



Vocational education and training in Latvia

Short description

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Foreword

One of the priorities of the 2015 Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) is to promote competitiveness to generate jobs and economic growth in the EU. This requires encouraging entrepreneurial mindsets and stimulating the innovative capacity of industry and service sectors. Vocational education and training (VET) policy is part of this process. VET provides people with the skills and competences they need to be able to succeed in the labour market. VET also provides enterprises with the skills base they need to be competitive. In Europe's joint endeavour to overcome the effects of the economic crisis, VET has thus moved centre stage.

Since 2002, European cooperation on VET within the so-called Copenhagen process has played a crucial role in raising awareness of its importance. This has made a real difference at EU level and in Member States. In the Bruges communiqué, long-term objectives for VET until 2020 were combined with a set of policy measures that countries, the European social partners and the Commission committed themselves to put in place by 2014. Achievements of the past and future challenges, the new Commission's priorities and revision of Europe's 2020 strategy set the scene for defining new objectives for European cooperation in VET for the period 2015-17. These new priorities, which will be informed by Cedefop's review of achievements since 2010, will be decided under the Latvian Presidency. This will also put its VET in the limelight. By providing an insight into the main features and current developments, this short description contributes to a better understanding of VET in Latvia and some of the key challenges the country faces, such as high youth unemployment. Latvia aims at ensuring better labour market prospects and attractive VET options for a decreasing group of young people – a consequence of demographic trends.

It is among the countries stepping up young people's opportunities to combine learning at an educational institution with learning in an enterprise following a recommendation by the Council to reinforce apprenticeships. While apprenticeship training exists, it is not a characteristic feature of the country's VET system and its qualifications are not included in the national qualifications framework (NQF) (*Latvijas kvalifikāciju ietvarstruktūra*). A new scheme is being piloted and also inspired by bilateral and multilateral cooperation for policy learning in the European alliance for apprenticeships context and the Erasmus+ programme. Initial steps seem promising. To be sustainable, new approaches need to be developed and embedded in their national contexts.

This also requires collaboration and commitment of all stakeholders where social partners have a specific role to play. Recent establishment of sectoral expert councils suggests that Latvian VET policy-making and implementation is increasingly considered a shared responsibility. Cooperation to ensure that people acquire skills that help them find jobs and are in line with employers' needs does not only require flexible learning offers and pathways. Well-developed labour market intelligence and education and career guidance and counselling for young people as well as adults are key.

Like other countries Latvia faces a challenge of improving VET quality in time of scarce financial resources and convincing all partners that VET should be seen as an investment in the future rather than an expense. Provided all partners within education and training and the labour market are committed to recent reforms, they can go a long way towards addressing the challenges the country currently faces.

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Latvia



Area:	64 573 km ²
Capital:	Riga
System of government:	Parliamentary democracy
Population:	2 001 468 (2014)
Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) (nominal):	EUR 11 537 (2013)

In this short description VET is referred to as 'vocational education' (in Latvian: '*profesionālā izglītība*'). It includes periods of practical training in schools and enterprises. The term 'training' is not commonly used in the national context.

CHAPTER 1.

External factors influencing VET in Latvia

1.1. Demographics

Latvia has a population of 2 001 468 inhabitants (2014) and a territory of 64 573 km². The population has decreased in the past two decades due to a negative natural increase and emigration of people in search of employment abroad.

While proportions of people of pensionable age increased from 20.2% in 2010 to 22.7% at the beginning of 2014, the working age population has decreased from 64.2% to 62.6%. The share of the school-age population is also in decline.

Most people reside in urban areas (67.8%), of which 47.4% in the capital. The urban/rural ratio has not changed significantly since 2009, but an inland migration from rural areas to Riga continues. Most social and economic facilities are concentrated in the cities and there is limited availability of education and other services in rural areas.

1.2. Economic background

During the economic crisis GDP decreased by 25%. Since end-2009, growth resumed. From 2011 to 2013, the economy expanded rapidly – on average by 4.7% per year. It is among the fastest growths in the EU. Due to an unfavourable external market environment (low demand in some trading partner countries), GDP growth in recent years was slower than expected: 4.1% in 2013 and 2.8% in the first quarter of 2014.

In 2013, domestic and international demand for goods and services strongly influenced economic growth. Construction (7.4%), commercial services (7%), public services (5.3%) and trade (4.4%) sectors contributed most to it (Table 1).

Table 1. **GDP growth and employment by sector, 2011-13 (%)**

	GDP growth			Employment in sectors		
	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	19.6	20.1	20.3
Total	5.3	5.2	4.1	100	100	100

Source: Ministry of Economics and Central Statistical Bureau, 2014.

From 2011 to 2013, most employees worked in the service and trade sectors. The share of employees in manufacturing was approximately 13%.

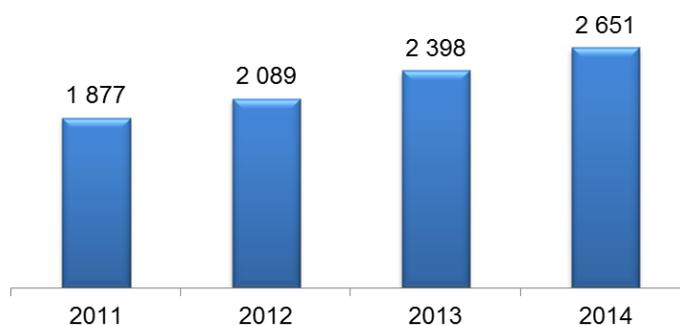
Export of goods and services has remained the economy's main growth factor since 2010. Low demand on external markets slowed down growth in metal and chemical industries, while production of electrical and optical equipment, food and woodworking industry products increased in 2013. Growing employment led to an increase in domestic consumption and had a positive impact on trade and commercial services.

In 2013, State budget expenditure for education was the third highest (16.4%), following social security (28.4%) and economic stimulus measures (18.7%) (Ministry of Economics, 2014a). According to Eurostat data, the education budget decreased from 6.8% of GDP in 2009 to 5.5% in 2012.

The budget for vocational education institutions under responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija*) increased from EUR 54.07 million in 2011 to EUR 58.28 million in 2014 (Saeima, 2013). However, this is less than in 2008 and 2009 (EUR 77.65 million and EUR 60.53 million).

State funding for both vocational and general education is allocated based on numbers of students. In general education this rule applies only to teacher salaries. For vocational education, the amount per student (Figure 1) is approved by the government (Cabinet of Ministers, 2007b) and covers vocational education staff salaries, student allowances, practical training (including accident insurance) costs, maintenance of dormitories and expenditure for culture and sports.

Figure 1. **VET financing per student (Ministry of Education and Science schools), 2011-14 (EUR)**



Source: Ministry of Education and Science.

Figure 1 demonstrates that since 2011 the Ministry of Education and Science has increased per-student financing in vocational education by 41%. In addition, other resources (including EU funds) have been allocated to development of the VET system. For example, EUR 160.6 million were invested in modernisation of equipment and infrastructure (2009-15 project) (Cabinet of Ministers, 2008b; 2013a). Schools also use their own revenues to finance vocational education.

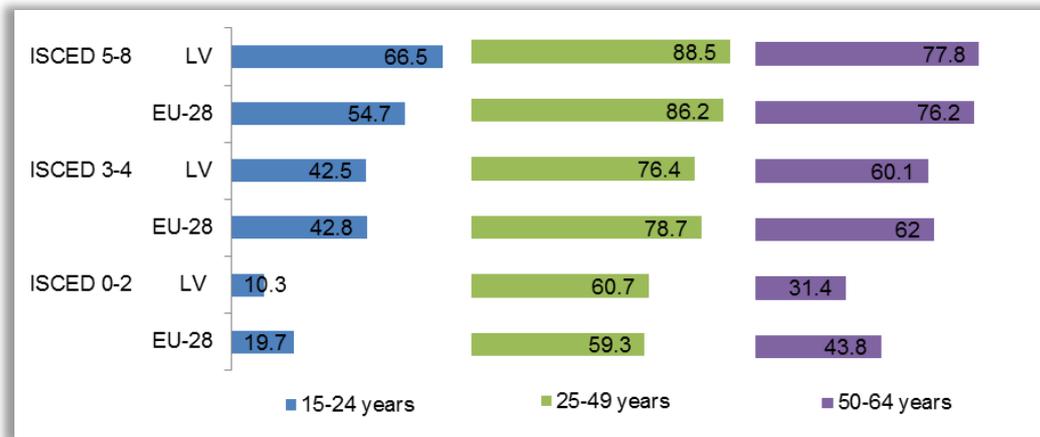
1.3. Labour market

The labour market is regulated by the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a), legislation on supporting unemployed and job-seekers (Saeima, 2002), and the Unemployment Insurance Law (Saeima, 1999b).

Development of employment policy is a responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare (*Labklājības ministrija*). The shift from short-term active labour market policy measures to combat consequences of the crisis to traditional measures is part of its recent strategy. Inclusive employment policy guidelines 2014-20 (Ministry of Welfare, 2014) foresee more learning opportunities and activities to help the unemployed and job-seekers start up their own businesses. Education policy priorities, formulated by the Ministry of Education and Science in the education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) also foresee close cooperation with the employment sector.

In 2013, the employment rate of the 15 to 64 age group was 65.0%. It is above the EU-28 average of 64.1%. More males were in employment (66.8%) than females (63.4%) although the gender gap at national level of 3.4 percentage points was three times lower than the EU-28 average (10.6 percentage points).

Figure 2. **Employment rate by age group and highest level of education attained in 2013 (%)**



NB: International standard classification of education (ISCED) 97.

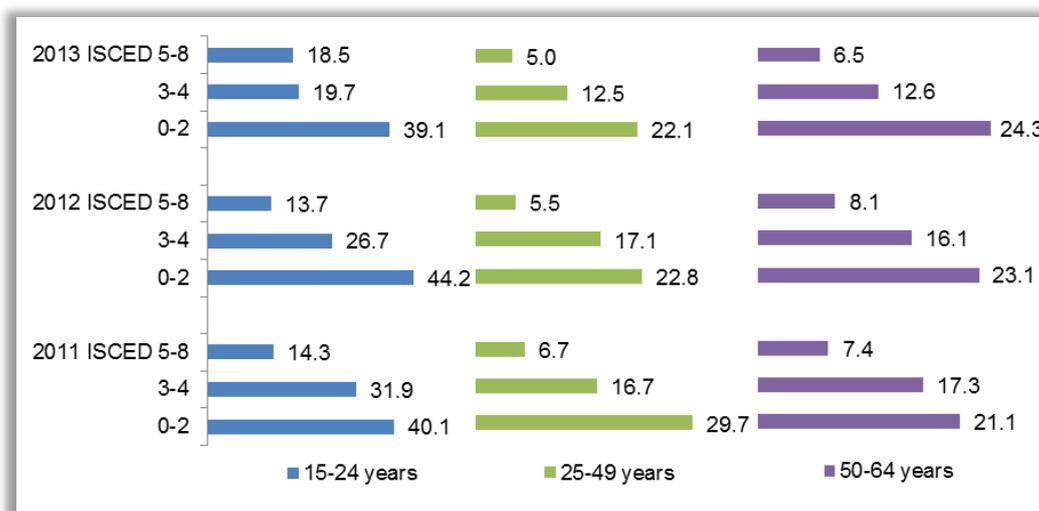
Source: Eurostat, labour force survey; last update: 21.8.2014, extracted: 29.8.2014.

Level of education is an important factor that influences employment (Figure 2). The employment rate of people who attained ISCED levels 5 to 8 is higher than in EU-28 in all age groups, being the highest – 88.5% (86.2% in EU-28) for 25 to 49 year-olds. In contrast, young people (15 to 24) with low levels of education (ISCED 0-2) have the lowest employment rate (10.3%; 19.7% in EU-28).

The share of unemployed people aged 15 to 64 of the total economically active population has more than doubled during the economic crisis from 7.8% in 2008 to 19.0% in 2010. It then gradually decreased to 12.1% in 2013. The current average unemployment rate in EU-28 is lower than in Latvia, but has the opposite (growing) trend.

The unemployment rate also depends on educational attainment (Figure 3). In 2013, the lowest unemployment rate (5.0%; 6.5% in EU-28) was among people (25 to 49) with higher levels of education (ISCED 5-8). Unemployment of young people (15 to 24) with a low level of education (ISCED 0-2) is high, although it decreased from 44.2% in 2012 to 39.1% in 2013.

Figure 3. **Unemployment rate by age group and highest level of education attained (%), 2011-13 (%)**



NB: ISCED 97.

Source: Eurostat, labour force survey; last update: 21.8.2014, extracted: 1.9.2014.

According to the public employment service (State Employment Agency (Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra) (NVA)), registered unemployment increased due to the economic crisis from 6% in 2007 to 17.3% in 2010 and decreased to 8.6% in 2014. The share of young people (15 to 24) in total numbers of registered unemployed has gradually decreased from 14.5% in 2009 to 9.0% in 2014.

Women use NVA services more (57.3% in 2014) than men (42.7%). Regional distribution of registered unemployment has remained relatively stable over time. The Riga region has the lowest rate (5.4%) – more than three times lower than the eastern region Latgale (18.1%) where unemployment is traditionally higher.

Young VET graduates are better placed in the labour market. In 2013, there were fewer 15 to 24 year-old jobless VET graduates (25.3% of total registered unemployment in the age group) than unemployed VET graduates in total (37.3%).

1.4. Employment policies relevant to VET

One challenge outlined in the Latvian national reform programme for implementation of EU 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2011) is to combat structural unemployment by ensuring better correspondence of qualifications and

skills to labour market needs. The major policies for combating structural unemployment aim to:

- (a) improve active labour market policy measures by a gradual shift from combating consequences of crisis (such as subsidised employment) to traditional active labour market policy measures (such as lifelong learning opportunities for the unemployed and persons at risk of unemployment) (Ministry of Welfare, 2011);
- (b) reengage efficiently the economically inactive population into the labour market and support regional mobility;
- (c) promote efficiency of public employment services;
- (d) reinforce the lifelong learning approach.

To promote employment, vocational schools are being more actively engaged in implementation of respective policies. According to legislation on supporting unemployed and job-seekers (Saeima, 2002), the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science provide vocational education, career guidance and requalification and professional development for the unemployed and job-seekers. They also offer non-formal learning and qualification courses for the (self-) employed at risk of unemployment. Both ministries work on improving employment policy and support involvement of unemployed/job-seekers/(self-)employed in learning through State and EU cofinanced projects.

National policy for reducing unemployment is implemented by NVA – a public agency supervised by the Ministry of Welfare. NVA cooperates with State and local government institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. Policy is implemented in line with government procedures for organising and financing active and preventive employment measures (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011a).

Strategy for the shift from short-term to traditional active labour market policy measures (Ministry of Welfare, 2011) introduced education vouchers and practical experience of three VET programmes (three weeks each) for young people to explore careers.

Education institutions that provide training for the unemployed are procured by NVA. A list of occupations and skills in demand is annually approved by a Ministry of Welfare commission including representatives from ministries (welfare, economy and education), NVA, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia and other institutions.

1.5. Regulation of access to occupations/professions

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

As part of classification of occupations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010b), occupational standards define the respective key tasks and duties and requirements (including knowledge, skills, competences) for VET qualifications. The procedure for developing occupational standards is approved by government (Cabinet of Ministers, 2007a). It stipulates that the Ministry of Education and Science (for European qualifications framework (EQF) levels 5-7) and the National Centre for Education (Valsts izglītības satura centrs) (VISC) (for EQF levels 3-4) coordinate design of occupational standards and cooperate with social partners (national tripartite subcouncil for cooperation in vocational education and employment, and professional organisations) and line ministries.

The Law on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Saeima, 2001b) and relevant government regulations stipulate special norms for educational programmes, recertification or evaluation of regulated professions to:

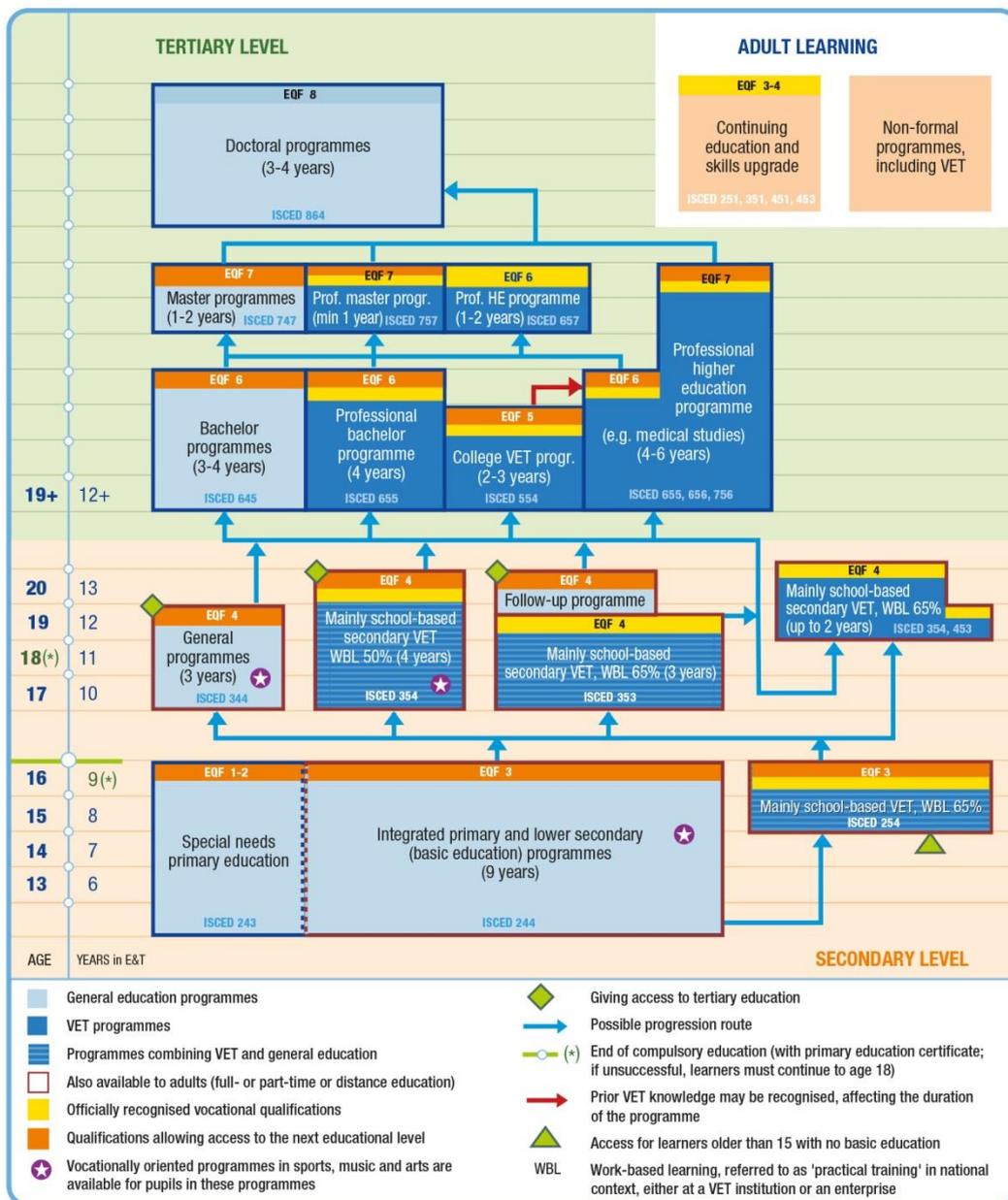
- (a) ensure activities meet safety, health or other specific requirements;
- (b) ensure staff have the qualifications required for specific occupations/professions;
- (c) enable recognition of Latvian qualifications abroad and foreign qualifications in Latvia;
- (d) promote free movement of individuals in the EU and members of the European Free Trade Association.

Regular recertification/evaluation is usually conducted by non-governmental certification centres in the relevant sector, such as Certification Centre of the Latvian Railwayman Society, Certification Commission of the Latvian Nurse Association. A total of 68 regulated professions, 164 specialities and 89 subspecialities (2014) are currently covered by legislation (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006b).

CHAPTER 2. Provision of VET

2.1. VET in Latvia's education system

Figure 4. VET in Latvia's education system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Latvia.

The Latvian education system's main elements are:

- (a) pre-school education;
- (b) integrated primary and lower secondary education (hereafter basic education);
- (c) upper secondary education (hereafter secondary education);
- (d) higher (tertiary) education.

Pre-school education for five to six year-old children is compulsory. It is followed by nine years of compulsory basic education and three years of non-compulsory secondary education. Basic education is mainly general, however, vocational education is offered in its later stages. Secondary education can be acquired through general or vocational programmes. Higher (tertiary) education includes both academic and professional study programmes.

2.2. Government-regulated VET provision

Initial vocational education is highly regulated by the State. The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) set the policy priorities while the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) provides legal regulations.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education and Science presented a policy paper for raising attractiveness of vocational education and stimulation the active involvement of social partners (Cabinet of Ministers, 2009). It outlines solutions for key challenges in vocational education. Based on this paper, a European Social Fund (ESF) project to develop sectoral qualifications and raise efficiency and quality of vocational education (2010-15) is being carried out. Its results are to be incorporated in legislation.

2.2.1. VET pathways

2.2.1.1. *Initial vocational education*

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

- (a) basic vocational education;
- (b) secondary vocational education;
- (c) professional higher education: (i) first-level professional higher (college) education; (ii) second-level professional higher (university) education.

Vocational education and professional higher education programmes are mainly school-based, with practical learning periods at schools or enterprises.

Vocational education institutions can be public (State, local government) and private. In 2012, amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a)

revised types of vocational education institutions according to the programmes and professional qualifications they offer.

Students are admitted to public vocational schools according to annual enrolment plans. The Ministry of Education and Science collects, adjusts and transforms all school requests into enrolment plans with sectoral expert councils. The plans are then endorsed by the national tripartite subcouncil for cooperation in vocational education and employment.

To prepare pupils for studies in vocational education programmes in arts, culture or sports, vocationally oriented educational programmes are implemented concurrently with basic and secondary general education. They provide systematised knowledge and skills in the selected field, but do not lead to a professional qualification.

(a) Basic vocational education

Vocational education at lower secondary level is implemented via basic vocational education programmes (see Annex II). Programmes are mostly provided by basic vocational education schools (*profesionālā pamatskola*). Young people (at least 15 years old) can enrol in such programmes (ISCED-P 254) regardless of their previous education. They lead to a certificate of basic vocational education (*apliecība par profesionālo pamatizglītību*) that allows progression to secondary level education and professional qualification at EQF level 3 (such as cook's assistant). Early leavers without basic skills are offered special vocational programmes (*pedagoģiskā korekcija*) for better integration into the education process. These programmes are mainly designed for students with intellectual impairment and dropouts from basic general education.

(b) Secondary vocational education

At upper secondary level, vocational education (*arodizglītība*) and vocational secondary education (*profesionālā vidējā izglītība*) programmes are available for students with a certificate of basic education (see Annex II). Content of these education programmes is defined by State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000) and occupational standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2007a).

Vocational education programmes (*arodizglītība*) (ISCED-P 353) are provided by *arodskola* and lead to a certificate of vocational education (*atestāts par arodizglītību*) and professional qualification at EQF level 4 (such as cook). These programmes do not give a right to enter higher (tertiary) education. For admission to higher education a one-year intermediate general secondary education 'bridge programme' must be followed.

Vocational secondary education programmes (ISCED-P 354) are provided by *profesionālā vidusskola* and *tehnikums*, and lead to both a diploma of vocational secondary education (*diploms par profesionālo vidējo izglītību*) and professional qualification at EQF level 4 (such as car mechanic). Vocational secondary education students must also take State exams in the following general subjects: Latvian, mathematics, foreign language and one subject selected by the student. This provides students with a certificate of general secondary education (*vispārējās vidējās izglītības sertifikāts*) and the right to enter higher education.

Post-secondary education programmes (see Annex II), in contrast to what their name suggests, belong to upper secondary level. They are designed primarily for 18 to 20 year-old general secondary school graduates to help them acquire vocational skills. Apart from their duration, characteristics of such programmes are the same as programmes at upper secondary level. In 2014/15, these programmes have been offered to 17 to 29 year-old students with basic or secondary education in the 'youth guarantee initiative' using ESF support.

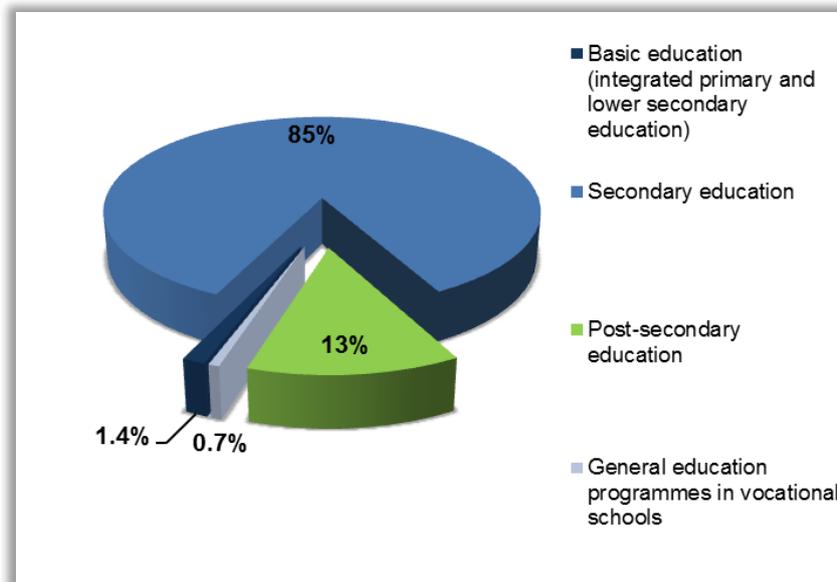
To acquire a qualification, VET students have to take a State qualification exam at the end of the education programme. The government defines how exam content is developed for basic and secondary education levels (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c).

Institutions that provide vocational secondary education programmes and additionally act as regional methodological and further education centres and carry out validation of professional competences acquired outside formal education can obtain a title of 'vocational education competence centre' according to criteria established by the Cabinet of Ministers (2013b). Institutions with more than 500 students in regional centres (more than 800 in Riga) are gradually transformed into competence centres (see Sections 2.2.4 and 4.2).

More detailed information on shares of general education and vocational education, theory and practice as well as progression routes and labour market access is provided in Annex II.

Most vocational education is offered at secondary level. In 2013, most of approximately 31 000 VET learners were in secondary vocational education (Figure 5). As shown in Figure 5, basic vocational education is marginal.

Figure 5. **Share of students in VET programmes (excluding higher education) in 2013/14**



Source: Ministry of Education and Science, <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/registri-statistika/statistika-profesionala/11937.html> [accessed 28.1.2015].

Although the share of students in post-secondary vocational education programmes is still comparatively small, they have become more popular – numbers of students in such programmes has doubled in the past four years. This is linked to growing youth unemployment as they offer labour-market-relevant skills in a short period of time.

From 2010 to 2013, there was a 13% decrease of VET students (excluding higher education). The decrease is in line with demographic changes in the country.

Basic education graduates usually choose general secondary education (general 61%, 34% vocational). Attractiveness of vocational education has been set as one of the policy priorities for education (Cabinet of Ministers, 2009; Cabinet of Ministers, 2010a; Saeima, 2014).

In past years, distribution of vocational education students between fields of study varied only slightly (Table 2). The most popular programmes are in engineering, manufacturing and construction (39.2% in 2013), services (25%), and social sciences, business and law (13.7%).

Table 2 demonstrates that education/career choices of secondary education graduates have not significantly changed since 2011. However, more graduates continue in higher education studies (from 58.3% in 2011 to 62.0% in 2013) or in vocational education (from 5.3% in 2011 to 7.9% in 2013). Now that fewer

graduates from secondary education than before discontinue studies (from 36.4% in 2011 to 30.1% in 2013) is a positive trend.

Table 2. **Students by field of study in VET schools, 2011-13 (%)**

	2011	2012	2013
General education*	0.6	0.5	0.7
Humanities** and arts	8.8	9.4	10.2
Social sciences, business and law	14.1	13.5	13.7
Natural sciences, mathematics and information technologies	5.7	5.6	5.9
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	42.4	40.9	39.2
Agriculture	2.4	2.8	2.7
Health and welfare	2.1	2.5	2.7
Services	24.0	24.8	25.0
Total	100	100	100

* In addition to VET programmes, VET schools may offer general education programmes.

** For example, design programmes.

Source: www.csb.gov.lv [accessed 27.1.2015].

(c) Professional higher education

Higher education programmes (see Annex III) can be academic (lead to a degree) and professional (lead to a degree and/or professional qualification). More than two thirds of all higher education students study in professional programmes. Professional higher education programmes allow continuous progression from EQF levels 5 to 7. Higher education institutions, including colleges (*koledža*) provide full-time, part-time and distance studies at all study levels. While universities provide a full range of professional programmes, colleges only offer first-level professional higher education programmes leading to EQF level 5.

2.2.1.2. *Continuing vocational education*

Initial vocational education and continuing vocational education have the same legal and governance framework. Continuing VET (CVET) in Latvia can take a form of formal and non-formal education.

Similar to initial vocational education, students of continuing vocational education take a final qualification exam in accordance with procedures approved by the government (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c). Examinations are organised by the education provider in cooperation with VISK to ensure that all graduates comply with the knowledge, skills and competences required for a profession. Social partners are involved in evaluating examination performance.

Continuing education is included in classification of the Latvian education system (Cabinet of Ministers, 2008c). Continuing education levels are linked to the EQF and, since 2014, also to ISCED (Table 3).

Table 3. **Classification of continuing vocational education programmes**

Programme	Education- al level	EQF level	Latvian professional qualification level	ISCED 2011-P
Continuing vocational education (480 hours)	Integrated primary and lower secondary	-	1	251
Continuing vocational education after (non-) completed basic education (480 hours or more)		3	2	351
Professional development after (non-) completed basic education		3	-	351
Continuing vocational education after completed secondary education (640 hours or more)	Upper secondary	4	2 or 3	453
Professional development after completed secondary education		4	-	451

Source: Cabinet of Ministers, 2008c.

Continuing vocational education programmes are similar to those offered in initial vocational education. Legally, they have to be at least 30% based on State vocational education standards.

Continuing vocational education programmes enable adults with previous education/work experience to acquire a professional qualification. Programmes are always offered for a specific State-recognised qualification/profession:

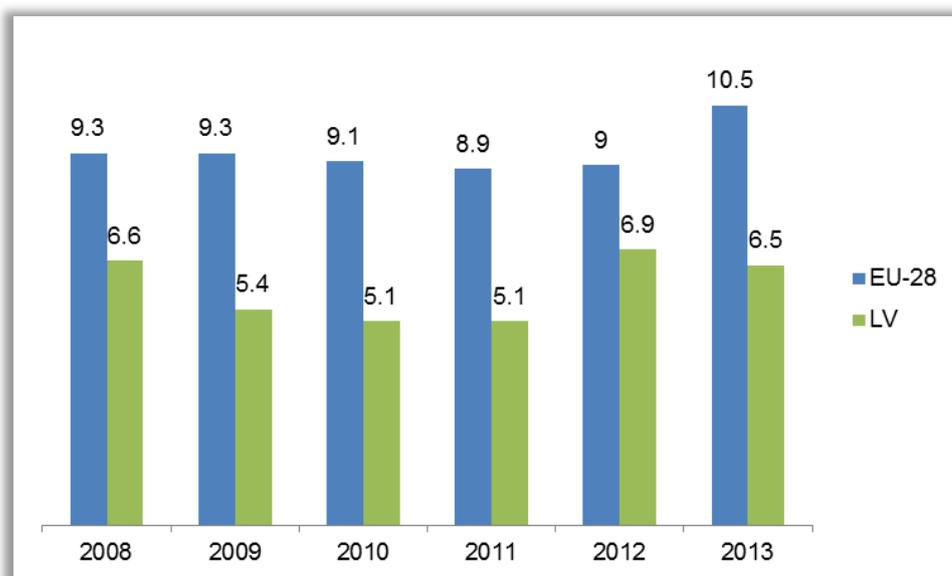
- (a) for students with vocational secondary or vocational education to acquire a professional qualification at EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 3, such as bookkeeper), minimum duration of the programme is 960-1 280 hours depending on the field;
- (b) for those without a prior education requirement to acquire a professional qualification at EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 2), minimum duration of the programme is 480 or 640 hours depending on the relevant occupation standard;
- (c) for those without a prior education requirement to acquire a professional qualification at EQF level 3 (Latvian professional qualification level 1) minimum duration of the 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 systematised professional knowledge and skills corresponding to requirements of the labour market. They cannot award a qualification without a

prior education requirement; duration of programmes is 160 to 320 hours depending on the field.

Non-formal education, in different courses, also eases development of various knowledge and skills. Such courses do not provide formal qualifications but they increase participation in lifelong learning, which in Latvia is below the EU average (Figure 6).

Figure 6. **Participation of adults (25-64 year-olds) in lifelong learning, 2008-13 (%)**



Source: Eurostat, last update: 21.7.2014, extracted: 4.9.2014.

Participation in continuing vocational education has increased due to provision of courses for the unemployed arranged by NVA. Provision of tuition-free (or reduced-fee) courses using ESF has stimulated participation. However, the political ambition to increase lifelong learning participation to 12.5% in 2013 has not been reached (European Commission, 2011).

Licensing and accreditation ensure quality of education (including vocational) programmes. A licence is permission to implement a particular programme that meets all requirements of educational and occupational standards. Providers must ensure proper infrastructure and equipment, and if necessary, obtain an agreement from the relevant professional association. The licence is issued for an indefinite period.

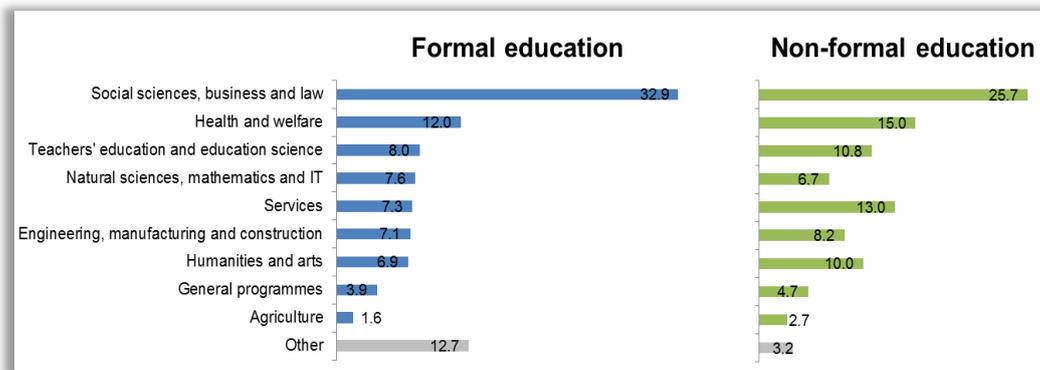
Accreditation is a right for two to six years to issue a State-recognised qualification for a particular programme. In an accreditation process, quality of implementation of the relevant educational programme is evaluated.

All public continuing vocational education programmes (480 hours or more) and professional development programmes (160 hours or more) must be licensed and accredited by the State Education Quality Service (Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests) (IKVD). Providers of professional development programmes (159 hours or less) must obtain a licence from local government. Public providers can offer non-formal learning programmes without a licence.

Vocational education providers can offer full-time, part-time and extramural studies. Distance learning is provided by private and State education institutions.

In 2011, the most popular continuing vocational education programmes and courses were in social sciences, business and law, services and health and welfare (Figure 7).

Figure 7. **CVET courses by field of education in 2011 (%)**



Source: www.csb.gov.lv [accessed 27.1.2015].

Figure 7 demonstrates that social sciences, business and law continuing vocational education courses more often are formal programmes while courses in humanities and arts, services, and health and welfare are offered more often as non-formal programmes.

In Latvia as in the rest of the EU, people with lower education levels participate less in learning later in life. According to Eurostat data, the participation rate in formal adult education of employed persons (aged 25 to 64) is close to the EU-28 average, while participation rates for the unemployed and the inactive population are lower (Table 4). Participation rates in non-formal education of the employed are only half that of the EU-28 average, while participation rates of the unemployed are similar.

Table 4. **Participation in education (25-64 year-olds) of employed, unemployed and inactive people in 2013 (%)**

Education	Employed		Unemployed		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: 21.7.2014, extracted: 4.9.2014; (u) low reliability.

Regional private education providers (education centres) implement continuing vocational education and non-formal education, and cooperate with the public employment service that procures training for the unemployed through its network of 28 regional offices.

Since 2010, young people (aged 17 to 25) who have not taken part in subsidised training for two years may apply to participate in short (one to one-and-a-half year) vocational education programmes within the ESF project coordinated by State Education Development Agency (Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra) (VIAA). Since 2012, also young people with a professional qualification, who are not (self-) employed, may enrol. Most programmes are secondary education programmes at EQF level 4 (Latvian professional qualification level 3). One-year programmes ensure mastering simple occupations at Latvian professional qualification level 2. Since 2014, these programmes have been available to young people (aged 17 to 29) in the youth guarantee framework (see Section 2.2.1.1).

2.2.2. Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships in crafts have existed since 1992, but are provided in a rather small scale. As defined in the Law on Crafts (Supreme Council, 1993), a 'craft apprentice' is a person, who has joined a crafts company or an education institution and signed a training contract. Apprenticeships are implemented separately from programmes in other education sectors and are not included in the educational programme classification (no relevant ISCED level). Only the Law on Crafts stipulates norms for apprenticeships and procedures for awarding craftsman qualifications.

Apprenticeship qualifications neither provide access to regulated professions nor to the formal education system. Currently, there are no reintegration-in-education mechanisms in place for those who dropped out of apprenticeships before completing the programme.

An apprenticeship programme includes study periods followed by a journeyman and master of crafts exams organised by the Chamber of Crafts. The

chamber has signed cooperation agreements with several vocational schools that provide theoretical knowledge. Thus, apprenticeship programmes include school- and enterprise-based learning. The proportion between school- and enterprise-based learning is not defined.

The chamber supervises training and registers craftsmen, journeymen and apprentices, crafts companies and crafts master workshops in its database. It also issues licences that give people a right to train apprentices, a right that craftsmen have by default.

Young people are admitted to apprenticeship programmes regardless of their previous education, but not earlier than the year in which they turn 16 (unless they have permission from a parent or guardian). Persons can become apprentices if they find a teaching-master. Apprentices have to attend an educational course on crafts history provided by the chamber. Apprenticeship programmes are designed by the relevant professional association and approved by the council of the Chamber of Crafts. Duration of programmes is set by craft associations; on average three years. Apprentices can often receive remuneration from the second year of apprenticeship paid by the crafts master or the company.

Journeyman (*amata zēļa diploms*) and master of crafts (*amata meistara diploms*) qualifications can be obtained through apprenticeships. To obtain journeyman and master craftsman qualifications candidates have to be members of the chamber's sectoral or regional craft association and pass the respective exams. The journeyman qualification comprises a theoretical and a practical (presentation of a project) part. To take part in a master craftsman examination, journeyman candidates have to have eight years of work experience in the field. The theoretical two-month course for master craftsman candidates is offered by the chamber. A master craftsman with previously acquired relevant higher education is considered an academically educated master of crafts.

To make vocational education more responsive to labour market needs, the Ministry of Education and Science has designed a new apprenticeship-type scheme. In English the more general term 'work-based learning' (*darba vidē balstītas mācības*) tends to be used when referring to this project. The Ministry of Education and Science signed a memorandum on cooperation in VET in Europe (2012) and a declaration of intent with the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research on cooperation in VET (2013). The memorandum and declaration aim at supporting work-based learning development.

In 2013, six vocational education institutions started offering the new scheme in several vocational education programmes. This encompasses developing flexible curricula according to occupational characteristics and sharing

responsibilities of teaching (theory) and training (practice) between schools and enterprises. Vocational education institutions ensure acquisition of theoretical knowledge and, in general, improvement of curricula. Companies provide professional training in a real workplace environment and pay an allowance or a wage to students.

So far, the project has been implemented successfully and is appreciated both by students/teachers and employers. In 2014/15, numbers of schools that applied for participation in the work-based learning project increased four times, and numbers of enterprises – six times compared to 2013/14. Introduction of the new scheme at system level has become a priority of education and employment policies for 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014). In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Science signed a ‘memorandum on cooperation in VET’ which set in motion a cooperation project on work-based learning between the Baltic States and Switzerland. Proposed amendments (October 2014) to the Vocational Education Law are being discussed in parliament and will provide a legal basis for the new approach.

2.2.3. VET provision for special target groups

Unemployed people receive support to acquire new or improve existing professional skills. Vocational education and (re)qualification is one of the active labour market policy measures provided by NVA. In 2013, 6% of the registered unemployed were involved in continuing vocational education programmes (which award a professional qualification), 3% were involved in professional development programmes (which do not award a professional qualification) and 22% were involved in non-formal education. In addition to free education, the unemployed receive a monthly allowance of EUR 100.

According to legislation on supporting unemployed and job-seekers (Saeima, 2002), the most vulnerable groups among them are:

- (a) young job-seekers (aged 15 to 24);
- (b) pre-retirement age (aged 55 to 64) individuals;
- (c) long-term (>1 year) unemployed;
- (d) individuals returning to the labour market after parental leave (six months);
- (e) individuals with disabilities;
- (f) individuals caring for a family member;
- (g) former convicts and former drug addicts.

Involving vulnerable groups in measures supporting active employment (including vocational education and (re)qualification) to foster labour market inclusion is a strategic objective of NVA.

Young people with special needs constitute another vulnerable target group. Development centres (special boarding schools in municipalities) provide special general basic education programmes and vocational basic education programmes for learners with mental impairments leading to qualifications up to EQF level 3 (Latvian professional qualification level 1). The Ministry of Welfare Social Integration State Agency (Sociālās integrācijas valsts aģentūra) implements national social integration policy for persons with special needs by providing a wide range of vocational education programmes (at levels of basic and secondary vocational education, first-level professional higher education, and continuing vocational education) and social rehabilitation services. The Alsviki vocational school (under the Ministry of Education and Science) implements programmes for young disabled people.

Since 2011, the government has been specifically addressing the need to help young prison inmates acquire key competences and a vocational qualification. Since 2014, VIAA has been organising vocational programmes for inmates (aged 15 to 29) through an ESF project ⁽¹⁾.

Young people not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) is a target group which receives learning and employment support in the youth guarantee framework (Ministry of Welfare, 2013). The initiative includes expanding active employment measures provided by NVA and implementing short initial vocational education programmes (one to one-and-a-half year) for young people (aged 17 to 29) administered by VIAA (see Section 2.2.1.1).

2.2.4. VET governance

Most vocational education providers are governed by the State. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for most of these. Others are under responsibility of the Ministries of Culture, Welfare and the Interior. There are also vocational education schools established (or taken over from the State) by local government and private ones.

The VET system is governed by the following State institutions:

- (a) Cabinet of Ministers (*Ministru kabinets*) defines policies and strategies for vocational education and sets procedures for development of occupational standards, organisation of practice, qualification requirements and professional qualification exams. It also regulates examination centre accreditation, sets the criteria for issuing State-recognised qualifications and

⁽¹⁾ 'Implementation of the initial vocational education programmes for young people within the youth guarantee' (*Sākotnējās profesionālās izglītības programmu īstenošana garantijas jauniešiem ietvaros*).

- recognising foreign qualifications as well as granting a title of 'competence centre' to providers;
- (b) Ministry of Education and Science develops the framework regulations for vocational education. It proposes allocation of funds from the State budget and finances the vocational education providers it has established. The ministry also organises implementation of career education, approves regulations and appoints heads of vocational education institutions under its responsibility;
 - (c) other ministries (Ministries of Culture, Welfare and of Interior) develop proposals for allocation of funds for financing vocational education schools under their responsibility and organise continuing professional development for teachers. The ministries also organise continuing vocational education for adults and professional development and training for the unemployed. They cooperate with the Ministry of Education and Science on designing occupational standards, ensuring education quality and other issues;
 - (d) Ministry of Education and Science VISC develops content of basic, secondary and continuing vocational education, professional development and vocationally oriented education. It develops the content and procedures for State exams and coordinates development of study materials in line with vocational education standards. The centre also coordinates professional development of vocational teachers;
 - (e) Ministry of Education and Science IKVD licenses education programmes (except adult non-formal and higher education and hobby programmes). It also evaluates quality of vocational (except professional higher) education and has been coordinating implementation of the common European quality assurance for VET (EQAVET) since 2013;
 - (f) Ministry of Education and Science VIAA promotes development and implementation of education policy (including continuing education) by acting as intermediary in administration and control of EU funds, introducing EU programmes, and supporting development of career education policy;
 - (g) Ministry of Welfare is responsible for labour market policy development, including training interventions;
 - (h) Ministry of Welfare NVA implements labour market policy, including programmes for the unemployed;
 - (i) local government participates in implementation of vocational education by managing their own schools. They promote business development in their territory, cooperate with employer organisations and help students find training placements.

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

- (a) the national tripartite subcouncil for cooperation in vocational education and employment (Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome), founded in 2000 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 subcouncil are to:
 - (i) review policy proposals and draft legal norms for vocational education, human resource development and employment;
 - (ii) evaluate and propose changes in management, funding and implementation of vocational education to State NGOs;
 - (iii) endorse occupational standards before their submission for approval to the Cabinet of Ministers;
 - (iv) endorse annual student enrolment plans prepared by sectoral expert councils;
- (b) a total of 12 sectoral expert councils (*Nozaru ekspertu padomes*), founded in 2011. Their main functions are to propose solutions for long-term human resources development in their respective sectors and to ensure that vocational education provision is in line with labour market needs. This includes participation in development of occupational standards, education programmes, quality assessment procedures, work-based learning, etc. Councils prepare and submit vocational education enrolment plans to the Ministry of Education and Science. Representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economics, Employers' Confederation and Free Trade Union Confederation are also involved in the councils. Representatives from the Ministry of Welfare and NVA can also participate in council meetings. The councils' role and functions, which are to be included in the Vocational Education Law, are discussed in parliament.

As a reaction to the negative demographic trend that decreases numbers of vocational education students, and to limited financial resources, the Ministry of Education and Science designed guidelines to optimise the VET provider network in 2010-15 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010a). In 2014, there were 34 vocational education schools under responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014a). The guidelines endorse further structural reforms to reduce numbers of vocational schools to 30 by 2015 and modernise the network by clearly defining school type and jurisdiction and, if necessary, by merging schools.

2.2.5. Financing

Procedures for financing vocational education are stipulated by the Education and Vocational Education Laws (Saeima, 1998; 1999a).

Education institutions are financed from the State budget, local government budget or private funding according to ownership (Table 5). State budget allocations for vocational education programmes are calculated per student.

Table 5. **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/SB	PF	PF

SB: State budget; LGB: local government budget; PF: private funding.

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

** Scholarships, maintenance of dormitories, rehabilitation, catering, practice placements, insurance, culture education and sports, salary (except teacher salary).

Source: ReferNet Latvia.

Salaries of teachers in State and local government education institutions (including pre-schools) are paid from the State budget. Local governments may supplement salaries in vocational education schools. For accredited basic, secondary and higher education programmes the State can also finance salaries of teachers in private schools.

A majority of vocational schools are State-owned and -run; therefore, the national budget is vocational education's main source of funding. Local governments and private entities may also provide subsidies. Education institutions (both vocational and general) may receive additional funding from donations and paid services, to be used for purchasing learning aids and equipment, student grants, and (partially) to cover fees. An additional source of financing vocational education is tuition fees. Services of State and local government schools that implement pre-school, basic and secondary education are free of charge; private schools may charge students a fee.

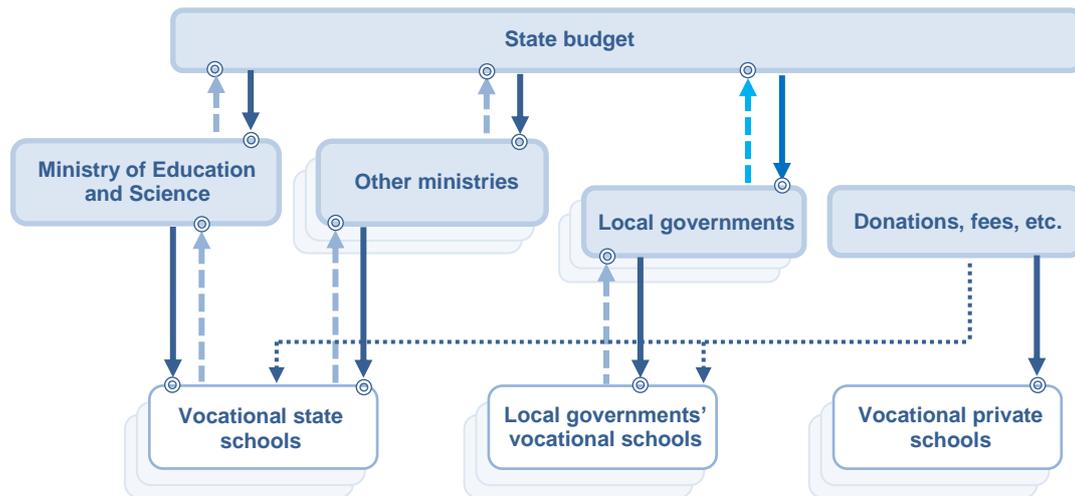
There are fixed and non-fixed costs (Cabinet of Ministers, 2007b) covered by the government, for example:

- (a) allowances (scholarships);
- (b) student residence maintenance;
- (c) rehabilitation and catering services for students with special needs;
- (d) culture education and sports activities;
- (e) practical training in enterprises;

- (f) accident insurance for practical training in enterprises.

In higher education, the State covers fees for a certain number of negotiated study places for students with good grades. Students with lower achievements or willing to enrol in a non-subsidised field of study (with a surplus of students/graduates) may be charged a tuition fee. Local governments may charge a fee in municipal sports and music vocational education schools.

Figure 8. **Financing scheme of initial vocational education**



Source: ReferNet Latvia, 2011.

Education institutions may simultaneously implement education programmes funded from different sources (Figure 8).

According to the Education Law (Saeima, 1998) adult education may be financed from State and local government budgets, employers' resources, students' fees, donations and other sources. Some local governments allocate a fixed percentage to adult education from their budget. Important sources of funding are EU, Norwegian and Swiss financial assistance instruments, including Structural Funds and Erasmus+ (former lifelong learning programme 2007-13) that have helped create more learning opportunities for adults through various projects.

National data collection on financing continuing vocational education was discontinued in 2005. Information is available only on financing from the State budget, ESF and partly from local government. Statistics on employers' and individual contributions are not regularly collected. According to data collected by the Ministry of Education and Science (2013), in 2012, local governments invested approximately EUR 2.25 million in adult non-formal education for 63 000 adults compared to EUR 1.29 million and 29 000 adults in 2009. Support varies

by region and local government. Local governments have developed additional support instruments:

- (a) funding or cofunding local education institutions (adult education centres, folk schools, culture centres, general education establishments) that offer adult non-formal learning;
- (b) providing infrastructure or discounts on renting facilities for providers of adult non-formal education;
- (c) cofinancing EU and other projects that focus on implementation and development of adult non-formal education;
- (d) offering subsidies to NGOs to ensure availability of education services for adults. However, these activities will unlikely be sufficient to achieve the 15% target of adult learning participation by 2020.

2.2.6. Teachers and trainers

The term ‘trainer’ is not used in vocational education. Teachers provide both theory and practical learning at school. Every vocational education teacher can work in initial and continuing vocational education at basic and secondary education levels.

Vocational education teachers:

- (a) implement education programmes according to State vocational education standards and occupational standards and foster creativity and independence of learners;
- (b) develop syllabi (to be approved by heads of vocational education institutions);
- (c) apply new ideas, technologies and methods in the learning process;
- (d) assess knowledge and skills of learners.

In 2014, new government regulations set requirements for initial education and professional qualification of teachers and introduced a procedure for improving their professional competences (Cabinet of Ministers, 2014c). Teachers without pedagogical qualification are now required to attend a pedagogical course offered by a higher education institution (72 hours). In addition, teachers are required to undertake at least 36 hours of continuing professional development every three years.

Teachers of vocational subjects must have a minimum of either:

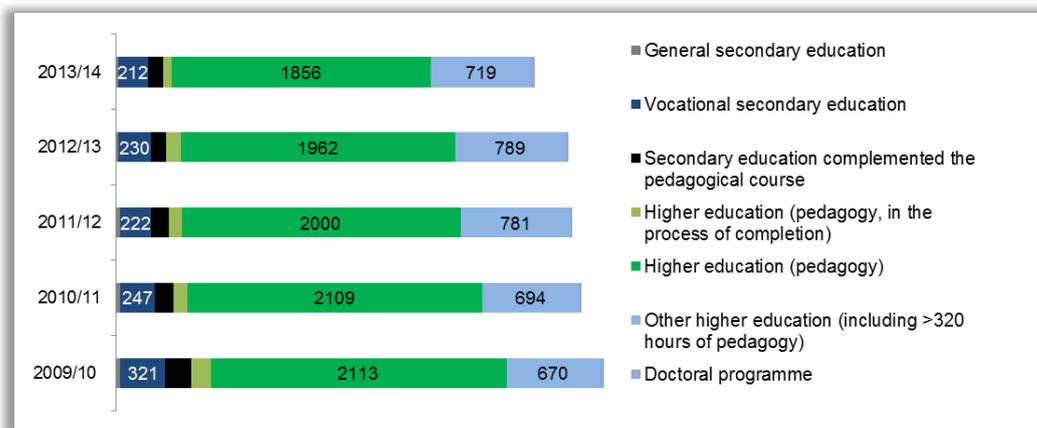
- (a) tertiary education in a relevant field (such as engineering) complemented by a pedagogical course (72 hours);
- (b) vocational upper secondary education (or master of crafts) level qualification complemented by a pedagogical course (72 hours).

The requirement for a pedagogical course does not apply to supervisors of practical training with less than 240 teaching hours per year.

Teachers of general subjects in vocational education must have a minimum of either:

- (a) tertiary education in pedagogy/education and a teaching qualification in the particular subject;
- (b) tertiary education in the relevant field of science and either a teaching qualification in a particular subject (may be in the process of completion) or a pedagogical course (72 hours).

Figure 9. **Qualification of VET teachers (teachers)**



Source: Ministry of Education and Science, <http://izm.izm.gov.lv/registri-statistika/statistika-profesionala/11937.html> [accessed 28.1.2015].

Most vocational education teachers have attained higher education (Figure 9). Since 2009/10 numbers of vocational education teachers have decreased by 14%. At the same time, the share of teachers with tertiary education increased from 81% to 87%.

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

2.2.7. Implementation of the NQF

The NQF was linked to the EQF in 2011. It consists of eight levels. Acquirement of learning outcomes is formulated as an objective in State standards of academic (Cabinet of Ministers, 2014a) and second-level professional higher education programmes (Cabinet of Ministers, 2014b). Knowledge, skills and attitudes are also integrated into general and vocational education standards.

The framework comprises formal basic, secondary and higher education (general/academic and vocational/professional) (Academic Information Centre and Ministry of Education and Science, 2012).

In 2010, NQF level descriptors were included in Cabinet of Ministers regulations on classification of Latvian education (Cabinet of Ministers, 2008c with amendments in 2010 and 2014). NQF descriptors are based on learning outcomes. Similar to the EQF, they are expressed as:

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

The regulations link all formal education levels to relevant NQF/EQF levels as demonstrated in Table 6.

Cabinet of Ministers regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013c) stipulate that diploma supplements should include NQF/EQF or European higher education area (EHEA) framework level. All NQF/EQF levels should also be reflected in a diagram of the Latvian higher education system that is part of the diploma supplement.

In line with amendments (in progress, submitted in 2014) to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) State vocational education and professional qualification diplomas should include the relevant NQF level by 2015.

In 2008, the Academic Information Centre (Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs) that supervises Latvian representation in the ENIC-NARIC network, Europass and ReferNet, was appointed as the national coordination point for the EQF. It organised the national consultation process and promoted establishment of the framework. Due to complexity of reforms required to adopt the framework, a decision to do the referencing in two consequent steps was taken:

- (a) 2009-11: establishment of the NQF, referencing the formal Latvian education system to the EQF for lifelong learning and the qualifications framework in EHEA;
- (b) 2013-15: review of the self-assessment report based on the new Vocational Education Law (expected), Higher Education Law (expected) and results of ongoing projects, such as the ESF project 'Developing the sectoral qualifications system and increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education' (2010-15).

Table 6. **Formal qualifications and EQF/NQF levels**

NQF/ EQF level	Latvian education documents (qualifications)
1	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes addressing learners with severe mental development disorders or several severe development disorders)
2	Certificate of general basic education (for students in special educational programmes addressing learners with mental development disorders)
3	Certificate of general basic education Certificate of vocational basic education
4	Certificate of general secondary education Certificate of vocational education (without rights to enter higher education) Diploma of vocational secondary education (with rights to enter higher education)
5	Diploma of first level professional higher education (first level professional higher (college) education; length of full-time studies two to three years)
6	Bachelor diploma Professional bachelor diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (second level professional higher education, length of full-time studies – at least four years)
7	Master diploma Professional master diploma Diploma of professional higher education, diploma of higher education, diploma of higher professional qualification (second level professional higher education, total length of full-time studies – at least five years).
8	Doctoral diploma

Source: Cabinet of Ministers, 2008c.

2.2.8. Increasing efficiency and quality of vocational education

In 2009, the Cabinet of Ministers launched a strategy to make vocational education more attractive and involve social partners more actively (Cabinet of Ministers, 2009). It also supports improvement of vocational education programmes. Some results are already visible. In 2012-13, 14 sectoral qualifications frameworks were created with ESF support based on a survey of representatives of different economic sectors.

A new modular structure for vocational education programmes has been discussed. This approach includes use of learning outcomes, relevant teaching/learning methods and indicators of achievement. To change the

curricula structure, five modules (for initial and continuing vocational education) were created. They promote acquisition of lifelong learning competences in vocational education. These competences are also included in education and occupational standards. VISC has developed methodological recommendations for designing modular vocational education programmes (VISC, 2013). These recommendations were tested in 2013. Dialogue on alternative forms of evaluating learning outcomes in relation to the new modular approach has begun. In the education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014), applying the modular approach is seen as a main driver for increasing VET attractiveness.

The Ministry of Education and Science nominated four experts to promote the European credit system for VET (ECVET) and ease its implementation in Latvia. In 2014, VIAA initiated an Erasmus+ project to support the national ECVET expert team. The project will last until 2015.

2.3. Other learning options for employees

Work-related knowledge, skills and competences can also be acquired through non-formal education or short professional development courses. They are provided by vocational education institutions, university continuing education departments and their local/distance learning centres, chambers of commerce, adult education centres, associations and private providers.

2.3.1. Sectoral education programmes

Education providers that offer programmes for regulated professions or professions with special certification requirements may also provide non-formal education. For example, the Latvian Medical Doctors' Association offers non-formal education courses for doctors preparing for (re)certification.

Seminars and courses for upskilling teachers are organised by VISC. The centre uses ESF cofinancing for continuing professional development of teachers, heads of schools and librarians.

Sectoral associations also use ESF to promote competitiveness of companies through learning. Projects are implemented in partnerships. Most learning focuses on computing, engineering sciences and technologies, production, design, creative industries, natural sciences, mathematics and statistics.

2.3.2. Workplace learning

Enterprises are not obliged to upskill their employees. However, the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a) states that employers should bear the costs of (vocational) education initiated by them. In most cases, employees' learning depends on their employers' initiative and available resources. Job rotation within the organisation is also used as a means of training.

Enterprise-provided learning that assists employees in adapting to new tasks to guarantee/improve their careers is a type of non-formal education. It provides an opportunity to acquire new skills and competences. Education providers (education centres in large enterprises or external (adult) education centres) can provide study programmes in accordance with enterprise needs. Teachers can be employed by an education provider or may be directly contracted by employers to provide courses. It is usually the providers' responsibility to design their own education programmes. For certain regulated professions, other bodies may be consulted to ensure that relevant occupational standards are met. Quality of provision is not monitored otherwise.

A recent study of 14 economic sectors analysed provision of initial vocational education and continuing education in sectors. Results indicate that part of the skills needs in sectors in terms of specific occupations is not catered for by vocational schools; therefore, large enterprises ensure work-based learning for their employees at the enterprise. For example, the learning centre of the biggest heating service company in Riga has trained its employees since 1999. In cooperation with other sectoral enterprises once per month the learning centre also provides training for employees from other enterprises.

Another example is the natural gas provider which prefers to employ individuals without specific prior knowledge for elementary occupations and ensures necessary learning in its own education centre and through work under guidance of a mentor. Generally, these learning activities focus on specific technical skills, such as performing dangerous work. 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. Most enterprises (although mainly large) are ready to finance upskilling of their employees.

2.3.3. Funding mechanisms

National statistics on expenditure on education by enterprises are not collected. The tax system does not encourage employers to invest in learning. Only large, stable enterprises may afford a learning budget. These enterprises usually have a human resource development strategy. Smaller enterprises tend to invest less

in employees' education as other priorities, such as their survival on the market, dominate.

National public agencies support skills development projects cofinanced by EU funds. The Investment and Development Agency (Latvijas Investīciju un attīstības aģentūra) coordinates implementation of human resources development projects in which enterprises are highly interested. The NVA coordinates learning activities for the employed (including those at risk of unemployment).

2.4. Recent developments in adult education policy

Optimising the adult education system is a challenge for the Ministry of Education and Science and other stakeholders, including the State and social partners. In 2013-14, the Ministry of Education and Science organised six interagency forums to discuss initiatives on adult education policy for 2014-20 and a new national adult education cooperation model was designed. The project was financially supported by the European Commission.

The Ministry of Education and Science intends to fine tune the national adult education system in 2015 and prioritise addressing learning needs of 25 to 54 year-old employed adults. The ministry will also encourage employers' active cooperation with vocational education institutions and will ease employees' participation in continuing education by introducing incentives. There are also plans to address a current lack of statistics on the non-formal adult education sector and learning taking place at enterprises.

CHAPTER 3.

Shaping qualifications in VET

3.1. Anticipation of labour market needs

Responsibility for providing labour market forecasts rests with the Ministry of Economics (*Ekonomikas ministrija*) and NVA.

The Ministry of Economics produces medium- and long-term forecasts. It set up an advisory council for labour market forecasting (*Darba tirgus prognozēšanas konsultatīvā padome*) – a platform for dialogue between representatives of the State, employers, employees and local governments. The medium-term labour market forecasts published by the Ministry of Economics are a basis for discussions in the council:

- (a) report on economic development (two per year) with forecasts and reflection about past developments (Ministry of Economics, 2014a);
- (b) report with medium- and long-term labour market forecasts (Ministry of Economics, 2014b).

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

The instruments for labour market forecasting are based on the 2007 dynamic optimisation model. Its structure is based on a system-dynamic approach of the labour market equilibrium concept. The model takes into account ageing and professional mobility of the labour force. Labour force demand by sector is determined by economic scenarios of future growth and changes in productivity. Demand by occupation is derived from labour force demand and expected changes in the occupational structure of sectors. Demand for education is characterised by skills or the educational level required to perform a job. Labour market forecasts are based on international classification systems adapted to the situation in Latvia; thus, national forecasts are internationally comparable.

According to a report on labour market medium- and long-term forecasts (Ministry of Economics, 2014b), almost two thirds of the increase in labour force demand until 2020 will be in three sectors: manufacturing industry, trade and business services. Demand will decrease in traditional sectors such as agriculture. As a result, demand for highly qualified specialists (with higher and vocational secondary education) will increase rapidly. Engineering, production

(mainly electric and electronic engineering, metalworking, mechanical engineering and food processing sectors), natural sciences and information technologies' sectors are expected to have an undersupply of labour force. In the long term, supply of equipment and machine operators, qualified workers and crafts profession workers will significantly fall short of demand if the education structure remains unchanged. A similar situation will also emerge in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries' sectors and in sectors with many employees close to pensionable age. In almost all sectors, especially after 2020, demand for low-skilled labour will decrease.

The NVA carries out short-term labour market forecasts. It also conducts employers' express surveys twice per year to anticipate changes in structure of the labour force in the following six months. The surveys help to clarify reasons for changes in demand and supply for occupations. Their results are used to adjust the education offer for the unemployed.

The Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) (Centrālā statistikas pārvalde) conducts a labour force survey four times per year and collects data on education levels, employment by type of economic activity and occupation.

Data on higher education institutions' and vocational education providers' graduates are collected by the institutions themselves and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science and to the CSB for further analysis and publication. According to the amendments (2011) to the respective legislation (Saeima, 1995c), higher education institutions have to ensure that information about graduates' employment is collected and analysed. This has led to more data. 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. Designing qualifications

Vocational education programmes are designed in line with education and occupational standards.

Content of vocational education programmes is defined by State vocational education standards (Cabinet of Ministers, 2000). This includes strategic aims, basic principles, mandatory content, ratio of theory and practice and evaluation procedures. Vocational education providers also ensure that specific skills and competences required in the occupational standards are included in the programmes they offer (see Section 2.2.4).

Occupational standards are designed by designated working groups comprising representatives of ministries, local governments, employers,

employees, chamber of commerce and industry, NGOs and vocational education providers. The standards are endorsed by the national tripartite subcouncil for cooperation in vocational education and employment, approved by the government, and reviewed at least once every five years.

Qualification exams that consist of theoretical and practical parts are designed in line with both occupational and State education standards. Representatives from relevant sectoral organisations participate in the examination process.

3.3. Labour market relevance of VET

To ensure labour market relevance of vocational education two instruments are used: limiting or expanding provision of education in quantitative terms, and improving its quality.

The Ministry of Education and Science uses annual proposals of 12 sectoral expert councils and medium- and long-term forecasts of labour force demand and supply as sources to plan vocational education supply (provision plans, including numbers of potential students and types of programmes).

In addition, work to improve quality of vocational education programmes is ongoing. Since 2007, occupational standards have to include professional competence, namely necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in certain work situations. Standards designed before 2007 and programmes have to be updated before their accreditation expires. With adoption of a new classification of occupations and its procedures (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010b) in 2010, occupational standards approved prior to 2010 also have to be reviewed. Key occupational standards in 14 sectors are being aligned with labour market needs using ESF. In 2014, revision was partly completed.

To respond to high youth unemployment, vocational education standards were amended to introduce short vocational education programmes for 17 to 25 year-olds (one to one-and-a-half year). Previously such programmes lasted two years. Implementation of short programmes is supported by an ESF project coordinated by VIAA. Within the project, specialists in 70 different occupations are to be trained by mid-2015. Programmes were agreed with sectoral organisations and the national tripartite subcouncil for cooperation in vocational education and employment. Additionally, in the youth guarantee initiative framework, VIAA cooperates with more than 40 providers.

3.4. Quality assurance in VET

The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for policies and strategies to ensure accessibility and quality of education. Ministry of Education and Science institutions (including vocational schools) ensure the quality agreed in policy documents and legislation.

Quality is assured through:

- (a) elaboration of education policy;
- (b) registration and accreditation of education providers;
- (c) licensing and accreditation of education programmes;
- (d) supervising the educational process.

A principle of accreditation ensures each programme's content meets required standards of vocational education provided by public (State, local government) and private institutions. It also increases transparency of education provision and fosters recognition of Latvian qualifications abroad. IKVD among other functions organises licensing and accreditation of vocational education programmes, and accreditation of vocational education providers and examination centres of State, local government and private entities.

Only accredited local governments and private vocational education institutions may apply for State funding for continuing vocational education, professional development and vocationally oriented education programmes. In 2010, IKVD joined the EQAVET working group working towards a better quality assessment system for vocational education. It coordinates implementation of the EQAVET recommendation and introduction of common quality assurance indicators in vocational education at national level since 2013 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013e) (see Sections 2.2.4 and 3.6).

During the licensing or accreditation process, IKVD hires external experts and representatives of sectoral NGOs and employers to evaluate the programmes' compliance with State education standards, occupational standards and other regulations. All experts have specific knowledge of the accreditation process.

VISC ensures development of content for vocational education (except higher education) in compliance with State education standards (see Section 2.2.4). It also ensures development and implementation of a uniform content of vocational education State examinations, coordinates development of study aids complying with general and vocational education standards, and coordinates teachers' professional development.

The Higher Education Council (Augstākās izglītības padome) is responsible for quality assurance of higher (including professional) education. The council

takes decisions on accreditation of higher education institutions and submits them to the Ministry of Education and Science for approval. In 2011-13, the council implemented an ESF project that evaluated most of higher education including higher professional programmes. National and international experts evaluated 860 study programmes in 28 study fields, and provided suggestions for improvements. Results were used for accreditation of higher education programmes in 2013.

In 2012, new Cabinet of Ministers regulations for accreditation of higher education institutions, colleges and study fields (Cabinet of Ministers, 2012b) were adopted. Instead of accreditation of single study programmes, now study fields that include all programmes of the same field undergo joint accreditation. Evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions/colleges and study fields, and licensing of study programmes (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013d), is organised by the Ministry of Education and Science. At end of 2014, the government decided to reassign this function to the Academic Information Centre (Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs).

In 2013, IKVD set up a register of study fields – a public portal ⁽²⁾ that includes information on statistics of higher education, accreditation of institutions and study fields and other key data.

3.5. Validation of non-formal and informal learning

Development of a system for validation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal/informal learning was a policy objective of the lifelong learning strategy 2007-13 (Cabinet of Ministers, 2008a).

Validation of professional competences acquired outside formal education was launched in 2011 after amendments to the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a). Accredited education providers and examination centres with an IKVD permit carry out the validation process. The validation procedure for EQF levels 3-4 qualifications (Latvian professional qualification levels 1-3) is described in government regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011b).

The validation procedure includes the following steps:

- (a) submission of application;
- (b) professional qualification exam;
- (c) certification of professional qualification.

⁽²⁾ See <https://svr.ikvd.gov.lv> [accessed 29.1.2015].

Validation is offered for a fee. Vocational education providers that assess professional competence must inform/advise candidates (free of charge) about requirements of occupational standards and the exam procedure. Once applicants have passed the exam, they receive a certificate of a professional qualification according to Cabinet of Ministers regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2011c).

For higher education, government regulations that determine the validation procedure and criteria (Cabinet of Ministers, 2012a) were approved following amendments of 2011 to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c). Learning outcomes acquired through professional experience may only be recognised in a study programme. Thus, learning outcomes have to be acquired in a profession relevant to a field in a study programme.

3.6. Cooperation with stakeholders

The recent VET system reform was based on successful cooperation between State institutions and social partners. Sectoral expert councils gained a decisive role in aligning vocational education to needs of the economy. As a result of the survey on vocational education needs in 14 sectors a structure of sectoral professional qualifications and respective descriptions were developed. Occupational standards continue to be developed and updated for key professions and qualifications.

Development of a modular approach to content of vocational education programmes and qualification exams was also carried out in close cooperation with stakeholders. Implementation of EQAVET and joint vocational education quality assurance indicators takes place in cooperation with social partners. In 2013-14, the EQAVET coordinator (IKVD) organised a discussion cycle on quality assurance issues involving sectoral expert councils, Ministry of Education and Science and other stakeholders. IKVD has compiled views of stakeholders and is incorporating EQAVET quality criteria and indicators into the Latvian vocational education quality assurance system.

CHAPTER 4.

Promoting participation in VET

4.1. Incentives for learners, education providers and enterprises

Attractiveness of initial vocational education and reduction of early leaving from education are national policy priorities. The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) foresee preventive and compensatory actions, including:

- (a) promoting youth involvement in leisure and extracurricular activities;
- (b) providing scholarships for vocational education students;
- (c) conducting a study on reasons for leaving education early;
- (d) implementing initial vocational education programmes in the youth guarantee initiative framework;
- (e) identifying young NEETs and involving them in education.

Unlike general education students, vocational education students receive a monthly allowance according to government regulations on scholarships (Cabinet of Ministers, 2004). Students in public vocational education programmes receive an allowance from a 'scholarship fund' of the vocational education provider. The allowance amounts to between EUR 10 and 71 per month. Orphans/children without parental care (not in care institutions or foster families) and best performers in studies or school social activities receive a higher allowance.

From 2009 to 2015, advanced initial vocational education students, based on their performance, have an opportunity to receive ESF cofinanced scholarships per month:

- (a) in the first study year: EUR 14-29;
- (b) in the second, third and fourth study year: EUR 29-71;
- (c) 17 to 25 year-old students of short programmes: up to EUR 100 (since 2012).

According to vocational education students themselves, allowances and scholarships have been a successful motivation tool. The Ministry of Education and Science is currently discussing replacing the ESF project-based funding with State funding.

Tax incentives for individuals and enterprises are also available and regulated by laws on personal and enterprise income tax (Saeima, 1993; 1995a).

Individuals may request the State Revenue Service (Valsts ieņēmumu dienests) to reduce their taxable income by amounts of their education (and

medical) expenses up to a maximum of EUR 213 per year, including expenses paid for brothers/sisters/children under 24 years of age (Cabinet of Ministers, 2001). The revenue service is also responsible for monitoring use of tax incentives. Recent statistics, however, do not include all claims, as expenses may be claimed up to three years after they have been incurred.

For taxation purposes 'education' is understood as participation in:

- (a) State-accredited educational programmes (including higher and vocational education);
- (b) EU/European economic area State-accredited occupational learning;
- (c) skills or qualification development.

Tertiary (including professional) education students can apply for two types of study loans to cover tuition fees and costs of living. Loans are offered by 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 regulating allocation, repayment and clearance of the loan is defined in the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c).

In 2014, the government discussed labour tax exemptions for employers who offer training placements (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014b).

4.2. Guidance and counselling

The Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Welfare are responsible for career guidance and counselling. The Education Law (Saeima, 1998) stipulates that local governments are responsible for provision of career education for children and youth. Since 2013, the law establishes students' right to receive career guidance and counselling; outlines responsibilities of heads of education institutions for ensuring access to career development services and defines the respective terminology. The Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a) determines responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Science' for introducing guidance and counselling in vocational education.

The present career development support system has been in place since 2006. It was launched by a Ministry of Welfare policy paper on improving career guidance (Cabinet of Ministers, 2006a) developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Economics, the former Ministry of Regional Development, the Association of Local Governments, social partner organisations and guidance practitioners. The paper covers all aspects of lifelong

guidance including the mechanisms to ensure better cooperation and coordination between key stakeholders at different levels.

In 2007, the national guidance and counselling forum (Karjeras attīstības atbalsta sistēmas sadarbības padome) was established. It gathers policy-makers from the relevant ministries, guidance providers, social partners and users. The forum proposes changes at national and local levels, thus, contributing to development of guidance and counselling policy and system. It also cooperates with the Latvian delegation to the European lifelong guidance policy network.

According to government regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2010c) offering support in career education is one of the criteria for assessing quality in schools. The new regulations (Cabinet of Ministers, 2013b) foresee additional requirements for vocational education providers who seek to be recognised as vocational education competence centres. These competence centres in relevant economic sectors should provide individual career counselling and support measures for career education to help students acquire career management skills.

VIAA represents Latvia in the Euroguidance network by Ministry of Education and Science delegation. Financed by the Ministry of Education and Science and the EU Erasmus+ programme it supports implementation of career education policy within the education sector and provides information on education opportunities in Latvia and other EU countries.

The agency develops information materials to provide methodological support for career guidance practitioners working at schools and guidance materials for young people and adults. VIAA also organises seminars for practitioners and, since 2012, organises a 'career week' in big cities. The agency maintains and updates an education opportunities database ⁽³⁾ with information about general, vocational and higher education providers and programmes, as well as information about non-formal learning opportunities. VIAA also offers a website ⁽⁴⁾ which informs about the world of work. In cooperation with the Academic Information Centre (Akadēmiskās informācijas centrs), VIAA maintains and updates a website ⁽⁵⁾ for foreign students that contains practical information about education programmes in foreign languages.

Guidance and counselling is also part of the NVA remit which operates in accordance with the Labour Law (Saeima, 2001a), laws on social security and on

⁽³⁾ See www.niid.lv [accessed 28.1.2015].

⁽⁴⁾ See www.profesijupasaule.lv [accessed 28.1.2015].

⁽⁵⁾ See www.studyinlatvia.lv [accessed 28.1.2015].

supporting unemployed and job-seekers (Saeima, 1995b; 2002). The latter includes NVA's function to ensure free career advice for the unemployed and job-seekers. The agency provides:

- (a) career information and planning;
- (b) analysis of life and work values;
- (c) online career consultation;
- (d) support in preparing for work interviews (writing CVs and job applications);
- (e) other services.

Client needs inform choices of counselling methods used. The first meeting is devoted to clarifying aims of the consultation and selecting the most appropriate working method, which may be focused on exploring professional interests, vocational aptitude, or exploring clients' knowledge, skills/competences and values. If need be, psychological support is ensured in form of a structured conversation to discuss possible solutions. The NVA web portal 'Career services' ⁽⁶⁾ informs about education institutions, self-assessment tests, occupations and offers a possibility of e-consultation.

According to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (Saeima, 1995c), students have a right to receive information on issues regarding their studies and potential careers. In many higher education institutions there are designated career centres that provide information on education and career opportunities, while in other higher education institutions these duties are performed by faculty staff.

In the private and NGO sectors, provision of guidance services is underdeveloped, but there are some promising initiatives. An example is the youth consultation web portal ⁽⁷⁾ (since 2008), which is considered the largest in Latvia informing on career and education issues.

4.3. Key challenges

The main current challenge is to ensure access to guidance and counselling for young people. In the economic recession NVA shifted focus from providing career guidance for school students to supporting the unemployed. This makes it crucial to reestablish career counsellors in the education system. However, measures to support learners through development of career education, and

⁽⁶⁾ See Karjeras pakalpojumi, <http://www.nva.gov.lv/karjera> [accessed 28.1.2015].

⁽⁷⁾ See www.prakse.lv [accessed 28.1.2015].

guidance and counselling within the education system have been postponed due to limited resources (Jaunzeme, 2013). The education development guidelines 2014-20 (Saeima, 2014) foresee easing career education and widening access to individual career services in a lifelong learning context starting from 2015 with support from public and EU funds.

List of abbreviations

CSB	Centrālā statistikas pārvalde [Central Statistical Bureau]
CVET	continuing VET
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
ECVET	European credit system for VET
EHEA	European higher education area
EQAVET	European quality assurance in VET
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
IKVD	Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests [State Education Quality Service]
ISCED	international standard classification of education
IT	information technology
NEET	young people not in education, employment or training
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NQF	national qualifications framework
NVA	Nodarbinātības valsts aģentūra [State Employment Agency]
VET	vocational education and training
VIAA	Valsts izglītības attīstības aģentūra [State Education Development Agency]
VISC	Valsts izglītības satura centrs [National Centre for Education]

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Ministry of Education and Science: www.izm.gov.lv

VISC: www.visc.gov.lv

IKVD: www.ikvd.gov.lv

VIAA: www.viaa.gov.lv

Latvian Chamber of Crafts: www.lak.lv

Employers' Confederation of Latvia: www.iddk.lv

Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees: www.lizda.lv

National database on learning opportunities: www.niid.lv

CSB: www.csb.gov.lv

Academic Information Centre: www.aic.lv

Higher education quality evaluation centre: www.aiknc.lv

Ministry of Culture: www.km.gov.lv

Ministry of Economics: www.em.gov.lv

Ministry of Welfare: www.lm.gov.lv

NVA: www.nva.gov.lv

Annex 1.

Glossary

Apprenticeship (*mācekļu apmācība*)

In the Latvian context, the term is similar to 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. Apprenticeships are implemented separately from programmes in other education sectors and are not included in the educational programme classification (no relevant ISCED level).

Competence (*kompence*)

Regarding the national framework, the term is expressed as ability to carry out analysis, synthesis and assessment. In the Vocational Education Law (Saeima, 1999a as amended in July 2010) only 'professional competence' is defined: necessary skills, knowledge and responsibility in work situations. However, the definition used in context of the European qualifications framework 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 context of the European qualifications framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

CVET (*profesionālā tālākizglītība*)

A special kind of vocational education which provides an opportunity for adults with previous education and professional experience to acquire a vocational qualification at a specific level (Saeima, 1999a). Thereby, the term is interpreted similarly to the international definition, namely, CVET can be broadly defined as professional or vocational development through education and training undertaken typically after one has completed initial VET. It is provided and undertaken on initiative of public authorities, social partners, sectors, enterprises, individuals as well as a range of voluntary and community organisations.

Tertiary or higher education (ISCED 5-7, *augstākā izglītība*)

An educational level, which is acquired after upper secondary education, in science or art (Saeima, 1998).

Formal learning (<i>formālā izglītība</i>)
Includes basic education, secondary education and higher education (Saeima, 1998).
General education (<i>vispārējā izglītība</i>)
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 do not specialise in particular areas, are typically school-based. After successful completion participants are not provided with a labour-market-relevant qualification. However, the term 'general education' is mostly used to refer to secondary education, while the term 'academic education' is used for higher level education programmes.
Initial VET (<i>sākotnējā profesionālā izglītība</i>)
Formally organised vocational education, mostly at upper secondary education level, which is similar to the international definition, namely, education undertaken after full-time compulsory education (mainly nine years primary and lower secondary education) to promote acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to enter an occupation. Management and legal basis of initial vocational education are not separated from continuing vocational education. Most vocational education is implemented through school-based programmes, which include practical learning periods at school and enterprise; in Latvia initial vocational education is referred to as 'vocational education'.
Lower secondary education (ISCED 2, <i>pamatizglītības otrais posms</i>)
Division of lower and upper secondary education is not used in Latvia; therefore, this stage of education belongs to primary education and is called the second stage of basic school (grades seven to nine) including both general and vocational education programmes.
Non-formal learning (<i>neformālā izglītība</i>)
Educational activities in conformity with interests and demand organised outside formal education (Saeima, 1998).
Occupation (<i>profesija</i>)
See profession.
Post-secondary (non-tertiary) education (ISCED 4, <i>pēcvidējā izglītība</i>)
One to three-year programmes are categorised nationally as upper secondary. These programmes provide professional knowledge and skills only. Educational process and assessment are organised similar to other upper secondary education programmes. Students are usually older than those in upper secondary education.

Profession (<i>profesija</i>)
A type of occupation of a natural person in fields of production of goods, distribution or services, as well as education, culture and art which require certain preparedness (Saeima, 1999a).
Qualification (<i>kvalifikācija</i>)
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 ' <i>kvalifikācija</i> ' refers only to vocational education.
Skills (<i>prasmes</i>)
The Latvian definition is similar to the international one ⁽⁸⁾ , namely, ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.
Upper secondary education (ISCED 3, <i>vidējā izglītība</i>)
Division of lower and upper secondary education is not used in Latvia; upper secondary education refers to secondary education after nine years basic school; it lasts three to four years and includes both general and vocational education programmes.
Work-based learning scheme (<i>darba vidē balstītas mācības</i>)
It is an approach/scheme applied since 2013 in vocational education. It refers to acquisition of practical skills and knowledge primarily in a company's real working environment, 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. In contrast to apprenticeship the scheme provides qualifications linked to NQF and are part of the formal education system.

⁽⁸⁾ In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Annex 2.

VET at basic and secondary levels

Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	ISCED 2011 and EQF level	General: vocational subjects (%)	Theory: practice (*) (%)	Average duration	Access (horizontal/vertical) to other pathways
Vocational basic education programme (including pedagogical correction programme)	(a) Basic education (b) Without basic education, but not younger than 15	Primary sector, manufacturing, construction; business and other services	P/A 254 EQF 3	60:40	35:65	One to three years	Vocational secondary education programmes, labour market
Vocational education programme	General or vocational basic education	Primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed services	P/A 353 EQF 4	60:40	35:65	Three years	Vocational secondary education, inter-mediate general education programme, labour market
Intermediate general secondary education 'bridge programme'	Vocational education programme, three years after basic education	---	P/A 344 EQF 4	100:0	---	One year	Higher education programmes
Vocational education programme	General or vocational basic education	Primary sector and utilities, manufacturing, construction, distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed	P 351, A 254 EQF 3	0:100	35:65	One year	Vocational secondary education, labour market
Vocational education programme (including pedagogical correction programme)	Without basic education, but not younger than 15	distribution and transport, business and other services, non-marketed	P/A 254 EQF 3	60:40	35:65	Three years	Vocational secondary education, labour market

Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	ISCED 2011 and EQF level	General: vocational subjects (%)	Theory: practice (*) (%)	Average duration	Access (horizontal/vertical) to other pathways
Vocational secondary education programme	General or vocational basic education, vocational education	services	P/A 354 EQF 4	60:40	50:50	Four years, two years after VET programme	Higher education programmes, labour market
Vocational education programme	General or vocational secondary education		P/A 453 EQF 4	0:100	35:65	One year	Labour market
Vocational secondary education programme	General secondary education		P/A 453 EQF 4	0:100	30:70	One-and-a-half to three years	Labour market

(*) Practice – practical and laboratory work in study subjects (mainly at school), practical learning (mainly at school) and qualification practice (mainly in enterprise).

Source: ReferNet Latvia.

Annex 3.

Professional education at tertiary level

Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding level of study	Academic: professional subjects (%)	Class-based learning: practice (%)	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	Two to three years
Second-level higher professional education programme (university programme)	Secondary education or first- or second-level higher professional education, or bachelor degree		ISCED 6 to 7 (see below) Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF levels 6 to 7	17:83	70:30	Four to five years, at least four years after secondary education and not shorter than two years after college education
University programmes						
Description	Admission requirements	Main economic sectors	Corresponding level of study	Content of study programmes (*)		Average duration of studies
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,	ISCED P 655/A 650 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	Total 40 Latvian CP (1 Latvian credit =1.5 European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS), of which: (a) 4 CP theoretical courses in the branch; (b) 26 CP practice; (c) 10 CP State exam (including final thesis).		One to two years Total duration of higher education studies – at least four years
Professional	Secondary		ISCED P 655/A	Total at least 160 Latvian CP, of which:		Minimum four

bachelor or professional higher education programme	education	non-marketed services	650 Latvian professional qualification level 5 EQF level 6	(a) minimum 20 CP general courses; (b) minimum 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and information technology (IT) courses; (c) minimum 60 CP courses of occupational speciality; (d) minimum 6 CP free choice courses; (e) minimum 20 CP practice; (f) minimum 12 CP State exam (including final thesis).	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: (a) minimum 4 CP theoretical courses of speciality; (b) minimum 20 CP practice; (c) minimum 10 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least one year Total duration of higher education studies at least four 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: (a) minimum 20 CP general courses; (b) minimum 36 CP theoretical courses of speciality and IT courses; (c) minimum 60 CP courses of occupational speciality; (d) minimum 6 CP free choice courses; (e) minimum 20 CP practice; (f) minimum 12 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least five years
Professional master programme	Academic or professional bachelor 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: (a) minimum 5 CP courses of recent achievements in sector's theory and practice; (b) minimum 3 CP courses of research, creativity, design and management; (c) minimum 26 CP practice (for academic bachelor graduates); (d) minimum 6 CP practice (for professional bachelor/programmes graduates); (e) 20 CP State exam (including final thesis).	At least one year Total duration of higher education studies at least five years

(*) CP: credit points (*kreditpunkti*).

Source: ReferNet Latvia.



Vocational education and training in

Latvia

Short description

This short description contributes to a better understanding of vocational education and training (VET) in Latvia by providing an insight into its main features and by highlighting VET policy developments and current challenges.

Recent VET initiatives and reforms focus on strengthening cooperation between stakeholders, developing sectoral qualifications, and raising efficiency and quality of vocational education. The VET provider network is being optimised to respond to demographic trends and shrinking financial resources. At the same time, several policy measures aim to make VET more attractive, for instance by increasing support for learners and labour market relevance through stronger focus on new forms of work-based learning.

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