

# Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems

## Country Report: Estonia<sup>1</sup>

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This report is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: **Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET**, prepared by the **Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission**. This report is not intended as an official view. But rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET systems in Europe.



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## **Theme 1: Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon**

### **1. Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET)**

#### **a) Raising the status of IVET**

Different strategies are under development as a part of the Estonian VET Development Plan for the years 2005-2008 for raising status and attractiveness and improving flexibility of VET.

The main principle of raising the status and attractiveness of VET is the quality improvement of initial vocational education and training which includes updating the infrastructure, technologies, teacher training, and developing curricula. Prioritized issues are also the involvement of employers and other social partners into the development of VET, both on national and local (school) level.

In the following the main principles for raising the status of initial VET (IVET) are sketched and commented regarding the improvements that have been achieved so far:

*Development of VET system and framework curricula design by the year 2008 – creating a common basis at national level to synchronize the main content of VET (enables to raise VET quality and increase the mobility of students at national level) (Action Plan... 2004:1) .*

Due to fragile and weak institutional structures at national level in the 1990s national curricula for VET have been lacking so far, although stipulated as a prerequisite by the Vocational Education Institutions Act in 1998. Much of the progress in VET has been achieved in the area of *modernisation of curricula*, which in Estonia was the main vehicle of reform. Modular curricula in VET were developed and implemented in a number of pilot schools with PHARE support between 1994 and 1998 and as compared to other transition countries the spin-off of the pilot school approach has been remarkable. In 2001, already all school programmes were modular. The VET curriculum reform approach applied in Estonia might be called the “labour market training model”, as it is a modular and competence-based system (based on the Irish experience), designed to be flexible and adaptable and can embrace initial training for young people as well as continuing training for adults and unemployed (Country Monograph 2003:78).

*Increasing the efficiency of practical training in VET (objectives practice, supervisors' training, evaluation, announcement of practical training placements etc) (Action Plan... 2004:1).*

A very important challenge and future development direction is the necessary expansion of work placements and practical training tied to the school programme. There has been no national system for organising practical training in enterprises developed so far and practical training facilities are not offered any substantial support. So far individual VET institutions have established either formal or informal agreements with local employers concerning the provision of in-company practicing opportunities both for students and teachers. Despite successful single initiatives, most VET institutions experience ongoing difficulties in finding quality placement training opportunities, where the content of the practical training is matching the off-the-job inputs<sup>2</sup>. (Country Monograph 2003:81)

*Improvement of cooperation with employers, involving employers in VET schools management and development (Amendment in Vocational Educational Institutions Act, that stipulates majority of places in VET School management to employers) (Action Plan... 2004:1).*

Apart from involvement in Vocational Councils, employers are also participating in the examination committees of VET school examinations and are directly involved with the Ministry of Education in the annual Student Course Admissions planning process. Social partners, as members of VET school boards, need to participate much more actively in leading the changes in schools and the commitment of employers and private enterprises needs to be enhanced in particular with regard to dialogue with VET institutions, as well as their role in curricula development and staff training. (Country Monograph 2003: 80-81).

*VET curricula should be based on VET standards (national VET qualification system); it is planned to merge VET school graduation with taking vocational examination (Action Plan 2004:2).*

At present there is *no formal system of VET qualifications* in place in Estonia, the graduation certificate does not attribute vocational qualifications, but confirms only that a certain programme has been covered at a certain level in a certain VET school. However, as of 2002/2003 first competence-based qualification exams were piloted within the framework of national system. As from the school year 2003/2004 the graduates from VET schools can undertake competence-based vocational qualifications exams on a voluntary basis financed by the Ministry of Education and Research, in case combined with VET school graduation exams. It is planned to develop a system that combines the school graduation exams and competence based qualification exams where appropriate and stipulated by the vocational qualification levels. The concept of the *new Estonian VET standard* (agreed with stakeholders and social partners) is based on three distinct and interrelated elements: 1) National vocational qualification standard, prepared by working groups of the Vocational Councils and approved by the councils and Ministry of Social

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Affairs (MoSA). 2) National Curricula, based on the approved vocational standard, prepared by educational experts and approved by the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER). 3) National assessment standard, based on the vocational standard and approved by the newly created Estonian Qualifications Authority. (Country Monograph 2003: 72-73).

*To start designing common VET quality Assurance System in 2005 (accreditation of VET insititutions) (Action Plan... 2004:3)*

The aim is to integrate a national monitoring system, which is under renewing process, and other monitoring tools in VET system into *one system of quality assurance of VET*.

*Developing financial principles of VET and increasing one student-learning place costs 1.5 times since September 2005 (Action Plan...2004:6).*

The situation today where costs for student learning places in general education and in VET are practically equal, is inadmissible. Financing in VET system is based on the cost of per capita. The school budget is calculated according to the following formula: the basic costs of the learning place coefficient/factor per vocation and the number of students. According to the vocational Education Act the state has the obligation to finance vocational secondary education programs after basic school in all schools regardless of the legal form.

#### ***b) Improving the attractiveness of IVET***

There are no special advertising strategies developed in VET in Estonia – high quality of VET would be the best option for increasing the status and attractiveness of VET.

A lot of attention is paid on VET, both in school level as well as national level by employers and by journalists; the positive events in VET are consciously highlighted. The Action plan for improving the image of VET during the following years includes following activities:

- Announcing target groups about possibilities offered by Structural Funds (applying procedures, aims, deadlines)
- Communication plan for arranging school networks (visits for journalists to successful VET schools and regional training centres, to demonstrate modern study complexes)
- State ordered student places of VET in cooperation with representatives of employers: the vocational education division in the Ministry of Education and Research works out the principles of state ordered student places, announces the determination of state order and arranges press conferences when agreements have been achieved
- Career guidance and counselling: Television broadcast where professionals talk about their professions and success stories (“Ametilood”).
- National Employee Qualification System: introducing qualification system, the actions of Estonian Qualification Authority and vocational examinations (vocation examinations). Together with vocational

examinations it is possible to introduce different VET specialities. (Improving image... 2004).

The Ministry of Education and Research is currently supporting the following activities directed to improving the image of VET:

- Television show named “Ametilood” where professionals talk about their professions. In this show the employees of different specialties (both of popular and not so popular) in VET schools are positively highlighted.
- In cooperation with the Foundation of Vocational Education and Training Reform and with the PR company Ots & Partners under the project PHARE 2000 a PR initiative took place. The target groups were potential VET students, parents, journalists and people work in educational sector.
- 2 radio broadcasts that cover different education-related topics. (Radio Kuku broadcast named “Recess” (“Vahetund”), Radio Estonia – “Spectrum”. (VET Overview... 2003:11).
- Promoting VET Schools Quality Award Model as the mean of improving school management – this has had an important impact on creating a positive image of VET schools (pilot project started and financed under project PHARE 2000; currently the process is financed by the Ministry of Education and Research). In 2004 16 schools have already participated in the mentioned training, 11 have submitted the application. Some schools also participate in the competition of National Quality Award that is generally directed to business organisations.
- Arrangement of Vocation skills competitions and promoting the participation of these competitions. These competitions are led by VET schools and supported by Ministry of Education and Research. Some schools also participate in international vocational competitions.

### ***c) Increasing the flexibility of IVET***

The innovations below concerned with increasing the flexibility of IVET anticipate the amendment in Vocational Educational Institutions Act that will be prepared in autumn 2004 and the aim is to apply these changes by September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

- VET program after basic school without secondary education
- Secondary VET with transition year preparing for state examinations and entering to higher education level
- Vocational training programmes for people who have not completed basic education
- Piloting and introducing apprenticeship system at national level (PHARE 2002 project in West-Estonia islands, East-Estonia and South-Estonia)
- Enabling pre-vocational education in basic school and gymnasium

- Developing and ensuring VET learning opportunities for pupils with special needs

**d) *Main barriers to achieving these objectives***

The main principle for preparing all above-mentioned VET changes is initiating a wide discussion between different divisions and departments of the Ministry of Education and Research, Employers' representatives and other social partners.

A lot of big time-consuming initiatives are activated – studying the experiences of different countries, clarification, working out concepts takes a lot of time. The main problem is how to transform these assignments fast into conditions of limited resources (material, human). The different opinions of different political parties in VET strategies and limited resources in public sector can also be considered as a barrier.

**2. *Reducing the number of early school leavers***

**a) *School leavers at the earliest opportunity and with few or no recognised qualifications***

The drop-out rate in VET generally is up to 19% in session 2002/2003. There are many of those who leave VET program after basic school (18% in session 2002/2003). The main reason for leaving the school is pupils' incapacity or unwillingness to attain general education (currently in VET program after basic school the secondary education is compulsory – the possibility to gain VET education without secondary education is planned to enable by Sept 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005).

The drop out rate is also high in VET program after gymnasium (21% in session 2002/2003). The main reason for leaving vocational secondary education is continuing studies in higher education level. (A lot of pupils enter to VET school after gymnasium because they have not entered the university. These students usually plan to try again to enter to university next year).

The new PHARE 2002 economic and social cohesion program has been implemented in 2004-2005 aiming to develop and introduce work-linked training programs and networks in three target regions – North-East Estonia, South-Estonia and Islands. This program is mainly addressed to the problems of early school leavers and drop-outs from the educational system by offering them specific training directly targeted to the needs of local industry. This project's aim is to work out apprenticeship training programs to help integrate the young people without vocational skills to the labour market. This project will also diversify the forms of vocational training, it will improve the cooperation between VET schools and enterprises, and will increase quantity of work-linked training. Two main target groups will benefit from this pilot project: 1) early school leavers/school dropouts who represent the most socially excluded within abovementioned regions; 2) young people with general secondary education but without vocational qualifications who, according to Estonian Labour Market Board statistics, find it difficult to find a job because of the specific technical skills required by employers and prior work experience. The project is implemented in cooperation with VET schools (7) and enterprises (25). Course curricula and teaching materials will be developed that are based on existing vocational standards and that will consider the educational level of participants in training. The main difference

between the project and of existing pre-vocational programs is that the *result is real qualification*. The emphasis of the learning process is on practical training in enterprise that enables to experience real work processes. The part of practical training is up to 65% depending on field and speciality. It is planned to give the possibility of the practical training to 200 young people. The final result of the whole process would be giving work up to 70% of the participants in the project (Project Fiche 2002).

**b) School leavers of formal education with low levels of basic skills at the age of 15?**

There is a significant risk group of children (mainly boys, grades 5-8 in basic school) who either ignore compulsory school attendance or leave the system early (estimated up to 3% of the total number of compulsory school attendants). Their prospects for obtaining a stable job are minimal and often other social problems follow (crime, drug addiction). This is partly linked to the problem of registration for school attendance (mainly in Tallinn), which has not yet been fully resolved.

In June 2001 through the amendment to the Vocational Education Institutions Act access to basic (preliminary) vocational education has been opened for young people (up to 25 years of age) who have not completed basic education (annually more than 1300 pupils, with a substantial cumulative effect). This risk group can now acquire basic education in parallel to vocational education. In 2001 about 140 young people (in 7 VET schools, on average 20 students per school) without basic education had the opportunity to receive this form of basic vocational training, but this is probably not enough, since the age group 17-25 currently includes more than 20.000 people without basic education. The drop out rate in secondary general education is 7% (Monograph 2003:86).

Action Plan for Developing Estonian VET System in 2001-2004 foresees to develop and implement pre-vocational education programs for young people without basic education. In 2003/2004 161 young people who are beyond the compulsory education age and 45 within the age group of compulsory education were financed by the state on a pilot basis. The system still needs to be developed.

There are a lot of good local initiatives – people without basic education will study according to the prevocational curricula in VET schools being in the list of basic school pupils in the same time and continuing to acquire basic education. The process as a whole is not completely regulated, it is being worked out at the moment. In the future the main option for people without basic education is to attain vocational qualification in apprenticeship training.

According to the action plan for integration of pupils dropped out from basic school to the educational system following actions are planned:

- Gathering the information about people without basic education from Local Government, Ministry of Social Affairs and from Employment Office
- Analysis of the gathered data by region, age group etc

- Gathering statistical data about those who study in adults Gymnasiums at least twice a year to optimise the funding of these gymnasiums.
- Schools should develop flexible and diverse learning opportunities and forms in order to suit the needs of the learners incl. night classes, distance (incl. e-learning), external studies, opportunities to take single subjects and individually tailored curricula.
- Introducing a change in the financing schemes of night and distance learning programs after basic school.
- The Ministry of Social Affairs should develop a package of social guarantees for adult learners.
- Announce Employment Office about prevocational training possibilities
- Propagate good experience.
- Raising the image of adult gymnasiums.

### **3. Increasing VET at tertiary level**

The Estonian higher education system is double-tracked and consists of universities (= academic education) and institutions of professional higher education (= tertiary level in VET). Some vocational institutions also have a right to offer professional higher education programs. There have been following innovations in VET tertiary level lately:

*Taking into account prior experiences.* Speaking about professional higher education it is important that people who have obtained secondary vocational education have the right to access studies as well. Acquisition of vocational education must not be a dead end. In 2003 the MoER legalized the right of institutions of higher education to take into account prior study results and work experience (up to 50% of the content of curricula). This means the possibility was created to connect the curricula of VET education with higher education curricula so that when continuing studies at higher education level repeating already acquired knowledge is avoided. In several areas, for instance, nursing and midwife training, the consideration of earlier studies and work experience has been applied very well. Also the cooperation between different training institutions has become more intensive.

*Description of competencies.* Descriptions of programs through credit points or levels of education that allow for access is not sufficient. It is necessary to switch over to the description of competencies acquired by the completion of studies, because compared to the length of the program it is more important to know which competencies, knowledge and skills are held by the particular graduate. Likewise, upon development of curricula, institutions of higher education have to pay more attention to the goals of the curriculum so that prospective students would know what competencies they will get upon passing it. At latest by 2006 all higher education institutions need to apply common European credit points system. The current credit points system also enables movements between higher education institutions in national and international level and describes and takes into account competencies.

*Correspondence to labour market needs.* The basis for state commissioned student places is state training order. Indirectly labour market is regulating the training needs. On state level regulation the connection between studies and future job/work is not synchronized – it means that those who have studied in state commissioned student places can start working in some other speciality and in some other country. In accreditation of curricula it is obligatory for higher education institutions that the curricula is in accordance with existing vocational standard for this speciality. Also self-assessment is expected from higher education institutions during accreditation processes while it has become important to analyse/survey where the graduates start to work, also asking feedback from them. Based on the feedback curricula will be adjusted to the changed needs in labour market. Higher education institutions provide career consultation and counselling through counselling centres, such services often also act as a bridge between employers and students. Companies are invited to introduce their enterprises to students, lectures and seminars are organised, with students being invited to join a job-seekers database.

#### **4. Incentives for employees to update knowledge & skills**

##### **a) Initiatives and measures of government**

In 1997, the Government of the Republic of Estonia took the decision to create a qualification system for the Estonian employees, and allocated financial resources from the state budget for this purpose. In 2000, the parliament of Estonia passed the Professions Act. Pursuant to the Professions Act, the Estonian Qualifications Authority (EQA) was established in 2001 by representatives of the state, employers and employees. The tasks of the EQA cover organising the activities of professional councils approved by the Government of the Republic as well as development, supplementing and improvement of professional standards, and establishment of evaluation criteria; working out methods for developing and implementing the employees' qualifications system, and the qualification evaluation system; organisation of performance of tasks given by professional councils pursuant to the Professions Act; managing the state register of professions as an authorised processor of the register. The state finances carrying out professional examinations for school graduates.

##### **b) Initiatives and measures of employers**

The creation of the qualification system started on the employers' initiative at the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the largest business representation organisation in Estonia. Professional standards are developed by employers according to the actual needs of the labour market. The employers are also developing and implementing the awarding process of professional qualifications.

##### **c) Initiatives and measures of other stakeholders**

Trainers: Trainers participate in implementing the qualification system. Pursuant to the law, VET curricula have to follow the requirements of professional standards.

Employees' representatives: Trade unions and professional associations participate in the processes of the qualification system.

**d) *Examples of the contribution of VET to successfully promoting inclusion***

Schools offer their graduates the possibility to take the examinations organised by awarding bodies.

**5. *Meeting the challenges of an aging population – innovations and initiatives in VET that are being introduced to encourage older people (55+) to remain at work longer and to participate in training and other forms of lifelong learning.***

Because of unfavourable demographic developments (decreasing population) and some likely detrimental effects on the employment structure it is very important to increase study possibilities for adults.

According to recent research results (Needs for Lifelong Learning in Estonia 2001) the most important reason preventing further studies is age. The most likely explanation is that the older generation does not have sufficient financial resources to pay for their training/studies.

The research (Needs for Lifelong Learning in Estonia 2001) shows that 13% of the people at the age of 15-74 were involved in different types of educational activities, with regards to the sizes of population in Estonia, the number of those having studied during the year 2001 was approximately 130 000, but the survey did not include non-formal education, that's way it can be assumed that the number of learners is bigger. In the age group 50-59 the percentage of learners was 13, 4%. The lowest proportion of learners was in the youngest (15-19) and the oldest (60+) age group – 3, 1%. Learners of the oldest age group attend the courses at their leisure time (64%), other age groups study during working hours and get compensation as well.

Among the pensioners who are still working at least 4% have studied and it is a noteworthy fact that pensioners who are not working, wish to learn more about entrepreneurship and business (36%). They seem to have plans of starting their own business, instead of staying home. The preferences of pensioners still working are humanities and social studies (51%).

The main reason given for not studying among the age groups 40-49, 50-59 and 60 is to be too old to study. It must be admitted, that with the aging of Estonia, it becomes increasingly important for older generations to stay longer active in labour market. In this sense there is a lot to be done for adult educators in terms of organising continuing education courses, retraining labour force and changing the mentality in the society.

***Formal education***

The schooling of a first speciality or education is financed by the State. In order to provide people with the opportunity to acquire secondary vocational education outside the daytime study form, the state finances distance learning places in vocational education institutions as well. Until now vocational education could be acquired in vocational education institutions after acquiring

secondary education. In the coming years, the Ministry of Education and research wants to find ways for providing vocational education to those people who have acquired only basic education, but who, for various reasons, cannot learn a profession in the daytime study form.

### ***Work-related training***

Work related training is paid for by the interested natural or legal person (the cost of training courses can be subtracted from the income taxes of natural persons or profit of legal person). Present tax system favours enterprises to support work-related training.

Funds may be prescribed in local government budget to guarantee work related training opportunities.

Enterprise Estonia offers support to entrepreneurs for counselling service and training programmes.

Training support by the ministry of Agriculture can be applied by entrepreneurs who act in the field of agriculture, fishery, handicraft, landtourism.

### ***Popular adult education (non-formal adult education)***

In all regions of Estonia there are training centres which provide adult learners with non-formal training. Usually, these are “folk universities”, training centres or culture centres. The most popular courses in these education institutions are arts and culture, language, business and computer courses. According to the results of the research conducted in 2002 there is a growing interest towards the popular adult education in the spheres of culture and art. Popular adult education is aimed at increasing the talents, social skills of a person. Mostly, the training takes place in the form of courses, often also in study groups. Although popular education is related to one’s hobbies or interests, it is sometimes very difficult to draw a distinct line between non-formal education and professional education. In some instances the hobby is likely to develop into a job. For many people, the knowledge and skills acquired in the framework of informal education help to be more successful in their daily work. Learners are motivated to come to study as they are able to compose their own study programmes and are expected to engage actively in study process. The main object is to motivate persons to learn and direct them towards self-directed learning.

Although a large share of training in Estonia involves a tuition fee for the learner, the state does support people's participation through the current tax system. According to the Income Tax Act, people are entitled to an exemption from income tax to the extent of the amount spent on education and training. Acquisition of basic and general secondary education through evening courses and distance learning or as an external student is tuition-free. The state finances a certain number of study places for acquiring secondary vocational education as well.

Employment offices provide the unemployed with a labour market service, including vocational guidance and employment training.

The project Look@World was aiming at supporting the use of Internet. The project was initiated in private sector, but it found its partners also in governmental and non-governmental sector, in all the administrative regions

in Estonia. As a result of free of charge Internet education (8 hours block) was offered for more than 100 000 inhabitants of Estonia. The project ended in 2004.

According to the Coalition Agreement 2003-2007, in 2005 national computer study program is being started for people over the age of 45. It is meant for those who did not have opportunity to join the project Look@World.

To encourage an aging population to participate in lifelong learning, different study forms are used: full-time, part-time, virtual learning, distance learning.

With the support of ESF vocational education institutions, popular adult education centres and private training institutions are planning to offer work-related training to adults, including age group 50+.

### ***Supporting structures***

***Vocational qualification system*** – in 2001 the Estonian Qualification Authority was established in order to continue developing professional qualification system. In order to raise the competitiveness of Estonian labour force qualifications must be measurable (in both Estonian and on the international level), primary, further and retraining system must be flexible.

One goal of the qualification system is to recognise non-formal and informal education.

The creation of professional standards by employers allows developing a curriculum of vocational work-related training.

Employees will benefit by getting a clear overview of existing and missing skills, training options and safety through professional certificate.

***Development of former study and work experience recognition system*** – the recognition system supports the flexibility of lifelong learning. The amendments made to the University Act in 2003 bind universities to develop a system registering previous work and study experiences by 1 September 2004. In case of representatives some selected specialists, such as teacher, universities already have this obligation for the academic year 2003/2004. Lots of institutions which provide continuous training take into consideration previous work experiences and studies.

***Database of the opportunities of lifelong learning*** – integrated advisory system will be built, the primary objective is to increase the responsiveness of education to business demands and to improve access of vocational and higher education specialists to labour market. Database test-version has already been created.

***Remodelling vocational training institutions network*** – it is important to continue creating regional vocational training institutions, where additionally to the primary training work related training for adults are provided. Vocational training centres should become local development centres, where there is curricula development, continuous training of teachers and counselling service.

***National adult education priorities*** – in 2000, the Government of the Republic adopted the “National Principles of Adult Education until 2003.” By

today, the Ministry of Education and Research has prepared draft national adult education priorities for 2004-2006. The national priorities of adult education have been approved by the Adult Education Council, a counselling body of the Government of the Republic in adult education issues. The national priorities will be approved by the Government of the Republic and the Ministry of Education and Research, partners and various parties will be proceeding from them upon organising their activities.

The national priorities are the following: creating better opportunities for lifelong learning, including formal education and those who have dropped out of school; creating a counselling system for adults and a database of the opportunities of lifelong learning; development of former study and work experience recognition system; creating system for financing adult education; quality assurance in adult education, especially in work-related training.

## **6. Effectiveness and efficiency of VET**

### **a) Perception of effectivity of VET**

There is no good indicator system implemented to measure effectiveness and efficiency of the VET system. There is no doubt that vocational education has strong impacts on fostering individual career, self-confidence and personal identity. One way to measure VET system is through the reputation of vocational education.

The reputation of vocational education has traditionally been low in Estonia. Although in recent years the share of students choosing vocational education has increased, it still remains notably lower than in most European countries. That is one of the reasons why unemployment co-exists with the demand for skilled labour.

The implementation of the vocational education reform plays an important role in the supply of qualified labour. The vocational education reform focuses on establishing regional vocational education centres and increasing the share of work practise at enterprises. Such centres have already been established in Tallinn, Tartu, Võrumaa, Narva, Kohtla-Järve and Kuressaare. Involving social partners in the development of vocational education and training supports the improvement of the training quality.

A very important challenge and future development direction is the necessary expansion of work placements and practical training tied to the school programmes.

So far individual VET institutions have established either formal or informal agreements with local employers concerning the provision of practicing opportunities both for students and teachers. Despite of a number of successful initiatives, too many VET institutions experience ongoing difficulties in finding quality placement training opportunities, where the content of the practical training is matching the off-the-job inputs.

A national apprenticeship system does not exist in Estonia, which could increase the supply of highly skilled (crafts) people with a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of industrial and other processes. There are

only some enterprises that train persons or small groups on their own initiative and cost. The PHARE 2002 programme is targeting to pilot apprenticeship schemes. The objective is to develop recognised work-related training programmes with active participation of enterprises. The main target groups under the project are school drop-outs and people with general secondary education but without vocational qualifications.

There is little doubt that a learning process has been successfully initiated among educational policy makers, individual teachers and social partners in the last decade, in particular through EU Phare support, with respect to both the nature of the required VET reforms and increased responsiveness to different target groups. The present education system (and VET institutions) has demonstrated the willingness and capacity in responding to different client needs and to deliver training interventions to a wide variety of target groups. This includes the delivery of evening courses for the general public, training courses for employees and employers and regional based specific skills training courses for the unemployed. Analysis of feedback from the beneficiaries of these courses has in the main been positive.

In educational reality a shift has been slowly and gradually taking place from the previous more collective approach towards an individual centred one.

The PHARE Multi-country Programme for Distance Education has been an important catalyst for open/distance learning developments in Estonia. What is still lacking is a systematic analysis of individual needs of participants both of the initial education and continuing education system (including specific needs of the unemployed), and subsequently the development of a related policy and actions addressing individual needs.

The involvement of social partners has evolved in the last years as well as the perception and commitment of employers regarding the importance of VET is slowly improving.

Still there is a high need to increase co-operation between schools and enterprises, as well as a clear national policy and related support to address the twin issues of the low number and quality of practical placements in enterprises. Organisation of work placements requires agreements with companies and the creation of incentives for organising them in co-operation with educational institutions. Accreditation of companies offering work-linked training would be important for ensuring the necessary conditions and the required quality of work placements.

Support for updating the learning environment of VET schools is needed as well.

Certainly, the vocational education is an effective instrument for increasing youth employment. VET gives the best opportunity to become self-confident through professional qualification and have good relationships with employers through practical training.

***b) Improving management and organisation and effectivity of VET***

The Estonian vocational education system is strongly centralised. The majority of vocational education institutions are state-owned. The provision of initial vocational education is financed from state budget and it is too early to

speak about a multi-level financing scheme having been implemented in Estonia.

The ownership of vocational education institutions lies at public and private sectors. The negotiations over the “municipalisation” of vocational education institutions are continuing. Several vocational schools of the same region have been merged into vocational education centres in order to save costs and to improve the quality of teaching, then the owners are local governments.

The Vocational Education Institutions Act regulates the financing of public vocational schools. Public vocational schools receive funds from the state budget to cover the following expenses:

- Study costs – include the expenses incurred by the educational institution in order to finance studies: remuneration (of teaching staff, management and administrative staff), administration and management costs (including the costs of maintaining the buildings) and the cost of teaching aids;
- Education allowances – include the expenses on scholarships, catering and the compensation for travel fare concessions;
- Expenses made of the revenue from economic activity;
- Investments – include the costs of the renovation of buildings and the acquisition of teaching aids.

The Vocational Education Institutions Act regulates the financing of municipal vocational schools, which prescribes that the study costs related to the teaching of students studying in a municipal school on the basis of the basic education shall be covered from the state budget funds on the basis similar to the financing of public schools. The study costs related to the teaching of students studying in a municipal school on the basis of secondary education may be covered from the state budget upon agreement with the corresponding rural municipality or city government. Thus, municipal vocational schools receive funds from the state budget to cover the following expenses:

- Study costs;
- Scholarships;
- Investments (according to an agreement)

The Private Schools Act and Vocational Education Institutions Act regulates the financing of private vocational schools. Private vocational schools are financed from the state budget similarly to public vocational schools, and the same coefficient apply, but the cost of a student place is financed from the state budget only to the extent of the cost of the salaries of teachers and study aids. The owner of school covers other costs.

### ***International cooperation***

Aid received through international projects has been provided mainly by PHARE projects and the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

### ***Vocational education financed by enterprises and social partners***

Courses organised and financed by enterprises are divided into two by the type of organiser and planner:

- In-service training courses planned and organised by enterprises themselves (internal courses). Internal courses may be held outside an enterprise.
- In-service courses planned and organised by external organisations (external courses). External courses may be held in the premises of an enterprise.

#### ***c) Main trends in terms of investment in VET***

Public-private partnerships do not make any progress in Estonia, yet. The one and only good example is reorganizing Taebala VET School to Läänemaa Vocational Education Centre, where private investment is remarkable.

There are a lot of good examples in Estonia where enterprises support the VET system study process with teaching aids and materials for practical training.

The most important trend in investments VET system is the EU Structural Funds for vocational training modernisation activities. Public investments are only co-financing.

## ***Theme 2 Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes***

### ***7. Improvements in learning processes and contents***

There are several new trends in Estonia which were introduced in education during the last years. The main road is going to student-centred learning styles. In general education institutions and vocational education institutions both they are paying more and more attention to the student-centred learning. But today it is still too early to say that these learning styles are the most popular.

In vocational education institutions much attention has been paid to the links of general studies with professional training. Many new style study materials (text-books, work-books, WEB-pages etc.) were created, designed and published during the last years.

According to the Teacher Training Framework all teachers should have pedagogical higher education in some years. Therefore there are some new curricula created at the universities to qualify vocational trainers who have higher education in pedagogy; and for the others to achieve the pedagogical higher education. This legislative-based stronger influence to the vocational education teacher-training of universities means that vocational trainers' pedagogical qualifications are rising and they are taught and supposed to use more problem- and project-based pedagogy as well as other active methods.

The Ministry of Education fixed the ten most prospective vocational schools which will be upgraded during the coming years. It means that these schools will receive very modern equipment and sufficient teaching staff – modern methods with modern technology can be used.

No specific research has recently been carried out that would clearly identify the scope of innovative teaching and learning methods being used in VET. However, due to the changes in the qualification requirements for VET teachers, many have taken up pedagogical training in order to meet the requirements, and through that training, which emphasises modern teaching and learning methods, a definite trend towards student-centred and competences based learning can be noted.

Participation in Leonardo projects has also influenced the shift towards innovation in teaching. The ROUTES project “Access to Training via Mentor Supported Rural Learning Groups” and CURENGCOL, which developed a semester-long project-based curriculum, are a few examples.

Still, most of the development can be identified in the contents of VET, mostly in the area of modernisation of curricula, which in turn provides opportunities for using more innovative teaching and learning methods.

Modular based curricula in VET were developed and implemented in a number of pilot schools with PHARE support between 1994 and 1998. The VET curriculum reform approach applied in Estonia might be called the “labour market training model”, as it is a modular and competence-based system (modelled according to the Irish experience), designed to be flexible and adaptable and can embrace initial training for young people as well as continuing training for adults and unemployed.

Even though national curricula for VET have been still lacking, and schools have been developing their own school curricula, which have to be registered and approved by the Ministry of Education and Research, a definite transition towards the use of modular curricula has taken place by now. The national VET programmes are based on modules (measured by weeks, one study week is 40 hours) providing pupils with a variety of choices in terms of specialisation and organisation of education and training.

Alongside the development of school curricula, development of study materials for VET subjects has taken place on the school level. Considerable development on the national level has been lacking.

### ***8. Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning***

Links between learning sites at schools and at companies is a problematic area in Estonia. A national system for organising practical training in enterprises has not yet been developed and practical training facilities are not offered any substantial support.

Individual VET institutions have established either formal or informal agreements with local employers concerning the provision of practical training opportunities both for students and teachers. Despite successful single

initiatives, most VET institutions experience ongoing difficulties in finding quality placement training opportunities, where the content of the practical training is matching the off-the job inputs.

A national apprenticeship system, which could increase the supply of highly skilled people with a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of industrial and other processes does not exist in Estonia. There are only some enterprises that train persons or small groups on their own initiative and cost.

A PHARE 2001 programme is targeting to pilot apprenticeship schemes in a few selected occupations and under PHARE 2002 work-linked training programmes are being developed for specific risk groups (drop-outs and general secondary school leavers without vocational skills).

The Apprenticeship Project 2004, which is part of the abovementioned initiative, includes 7 VET schools and 25 enterprises, which altogether offer training in 17 specialities and are targeting for approximately 200 students. Under this project 65 % of training is provided in enterprises and the rest of the studies are devoted to subjects that support the students in coping with the labour market and in working on the speciality. Studying general subjects is an option, but not a direct aim of the project. As a comparison, the length of studies on a VET curriculum for graduates from basic school is a minimum of 3 years, i.e. 120 study weeks (ISCED3/3B), of which the VET-related dimension (incl. practical training) must account for at least 50%. In average half of that 50% (in effect approx. 25%) is practical training in enterprises.

So far the legal framework does not support the apprenticeship project, but amendments are being made.

The creation of a legal framework supporting the development of new VET curricula based on vocational standards has opened up the possibility for getting access to vocational certificates through validation of related professional experience. The delivery of the first certificates has concerned mostly the professions of real estate agents and real estate assessors.

### ***9. Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision***

In order to graduate from a VET school, a pupil has to cover the full programme, take the necessary tests and pass all required examinations, practical training and the final paper. The requirements are fixed in the school curriculum. Successful graduates of VET schools are obtaining the school graduation certificate after having passed the internal school examinations.

The graduation certificate does not attribute formal vocational qualifications, but confirms only that a certain programme has been covered at a certain level in a certain VET school.

However, the development of National Employee Qualification System has progressed thus far that since school year 2002/2003, graduates from several VET schools can take – apart from school graduation examinations – also national qualification examinations, awarding a vocational qualification and respective certificate. The procedures of awarding a qualification are in place as well as requirements for the examination centres. By now 5-6 VET schools have got the right to carry out qualification centre examinations.

In order to help VET schools improve their quality on an institutional level, a VET School Quality Award has been initiated. The idea was implemented with a PHARE pilot project in 2003 with 9 VET schools participating in the final competition. The award follows the European Quality Award model and is based on the principles of Total Quality Management. In 2004 there are 11 VET schools participating.

The concept of the new Estonian VET standard (agreed with stakeholders and social partners) is based on three distinct and interrelated elements:

1. National vocational qualification standard, prepared by working groups of the Vocational Councils, and approved by the councils and the Ministry of Social Affairs;
2. National curricula, based on the approved vocational standard, prepared by educational experts and approved by the Ministry of Education and Research;
3. National assessment, standard based on the vocational standard and approved by the newly created Estonian Qualifications Authority.

The work on the setting up a National Employee Qualification system started in 1998, with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and employers playing an active role within the 12 Vocational Councils (the main role of these tripartite councils is the development of qualification standards) and the formal mechanisms are in place to facilitate social partners having a direct input on the national qualification system. Important progress was made in June 2001 by establishing a foundation, the *Estonian Qualification Authority* (operational since September 2001), in order to coordinate and organise the work on the National Employee Qualification System. As of January 2004, vocational councils have approved 365 vocational qualifications.

The creation of a legal framework supporting the development of new VET curricula based on vocational standards has also opened up the possibility for getting access to vocational certificates through validation of related professional experience. A new law on recognition of foreign professional qualifications was adopted in May 2000, which entered into force on January 1st, 2001.

## **10. Professional development and status of teachers and trainers**

Teachers' and trainers' professional development is recognised on the Republic level as a decisive factor for improving learning processes and outcomes. Therefore during the last five years priorities of the government always express importance for teacher-training. Several projects are (or have been) run in education initiated by the government and Ministry of Education (Hansa project, Estonian – UK school project, Estonian – Canadian school leadership project, Project of the school of the 21. century etc.).

The key initiatives of these activities are in

- Learning environment
- Teachers' qualification

- School leadership (incl. different approaches of quality management and team-work)

In September 2004 a reform of initial teacher training was inaugurated and the system of qualification years will be introduced. First of all it will be introduced in general education but in few years in vocational education system too.

All teachers of the vocational education and training system should follow a minimum 40 lessons pedagogical in-service training course (powered at Sept 2003) and all trainers shall complete 320 lessons pedagogical in-service training course. The next step is that in 2007 all teachers and trainers in the vocational education and training system should hold at least a bachelor's degree (or actively studying to achieve it).

The principles of the Bologna Declaration were introduced into higher education since 2002. Accordingly the changes were made in teacher education curricula. Teacher training Framework fixes the minimum number of in-service training lessons for different types of teachers to five years (compulsory to keep the job). It should establish the basis for the continuous professional development. Additional means can be introduced with help of flexible leadership in vocational schools (schools are free to motivate teachers with a large set of incentives like higher salary, additional extra payment, better working conditions, in-service training courses abroad, practice supervision abroad etc).

Innovative education and training practices eventually benefit students in

- better instruction
- higher level of achievement of educational aims (less behavioural problems with teenagers)
- higher chances to get the job.

The position of trainers in the organisation is low today. There are some steps planned to improve the teachers (or trainers) position (involving quality management principles in leadership, more power to the school-board etc). Teachers have the autonomy to decide on training methods and evaluate the students under the school evaluation frames. Their influence is almost non-existent in solving managerial and economical problems of the organisation. Professional trade unions are making first steps to be a serious partner in bargaining the conditions of collective contract.

In the society VET teachers and trainers are considered as teachers of comprehensive schools – he/she is teaching because he/she is not able to do anything more profitable. Teachers are considered as smart people who are very poor in economic decisions and not initiative in public questions. Probably the rise of their salaries (lower than the average in Estonia), demand of higher qualification to teach and public attention to their activities will make vocational teachers' social status higher.

## ***Theme 3 Building European Competences for a European Labour Market***

### ***11. Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy***

#### ***a) Main challenges to achieving the Lisbon employment objectives***

One of the main objectives of the Lisbon strategy is to achieve full employment by the year 2010, and the successful implementation of the EU employment strategy is playing an essential role in achieving the aim. The employment strategy package includes the employment guidelines and specific recommendations/priorities which were developed by the European Commission for each Member State and which are obligatory for each country to follow and report on.

With regard to Estonia, higher unemployment rate than the EU average and the high share of the long-term unemployed are mentioned as major problems. The recommendations made to Estonia are the following:

- 1. To improve the adaptability of employees and enterprises*
  - to lower the tax burden of labour force, especially of low-income workers
  - to promote different forms of work and working time
  - to improve the taxation system
  - to fight against black market labour
  - to monitor that increase in wages would follow the growth in productivity
- 2. To attract more people to the labour market and find work for everybody*
  - to look for possibilities for reducing inactivity and attract more people to the labour market
  - to increase employment of women, older people and people with poor education
  - to promote active search for work
  - to improve the access of the unemployed to re-training
  - to improve social involvement
  - to increase funding of labour market agencies
  - to pay special attention to vulnerable groups (long-time unemployed, young people, older people, ethnic minorities, people who do not know the Estonian language)
- 3. To invest more, and more effectively in human capital and life-long learning*

- to improve training opportunities of all employees, especially of those with poor education
- to reduce dropping out from schools
- to guarantee the quality of education and training
- essential: to create the system of life-long learning.

It is important to pay attention to the above recommendations. The Employment Action Plan, which includes the specific steps planned by the Government to follow the recommendations, should be sent to the European Commission by the first of October. The Employment Action Plan will be analysed and evaluated by the European Commission and other Member States.

For the implementation of the EU employment strategy and for following the recommendations of the European Commission it is necessary to make profound changes in the labour market system. The present system does not allow to offer labour market services of required quality and sufficient quantity and to follow the EU guidelines. The European Commission has repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that the Estonian labour market policy is underfunded (in the very last place even among the newly acceded countries), reaching only 0.2% of the GDP. In 2003 the employment rate in Estonia was 62,6% and the rise to 70% by the year 2010 is highly questionable. With present resources it is not possible to follow the employment guidance No.1, according to which young people (16 to 24) should be offered active measures within 6 months and adults within 12 months. 25% of the long-term unemployed should participate in active measures. In addition we have to apply the principle of individual approach and develop job finding plans for the unemployed individuals.

**b) Policies and strategies being developed to tackle these challenges**

In order to improve the situation the Ministry of Social Affairs has developed the concept of labour market services. If the concept were implemented, it would help to reduce unemployment, activate the unemployed and inactive people, improve the quality and increase the volume of labour market measures, enhance the competitive ability of the labour, etc. According to the new system the services provided to the unemployed would not be based on services but on needs, using the help of case managers. The aim is to activate people and help them return quickly to the labour market in order to prevent long-term unemployment and the wish to live on the support.

**12. Involving stakeholders**

**a) Role of stakeholders or social partners in the planning of VET at national, sector and company level**

The State commission for state ordered student places includes several stakeholders and social partners. Although, several stakeholders participate in the development of VET curricula: representatives from vocational education and training institutions, vocational councils and employers as well as from the National Examination and Qualification Centre.

Ministers of education, social affairs, economic affairs, representatives of employers' and employees' central organisations and representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry have signed a co-operation agreement for reforming the VET system. The aim is to guarantee qualified labour and its correspondence to the labour market needs.

Pursuant to the tripartite agreement the Estonian Employers Confederation is carrying out through its branch organisations in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Education and the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions a project to analyse the requirements of qualified labour until 2005.

A task of professional councils (a body of co-operation consisting of the representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the corresponding area of activity, and the representatives of the state) is to make proposals on development and planning of the VET-system: who and what to teach. Enterprises are involved through work groups and opinion polls.

The implementation of the vocational education reform plays an important role in the supply of qualified labour. The vocational education reform focuses on establishing regional vocational education centres and increasing the share of work practise at enterprises. Involving social partners in the development of vocational education and training supports the improvement the quality of the training.

### **13. Transparency, recognition & mobility**

#### **a) Credit frameworks**

There are no transferable credits in the VET-system yet, but during the following years, according to the development plan of Estonian VET, a system of transferable credits will be worked out.

#### **b) Reforming qualifications framework**

The PROFESSIONS ACT effective since 19. 01. 2001 creates a legal basis for bringing a regulation of the labour market in changed economical situation into being. On a state order the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry led from 1998 to 2001 the development of the vocational qualification system for employees. A model has been searched for from the present experience of EU states and a wide range of local experts from the practical side of the work as well as trainers has been involved.

In September 2001, the Estonian Qualification Authority (EQA) was established for carrying out and developing the vocational qualification system and keeping the register of professions. Founders of the EQA are Estonian Confederation of Employers, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions, Organisation of Employee Associations, and Ministry of Social Affairs.

These measures provide benefits to employers by allowing to

- design of personnel policy
- planning of training

- motivation of employees
- more effective use of labour force
- security through professional certificate

For the *employees* they create

- clearness about existing and missing skills
- clearness when using training opportunities, planning one's career and development
- security through professional certificate
- appropriate salary according to the qualification (future trend)

Additionally state and trainers will also benefit through transparency allowing for

- a better direction of finances in vocational training
- more founded direction of processes in the labour market
- evaluation and planning of human resource on the state level and
- clearness about training needs and content (for trainers and state).

The conditions for a successful reform of qualification frameworks are measurable qualifications, a common and comparable national measuring system and flexible initial, complementary and retraining systems. Three stages in system creation can be distinguished:

1. determination of contemporary professional skills and their levels, development of vocational standards,
2. conformation of vocational training and professional requirements and
3. determination of criteria, order and conditions of awarding of professions (certification).

The following actors, institutions and standards have been promising means to establish an Estonian qualifications framework:

The *Professional Council* is a co-operative body of representatives of employees, employers and professional associations of the relevant activity field, and the state. The aim of the professional council is to develop *vocational standards* necessary to meet the requirements of the labour market, and develop, implement and update the certification system. The professional council appoints experts of a relevant vocational area who map core professions, develop vocational standards, qualification levels and certification scheme.

A *professional standard* is a document that sets out requirements deriving from the vocational qualification to knowledge, skills, proficiency, experience, values and personal qualities.

*Professional qualification* is the level of competence required in the relevant vocational area and acknowledged on ground of regulated, historically or internationally developed requirements. Currently the following 5 qualification levels were defined:

Level I: an employee performs his or 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 or her duties.

Level III: an employee performs his or 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 or 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.

Over 1600 different institutions (companies, trainers, professional associations) have actively participated in the development of vocational standards in 1998-2003. In polls carried out to test standards in addition to the abovementioned institutions every tenth entrepreneur in Estonia has participated.

By May 2004 387 professional standards have been approved by professional councils.

Certification of professional qualification (hereinafter award of professional qualifications) is the process whereby the person certifies his vocational and professional level of competence and the awarding body of professional qualification assesses its compliance with the professional qualification applied for and issues a professional certificate.

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 may apply for an activity license for the award of professional qualifications. The procedure is worked out and validated by the institution awarding professional qualifications which stipulates:

fields and levels, in case of which the specific procedure of award of professional qualifications is valid;

principles and regulations for the attestation and award of professional qualifications;

review of applications;

certification document of professional qualification;  
 report on use of financial resources;  
 remuneration of the members of professional committee.

For award of professional qualifications the awarding institution establishes the professional qualifications committee consisting of employees, employers, vocational and professional associations.

By May 2004 38 awarding bodies have got an activity license.

### **c) Implementation of Europass**

Estonia plans to implement Europass national structures in accordance with European developments.

There are preparing measures implemented still (mapping situation and tasks, meetings with institutions involved, action plans)

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