study program meets the set of requirements. The decision may also include recommendations for eliminating minor shortcomings. Accreditation is valid for seven years from the date of decision.
- Conditionally accredited. Indicates that the institution or the study program under review has major shortcomings which need to be eliminated or addressed. In this case accreditation will be in force for two years from the date of the decision. (According to the Amendment of the University Act (Ülikooliseadus) in 2003, the “conditionally accredited” decision is in force for three years) At the end of this period re-accreditation is relevant. Credentials issued two years before the positive accreditation decision are also considered to be state recognised.
- Not accredited. Indicates that the institution or the study program has serious shortcomings, which jeopardize the quality of the graduates’ knowledge and skills.

A positive accreditation decision that can be full accreditation or conditional accreditation shall be in force for 7 or 3 years, respectively.

In case of a negative accreditation decision (“Not Accredited”) the institution or the study program will stop admission and instruction according to the not-accredited study program, and should ensure the transfer of students to another program or higher education institution in co-operation with the Ministry of Higher Education and Research.

040703 - Learning Outcomes

As both applied higher education and Bachelor’s study are defined as the first level higher education, those who have completed applied higher education, may not continue in Bachelor’s study free of charge (except working teachers). If people want to continue studying they have to pay for it themselves.

The most popular specialities are the so-called soft specialities (IT, law, and economy). However, the number of graduates from those specialities is big and it is difficult to find a job. The state supports specialities that are more technical and the demand for specialists in these specialities is big in the labour market.

Applied higher education study ends with final examinations or with defending a final paper. In applied higher education, the final exam or final paper forms at least 2 credits of the total study load.

A person who has acquired professional higher education is awarded an applied higher education diploma certifying the completion of the curriculum together with an academic report and an academic report in English (diploma supplement).

A person who has acquired professional higher education has the right to continue his or her studies in Master's study under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure established by the board of the educational institution. Students who have completed applied higher education, enter the labour market as technicians, middle specialists or office personnel.

0408 - Bibliographical Reference and Web Sites

Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium [Ministry of Education and Research – education – higher education]: <http://www.hm.ee>

Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium [Ministry of Education and Research – education – vocational education]: <http://www.hm.ee>

Kutseõppeasutuse seadus [Vocational Education Institutions Act] (RT I 1998, 64/65, 1007) <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/ert/act.jsp?id=816782>

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