
Latvia

VET in Europe – Country report

2014

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1. EXTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING VET¹

1.1. STRUCTURE/DEVELOPMENT OF THE POPULATION

Latvia has 2.00 million inhabitants (2014) and a territory of 64,589 km². The population has been decreasing in the last 20 years due to negative demographic trends (natural increase: -0.47% in 2011, -0.45% in 2012 and -0.40% in 2013) and emigration (net migration: -0.97% in 2011, -0.58% in 2012 and -0.70% in 2013) mainly for employment reasons.

The share of population below the working age has been decreasing from 2000 (18.0%) except for the past five years (from 13.8% in 2010 to 14.7% in the beginning of 2014). However, the proportion of the schooling age population is expected to decrease further until at least 2015. The proportion of population above the working age shows steady increase during the last years, i.e. from 20.2% in 2010 to 22.7% in the beginning of 2014. The proportion of working age population in the recent years has decreased (from 64.2% in 2011 to 62.6% in 2014).

In 2014, the largest share of population lived in urban area (67.8%), of which 47.4% – in Riga. The urban/rural ratio has not changed significantly since 2009. The majority of social and economic facilities are concentrated in Riga and in other big cities, thus, education and other services in rural areas are limited. There is also an inland migration from rural areas to Riga.

1.2. STRUCTURE/DEVELOPMENT OF THE LABOUR FORCE

The employment rate for the age group 15-64 in 2013 (65.0%) was above EU-28 average (64.1%) and has increased comparing to 2011 (60.8%) and 2012 (63.1%). However, this is still below the rate of 2008 (68.6%). For males employment rate is slightly higher than for females (respectively 66.8% and 63.4% in 2013), but the gender gap is not as big as for EU-28 (respectively 69.4% and 58.8%).

The employment rate in 2011-13 (Table 1) for people with higher levels of education (ISCED 5-8) in Latvia was higher than in the EU-28 in all age groups, being the highest – 88.5% (86.2% in the EU-28) in 2013 for people aged 25-49. At the same time the age group 15-24 with low education levels (ISCED 0-2) demonstrates the lowest employment rate (10.3%; 19.7% in the EU-28).

Table 1. Employment rates by age groups and highest level of education attained (%), 2011-13

	TIME	2011			2012			2013			
		ISCED/AGE	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64
EU 28	0-2		21.5	62.1	43.2	20.4	60.7	43.5	19.7	59.3	43.8
	3-4		44.2	79.8	60.2	43.4	79.2	61.1	42.8	78.7	62.0
	5-8		55.5	87.1	74.8	54.5	86.5	75.7	54.7	86.2	76.2
	No R.		5.6	73.2	61.3	5.6	73.4	65.2	5.8	72.3	64.6
	Total		33.7	78.0	57.4	32.9	77.5	58.4	32.3	77.0	59.3
LV	0-2		9.8	54.2	38.1	10.5	58.7	38.7	10.3	60.7	31.4
	3-4		37.3 ⁾	73.2	56.7	39.9	73.0	57.8	42.5	76.4	60.1
	5-8		67.8	87.5	77.1	70.2	89.6	78.4	66.5	88.5	77.8
	No R.		:	:	:(u)	:	:(c)	:	:	:(u)	:(c)
	Total		25.8	75.2	59.3	28.7	76.8	60.8	30.2	78.8	62.0

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey); last update: 21-08-2014, extracted: 29-08-2014

Special values - : not available; No R. - no response; u - low reliability; b - break in time series; c - confidential.

¹ In the Latvian education legislation and system, term “vocational education” is applied, rather than “vocational education and training” because the most of vocational education is implemented through school-based education programmes that include periods of practical learning at school and enterprises.

The unemployment rate (share of job seekers aged 15-64 of total economically active population) has doubled during the economic crisis from 7.8% in 2008 to 19.0% in 2010; then gradually decreased to 12.1% in 2013.

The greatest unemployment rate in Latvia is among the young people (15-24) with lower levels of education (ISCED 0-2). It has decreased from 44.2% in 2012 to 39.1% in 2013. The current EU-28 unemployment rate is lower, but has the opposite (growing) trend. In 2013, the lowest unemployment rate (5.0%; 6.5% in the EU-28) was among the population (25-49) with higher levels of education (ISCED 5-8) (Table 2).

Table 2. Unemployment by age groups and highest level of education attained (%), 2011-13

TIME	ISCED/AGE	2011			2012			2013		
		15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64	15-24	25-49	50-64
EU 28	0-2	28.3	16.9	10.8	30.5	19.1	12.6	31.0	20.4	13.6
	3-4	18.8	8.1	6.5	20.2	8.9	6.7	20.8	9.3	6.8
	5-8	16.8	5.5	3.7	18.0	6.2	3.7	18.8	6.5	4.0
	No R.	19.7	8.7	5.2 ^(u)	210.1	8.4	5.1 ^(u)	19.2	9.4	5.2 ^(u)
	Total	21.4	9.0	6.9	22.9	9.9	7.5	23.3	10.4	7.8
LV	0-2	40.1	29.7	21.1	44.2	22.8	23.1	39.1	22.1	24.3
	3-4	31.9	16.7	17.3	26.7	17.1	16.1	19.7	12.5	12.6
	5-8	14.3 ^(u)	6.7	7.4	13.7 ^u	5.5	8.1	18.5	5.0	6.5
	No R.	:	:	:	: ^(c)	: ^(c)	: ^(c)	:	:	:
	Total	31.0	14.9	14.9	28.5	13.7	14.3	23.2	10.8	11.4

Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey); last update: 21/08/2014, extracted: 1/09/2014.

Special values - : not available; No R. - no response; u - low reliability; b - break in time series; c - confidential.

The registered unemployment rate at the State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, NVA) has increased during the crisis from the minimum level of 6% in 2007 to 17.3% in March 2010. It has decreased to 8.6% in July 2014 with the total of 83 163 unemployed people, which is less than in 2013 (92 975). The share of young people (15-24) of the total number of registered unemployed gradually decreases from 14.5% in the end of 2009 to 9.0% in July 2014.

Women use NVA services more (57.3%; July 2014) than men (42.7%). Share of the registered unemployment in the regions remains stable. The lowest unemployment rate (July 2014) was registered in Riga region (5.4%) that was three times less than in Latgale region 18.1% (eastern part of the country with usual unemployment rate higher than in other regions).

The most (36.8%) of the registered unemployed (July 2014) have vocational upper-secondary education (ISCED 3-4) followed by the general upper-secondary education (ISCED 3) graduates (26.9%), primary education (ISCED 2) graduates (18.6%) and higher education (ISCED 5-8) diploma holders (15.0%). The 2.7% of registered unemployed have lower than primary education. Since 2010, the relative weight of groups has remained stable (<1% deviation).

1.3. ECONOMY STRUCTURE/THE RELATIVE WEIGHT OF DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES AND THEIR DYNAMICS

During the crisis, the gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by 25%, yet in the 4th quarter of 2009, the growth resumed, and, in 2010, a gradual increase of GDP has been observed. In 2011, the growth was 5.5%. The national economy continued growing at a rapid pace in 2012, and the GDP increased by 5.6% (the fastest growth in EU) compared to 2011. In 2013, despite the unfavourable external market environment, GDP growth was 4.1%; however, the growth rate decreased slightly in the recent quarters – in the 1st quarter of 2014, GDP was higher by 2.8% than a year ago.

The strong economic growth in 2013 was based on both external and domestic demand. Construction (7.4%), commercial services (7%), public services (5.3%) and trade (4.4%) sectors contributed the most to the growth (Table 3).

Table 3. Structure of the Latvian economy, 2011-13

SECTOR \ YEAR	GDP by sectors – volume changes (%)			Occupied jobs – share of total (%)		
	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	-1.1	-0.9	-0.7	2.4	2.5	2.5
Manufacturing	11.7	9.3	0.0	13.5	13.6	13.6
Other industry	-1.3	-2.6	-3.3	2.8	2.8	2.8
Construction	11.0	14.5	7.4	6.3	6.6	7.0
Trade	9.4	7.4	4.4	20.2	20.3	20.1
Transport	8.1	3.6	1.3	8.5	8.7	8.7
Public services	0.6	-0.6	5.3	26.7	25.4	25.0
Other commercial services	2.7	4.3	7.0	19.5	20.1	20.4
Total:	5.3	5.2	4.1	100	100	100

Source: *The National Economy of Latvia: Macroeconomic Review (2014)* CSB, Ministry of Economics

Most of the labour force in 2011-13 was employed in services and trade. The share of employees in manufacturing has been approximately 13%.

Export of goods and services has remained the key growth driver since 2010. Although the weak demand in export market slowed down growth in metal and chemical industry, the production volumes of electrical and optical equipment, food and wood industries increased in 2013. The employment growth contributes to the domestic consumption, which has a positive impact on trade and commercial services.

In 2013, the state budget expenses for education were the third highest (16.4%), following the social protection (28.4%) and economic activities (18.7%)(MoE, 2014a). In 2012, according Eurostat data, education budget constituted 5.5% of GDP – showing a decreasing tendency in the last years (6.8% in 2009, 6.1% in 2010 and 5.7% in 2011).

In 2011-13, the subsidy of state budget to the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) decreased from EUR 412.89 million in 2011 to EUR 320.52 million in 2013. Yet in 2014, the state subsidy slightly increased to EUR 323.26 million. There is a small increase in the MoES budget for its vocational education institutions: from EUR 54.07 million in 2011 to EUR 58.28 million in 2014 (Saeima, 2013). It is still less than funding in 2008 and 2009 (EUR 77.65 million and EUR 60.53 million accordingly).

Both in vocational and general education funds are allocated per student. In general education this applies only to teachers' salaries. The amount per vocational education student is stipulated by the Cabinet of Ministers' Regulations on the minimum expenditure per one student for vocational education programmes (CoM, 2007c). It covers salaries, student allowance, student hotel maintenance, qualification practice organization, insurance against accidents during qualification practice and expenditures for culture and sports. On average MoES has provided EUR 1877 in 2011, EUR 2089 in 2012, EUR 2398 in 2013 and EUR 2651 in 2014 per student per year. Since 2014, the actual government's funding almost entirely conforms to the approved amount. Schools use also their own revenue.

The development of vocation education has been supported by the EU funding, as well. For example, EUR 160.6 million has been invested through the ERDF project "Modernization of equipment and improvement of infrastructure for implementation of vocational education programmes" (2009-2015) (CoM, 2008b, 2013a).

1.4. DEGREE OF REGULATION OF THE LABOUR MARKET, LABOUR SUPPLY/LABOUR DEMAND, MISMATCHES

Labour market is regulated by the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a), the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (Saeima, 2002), and the Unemployment Insurance Law (Saeima, 1999b).

The employment policy is responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*, MoW) together with the NVA. In 2011, MoW elaborated the Strategy for the shift from short-term active labour market policy measures (for combating consequences of crisis) to the traditional active labour market policy measures (MoW, 2011), which provides lifelong learning measures for the unemployed and persons at the unemployment risk. In 2014, MoW prepared the project of “Inclusive employment guidelines for 2014-2020” (MoW, 2014), which include promotional measures for the unemployed and job seekers in the labour market through various learning opportunities, and activities involving self-employment and business start-ups.

The education policy is responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*, MoES). The major national policy priorities are formulated in the “Education development guidelines for 2014-2020” (Saeima, 2014), which foresee close cooperation with employers.

According to the “Latvian national reform programme of implementation of the ‘EU 2020’ strategy” (European Commission, 2011), one of the national macro-structural challenges is to combat structural unemployment by ensuring better correspondence of qualifications and skills to the requirements of the labour market. The major policies for combating the structural unemployment are:

- Improving the active labour market policy measures by a gradual shift from combating the consequences of crisis to the traditional active labour market policy measures;
- Efficient reengagement of economically inactive population to the labour market and support to the regional mobility;
- Promoting efficiency of public employment service; and
- Introducing the lifelong learning approach.

1.5. DEGREE OF REGULATION OF ACCESS TO OCCUPATIONS/PROFESSIONS

The Vocational Education Law (1999) states that the content of vocational education is regulated by the national vocational education standards (state vocational education standard, state vocational secondary education standard and state standard for the first level of professional higher education), occupational standards and vocational education programmes (Saeima, 1999a).

As a part of the classification of occupations (CoM, 2010b), occupational standards define the key tasks and duties for professions and requirements (including knowledge, skills, competences) of vocational education qualifications. The procedure for developing occupational standards approved by the government (CoM, 2007b) stipulates that MoES (for EQF levels 5-7) and the National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības satura centrs*, VISC) (for EQF levels 3-4) coordinate the design of occupational standards in cooperation with the social partners (National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment, and professional organizations) and line ministries.

The Law on the Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Saeima, 2001b) and relevant government regulations stipulate special requirements (e.g. the minimum requirements for educational programmes or professional knowledge/skills, regular re-certification or evaluation, and sub-division of professions) for regulated professions:

- To ensure the conformity of activities with the specific requirements, e.g. safety, health;
- To protect certain professions from unqualified personnel by determining higher professional requirements;
- To ensure recognition of Latvian qualifications abroad and foreign qualifications in Latvia;
- To promote free movement of individuals in the EU and the member states of the European Free Trade Association.

Regular re-certification/evaluation is usually conducted by the NGO certification (by delegation) centres of the relevant sector, e.g., Certification Centre of the Latvian Railwayman Society, Certification Commission of the Latvian Nurse Association. There are currently 68 regulated professions, 164 specialities and 89 sub-specialities (2014) included in the legislation (Regulations regarding professions regulated by lists of specialities, sub-specialities and additional specialities, CoM, 2006b).

1.6. MAIN FEATURES OF WELFARE/EMPLOYMENT POLICIES RELEVANT TO VET

According to the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (Saeima, 2002), the MoW in cooperation with the MoES provides vocational education, career guidance, and re-qualification and professional development for the unemployed and job seekers, non-formal learning and development of qualification for the (self-)employed under the unemployment risk. The ministries propose the employment policy improvements and support the involvement of unemployed/job seekers/(self-)employed through the state and EU co-financed projects.

The national policy for reducing unemployment is implemented by the NVA – a public agency under the supervision of the MoW. The NVA cooperates with the state and local government institutions, NGOs, and other private and legal entities. The policy is implemented in line with the government approved procedures for organising and financing active employment measures and preventative measures for reducing unemployment (CoM, 2011a).

The strategy for the shift from short-term active labour market policy measures for combating consequences of crisis to the traditional active labour market policy measures (MoW, 2011) has introduced education vouchers and other measures for promoting youth employment, such as real-life try-out of three professions (three weeks each) to explore careers.

The education institutions that implement educational activities for the unemployed are selected by the NVA according to the public procurement procedure. The list of occupations and skills is proposed annually by the MoW commission with representatives from the ministries (welfare, economy, education), the NVA, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (*Latvijas Pašvaldību savienība*), the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (*Latvijas Brīvo arodbiedrību savienība*), the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (*Latvijas Darba devēju konfederācija*), as well as other institutions upon request. A pilot project on continuing vocational education for the unemployed in vocational education institutions was started in 2014. In 2014 in the framework of the initiative "Youth Guarantee" (MoW, 2013), NVA also initiated cooperation with MoES and State Education Development Agency (VIAA) regarding the involvement of unemployed young people in initial vocational education.

1.7. VALUE OF VET QUALIFICATIONS ON THE LABOUR MARKET

When comparing rates of the employed and unemployed by their education (Table 4), it is evident that the share of individuals with higher education among the unemployed is smaller, while the rate of those persons with general (upper-secondary and primary) education among the unemployed is higher. This shows that inhabitants with higher and vocational education are in more favourable situation in labour market comparing to the inhabitants with general education.

Table 4. Shares of different population groups by the obtained education level (%), 2012-13

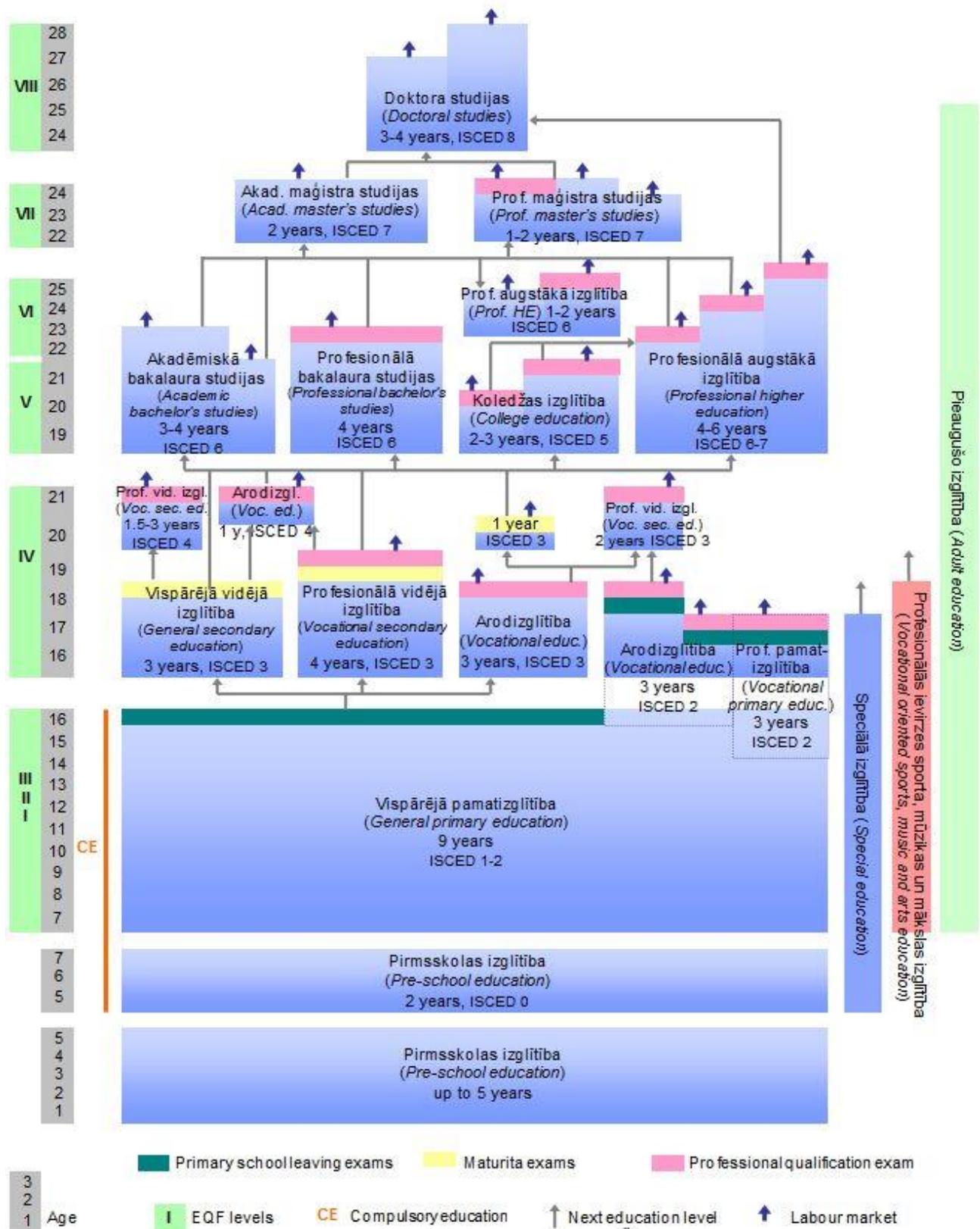
EDUCATION \ YEAR	Employed *		Registered unemployed (at the end of year)**		Graduates*		Registered unemployed: young people (15-24, at the end of year)**	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
Higher	34.2	35.2	12.5	14.0	32.9	35.3	9.0	9.9
Vocational (upper-secondary level)	34.0	33.2	37.2	37.3	14.5	13.4	22.8	25.3
General (upper-secondary or primary)	31.5	31.3	46.8	45.8	52.6	51.4	61.2	59.5
Beneath primary	0.3	0.2	3.0	2.8	-	-	6.6	5.4

Source: * CSB, www.csb.gov.lv; ** NVA

In Table 4 the column “Registered unemployed: young people (15-24)” shows that in this group of the unemployed there are mainly persons with general education (59.5%% in 2013) and without professional qualification. At the same time, the share of individuals with vocational education among the unemployed young people (25.3% in 2013) is significantly lower comparing to the total share of the registered unemployed with vocational education (37.3% in 2013).

2. PROVIDING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN A LIFELONG LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

2.1. DIAGRAM OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM



The main elements of the Latvian education system are:

- pre-school education,
- primary education,
- secondary education,
- higher (tertiary) education.

General education in Latvia lasts 12 years: nine at compulsory primary and three at the secondary level. Pre-school education for 5 to 6 years old children is compulsory too. Primary education comprises a choice or combination of general primary education (grades 1-9) and vocational primary education. Secondary education comprises a choice or combination of general secondary education, vocational secondary education and vocational education. Higher (tertiary) education comprises both academic and professional study programmes.

2.2. GOVERNMENT-REGULATED VET PROVISION

Initial vocational education is strictly regulated by the state. The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) regulates vocational education and is supplemented by various governmental decrees.

Considerable changes to the national vocational education policy have been presented by the MoES in 2009 in the “Concept of raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance” (CoM, 2009). The concept aims at outlining solutions for key challenges in vocational education with mutual agreement between the state and social partners. Based on this concept, the ESF supported project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2015) has been implemented and project’s results will be incorporated in the Vocational Education Law.

Proposed by the MoES and accepted by the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia current education policy priorities are defined in the “Education development guidelines for 2014-2020” (Saeima, 2014).

The main lifelong learning policy document was the “Guidelines for lifelong learning policy for 2007-2013” (CoM, 2007a) and its short-term programmes prepared by the MoES.

2.2.1. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Initial vocational education

Vocational education establishments offer education programmes in all fields of study. The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) defines three levels of vocational education:

- vocational primary education;
- vocational secondary education;
- professional higher education (first level professional higher education (college education) and second level professional higher education (university education)).

Vocational education and professional higher education programmes are mainly school-based, with practical learning periods at schools or enterprises. In 2013, MoES started work-based learning pilot projects in vocational education. Work-based learning is expected to be included in Vocational Education Law as one of the forms of vocational education acquisition (proposal for amendments in 2014).

Students are admitted to public vocational schools according to the annual enrolment plan. The MoES collects and together with Sectoral Expert Councils adjusts and transforms school requests

into enrolment plans endorsed by the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment.

Vocational education at lower secondary level is implemented through **vocational primary education** programmes (see Table 15 in the annex). Pupils are enrolled in vocational primary education programmes (ISCED 2) regardless of previous education, but not before the year they turn 15 years old. Vocational primary education programmes lead to a certificate of vocational primary education (*apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*) and the professional qualification of EQF level 3 (Latvian professional qualification level 1: theoretical and practical readiness, which allows fulfilling simple tasks in a specific sphere of practical activities, for example, a cook's or a carpenter's assistant – ISCED 2). Those without primary education are admitted to vocational education programmes offering pedagogical correction (this is targeted at early school leavers and those with a low level of basic knowledge and skills to integrate these young people back into the education system).

At upper secondary level, there are **vocational education** (*arodizglītība*) and **vocational secondary education** (*profesionālā vidējā izglītība*) programmes for students with primary education diploma (see Table 15 in the annex). The content of these education programmes is defined by state vocational education standards (*profesionālās izglītības standarts*, CoM, 2000) and occupational standard (*profesijas standarts*, CoM, 2007b). Since 2012, in the schools owned by the MoES when admitted to **vocational education** programmes, students' previous education is not considered (MoES, 2012). Programmes lead to a certificate of vocational education (*atestāts par arodizglītību*) and professional qualification of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 2: theoretical and practical aptitude for carrying out qualified executive work independently, e.g., carpenter, hairdresser, cook, tailor, welder – ISCED 3). These programmes do not give the right to enter higher (tertiary) education. For admission to higher education additional 1-year intermediate general secondary education course is available. **Vocational secondary education** programmes lead to a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) and professional qualification of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 3: increased theoretical readiness and professional mastery, which allows performing certain duties of an executor, which comprise the planning and organisation of work, for example, various technicians, car mechanics, modellers, and hospitality service specialists – ISCED 3). In addition, vocational secondary education students take state centralized exams in Latvian, Math, foreign language and one in optional study subject. Students receive a certificate of general secondary education (*vispārējās vidējās izglītības sertifikāts*) which gives the right to enter higher education. **Post-secondary education** programmes (see Table 15 in the annex), in contrary to their title, belong to upper-secondary level. They are designed primarily for 18-20 years old general secondary school graduates for acquisition of vocational skills. Except for duration characteristics of such programmes, they are the same as for upper-secondary level. In 2014/15, they are offered with the ESF support (for 17-29 year old students with primary or secondary education) in the framework of initiative Youth Guarantee.

To prepare for studying in a vocational education programme in art, culture or sport, vocationally oriented educational programmes are implemented concurrently with the general primary or secondary education that provide the acquisition of systematised knowledge and skills in the selected field, but do not lead to a professional qualification.

Higher education programmes (see Table 16 in the annex) are academic (lead to a degree) and professional (lead to a degree and professional qualification). Higher education institutions (including colleges) provide full-time, part-time and distance studies available for all study levels and almost all study fields, thus, contributing to promotion of lifelong learning.

To acquire professional qualification, students have to take state qualification exam in the end of the education programme. The government defines how the content of qualification exams is developed for primary and secondary education levels (CoM, 2011c).

Table 5. Students in vocational education programmes in the beginning of a study year

LEVEL \ YEAR	Students				Share of total (%)			
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2010	2011	2012	2013
Primary education	487	450	448	440	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4
Secondary education	33149	31206	27992	26464	92.7	90.1	87.2	85.2
Post-general secondary education	1857	2782	3488	3945	5.2	8.0	10.9	12.7
General education programmes in vocational schools	274	200	158	206	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.7
Total	35767	34638	32086	31055	100	100	100	100

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

Table 5 shows the decrease of number of students in vocational schools in 2010-13. The decrease is similar to the demographic trend in the country. Vocational primary education is not attended on a large scale, since these programmes are provided for those with special needs (mainly with mental disabilities) or for drop-outs from general primary education. Most of vocational education is acquired at the secondary education level. Post-secondary vocational education programmes have become more popular – the number of students has doubled in the last four years due to the implemented education activities for the young unemployed, although the share of students is still comparatively small.

Primary education graduates' preferences about their further education traditionally are in favour of general secondary education (general 65:35 vocational). A promotion of prestige and a parity of esteem of vocational education have been set as priority in vocational education policy (e.g. Concept for raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance (CoM, 2009a); Guidelines for optimisation of vocational education establishments' network for 2010-2015 (CoM, 2010a); Education development guidelines for 2014-2020 (Saeima, 2014)).

During last years, the **distribution of vocational education students between fields of study** varies within 1-2% limits (Table 6). The most favoured fields of study are engineering, manufacturing and construction (39.2% in 2013), services (25%), and social sciences, business and law (13.7%).

Table 6. Students by field of study in vocational schools in the beginning of school year 2011/13

FIELDS OF STUDY \ YEAR	Number of students			Share of total (%)		
	2011	2012	2013	2011	2012	2013
Total	34638	32086	31055	100	100	100
General education	200	158	206	0.6	0.5	0.7
Humanities and arts	3057	3030	3153	8.8	9.4	10.2
Social sciences, business and law	4867	4328	4245	14.1	13.5	13.7
Natural sciences, mathematics and information technologies	1963	1795	1844	5.7	5.6	5.9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	14675	13120	12169	42.4	40.9	39.2
Agriculture	840	884	831	2.4	2.8	2.7
Health and welfare	727	816	852	2.1	2.5	2.7
Services	8309	7955	7755	24.0	24.8	25.0

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

Secondary education graduates' preferences about their further education/career are also relatively stable in recent years, but there is a trend that more graduates continue in higher education (from 58.3% in 2011 to 62.0% in 2013) or in vocational education (from 5.3% in 2011 to 7.9% in 2013), and less graduates discontinue their education (from 36.4% in 2011 to 30.1% in 2013).

Continuing vocational education

Although education pathways are different, the initial and continuing vocational education have the same legal and governance framework. **Vocational continuing education** enables adults with

previous education/work experience to acquire a professional qualification. Programmes are always offered for a specific state-recognised qualification/profession:

- For students with vocational secondary or vocational education to acquire professional qualification of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 3), the minimum duration of programme is 960-1280 hours depending on the field;
- Without prior education requirement to acquire professional qualification of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 2), the minimum duration of programme is 480 or 640 hours depending on the relevant occupation standard;
- Without prior education requirement to acquire professional qualification of EQF level 3 (Latvian professional qualification level 1) the minimum duration of programme is 480 hours.

Professional development programmes (at least 160 hours) enable people regardless of their age and previous education or professional qualifications to master systematized professional knowledge and skills corresponding to the requirements of the labour market, but professional qualification level is not awarded:

- Without prior education requirement, minimum duration of programme is 160-320 hours depending on the field.

Development of various knowledge and skills is also ensured through **non-formal education**, e.g. different courses.

In Latvia, participation of adults in education is lower than in EU-28 (Table 7). The political ambition to increase education participation rate from 5.3% in 2009 to 12.5% in 2013 has not been fulfilled as reflected in the “Latvian National reform programme for the EU 2020 strategy” (European Commission, 2011). Participation rates in continuing vocational education may have been positively influenced by the provision of education courses for the unemployed arranged by the State Employment Agency (NVA). Another motivating aspect of participation in adult education programmes is co-funding (ESF) that allows providing courses for free or for a reduced fee.

Table 7. Participation of adults (25-64) in education (%), 2008-13

YEAR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	9.3	9.3	9.1	8.9	9.0	10.5 ^(b)
Latvia	6.6	5.4	5.1	5.1 ^(b)	6.9	6.5

Source: Eurostat, last update: 21-07-2014, extracted: 04-09-2014

Continuous education is included in the classification of educational programmes outlined in the government regulations on the classification of Latvian education (CoM, 2008c). Since 2014, legal comparison with ISCED-2011 levels is provided. Continuous education programmes may belong to EQF levels 3-4 (the Latvian professional qualification levels 1-3) (Table 8).

Table 8. Classification of continuous vocational education programmes

Educational level	LQF/ EQF level	Professional qualification level	ISCED 2011	Programme
1. Primary	-	1	P2, A1	continuous vocational education without limits for previous education (programme duration at least 480 hours)
2. Lower-secondary	3	2	P3, A2	continuous vocational education after completed or unfinished primary education (programme duration 480, 640 or more hours)
	3	-	P3, A2	professional development after completed or unfinished primary education
3. Upper-secondary	4	2 or 3	P4, A4	continuous vocational education after general or vocational upper-secondary education (programme duration 640, 960 or more hours)
	4	-	P4, A3	professional development after general or vocational upper-secondary education

Education providers elaborate continuous vocational education programmes that are similar to initial vocational education, in accordance with the state vocational education standards and

occupational standards. Legally continuous vocational education programmes have to contain at least 30% of content from vocational education standard.

The accreditation system is based on standards determined in the Education Law (Saeima, 1998). Vocational education providers can only offer courses in programmes, which have been licensed. Licence is a permission to implement a particular education programme, stating that educational programme meets requirements of both educational and occupational standards, and the education institution has all necessary facilities and technical equipment and, if necessary, the alignment with the industry's professional associations. The license is issued for an indefinite period.

Accreditation is the acquisition of rights for 2-6 years to issue a state-recognised qualification for an educational programme and an education provider. In the course of accreditation the quality of implementation of the relevant educational programme is evaluated. All public continuing vocational education programmes (480 hours or more) and professional development programmes (160 hours or more) must be licenced and accredited by the State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*, IKVD). Professional development programmes (159 hours or less) must obtain a license from the local government. Public providers can also offer non-formal learning programmes without obtaining a license.

Similar to initial vocational education, students of vocational continuing education programme take a final qualification exam in accordance with procedures approved by the government (CoM, 2011c). Examination is organised by the education provider in cooperation with the National Centre for Education (VISC) to ensure that all the graduates, obtaining a certain profession, have compliant knowledge, skills and competences. Social partners are also involved in evaluating examination performance.

Vocational education providers may ensure full-time, part-time and extramural studies. Distance learning is ensured both by private and state education institutions. Mainly higher education institutions offer distance learning programmes. Distance Education Centre of Riga Technical University (1997, co-funded by Phare) offers e-learning courses in computing, business planning, languages, etc. Also private education providers offer e-learning courses. Private learning centre Buts Ltd (in 2012) implemented 35 e-learning courses (160 or 320 hours) in quality leadership, computing, accountancy up-skilling, etc., as well as courses (480, 640 or 960 hours) for obtaining a professional qualification, e.g., accountant, clerk, computer system technician, etc.

The most popular continuous vocational education courses were in social sciences, business and law, services and health and welfare (Table 9).

Table 9. Continuing vocational education courses by field of education (%), 2011

	Formal education	Non-formal education
Total	100	100
General programmes	3.9	4.7
Teachers' education and education science	8.0	10.8
Humanities and arts	6.9	10.0
Social sciences, business and law	32.9	25.7
Natural sciences, mathematics and information technologies	7.6	6.7
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	7.1	8.2
Agriculture	1.6	2.7
Health and welfare	12.0	15.0
Services	7.3	13.0

Source: www.csb.gov.lv

Table 10 shows that in Latvia and in the rest of the EU, inhabitants with lower education levels participate less in education activities during the working life.

Table 10. Participation in education (25-64) by the level educational attainment (%), 2013

EDUCATION	ISCED 0-2		ISCED 3-4		ISCED 5-8		Total	
	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal
EU-28	1.0	3.6	2.9	6.2	5.3	14.7	3.1	8.0
Latvia	: (u)	1.6 (u)	2.0	3.0	3.6	7.9	2.4	4.4

Source: Eurostat, last update: 21-07-2014, extracted: 04-09-2014. Special values - : not available; (u) low reliability.

According to Eurostat data, participation rate in formal adult education of employed persons (25-64) is almost the same as the EU-28 average, while the unemployed and inactive population participation rates are lower (Table 11). Participation rate in non-formal education of employed is twice lower than EU-28 average, while the participation rate of unemployed is near to EU-28 average.

Table 11. Participation in education (25-64) by the labour status (%), 2013

EDUCATION	Employed persons		Unemployed persons		Inactive population		Total	
	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal	Formal	Non-formal
EU-28	2.6	9.4	3.5	7.2	4.7	3.7	3.1	8.0
Latvia	2.5	4.7	1.7(u)	6.1	2.2	2.4	2.4	4.4

Source: Eurostat, last update: 21-07-2014, extracted: 04-09-2014. Special values - : not available; (u) low reliability.

Some private education providers (education centres) located (or represented) in all regions implement continuing vocational education and non-formal education programmes and cooperate with the NVA – a public agency that buys the unemployed training through the network of 28 regional offices.

Since 2010, the ESF project “Acquisition of vocational education programmes, key skills and competences for continuing career” (*Profesionālās izglītības programmu, pamatprasmju un kompetenču apguve izglītības un profesionālās karjeras turpināšanai*) is implemented by the State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra, VIAA*) and vocational education schools. It provides short (1-1.5 years) vocational education programmes for young people (17-25) that are ineligible to receive the unemployed benefits. Since 2012, also young people with a professional qualification, who are not (self-)employed, may enrol. The majority of programmes offered within the project were secondary education programmes of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 3). One-year programmes ensured acquisition of simpler occupations of EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 2). Since 2014, these programmes are implemented for young people (17-29) within the framework of the ESF project “Implementation of the initial vocational education programmes for young people within the youth guarantee” (*Sākotnējās profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošana garantijas jauniešiem ietvaros*).

2.2.2. APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

The apprenticeship in crafts has a long-standing tradition (since 1992), but is provided in small scale. As defined in the Law on Crafts (Supreme Council, 1993), “craft apprentice” is a person who, in order to acquire the craft, has joined a crafts company or an education institution and has signed a training contract. Apprenticeships are implemented separately from other education sectors and are not included in the educational programme classification (no relevant ISCED level). Only the Law on Crafts (Supreme Council, 1993) stipulates norms for apprenticeships and procedures for craftsman qualifications. Latvian Chamber of Crafts (*Latvijas Amatniecības kamera*) – self-governing organisation – is involved in the implementation of the system.

Apprenticeship is implemented through apprenticeship programmes and journeyman and master of crafts exams. The qualification exams are organized by the Chamber of Crafts. The chamber has signed cooperation agreements with a number of vocational schools. Thus, the apprenticeship programmes include school- and work-based learning. One can become an apprentice if they find

a master who agrees to teach them. Such apprentices have to attend the educational course on crafts history provided by the chamber. Apprenticeship programmes are drafted by the relevant craft professional association and approved by the Council of the Chamber of Crafts. The duration of programmes on average is three years and is determined by craft associations.

Apprentices are admitted to a programme regardless of their previous education, but not earlier than the year in which they turn 16 (unless they have permission from the parents or guardian).

The journeyman (*amata zēja diploms*) and master of crafts (*amata meistara diploms*) qualifications can be obtained through apprenticeship. Both candidates of journeymen and master craftsman have to be members of the Chamber's sectoral or territorial craft association. The journeyman qualification is awarded after passing journeyman examination, which comprises two parts: theoretical and practical (presentation of a project). The master craftsman qualification is awarded after passing master craftsman examination. To apply for the examination of the master craftsman, the journeyman candidate has to have eight years of work experience in the field. The theoretical two months course for master craftsman candidates is offered by the Chamber of Crafts. The master craftsman with the relevant higher education is considered as an academically educated master craftsman.

Apprenticeship qualifications neither provide access to regulated professions nor give an access to formal education system. Currently there are no mechanisms in place for those who dropped out from apprenticeship before completing the education to continue their learning.

To address the challenge of the vocational education system – to make it more responsive to the labour market needs – the MoES has begun to build a new apprenticeship-type scheme called work-based learning (WBL) in vocational education schools. MoES has signed the Memorandum on cooperation in vocational education and training in Europe (2012) and the declaration of intent with Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany on cooperation in vocational education and training (2013). It aims to support work-based learning projects. In September 2013, six vocational education institutions started the implementation of work-based learning in several vocational education programmes. This includes flexible curriculum (according to occupational characteristics) and sharing responsibilities of teaching (theory) and training (practical) between school and enterprises. Vocational education institutions ensure acquirement of theoretical knowledge, improvement of curricula. Companies ensure professional learning in a real workplace environment and allowance/wage. Students are selected in work-based learning project programmes according to criteria that are set by the companies. So far, the project is implemented very successfully and is appreciated both by students/teachers and employers. In study year 2014/2015, the number of schools that applied for participation in the WBL projects increased four times, and the number of enterprises – six times comparing to study year 2013/2014. The introduction of WBL at education system level has become one of the priorities in education and employment policies for 2014-2020 (Saeima, 2014). In 2014, MoES has signed “Memorandum on cooperation in VET” with Switzerland and another project on Baltic States’ co-operation in WBL implementation will be started. The proposed amendments to the Vocational Education Law, which are currently discussed in the Parliament (October 2014), provide the framework of separate regulations for WBL.

2.2.3. VET PROVISION FOR TARGET GROUPS

Unemployed people are among the target groups, for whom the state and ESF support is given to acquire new or improve existing professional skills. Vocational education, re-qualification and qualification development is one of the active employment measures provided by the NVA. In 2013, 6% of the registered unemployed were involved in vocational continuing education programmes (professional qualification level is awarded), 3% were involved in professional development programmes (professional qualification level is not awarded) and 22% were involved

in non-formal education courses. The unemployed receive monthly allowance of EUR 100 to acquire or improve professional knowledge and skills.

According to the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (Saeima, 2002), the most vulnerable groups among unemployed are defined as:

- young job-seekers (15-24 years old);
- pre-retirement age (55-64) individuals;
- long-term (>1 year) unemployed;
- individuals after parental leave (6 months);
- individuals with disabilities;
- individuals caring for a family member;
- ex-convicts and ex-drug addicts.

Involving vulnerable groups into the active employment measures (including vocational education, re-qualification and qualification improvement) to foster their inclusion in the labour market is a strategic objective of the NVA.

Another special target group is **young people with special needs**. To ensure education for children/adolescents with mental disabilities, there are special boarding schools in municipalities – development centres implementing both special general primary education programmes and vocational primary education programmes for acquisition qualifications of EQF level 3 (Latvian professional qualification level 1). The MoW Social Integration State Agency (*Sociālās integrācijas valsts aģentūra*) implements the national policy of social integration for persons with different special needs by providing a wide range of vocational education programmes (at levels of vocational primary education, vocational education, vocational secondary education, first level professional higher education, vocational continuing education) and social rehabilitation services for persons with (possible) special needs. Alsviki Vocational School (under the governance of MoES) for young people with different disabilities implements vocational primary and vocational education programmes.

Since 2011, the state and ESF support is given for implementing vocational education programmes addressed to the **young people in prisons** to ensure acquisition of key competences and professional competences/qualification. Since 2014, VIAA implements these programmes for 15-29 years old convicts, in the framework of the ESF project “Implementation of the initial vocational education programmes for young people within the youth guarantee” (*Sākotnējās profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošana garantijas jauniešiem ietvaros*).

There are vocational primary (EQF level 3) and vocational education (EQF level 4) programmes for **early leavers** from general primary education and those with a low level of basic knowledge and skills. The programmes include pedagogical correction, which provides opportunity to acquire both vocational and general primary education. Such programmes are provided by some vocational education schools.

NEETs – young people who are not in education, employment, or training – is a target group which has gained special attention in the framework of initiative “Youth Guarantee” (MoW, 2013), including monitoring of NEETs in the territory of local governments and involving them in employment or education. The initiative includes enlargement of active employment measures provided by NVA and implementation of initial vocational education programmes (1-1.5 years) for young people (17-29) administered by VIAA.

2.2.4. SPECIFIC FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Governance

Most vocational education providers are state-owned. There are also vocational education schools established (or taken over from the state) by local governments, as well as private vocational education schools. The MoES is responsible for the largest share of state-owned vocational education schools. Some are under the supervision of other ministries (Ministry of Culture (*Kultūras ministrija*), Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*), Ministry of the Interior (*Iekšlietu ministrija*)).

At present (2014), vocational education system is managed by the following state institutions:

The Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*, CoM) determines the state's political and strategic areas in vocational education, sets procedures for: development of occupational standards and qualification requirements, organisation of practice, examination centre accreditation, professional qualification examinations, issuing state recognised qualifications, allocation of competence centre status, calculation and allocation of teachers' payment and recognition of foreign qualifications.

The Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*, MoES) develops the framework regulations for vocational education, proposes the allocation of funds from the state budget and finances vocational education providers established by the MoES. The ministry also organises implementation of career education, approves regulations and employs the heads of vocational education institutions under its supervision.

Other ministries develop proposals for allocation of funds for financing vocational education schools established by them and cooperate with the MoES regarding drafting occupational standards, quality assurance and other issues, organise further education of teachers, adult continuing vocational education and professional development and unemployed learning.

MoES National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības saturs centrs*, VISC) provides the development of content for vocational primary (lower-secondary), vocational, vocational secondary (upper-secondary), continuous vocational education, professional development and vocationally oriented education regarding state education standards; develops the content and procedures for state centralized examinations; coordinates the development of study literature corresponding to vocational education standards; coordinates and implements the professional development of vocational teachers.

MoES State Education Quality Service (*Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests*, IKVD) licences education programmes (except those of hobby, adult informal/non-formal and higher education); evaluates the quality of vocational (except professional higher) education. Since 2013, IKVD coordinates the implementation of EQAVET.

MoES State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra*, VIAA) promotes the development and implementation of education, continuing education and science policy by performing functions of intermediate institution in administration and control of European Structural Funds projects in education, introduction of the European Union programmes, and supports the development of career education policy.

Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*, MoW) is responsible for active and passive labour market policy.

MoW State Employment Agency (*Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra*, NVA) implements labour market policy, including programmes for the unemployed.

Local governments participate in the implementation of vocational education by managing schools owned by local governments; promote business development in their territory; cooperate

with employers' organizations and participate in the resolution of issues related to the practice placements for students in the local government.

The social dialogue and strategic cooperation is arranged (at institutional level) through:

1) The **National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment** (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*, 2000), which was founded by the ministries (Welfare, Economy, Finance, Justice, Agriculture, Education and Science, Regional Development and Local Government Affairs), the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, and the Employers' Confederation of Latvia. The tasks of the Sub-Council are as follows:

- To review the drafts of state development plans, concepts and legal norms concerning vocational education, human resource development and employment and draw up proposals for amendments;
- To evaluate and suggest improvements in management, funding and implementation of vocational education to the state and NGOs;
- To confirm occupational standards before they are submitted for approval of the CoM;
- To endorse annual students' enrolment plan proposed by the Sectoral Expert Councils.

2) 12 **Sectoral Expert Councils** (*Nozaru ekspertu padomes*, 2011) were established as a part of the ESF project "Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education" (VIAA, 2010-2015). The main functions of Sectoral Expert Councils are to find solutions for long-term human resources development in sectors and ensure vocational education's compliance to labour market needs (including participation in the development of occupational standards, education programmes, quality assessment procedures, WBL opportunities, etc.) They propose to vocational education student enrolment plans to the MoES. Along with the representatives from the sectors, the representatives from the MoES and the Ministry of Economics, Employers' Confederation of Latvia, and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia are involved in the councils. The representatives from the MoW and NVA can participate in the council meetings, as well. Sectoral Expert Councils' role and functions are defined by the proposed amendments to the Vocational Education Law, which are currently (October 2014) discussed in the Parliament.

As a reaction to the negative demographic trend impacting the number of vocational education students and to the limited financial resources, the MoES designed the Guidelines for optimisation of vocational education establishments' network for 2010-2015 (CoM, 2010a). The guidelines endorse further structural reforms in vocational education by optimising and modernising the network of vocational schools (reduction from 59 MoES vocational education schools in 2009/10 to 30 schools in 2015). On 30 June 2014, there were 34 vocational education schools owned by MoES (MoES, 2014a).

Vocational education schools issue educational documents in accordance with the implemented programmes (see 2.2.1).

Funding

Procedures of funding for vocational education are stipulated by the Education Law (Saeima, 1998) and further described by the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a).

Education institutions according to their ownership are financed from the state budget (SB), local government budget (LGB) or private funding (PF) (Table 12). Funding for the implementation of vocational education programmes is allocated from the state budget per student.

Table 12. Sources of vocational education funding

	Schools	Teacher salary	Fixed expenses*	Non-fixed expenses**
State		SB	SB	SB
Local government		SB	LGB or SB	LGB or SB (except teacher salary)
Private		PF	PF	PF

* Missions, services, energy and water, learning aid, equipment.

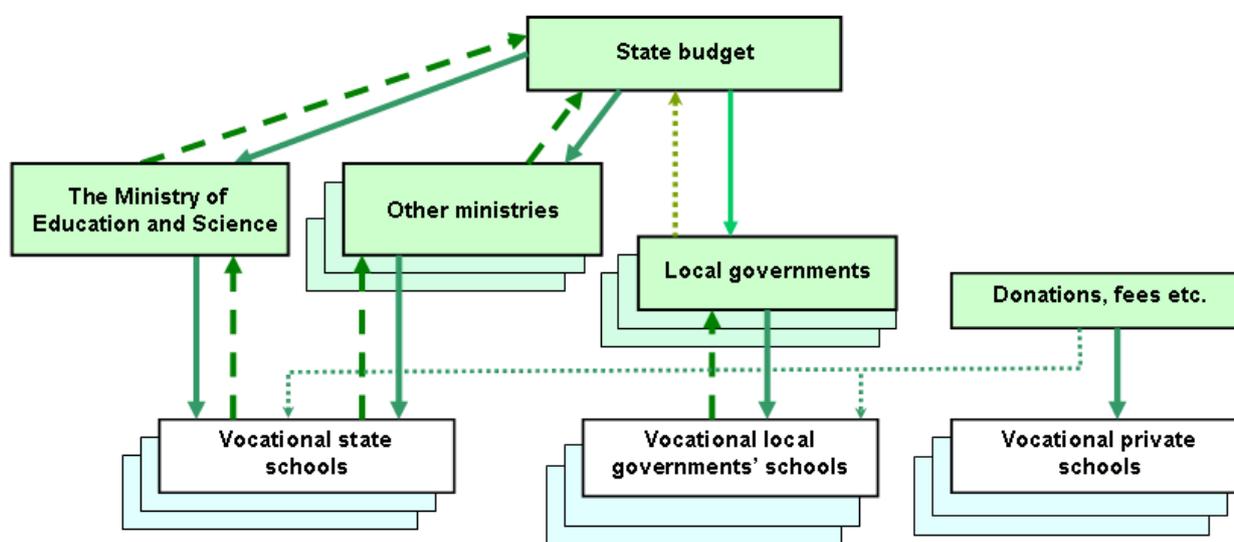
** Scholarships, maintenance of dormitories, rehabilitation, catering, practice, insurance, culture education and sports, personnel salary.

Additional funding source can be student fees. Services of the state and local government schools (implementing pre-school, primary and secondary education) are for free; private schools may charge students a tuition fee. In higher education, the state covers fees for a certain number of negotiated study places. Students with lower achievements or willing to enrol in a non-subsidised field of study may be charged a tuition fee. Local governments may charge a tuition fee in the municipal sports and music vocational education schools.

The majority of vocational schools are state-owned and run; therefore, the national budget is the main source of funding. Local governments and private entities may also provide subsidies for vocational education. Education institutions (both vocational and general) may receive additional funding form donations and paid services, to be used for purchasing learning aids and equipment, student grants, and to (partially) cover fees. Education institution may simultaneously implement education programmes funded from different sources (Figure 1).

Initial vocational education students receive state monthly allowance and can receive increased scholarship co-financed by the ESF (see 4.1.).

Figure 1. Flow of funds for initial vocational education



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Teacher salary in the state and local government education institutions (including pre-schools) is paid from the state budget. Local governments may supplement salary payment in any type of vocational education schools. For accredited primary, secondary and higher education programmes the state can finance teacher salary also in private schools.

According to the Education Law (Saeima, 1998), **adult education** may be funded from the state and local government budget, employers' resources, students' resources, donations and other sources. Some local governments allocate a fixed percentage from their budget to adult education. Important source of funding is the EU, Swiss and Norwegian financial assistance instruments, including structural funds and the EU programme Erasmus+ (previously the Lifelong Learning

Programme 2007-2013), which opened more learning opportunities for adults through various projects.

A national data collection on continuing vocational education funding has been discontinued in 2005. Partly information about adult education funding is available on learning activities supported by the ESF, state budget and partly – local governments. The statistics about employers' and individuals' funding are not being regularly collected. According to the data collected by MoES (2013), in 2012, local governments invested around EUR 2.251 million in adult non-formal education and 62 837 adults were involved (around EUR 1.289 million and 29 069 adults in 2009). There are different patterns of support between regions and local governments. Meanwhile, the local governments have developed other support instruments: 1) funding or co-funding education institutions in their territory that offer adult non-formal learning (adult education centres, folk schools, culture centres, general education establishments, etc.); 2) providing physical space or offering a rent discount for the implementation of adult non-formal learning programmes; 3) co-financing projects of foreign financial instruments that focus on implementation and development of adult non-formal learning; 4) offering subsidies for NGOs that ensure the availability of education services for adults. However, these activities in general cannot ensure the achievement of the stated objective of 15% of adults taking part in educational activities by 2020.

2.2.5. EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Vocational education institutions may be divided according to their ownership: state, local government and private schools. In 2012, amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) changed the titles of vocational education institutions according to education programmes and professional qualifications offered.

According to the law, there are the following vocational education institutions:

- 1) Vocational primary school (*profesionālā pamatskola*) – education institution that implements vocational primary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 1 (EQF level 3);
- 2) Vocational school (*arodskola*) – education institution that implements vocational education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 2 (EQF level 4);
- 3) Vocational secondary school (*profesionālā vidusskola*) – education institution that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4);
- 4) Technical school (*tehnikums*) – education institution that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4) and that has gained the status of vocational education competence centre;
- 5) College (*koledža*) – education institution that implements the first level professional higher education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 4 (EQF level 5).

Vocational education institution that implements vocational secondary education programmes leading to the Latvian professional qualification level 3 (EQF level 4), and additionally performs the functions of regional methodological centre, teacher further education centre, and the centre for evaluating professional competences acquired outside formal education may obtain the status of vocational education competence centre according to the criteria determined by the CoM (2013b).

In July 2014 there were 34 MoES vocational education schools. Vocational secondary education programmes may be obtained also in nine colleges under the supervision of the MoES. It is planned to continue optimizing the school network and differentiating remaining vocational schools by their type, which also would promote access to vocational education for adults. The large vocational education schools (more than 500 students) in regional centres are gradually

transformed into vocational education competence centres. In 2011-2014, already 12 vocational schools and 1 college were granted the status of competence centre. Smaller schools are being joined to state colleges or competence centres, or assigned under the direction of local governments, thereby, ensuring the resource consolidation (MoES, 2014a).

At present (2014), there are eleven vocational education institutions under the direction of local governments. Some of these schools implement both general and vocational education programmes. Thus, a qualitative education offer of all kinds is concentrated in jurisdiction of local governance and regarding its needs.

2.2.6. TEACHERS AND TRAINERS

In the vocational education system teachers provide both theoretical courses and practical learning at school. They implement vocational primary education, vocational (secondary) education, vocational upper-secondary education, and professional development and continuing vocational education programmes. Every vocational education teacher can work in initial and continuing vocational education at primary and secondary level.

Vocational education teachers:

- Implement education programmes according to state vocational education standards and occupational standards;
- Develop and implement syllabi (approved by the head of education institution);
- Assess the knowledge and skills acquired by learners;
- Foster the development of creative attitudes and independence of learners; and
- Discover and apply new ideas, technologies, and methods in the learning process.

In October 2014, new government “Regulations on necessary teacher education and professional qualifications, and procedure for the improvement of professional competences” (CoM, 2014c) were adopted, which determine education requirements and education acquisition procedures for vocational education teachers. Acquisition of pedagogical course in a higher education institution (72 hours) is now required for teachers without pedagogical qualification. In addition, teachers are required to undertake at least 36 hours of an up-skilling course every three years.

Since 2014, **teachers of vocational study subject** must have either:

- Higher education in a sector and pedagogical course in a higher education institution (at least 72 hours);
- Vocational upper-secondary education or master of crafts level qualification and pedagogical course in a higher education institution (at least 72 hours).

The requirement for a pedagogical course does not apply to supervisors of practice, whose teaching load is less than 240 hours per year.

Since 2014, **teachers of general study subjects** must have either:

- Higher education in pedagogy/education (Bachelor’s/Master’s degree or second level higher professional education) and teacher’s qualification in particular subject;
- Higher education in the relevant branch of science (Bachelor’s/Master’s degree or second level higher professional education) and teacher’s qualification in particular subject (or student in teacher’s education programme) or pedagogical course/programme in a higher education institution (at least 72 hours).

The most of vocational education teachers have higher education (Table 13).

Table 13. Education level of vocational education teachers

School year	Teachers	Teachers' education level								
		secondary education					higher education			
		total	general secondary	vocational secondary	have pedagogical education	currently students	total	pedagogical	other (including >320 hours of pedagogy)	PhD
2009/10	3228	349	28	321	185	143	2879	2113	670	25
2010/11	3164	276	29	247	130	100	2888	2109	694	20
2011/12	3102	251	29	222	124	91	2839	2000	781	12
2012/13	3112	245	15	230	110	104	2847	1962	789	20
2013/14	2899	225	13	212	108	60	2650	1856	719	24

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 2014

Requirements for higher education, including college teachers' education and qualifications are stipulated in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c).

2.2.7. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LATVIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Latvian Qualifications Framework (LQF) is established and has been presented to the EQF Advisory Group in 2011. It consists of eight levels. Descriptors of the LQF are based on learning outcomes (*mācīšanās rezultāti*). The framework includes formal (general/academic and vocational/professional) education: primary, secondary and higher (Academic Information centre, 2012).

In 2010, the LQF level descriptors were included in the CoM "Regulations on the classification of Latvian education" (CoM, 2008c). Similar to the EQF, they are expressed as:

- knowledge (knowledge and comprehension),
- skills (ability to apply knowledge, communication, general skills) and
- competence (analysis, synthesis and assessment).

The regulations also linked all formal education levels to the relevant LQF/EQF level as demonstrated in Table 14.

Table 14. Formal qualifications and EQF/LQF levels

LQF/ EQF level	Latvian education documents (qualifications)
1	Certificate of general primary education (for students in special educational programmes for students with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)
2	Certificate of general primary education (for students in special educational programmes for students with mental development disorders)
3	Certificate of general primary education Certificate of vocational primary education
4	Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education (without rights to enter HE) Diploma of vocational secondary education (with rights to enter HE)
5	Diploma of first level professional higher education (1 st level professional higher (college) education; the length of full-time studies 2-3 years)
6	Bachelor's diploma Professional Bachelor's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the length of full-time studies – at least 4 years)
7	Master's diploma Professional Master's diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (2 nd level professional higher education, the total length of full-time studies – at least 5 years)
8	Doctor's diploma

The CoM Regulations “Procedure by which the state recognised education documents certifying higher education are issued” (CoM, 2013c) stipulate that diploma supplements should include LQF/EQF or EHEA framework level. The LQF/EQF levels should also be reflected in the diagram of the Latvian Higher Education System that is part of the diploma supplement.

Achievement of learning outcomes corresponding to the EQF/LQF levels is formulated as an objective of HE programmes in the state standards of the academic (CoM, 2014a) and the second level professional higher education (CoM, 2014b).

According to the proposed amendments in 2014 to Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a), by 2015, the state recognized documents of vocational education and professional qualification should include relevant LQF level (amendments are still under discussion).

In 2008, the Academic Information Centre, which also supervises the Latvian representation in ENIC-NARIC network, Europass and ReferNet, was appointed as the national coordination point (NCP) for the EQF to organise the national consultation process and promote the established framework. As a result of the consultation process, the decision to arrange referencing in two consequent steps was adopted to facilitate meaningful implementation process as it is time-consuming and requires large scale reforms:

1. 2009-11: the establishment of the LQF, referencing of the formal Latvian education system to the EQF for lifelong learning and the QF-EHEA.
2. 2013-15: the review of the self-assessment report based on the new Vocational Education Law (expected), Higher Education Law (expected) and the results of on-going projects, e.g. the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-15).

2.2.8. INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The concept “Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance” (CoM, 2009) supports the improvement of vocational education programmes through the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-15). In 2012-13, economic sectors were surveyed and 14 sectoral qualifications frameworks were created. Modular approach in vocational education (including learning outcomes, content, teaching/learning methods, and indicators of achievement) is discussed in the project. The structure of education content was changed – five modules (for initial and continuing vocational education) were created by VISC – to promote acquisition of lifelong learning competences in vocational education. The lifelong learning competences are mentioned in the state education standards, occupational standards. VISC has also developed methodological recommendations for the elaboration of modular vocational education programmes (National Centre for Education, 2013). Their testing was initiated in several vocational education programmes in 2013. The dialogue about alternative forms of learning outcomes evaluation in relation to the implementation of modular approach has been started. In the “Education development guidelines for 2014-2020” (Saeima, 2014) the development of modular approach in vocational education programmes and work-based learning is interpreted as the main solution to increase the attractiveness of vocational education.

In April 2014, the State Education Development Agency in terms of Erasmus+ initiated project to support the team of national ECVET experts. The MoES nominated four experts to promote ECVET and facilitate its implementation in Latvia. The project activities will last until 31.03.2015.

2.3. OTHER FORMS OF LEARNING

2.3.1. LEARNING PROVIDERS, TYPICAL PROGRAMMES AND TARGET GROUPS

Different job-related knowledge, skills and competences acquisition or development is provided at sectoral or enterprise level mainly as non-formal education or short professional development courses. Job-related development of knowledge, skills and competences is offered by vocational education institutions, university continuing education departments and their distance learning centres, local education centres, chambers of commerce, adult education centres, other educational organisations and associations, and private providers.

See information about continuing vocational education in section 2.2.1.2.

2.3.2. SECTORAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Sectors with regulated professions or professions with special certification requirements may provide non-formal education. For example, the Latvian Medical Doctors' Association offers several non-formal education courses and lectures for doctors to prepare for certification exam and to collect necessary amount of education credit points for medical doctors' re-certification and professional upgrading.

Up-skilling of teachers (seminars, courses) is organised by the VISC. In recent years, the centre raised competences of teachers, heads of schools and librarians through ESF projects, e.g. "Further education of general education teachers" (*Vispārējās izglītības pedagogu tālākizglītība*, 2010-13) and "Improvement of theoretical knowledge and practical competences for vocational subject teachers and for supervisors of practical training" (*Profesionālo mācību priekšmetu pedagogu un prakses vadītāju teorētisko zināšanu un praktisko kompetenču paaugstināšana*, 2009-13).

Sectoral associations also use the ESF co-financed support to the learning of a workforce in order to promote the competitiveness of companies (learning activities organised in partnerships) (*Atbalsts nodarbināto apmācībām komersantu konkurētspējas veicināšanai – atbalsts partnerībās organizētām apmācībām*) administered by the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (*Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra*, LIAA). As projects are implemented through partnerships, various associations provide learning activities for enterprises. In 2011, the agency concluded 16 agreements with associations regarding the implementation of learning projects, which were intended for involving 16 000 employees from more than 900 enterprises (i.e. 4.4% of the adults involved in non-formal education during 2011 in Latvia). Implementation of the projects will continue until 1st June 2015 – 12 projects, which were the most successful and achieved the performance indicators, received additional funding. Around 97% of learning was conducted in the field of computing, engineering sciences and technologies, production, design, creative industries, physical sciences, mathematics and statistics. In 2012, the Latvian Information and Communications Technology Association in the frame of the programme has signed 31 agreements on implementing 16 education programmes of information technology for small and micro enterprises.

The project of the "Latvian rural development programme for 2014-2020" (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014) among other activities foresees the promotion of skills development, lifelong learning activities in agriculture and forestry sectors.

2.3.3. WORKPLACE LEARNING

In enterprises providing learning for employees is not mandatory. It is addressed in the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a), which obligates employers to pay for employees' vocational education and qualification development if employees are sent to education institution. Thus, in most cases, learning in enterprises depends on enterprise initiative and resources, since learning is a voluntary

activity. Enterprises tend to provide learning through external or internal courses. Other means such as job rotation within the organisation may also be used. Study groups and participation in conferences can also constitute a learning provision. The data on learning in enterprises are collected by the Central Statistics Bureau only as part of the European Survey (1999, 2005).

An enterprise-provided learning that assists employees in adapting to new tasks to guarantee/improve their career is a type of non-formal education. It provides an opportunity to acquire completely new skills or add certain competences (e.g. teamwork skills). Education providers (education centres in large enterprises or external (adult) education centres) are free to produce a study programme of different courses in accordance with enterprise's needs. Teachers may be employed by an education provider or may be contracted to provide a certain course directly by the employer. It is usually the responsibility of the provider to design their own education programmes. For certain regulated professions, other bodies may be consulted to ensure that relevant occupational standards are met. The quality of provision is not otherwise monitored. Education courses are usually funded by the enterprise and employees may be asked to contribute their part.

The study of 14 sectors was conducted including the offer of initial vocational education and continuing education opportunities in the sectors, which was supported by the ESF project "Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education" (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšanai, 2010-15*). The study results indicate that part of occupations necessary in the sectors are not provided in vocational schools; therefore, large enterprises ensure work-based learning for their employees at the enterprise. In some cases employer completely or partly covers tuition fees for employee's education.

JSC "Rīgas Siltums" (heating services) learning centre (1999) offers education in the specialities of the company. In cooperation with other sectoral enterprises once per month the learning centre provides also learning for employees from other enterprises. JSC "Latvijas Gāze" (natural gas provider) for the simple occupations employs individuals without specific prior knowledge and ensures necessary learning in their own education centre and through work under the guidance of a mentor. Generally, these learning activities focus on specific technical skills, e.g. performing dangerous work operations. According to the study, large enterprises consider that the best way for their employees to obtain necessary skills is through in-house work-based learning. Meanwhile, many medium and small enterprises cannot provide such learning opportunities. The majority of enterprises (although mainly large) are ready to finance the up-skilling of their employees.

2.3.4. FUNDING MECHANISMS

Enterprises are responsible for arranging learning activities for their employees, but they are not mandatory. At present, national statistics about funding spent on learning by enterprises are not collected. The tax system does not promote employer to invest in learning. Only large, stable enterprises may have a learning budget. These enterprises usually have a human resource development strategy. Smaller enterprises tend to invest less in employees' education. They tend to have other priorities in terms of their survival on the market.

The LIAA coordinates the implementation of Human Resources development projects supported by the EU funds (regulated by the relevant government regulations). Enterprises have showed great interest in these projects.

The NVA also coordinates learning activities for the employed (including those at risk of unemployment) since 2008. The measures are implemented in line with the CoM "Regulations regarding the procedures for organising and financing active employment measures and preventative measures for unemployment reduction and principles for the selection of implementing bodies of measures" (CoM, 2011a).

Preventive employment measures include vocational education for employed individuals, who are subject to unemployment risk (individuals receive voucher for EUR 427-711 to cover the learning fees and monthly allowance of EUR 100 for six months), and lifelong learning measures for the labour force. In 2013, 6 376 people (18% of involved in the NVA educational activities) participated in lifelong learning programmes for the employed.

2.4. DISCUSSION ON THE NEW TRENDS IN ADULT EDUCATION

The adult education system adjustment is a challenge for the MoES and other stakeholders, including state and social partners. With the support of the EU lifelong learning programme's grant, a new national adult education cooperation model has been designed in recent years. The MoES organised six interagency forums (2013-2014) in the framework of the project "Implementation of European programme in the field of adult education" (*Eiropas programmas īstenošana pieaugušo izglītības jomā*) to discuss initiatives on adult education policy for 2014-2020. The project was financially supported by the European Commission.

MoES intends to establish an effective adult education system during 2015. The priority will be 25-54 years old employed adults.

Further issues still need to be solved, e.g. regarding the lack of employers' motivation to cooperate with vocational education institutions (no legal provision) and ensure further education for their employees; the lack of statistics on adult non-formal learning and learning at enterprises.

3. SHAPING VET QUALIFICATIONS

3.1. METHODS FOR ANTICIPATING LABOUR MARKET NEEDS AND APPLYING THE RESULTS IN VET

The responsibility of providing labour market forecasts rests with the Ministry of Economics (*Ekonomikas ministrija*, MoE) and the NVA.

The MoE produces the **medium-term and long-term forecasts** and has set up the Advisory Council for Labour Market Forecasting (*Darba tirgus prognozēšanas konsultatīvā padome*) – a platform for the dialogue between the state (MoE), employers (Employers' Confederation of Latvia), employees (Free Trade Union Confederation), and the local governments (Association of Local and Regional Governments). The council holds annual meetings to discuss the mid-term labour market forecasts published by the MoE, including:

- The report on economic development (two per year) with forecasts and reflection on the past (MoE, 2014a);
- The report on labour market mid-term and long-term forecasts (MoE, 2014b)

The reports include an overview about the supply and demand, educational areas, levels and progression routes (including vocational education) of the labour force. The data are used by the MoES to plan vocational education provision.

The instruments for labour market forecasting are based on the dynamic optimization model (DOM) of labour market forecasting that was elaborated within the ESF project “Research of the long-term forecasting system of the labour market demand and the analysis of its improvement possibilities” (*Darba tirgus pieprasījuma ilgtermiņa prognozēšanas sistēmas izpēte un pilnveidošanas iespēju analīze*, 2007). DOM structure was developed based on the system-dynamic approach of the labour market balance concept. It takes into account the aging and professional mobility of the labour force. Labour force demand by sector is determined by scenarios of national economy – future growth and changes in productivity. The demand of occupations emerges from the labour force demand and expected changes in occupation structure of a sector. The education demand is characterised by skills or educational level that is required to perform the job. Labour market forecasts are based on international classification systems adapted in Latvia; thus, the forecasts are internationally comparable.

An expert evaluation of the education offer (assumptions about acquired skills and relevant education levels) match to occupations is used in forecasts based on the international occupational classification (ISCO-08).

According to the report on labour market mid-term and long-term forecasts (MoE, 2014b), almost 2/3 of increase in the demand of the labour force until 2020 will be in three sectors: manufacturing industry, trade and business services. Contribution to such traditional sector as agriculture will decrease. As a result, the demand for highly qualified specialists (with higher and vocational secondary education) will increase rapidly. Sectors of engineering, production (mainly electric and electronic engineering, metalworking, mechanical engineering and food processing sectors), natural sciences and information technologies are expected to have an insufficient supply of labour force according to forecast. In the long-term, the supply of equipment and machine operator, qualified worker and craftsman professions would be significantly lower than demand if the structure of the education remains unchanged. The similar situation will also be in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries' sectors, and in sectors with many pension age employees. Almost in all sectors, especially after 2020, the demand for low-skilled labour force will decrease.

The NVA carries out the **short-term labour market forecasting**. It also conducts employers' surveys (express) twice a year to anticipate the changes in the labour force structure in the

following six months, as well as to clarify reasons for changes, demanded and unclaimed occupations by employers. The results are used to adjust the education offer for the unemployed.

The **Central Statistical Bureau** (*Centrālās statistikas pārvalde*, CSB) functions according to the State Statistics Law (Saeima, 1997) and the Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Statistics (2009). Every three months the CSB conducts a labour force survey collecting data on education levels, type of economic action, and occupational groups. Based on the survey results, the MoE prepares the mid-term and long-term forecasts on matching the labour demand and supply.

Since 2012, the national statistics system is based on the new classification of economy sectors and occupations (NACE 2nd edition, ISCO-08).

The data on higher education institutions' (HEI) and vocational education providers' graduates are gathered by the institutions themselves and submitted to the MoES and the CSB for further analysis and publication. According to the amendments (2011) to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c), HEIs have to ensure that information about graduates' employment is collected and analysed. Thus, more data on graduates is available. Various aspects of graduates' professional activities are also explored in the Labour Force and Profession Survey and other small scale studies conducted by the CSB.

3.2. HOW AND BY WHOM QUALIFICATIONS ARE DESIGNED

Skill needs are taken into account when **drafting vocational qualifications** through the definition of **occupational standards** for different professions. In accordance with the CoM Regulations (2007b), occupational standards are developed by representatives of educational institutions and social partners in working groups organized by the VISC for the Latvian professional qualification levels 1-3 (EQF levels 3-4) and by the MoES for Latvian professional qualification levels 4-5 (EQF levels 5-7). Occupational standards are approved by the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*). MoW proposes drafts of occupational standards to the government for approval. Standards are updated and reviewed as necessary (at least every five years). Representatives of ministries, local governments, employers, employees, chamber of commerce and industry, NGOs and vocational education providers are involved in development and review of standards.

Occupational standards comprise a description of specific job tasks and duties, and necessary abilities, skills, and professional competences (necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain working situations). A standard also places an occupation in sectoral qualification system including description of employability, and determine to which level of professional qualification each specific profession corresponds. Educational institutions ensure that the necessary knowledge, skills and professional competences of the occupational standard are included in the relevant education programme. In 2010, new classification of occupations and its procedures – CoM Regulations (CoM, 2010b) – were adopted. The regulations enforce occupational standards to be included in the classification of occupations as appendices.

The content of vocational education programmes is defined by the **state vocational education standards** that are stipulated by the relevant CoM regulations (CoM, 2000). The state vocational education standards outline the strategic aims of education programmes, the mandatory content of education, and the basic principles and procedure for evaluating the acquired education. The standards determine the ratio of theory and practice, the ratio of subjects of general education and vocational subjects, the division of general education subjects, etc. Similarly, for professional higher education programmes state education standards are applied (CoM, 2001a, CoM, 2014c).

Vocational education programme describes objectives, content, implementation plan, requirements regarding previous education of students, qualification of teachers and resources necessary for implementation. Programmes are elaborated by education providers in line with the state education standards, occupational standards and VISC recommendations. The education programmes are licensed and accredited by the IKVD if they comply with these regulations.

In addition, the content of final qualification examinations, which conclude vocational education programmes and consist of theoretical and practical part, is drafted in line with the relevant occupational standards and state education standards. Representatives from relevant sectoral organisations (employers, workers) work in the examination commission.

3.3. ENSURING THE LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE OF VET

The **MoES** uses its mid-term and long-term forecasts of the labour force demand and supply as one of the sources in planning vocational education supply (provision plans, including the number of potential students and types of programmes), and in policy development (guidelines) and implementation, including ESF co-financed projects for restructuring vocational education, raising competence of teachers, quality of vocational education. Annually Sectoral Expert Councils submit to the MoES proposals for education provision plans in each sector.

Revision of occupation standards, on which education programmes are based, is an ongoing process. Since 2007, the standards besides knowledge and skills have to include professional competence, i.e. necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain work situations; therefore, all standards designed before had to be updated. In case standards (occupation or education) are altered, the education programmes have to be adapted accordingly. Otherwise, these programmes would not be accredited. With the adoption of new classification of occupations and its procedures (CoM, 2010b) in 2010, the occupational standards approved prior 2010 need to be reviewed. In terms of the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšana, 2010-15*), 80 occupational standards in key professions are planned to elaborate or improve according to the labour market needs in 14 sectors. In 2014, 61 occupational standards and 19 professional qualification requirements were already designed and approved.

To respond to high youth unemployment **vocational education standards** were amended in 2010 to introduce short (1-1.5 years) vocational education programmes (post-secondary level) for 17-25 years old individuals. Previously these were two-year programmes. The short programmes’ implementation is supported by the ESF project “Support to the quality improvement and implementation of initial vocational education programmes” (*Atbalsts sākotnējās profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošanas kvalitātes uzlabošanai un īstenošanai, 2010-15*) coordinated by the State Education Development Agency (*Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra, VIAA*). Within the project, it is planned to prepare 4300 specialists in 70 different occupations by April 2015. Programmes were harmonised with the sectoral organizations and the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment. Additionally, in the framework of the initiative “Youth Guarantee”, in 2014/15, the VIAA cooperated with more than 40 vocational education providers that started implementation of short (1-1.5 years) vocational education programmes for 17-29 years old individuals.

3.4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The MoES is fully responsible for the political and strategic aspects of the accessibility and quality of education. Several MoES institutions ensure the quality agreed in policy documents and procedures.

The quality is assured and maintained by:

- Elaboration of education policy and adopting strategic decisions;
- Development of the education content;
- Registering and accreditation of education providers;
- Licensing and accreditation of education programmes;
- Supervision of educational process.

National **vocational education quality control** is ensured through accreditation of programmes and provided according to the CoM Regulations “Procedures of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education providers and examination centres” (CoM, 2010c). The principle of accreditation ensures that the content of each programme meets the required standards of vocational education provided by state, local governments or private institutions. It also assists in the transparency of learning; thereby, fostering the ability to recognise Latvian qualifications in other countries. The **State Education Quality Service** (IKVD) among other functions organises licensing and accreditation of vocational education programmes, as well as accreditation of vocational education institutions and examination centres regardless their ownership (state, local government and private). Only accredited local governments’ and private vocational education institutions may apply for state funding for continuing vocational education, professional development and vocational oriented education programmes. To ensure better assessment system for the quality of vocational education IKVD has joined (2010) the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) working group.) IKVD coordinates implementation of the EQAVET in the Latvian vocational education, and introduction of the common quality assurance indicators in vocational education at a national level since 2013 (CoM, 2013e).

During the licence or accreditation process of programmes, the IKVD hires external experts and representatives of sectoral NGOs and employers to evaluate programme’s correspondence to the state education standards, occupational standards, the classification of occupations, and requirements of the content and process regulations. All experts have to be prepared for the accreditation process according to the IKVD course programme. They also make sure that the content of education programmes is updated and meets the sector's needs and requirements.

The **VISC** ensures the development of education content for vocational primary education, vocational education, vocational secondary, continuing vocational education, professional development and professionally oriented education in compliance with the state education standards. It also ensures development and implementation of a uniform content of vocational education state examinations, coordinates the development of study aids complying with the general and vocational education standards, and coordinate teachers’ professional development opportunities.

Higher Education Council (*Augstākās izglītības padome*) is responsible for higher (including professional) education quality. The Higher Education Council takes decision on the accreditation of higher education institution as a whole and submits it to the MoES for approval. In 2011-2013, Higher Education Council implemented the ESF project “Evaluation of higher education study programmes and suggestions for the improvement of quality” (*Augstākās izglītības studiju programmu izvērtēšana un priekšlikumi kvalitātes paaugstināšanai*) to evaluate higher education programmes (including higher professional education programmes). The use of learning outcomes and qualifications level descriptors was taken into account. 237 experts (also international) evaluated 860 study programmes in 28 study fields, and provided suggestions for improvements. The results of project were used for the accreditation of higher education programmes in 2013.

In 2012, new CoM “Regulations for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study fields” (CoM, 2012b) were adopted. Instead of accrediting study programmes, now study fields (including all the programmes of same field) undergo accreditation. The evaluation and

accreditation of HEIs, colleges and study fields and licencing of study programmes (CoM, 2013d), is arranged by the MoES, but it is planned to assign this function to an authorized institution within near future. In 2013, IKVD set up the register of study fields – a public website <https://svr.ikvd.gov.lv>, which includes information on statistics of higher education, accreditation of universities and colleges, accreditation of study fields, as well as basic data on higher education institutions.

3.5. VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The development of system for validation of skills and competences acquired through informal/non-formal learning was a policy objective to implement the programme of the lifelong learning strategy 2007-2013 (CoM, 2008a).

The **validation of professional competence acquired outside formal education** was launched in 2011 after amendments (2010) to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a). It is carried out by accredited education providers or examination centres, which have obtained the IKVD's permit. Validation procedure of the EQF level 3-4 (Latvian professional qualification level 1-3) qualifications is described in the government regulations (CoM, 2011b).

The validation procedure includes:

- Individual's application;
- Professional qualification exam;
- Issue of formal certificate of a professional qualification.

Validation is for fees. Vocational education providers that assess professional competence must consult the candidate (free of charge) about the requirements of occupational standards and the procedure of professional qualification exam. Applicants who have successfully (satisfactory) passed professional qualification exam receive a formal certificate of a professional qualification according the CoM Regulations "Procedure of professional qualification exams in accredited vocational education programmes" (CoM, 2011c).

For higher education level the CoM "Regulations on recognising the learning outcomes acquired in the previous education or professional experience" (CoM, 2012a) were approved following the amendments of 2011 to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c). The regulations determine the recognition procedure and criteria. Learning outcomes acquired through professional experience may only be recognised within a study programme (including practice, course or module). Thus, the learning outcomes should have been achieved in a profession relevant to the topic of a study programme.

3.6. SUCCESS IN COOPERATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Vocational education reform has been successfully conducted on the basis of the state institutions' cooperation with stakeholders. Sectoral Expert Councils have gained a decisive role in alignment of vocational education with sectoral needs. The survey on vocational education needs in 14 sectors (within the ESF co-financed project on the development of sectoral qualifications system, 2010-15) resulted in the development of descriptions and structure of sectoral professional qualifications. Occupational standards continue to be developed and updated for the key professions and qualifications requirements – for related professions and specialisations. The development of modular vocational education system (content of education programmes and qualification examinations) was carried out in cooperation with stakeholders, as well. Implementation of EQAVET and joint vocational education quality assurance indicators also takes place in co-operation with stakeholders. In 2013-2014, EQAVET coordinator (IKVD) provided discussion cycle on these issues involving the Sectoral Expert Councils, MoES and other

stakeholders. IKVD has compiled the views of stakeholders and is incorporating EQAVET quality criteria and indicators in the Latvian vocational education quality assurance system.

4. PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4.1. TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INCENTIVES FOR INDIVIDUALS, ENTERPRISES AND PROVIDERS

Promoting participation in initial vocational education and reduction of dropouts has been a priority in several policy documents. The most recent policy planning document Education development guidelines for 2014-2020 (Saeima, 2014) foresees preventive and compensatory action directions for reducing dropouts:

- Promoting youth involvement in leisure and extracurricular activities;
- Ensuring scholarships when acquiring vocational education and qualification;
- Conducting a study on drop out reasons;
- Implementing initial vocational education programmes in framework of the initiative “Youth Guarantee”;
- Identifying and involving young people, who are engaged neither in education nor employment, in “Youth Guarantee” activities.

The **state subsidy for vocational education providers** is determined by the government using per capita funding. MoES and line ministries determine the number of publicly-funded students' places in accredited vocational education programmes in state, local government and private educational institutions. Providers submit draft annual budgets to the MoES and receive funding after approval of the state budget. According to Vocational Education Law (Saeima,1999a), accredited local government and private vocational education providers may apply for state funding for continuing vocational education, vocational development and vocationally oriented education programmes.

Amendments (2013) to the Education Law (Saeima, 1998) stipulate that the state and local governments financially support adult non-formal education starting from 2015.

There are **fixed and non-fixed costs** in per capita formula in regulations on the minimum per student expenditures in vocational education programmes (CoM, 2007c).

Examples of costs are:

- allowance/scholarship;
- student hotel maintenance (EUR 282.23);
- rehabilitation measures (EUR 495.66) and catering services (EUR 694.36) only in one school) for persons with special needs;
- culture education and sports (EUR 22.77);
- practical learning in enterprise (EUR 7.11 per day);
- insurance against accidents during the practical learning in enterprise (EUR 4.98).

On average MoES has provided EUR 1877 in 2011, EUR 2089 in 2012, EUR 2398 in 2013 and EUR 2651 in 2014 per student per year. Since 2014, the actual government's funding almost entirely conforms to the approved amount. Schools use also their own revenue to ensure some development.

Tertiary education students can also apply for a **study loan**. There are two types of loans that cover 1) study fees (study loan) and 2) the living costs (student loan). Loans are offered by the selected banks (or other credit institutions) and are state-guaranteed.

According to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima,1999a), students in accredited first level professional higher education programmes are entitled to both types of loans. The procedure of the

allocation, repayment, and clearance of the loan is defined in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c).

The legal basis for **tax incentives** is included in the Law on Enterprise Income Tax (Saeima, 1995a) and the Law on Personal Income Tax (Saeima, 1993).

Enterprises pay a reduced (by 85%) tax off donations to the state-funded entities holding a “public benefit organisation” status.

In 2014, CoM reviewed the informative report “On options to apply the labour tax credits or other alternative incentives for employers who offer placements” prepared by MoES (MoES, 2014b) and asked to continue specification of incentives impact on the state budget.

Tax allowances for private tax-payers also exist. Individuals in their annual tax declaration may request the State Revenue Service (*Valsts ieņēmumu dienests*) to reduce their taxable income by the value (but not more than EUR 213.43 per year) of education and medical expenses (including expenses paid on behalf of the brother/sister/child until 24 years of age) (CoM, 2001b). As expenses may be claimed within a three years period, recent statistics does not include all claims. The State Revenue Service is the institution responsible for monitoring progress on the use of the tax incentive and taking corrective actions.

For taxation purposes by “education” is understood:

- State accredited educational programmes (including higher and vocational education),
- EU/EEA state-accredited occupational learning,
- Skills or qualification development.

Unlike general education students, vocational education students receive **monthly allowance** according to CoM Regulations on scholarships (CoM, 2004). Vocational primary education, vocational education (*arodizglītība*), and vocational secondary education students in publicly financed vocational education programmes receive allowance from the “scholarship fund” of vocational education provider. Allowance is EUR 10-71 per month. Orphans/children without parental care (not at children care institution or foster family) and best performers in studies or school social activities receive higher allowance.

In 2009-15, advanced initial vocational education students based on their performance have an opportunity to receive the ESF co-financed **scholarships** per month:

- During the first year of studies – EUR 14-29;
- During the second, third and fourth year of studies – EUR 29-71;
- 17-25 years old students of short programmes (1-1.5 years) – up to EUR 100 (since 2012).

In 2014-18, initial vocational education students (17-29 years old) of short programmes (1-1.5 years) can receive the ESF co-financed scholarships EUR 70-115 per month.

A scholarship has been a successful motivation tool for vocational education students according to their opinion. The MoES discusses replacement of the ESF funding for scholarships with the state budget.

4.2. GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING, STRUCTURES AND SERVICES

The MoES and MoW are overall **responsible for career guidance and counselling**.

The present career development support system is in place since 2006. It was launched by the CoM approved MoW White paper on the improvement of the career guidance system (CoM, 2006a) developed in cooperation with MoES, MoE, Ministry of Regional Development, Association of Local Governments, social partners’ organisations, and the guidance practitioners. The Paper

covers all aspects of lifelong guidance including the mechanisms to ensure better cooperation and coordination between key stakeholders in guidance and counselling at different levels.

In 2007, the national forum on guidance and counselling (*Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas sadarbības padome*) was established. It gathers policy makers from the relevant ministries, guidance providers, social partners and users. The forum advises the necessary changes at national and local levels, thus, contributing to the development of guidance and counselling policy and system. It also cooperates with the Latvian delegation to the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN).

The Education Law (Saeima, 1998) stipulates that the local governments ensure the provision of career education for children and youth. Since 2013, the law defines career education, guidance and counselling terminology; states that the heads of education institutions ensure accessibility to career development services; and students have the right to receive career guidance and counselling. The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) determines that the MoES organizes introduction of guidance and counselling in vocational education. This division is because the primary and secondary schools are under the management of local governments, while the MoES administers greatest part of vocational schools. According to the CoM Regulations “Procedure of accrediting general and vocational education programmes, education institutions and examination centres” (CoM, 2010c), the support in career education is the criteria for a school quality assessment. The new CoM Regulations “Procedure for granting and revoking the status of vocational education competence centre” (CoM, 2013b) foresee additional requirements for the status seekers. Vocational education competence centres (in the relevant economic sectors) should provide support measures for career education for students to acquire career management skills and individual career counselling. These are new steps in promoting guidance and counselling in vocational education.

The **VIAA** represent Latvia in the EC Euroguidance Network (by MoES delegation). Financed by the MoES and the EU Erasmus+ programme it supports implementation of career education policy within education sector and provides information on education opportunities in Latvia and other EU countries.

The VIAA develops various information materials both to provide methodological support for career guidance practitioners working at schools and guidance materials for young people and adults. The agency also organises seminars for career practitioners in schools and, since 2012, organises “career week” events in big cities. The agency maintains and updates an education opportunities database (www.niid.lv) with information about general, vocational and higher education providers and programmes, as well as information about non-formal learning opportunities. The VIAA maintained website www.profesijupasaule.lv, which provides multiform information on the world of work. In cooperation with the Academic Information Centre (*Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs*), VIAA maintains and updates website (www.studyinlatvia.lv) for foreign students that comprises practical information about education programmes in foreign languages.

The **NVA** operates in accordance with the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a), the Law on Social Security (Saeima, 1995b) and the Law on the Support for the Unemployed and Job Seekers (Saeima, 2002). The latter includes the NVA’s function to ensure free career consultations for the unemployed and job seekers. The agency is the only state institution providing career counselling. It provides career and “diagnostic” (exploration of vocational aptitude) consultations, career planning, analysis of life and work values, exploration of personal and professional characteristics, preparing for work interviews (writing CV and work applications); individual self-determination consultations – independent work with self-exploration methods and materials; group consultations – providing information on education and career development opportunities, labour market requirements and e-consultations; online career consultations, information about choice of occupation and work seeking issues through the NVA website (www.nva.gov.lv).

The counselling methods are selected according to the needs of the clients. The first consultation is devoted to clarifying the aims of the visit and selecting the most appropriate working method, which may be focused on exploring professional interests, vocational aptitude, exploring clients' knowledge, skills and competences, values (by using relevant methodology or tests). If need be, a psychological support is ensured in form of a structured conversation for discussing possible solutions. The NVA web portal "Career Services" (*Karjeras pakalpojumi*, <http://www.nva.gov.lv/karjera/>) provides information about education institutions, self-assessment tests, descriptions of occupations, as well as opportunity to receive e-consultations.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c), **students of HEI** have a right to receive information on issues regarding their studies and potential career. In many HEIs there are **career centres** specifically designated for providing information on education and career opportunities, while in other HEIs these duties are performed by faculty staff.

With some exceptions, in the private and NGO sector, the provision of guidance services is underdeveloped. A good example is the Youth Consultations web portal www.prakse.lv (since 2008), which is considered to be the largest in Latvia, providing information on career and education development issues.

4.3. CURRENT KEY CHALLENGES

The current challenge is to ensure access to guidance and counselling for young people. On the one hand, while in the economic recession the NVA shifted focus of providing career consultations from school students to the unemployed. This makes vital need to re-establish career counsellors in education system. On the other hand, career guidance and counselling activities for people in education (development of career education, guidance and counselling within education system, and ensuring access to career guidance and counselling for young people, development of vocationally oriented education) have been postponed due to limited resources available (Jaunzeme, 2013). The Education development guidelines for 2014-2020 (Saeima, 2014) foresee facilitating career education and access to individual career services in lifelong learning context with the public and EU funds support starting from 2015.

TABLES

Table 15. Initial vocational education at primary and secondary level (mainly school-based)

Name of educational programme	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding ISCED level and orientation/destination	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between theory and practice ² (share in %)	Average duration of studies	Access to (horizontal/vertical) to other pathways
vocational primary education programme (including pedagogical correction programme)	1) primary education 2) without primary education, but not younger than 15 y.o.	primary sector, manufacturing, construction; business and other services	P/A 254	60:40	35:65	1-3	Vocational secondary education programmes, labour market
vocational education programme	general or vocational primary education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	P/A 353	60:40	35:65	3 years	vocational secondary education, inter-mediate general education programme, labour market
inter-mediate programme in general secondary education	vocational education programme, 3 years after primary education	---	P/A 344	100:0	---	1 year	higher education programmes
vocational education programme	general or vocational primary education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	P 351, A 254	0:100	35:65	1 year	vocational secondary education, labour market
vocational education programme (including pedagogical correction programme)	without primary education, but not younger than 15 y.o		P/A 254	60:40	35:65	3 years	vocational secondary education, labour market
vocational secondary education programme	general or vocational primary education, vocational education		P/A 354	60:40	50:50	4 years, 2 years after vocational education programme	higher education programmes, labour market
vocational education programme	general or vocational secondary education,		P/A 453	0:100	35:65	1 year	Labour market
vocational secondary education programme	general secondary education		P/A 453	0:100	30:70	1.5 -3 years	Labour market

² Practice – practical and laboratory work in general and vocational study subjects (mainly at school), practical learning (mainly at school) and qualification practice (mainly in enterprise)

Table 16. Professional education at tertiary level (mainly school-based)

Name of education programme	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding level of study	Balance between general and vocational subjects	Balance between school-based learning and practice (share in %)	Average duration of studies
first level higher professional education programme (college programme)	secondary education	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED P 554/ A 550 Latvian professional qualification level 4 EQF level 5	36:64	70:30	2-3 years
second level higher professional education programme (university programme)	secondary education or first or second level higher professional education, or bachelor's degree		ISCED 6-7 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6-7	17:83	70:30	4-5 years not shorter than 4 years after secondary education and not shorter than 2 years after college education

University programmes:

second level higher professional education programme	first level professional higher education (college programme)	primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	ISCED P 655/ A 650 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total 40 Latvian CP (1 Latvian credit =1.5 ECTS), of which: - 4 CP theoretical courses in the branch - 26 CP practice - 10 CP state exam (including final thesis)	1-2 years Total duration of HE studies – at least 4 years
professional bachelor's or professional higher education programme	secondary education		ISCED P 655/ A 650 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which: - min. 20 CP general courses - min. 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and IT courses - min. 60 CP courses of occupational speciality - min. 6 CP free choice courses - min. 20 CP practice - min. 12 CP state exam (including final thesis)	min. 4 years
second level higher professional education programme	academic or professional bachelor degree, second level higher professional education		ISCED P 657/ A 650 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total at least 40 Latvian CP, of which: - min. 4 CP theoretical courses of speciality - min. 20 CP practice - min 10 CP state exam (including final thesis)	at least 1 year Total duration of HE studies at least 4 years
second level higher professional education programme	general or vocational secondary education		ISCED P 756/ A 750 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 7	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which: - min. 20 CP general courses - min. 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and IT courses - min. 60 CP courses of occupational speciality - min. 6 CP free choice courses - min. 20 CP practice - min. 12 CP state exam (including final thesis)	at least 5 years
professional master's programme	academic or professional bachelor's degree, second level higher professional education		ISCEDP 757/ A 750 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 7	Total at least 40 Latvian CP, of which: - min.5 CP courses of recent achievements in sector's theory and practice - min. 3 CP courses of research, creativity, design and management - min. 26 CP practice (for academic bachelor graduates) - min. 6 CP practice (for professional bachelor/programmes graduates) - 20 CP state exam (including final thesis)	at least 1 year Total duration of HE studies – at least 5 years

DEFINITIONS

APPRENTICESHIP (*mācekļu apmācība*) – in the Latvian context, the term has very similar explanation as in the international definition: systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace; the apprentice is contractually linked to an employer and may receive remuneration. The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation according to education programmes developed by the Chamber of Crafts and the Ministry of Education and Science.

COMPETENCE (*kompetece*) – regarding the national framework, the term is expressed as analysis, synthesis and assessment. In Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a), with amendments in July 2010) only “professional competence” is defined: necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain working situations. However, the international definition could be applied: the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/ or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

CONTINUING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (CVET, *profesionālā tālākizglītība*) – a special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for adults with previous education and professional experience to acquire a specific level vocational qualification (Vocational Education Law, 1999). Thereby, the term is interpreted similarly to the international definition, i.e. CVET can be broadly defined as professional or vocational development through education and training undertaken typically after one has completed initial vocational education and training. It is provided and undertaken at the initiative of public authorities, social partners, sectors, enterprises, individuals as well as a range of voluntary and community organisations. However, all recognised CVET programmes lead to certification; it is not considered informal education.

TERTIARY or HIGHER EDUCATION (ISCED 5-7, *augstākā izglītība*) – an educational level, which is acquired after upper-secondary education, in science or art; development of the individual in a selected academic or professional field of science or art, or in an academic or professional study stream in preparation for scientific and professional activity (Saeima, 1998).

FORMAL LEARNING (*formālā izglītība*) – a system which includes primary education, secondary education and higher education levels the acquisition of the programme of which is certified by an education or professional qualification document recognised by the State, as well as an education and professional qualification document (Saeima, 1998).

GENERAL EDUCATION (*vispārējā izglītība*) – the definition of “general education” in Latvia does not differ noticeably from the international definition, i.e. education mainly designed to lead participants to a deeper understanding of a subject or group of subjects, especially, but not necessarily, with a view to preparing participants for further education at the same or a higher level. These programmes, which are with a general orientation and do not focus on a particular specialization, are typically school-based. After a successful completion of these programmes the participants are not provided with a labour market relevant qualification at this level. However, the term “general education” is mostly used to refer to upper-secondary education, while the term “academic education” is used for higher level education programmes.

INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (*sākotnējā profesionālā izglītība*) – formally organised vocational education, mostly at upper-secondary education level, which is similar to the international definition, i.e. education undertaken after full-time compulsory education (mainly 9 years long primary and lower-secondary education) to promote the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to entry an occupation. The management and legal basis of initial vocational education are not separated from continuous vocational education. Most of vocational education is implemented through school based programmes, which include practical

learning periods at school and enterprise; therefore, initial vocational education is referred as “vocational education”.

LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION (ISCED 2, *pamatizglītības otrais posms*) – the division of lower- and upper-secondary education is not used in Latvia; therefore, this stage of education belongs to primary education level and is called the 2nd stage of primary school (grades 7-9) including both general and vocational education programmes.

NON-FORMAL LEARNING (*neformālā izglītība*) –educational activities in conformity with interests and demand organised outside of formal education (Saeima, 1998).

OCCUPATION (*profesija*) – see profession.

POST-SECONDARY (NON-TERTIARY) EDUCATION (ISCED 4, *pēcvidējā izglītība*) – in Latvia the programmes (ISCED 4) lie between the upper-secondary and tertiary levels of education, as well. However, nationally they are qualified as upper-secondary programmes. These programmes are oriented only to the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. Educational process and assessment is organised likewise to other upper-secondary education programmes. The students are usually older than those in upper-secondary education.

PROFESSION (*profesija*) – a type of occupation of a natural person in the field of the production of goods, distribution or services, as well as in education, culture and art which requires a certain preparedness (Saeima, 1999a).

QUALIFICATION (*kvalifikācija*) – evaluation of educational and professional skills with respect to a particular profession confirmed by documentary evidence (Saeima, 1998). This term raises ambiguity in the Latvian context: the English term “qualification” in Latvian means “education document” or “diploma”; while the Latvian term “kvalifikācija” refers only to vocational education. The national definition is similar to the given international one: a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process, which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

SKILLS (*prasmes*) – the Latvian context for the term is similar to the international definition, i.e. the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (ISCED 3, *vidējā izglītība*) – the division of lower- and upper-secondary education is not used in Latvia; upper-secondary education level refers to secondary education after 9-year primary school; it lasts 3-4 years and includes both general and vocational education programmes.

WORK BASED LEARNING (*darba vidē balstītas mācības*) – a new approach (since 2013) in vocational education and it means the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge primarily in a real working environment of the company, and only a relatively small part of the time (in most cases less than half) is accompanied by mastering theoretical knowledge in an educational institution.

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Links:

www.aic.lv	Academic Information Centre
www.aiknc.lv	Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre
www.csb.gov.lv	Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia
www.em.gov.lv	Ministry of Economics
www.ikvd.gov.lv	State Education Quality Service
www.izm.gov.lv	Ministry of Education and Science
www.lak.lv	Latvian Chamber of Crafts
www.ddd.lv	Employers' Confederation of Latvia
www.lizda.lv	Education and Science Workers Trade Union
www.lm.gov.lv	Ministry of Welfare
www.niid.lv	National database on learning opportunities
www.nva.gov.lv	State Employment Agency
www.siva.gov.lv	Social Integration State Agency
www.viaa.gov.lv	State Education Development Agency
www.visc.gov.lv	National Centre for Education

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	Academic Information Centre (<i>Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs</i>)
CoM	Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia (<i>Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets</i>)
CP	Credit points (<i>kredītpunkti</i>)
CSB	Central Statistical Bureau of the Republic of Latvia (<i>Centrālās statistikas pārvalde</i>)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework (<i>Eiropas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra</i>)
ESF	European Social Fund (<i>Eiropas Sociālais fonds</i>)
LIAA	Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (<i>Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra</i>)
LQF	Latvian Qualifications Framework (<i>Latvijas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra</i>)
MoE	Ministry of Economics (<i>Ekonomikas ministrija</i>)
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science (<i>Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija</i>)
MoW	Ministry of Welfare (<i>Labklājības ministrija</i>)
NCP	National Coordination Point (<i>Nacionālais koordinācijas punkts</i>)
VISC	National Centre for Education (<i>Valsts izglītības satura centrs</i>)
NVA	State Employment Agency (<i>Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra</i>)
VIAA	State Education Development Agency (<i>Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra</i>)
IKVD	State Education Quality Service (<i>Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests</i>)
WBL	Work based learning (<i>darba vide balstītas mācības</i>)

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