

# 1 Assessment and Recommendations

## Snapshot: Key Recommendations

### Strengthening pathways in upper secondary education in Lithuania

Issue 1: Reviewing students' transitions and orientation into upper secondary education

- a) *Making personalised transition recommendations for each student based on a wide range of information*
- b) *Ensuring that students and their guardians play an informed role in transition decisions*
- c) *Reconsidering the structure of schooling to facilitate transitions into upper secondary education*

Issue 2: Creating valued vocational pathways through upper secondary education

- a) *Providing more flexibility in vocational education to adapt to students' needs and abilities*
- b) *Creating a more work-based Vocational Education and Training (VET) option that promotes acquisition of foundational skills*
- c) *Providing a technically focused and a more academically oriented vocational upper secondary option*

Issue 3: Designing pathways with clear and sequential progression out of upper secondary education

- a) *Ensuring clear and diverse options of progression from upper secondary vocational education into further education*
- b) *Improving the quality of upper secondary vocational education to ensure its value is recognised by employers*

### Consolidating Lithuania's upper secondary certification to meet learners' diverse needs and promote higher-order, complex learning

Issue 1. Supporting continual improvement and high-quality assessment

- a) *Supporting the developers of the Matura to produce high-quality items that fulfil their purpose*
- b) *Developing continuous review, research and evaluation to ensure that the Matura remains fit for purpose*
- c) *Making the most of the new digital examinations*

Issue 2. Introducing alternative types of assessment

- a) *Reviewing and refining the current project component*
- b) *Strengthening the reliability of alternative assessments*

c) *Considering other types of alternative assessment*

Issue 3. Providing more flexible choices and options within the Matura

a) *Defining the purpose, structure and consequences of a more modular approach to assessment*

b) *Supporting a better match between course and examination choices*

*Meeting the needs of vocational upper secondary students in the Matura*

## Introduction

Although Lithuania has one of the highest rates of attainment in upper secondary education among OECD countries (OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>), upper secondary education seems to play a relatively modest role in shaping young adults' skills compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2012, 2015, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>). To improve the learning and outcomes of upper secondary graduates, Lithuania is currently undertaking a range of reforms at the upper secondary level (See Box 1.1). These include changes to how students enter upper secondary education, introduction of a new curriculum explicitly oriented towards competency development and reform of the national upper secondary examination and certification (the Matura). It is a pivotal moment for Lithuania to consolidate its upper secondary pathways and certification to provide greater depth in learning and more flexible options that support and recognise the breadth of competencies that matter for young people's transitions into further education and work.

This report was developed by the OECD Above and Beyond: Transitions in Upper Secondary Education project at the request of the Lithuanian National Agency for Education (*Nacionalinė švietimo agentūra*). As part of the report's development, the OECD team held workshops in Lithuania with a range of national stakeholders to understand how they perceive their country's upper secondary system and seek their views on opportunities for future development (Box 1.2). During the workshops, both students and teachers indicated that they perceive that the Matura predominantly assesses knowledge reproduction over application of that knowledge and that the items covered are not particularly engaging or stimulating. On vocational education and training (VET), participants reported that cultural and historical factors affect the reputation and attractiveness of VET and that it is perceived as an easier and less prestigious option than general education.

Chapter 2 of this report provides an overview of the context of upper secondary education in Lithuania, including the broader socio-economic context, the structure of upper secondary education and outcomes in terms of participation, completion and learning. Chapter 3 discusses ongoing reforms in vocational upper secondary education, notably the new curriculum, changes in entrance to upper secondary education, enhancement of career guidance services and the creation of short-course vocational programmes (ISCED 5), which cumulatively have the potential to help improve the reputation of VET (Box 1.1). It suggests how Lithuania can capitalise and build on its reforms to strengthen vocational education so that it becomes a distinct and respected option that enables young people to access high-quality employment or further education. Chapter 4 focuses on the Matura examination at the end of upper secondary education and suggests how investment in assessment expertise can drive continuous improvement, including aligning assessment with the new curriculum so that teachers and students focus their time and energy on the learning it emphasises.

### Box 1.1. Current and upcoming education reforms in Lithuania

#### Curriculum and requirements to complete

In 2020, Lithuania started updating the general curriculum framework for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education (ISCED 1-3), and in 2022 it started implementing a new competency-based curriculum.

In 2023, as well as introducing a new curriculum, Lithuania will introduce new requirements for the subjects that students are required to study and related changes to the Matura examinations (see Chapters 3 and 4). Key changes include:

- reducing hours for vocational students
- providing more choice for vocational students
- designating compulsory subjects at different levels.

#### Career guidance

By 2024, all learners must be provided with career guidance, vocational information and a counselling service. Lithuania is planning to develop a network of career guidance specialists who will support students to develop a sense of their strengths and interests, starting from Grade 1. The Ministry of Education will finance the initiative, but the municipalities will manage the funds and decide how to organise it (see Chapter 3).

#### Using academic information for entrance into upper secondary education

At the end of 2022, Lithuania passed a new law under which students' examination results from the Grade 10 national examinations in Lithuanian and mathematics will be used to inform transitions into upper secondary education. The reform will be implemented starting in 2024. Only students with a mark above 4 (the pass grade in Lithuania) in the Grade 10 examination will progress directly into upper secondary education. Those with marks below this threshold can retake the examination later in the same school year, repeat the year or move to vocational lower secondary school (ISCED 2) (see Chapter 3).

#### Matura reform

In 2022, Lithuania announced a series of reforms to the Matura examination at the end of upper secondary education (see Chapter 4). These include:

- removing school-level examinations and making all examinations at state level
- introducing intermediate and final examinations in Grade 11 and Grade 12
- introducing some digital examination.

Source: Beleckienė, Giedrė; Kazlavickas, Liutauras; Palevič, Mariuš (2022<sup>[3]</sup>), Vocational Education and Training in Lithuania 2021, [https://strata.gov.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PMBA2021\\_EN\\_web.pdf](https://strata.gov.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PMBA2021_EN_web.pdf) (accessed on January 30 2023).

## Box 1.2. Workshops

As part of the OECD review of Lithuania's upper secondary system, the OECD team undertook two missions to Lithuania (October 2022 and June 2023). During both missions the team delivered workshops to a range of national stakeholders – students, teachers, national education officials and civil society representatives (Table 1.1). The workshops were designed to be interactive to allow representatives to discuss how the system currently functions from their perspective, and later on, to reflect on the relevance and feasibility of the options for change suggested in the OECD report.

The main findings and insights from the workshops included the following:

- Teachers and students agreed that the Matura assesses what students know, rather than what they can do. Some students reported that it was possible to predict the Matura items before the examination, based on previous examinations.
- Many students indicated that they did not feel that the content of their learning in upper secondary education emphasised the skills and knowledge that would be important for them in the future.
- Many students currently in upper secondary vocational educational saw it as a valued option, but students in general education and those who were not yet in upper secondary education had a limited understanding of the role and purpose of vocational education.
- Students feel the need for more guidance when choosing subjects and examinations in upper secondary education.
- Both teachers and students indicated that parents put pressure on their children to enrol in general education and tertiary education.

**Table 1.1. Workshops, participants and scope**

	Mission 1 (October 2022)		Mission 2 (June 2023)	
	Workshop 1	Workshop 2	Workshop 1	Workshop 2
Participants	General and vocational upper secondary teachers from different schools and regions, general and vocational students from different schools, regions and grades (end of both lower secondary education and upper secondary education).	School leaders, civil society representatives, employer representatives, representatives from tertiary education (universities and colleges), Lithuanian Ministry and National Agency Officials on VET, curriculum, the Matura, post-secondary non-tertiary education and tertiary education.	General and vocational upper secondary teachers and students from different schools, civil society representatives, employer representatives, representatives from tertiary education (universities and colleges), Lithuanian Ministry and National Agency Officials.	General and vocational upper secondary teachers and students from different schools, civil society representatives, employer representatives, representatives from tertiary education (universities and colleges), Lithuanian Ministry and National Agency Officials.
Scope	Collecting information on the Matura examination and the student journey in, through and out of upper secondary education.	Collecting information on the upper secondary system and the current and future reforms.	Seeking feedback on the main issues and policy recommendations developed by the OECD team on examination and certification at the end of upper secondary education.	Seeking feedback on the main issues and policy recommendations developed by the OECD team on vocational education and pathways in upper secondary education.

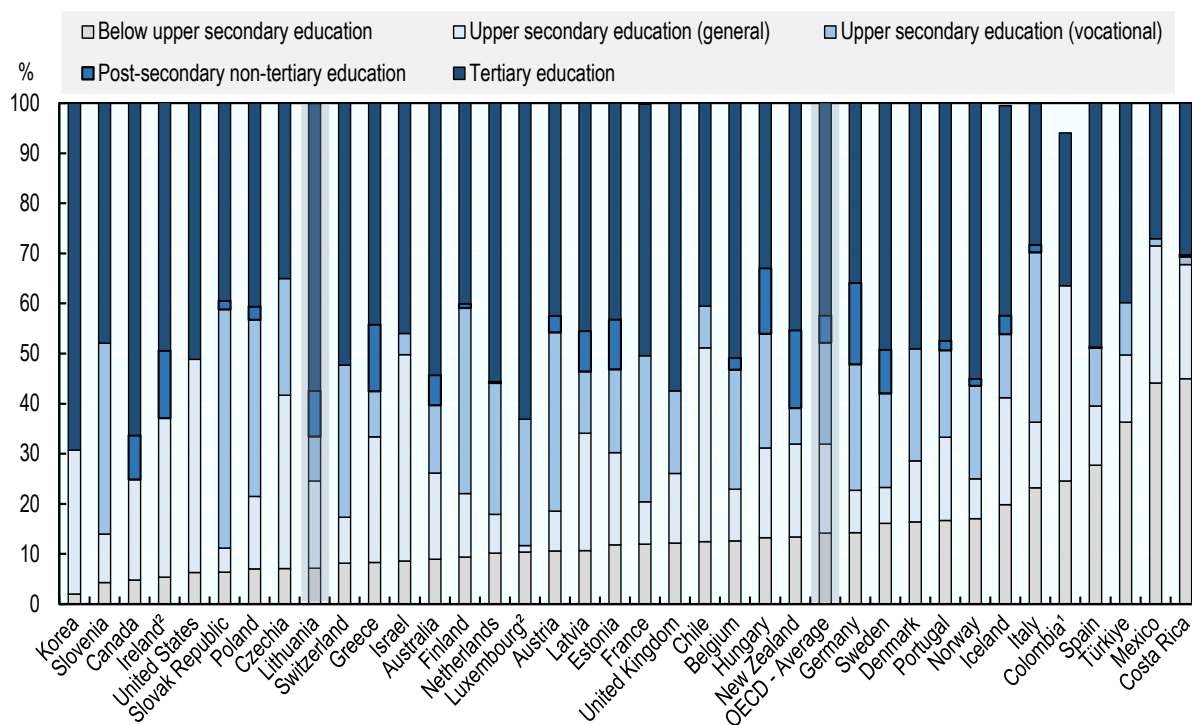
## Main trends in upper secondary education in Lithuania

### Participation and completion

*Attainment of upper secondary education is very high*

Lithuania has consistently been able to ensure that young people both successfully transition into upper secondary education and remain in the cycle until successfully completing it. Lithuania has one of the highest rates of upper secondary attainment across the OECD: 93% of 25–34 year-olds have attained at least upper secondary education, compared to the OECD average of 86% (Figure 1.1). Attainment of upper secondary education has been consistently high over time and translates into high rates of tertiary attainment. The share of 20–24 year-olds who attained at least upper secondary education in Lithuania increased from 87% in 2010 to 93% in 2020 (OECD, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>; OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>).

Figure 1.1. Educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds (2021)



Notes: <sup>1</sup>Upper secondary general education includes both general and vocational upper secondary education.

<sup>2</sup> Upper secondary general education represents both upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education.

Countries are ranked in ascending order of the share of 25-34 year-olds who attained below upper secondary education.

Source: OECD (2022<sup>[1]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>.

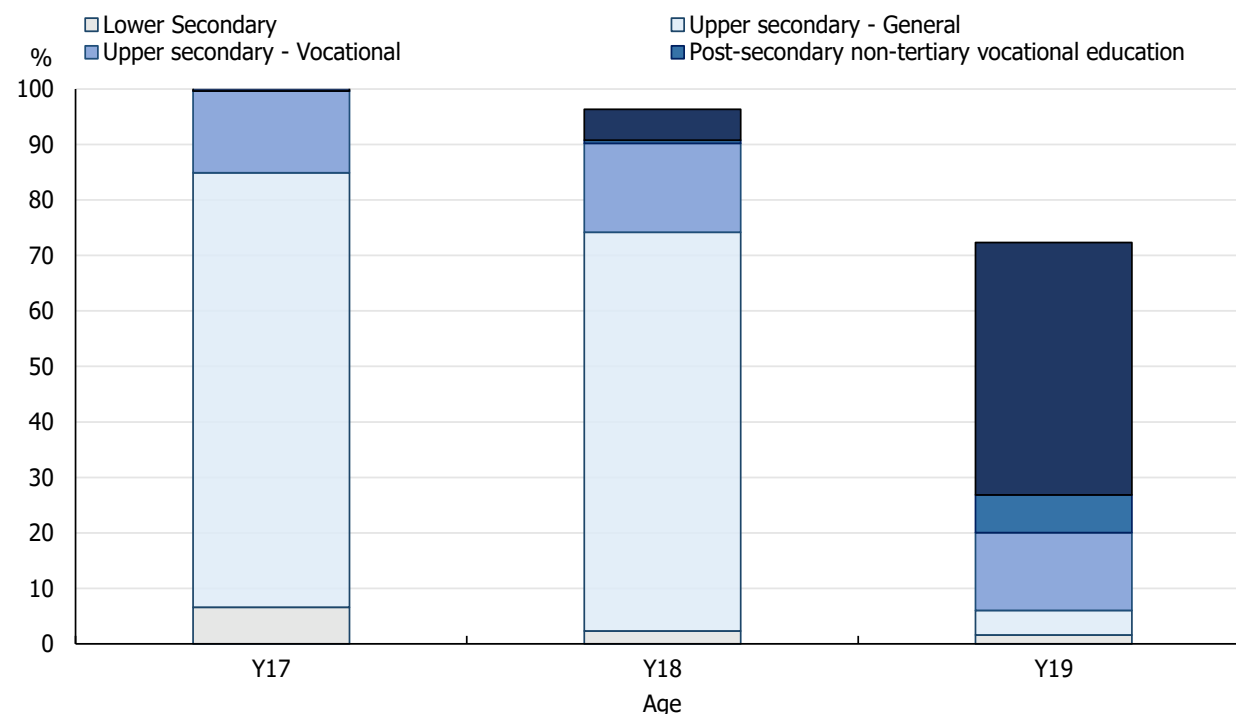
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*Participation in upper secondary education is very high, supported by smooth transitions into and through upper secondary education*

In line with high attainment overall, participation in education among 17-19 year-olds (the phase of upper secondary education) in Lithuania is high (Figure 1.2). Although compulsory education ends at age 16,

100% of 17 year-olds were enrolled in education in 2020, of which 93% successfully transitioned and were enrolled in upper secondary education (either general or vocational). Smooth transitions into upper secondary education could be encouraging this high participation (Perico e Santos, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>). In practice, this means that most students in Lithuania are enrolled in the grade that corresponds to their age. One factor contributing to smooth transitions is low repetition rates, as repetition results in students not progressing with their cohort, possibly making them more vulnerable to non-completion (OECD, 2021<sup>[5]</sup>). Smooth transitions could also be supporting students' completion of upper secondary education. Almost all students in Lithuania complete upper secondary education at the expected time, with only 4% of 19-year-olds still enrolled in general upper secondary education (Figure 1.2) and, in contrast to other OECD countries, there is limited change in completion rates two years after the programme's theoretical duration (Figure 1.3). The current plans to change entrance into upper secondary education, with the introduction of a threshold in the Grade 10 examination, could impact transitions into upper secondary education and potentially enrolments as well (see Chapter 3).

**Figure 1.2. Enrolment rates of 17–19 year-olds by level of education**



Source: OECD (2021<sup>[5]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b35a14e5-en>.

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### *Participation in upper secondary vocational education is lower than national targets*

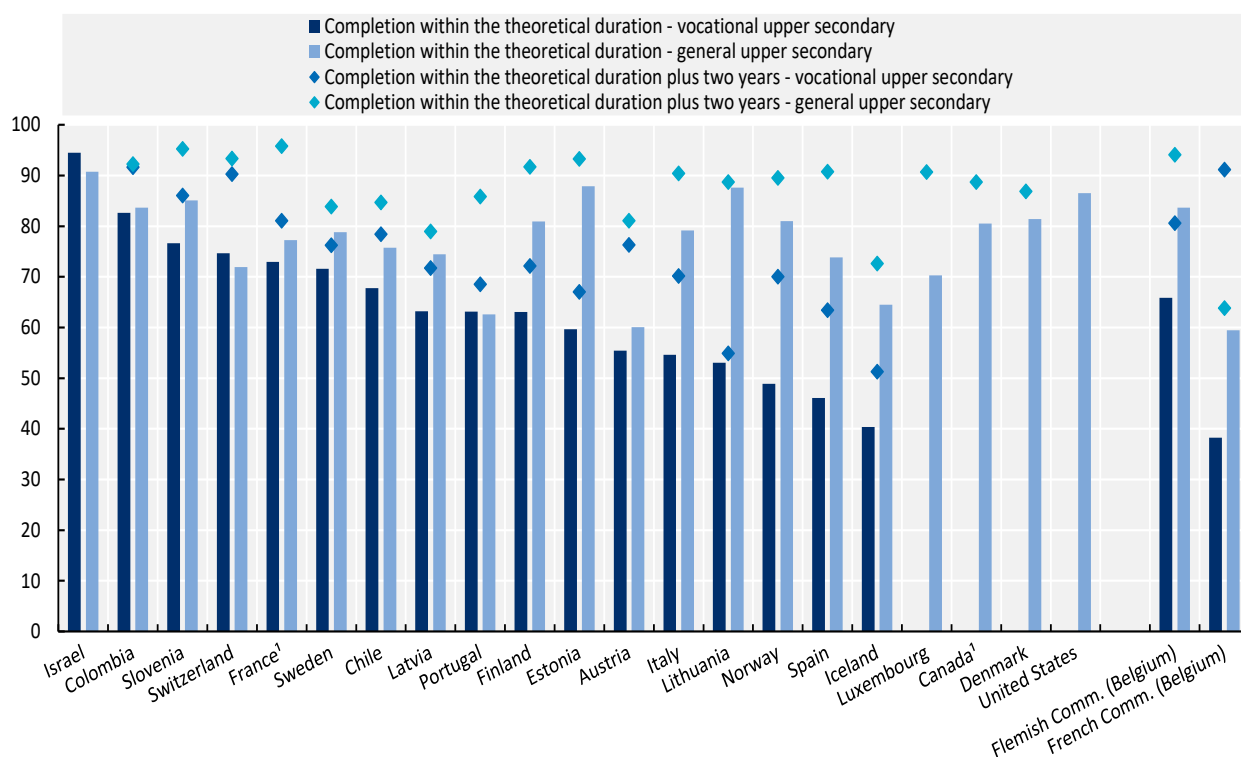
In Lithuania, 23% of 15-19 year-olds are enrolled in VET, compared to the OECD average of 36% (OECD, 2022<sup>[11]</sup>). One of the key policy concerns of stakeholders during the OECD Review team's mission to Lithuania in October 2022 was the comparatively low share of students enrolled in vocational upper secondary education. Despite successive policies and targets to increase upper secondary VET enrolment, participation has not increased significantly in recent years. On the contrary, enrolment in upper secondary VET has been stable in Lithuania at around 25% since 2013 (OECD, 2017<sup>[41]</sup>).

### Completion of upper secondary education is high but lower for VET programmes

Upper secondary completion rates measure the proportion of the students who enter an upper secondary programme and ultimately graduate from it (OECD, 2020<sup>[7]</sup>). Completion rates of upper secondary education are around 90% in Lithuania for students in general programmes (Figure 1.3). While completion rates in general programmes are among the highest across OECD countries (almost 90%), only 55% of VET students graduate by the theoretical duration of the programme plus two years. Lithuania has the widest gap between completion rates of general and vocational programmes among the countries that provided data.

**Figure 1.3. Upper secondary completion rates, by timeframe and programme orientation on entry (2021)**

Percent, true cohort data only



Notes: The data presented here come from an ad hoc survey and only concern initial education programmes. The reference year (2021, unless noted otherwise) refers to the year of graduation by the theoretical duration plus two years.<sup>1</sup> Year of reference differs from 2021.

Countries and other participants are ranked in descending order of the completion rate within the theoretical duration of vocational upper secondary students.

Source: OECD (2023<sup>[8]</sup>), INES 2023 ad hoc survey on upper secondary completion rate (accessed on 15 April 2023).

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*The gender gap in participation and completion of upper secondary vocational education is more pronounced than across the OECD on average*

As is the case across the OECD on average, upper secondary VET in Lithuania is more popular among men, with 29% of men enrolled compared to 16% of women. This gender gap in Lithuania is slightly higher

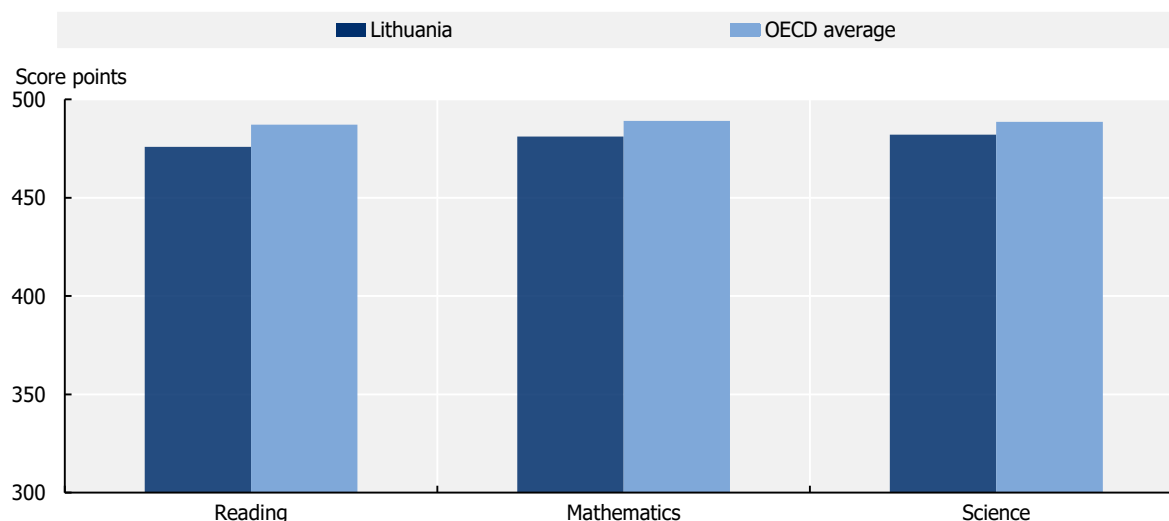
than the OECD average (OECD, 2022<sup>[11]</sup>). In Lithuania, women are more likely to leave VET early compared to men (a difference of 5 percentage points). Similarly, young women in Lithuania are less likely to complete upper secondary VET compared to young men: only 50% of young women completed VET, 10 percentage points lower than for young men, the largest gender gap across the OECD (OECD, 2023<sup>[8]</sup>). In contrast, young women enrolled in general upper secondary education in Lithuania have high completion rates, 7 percentage points higher than young men (OECD, 2023<sup>[8]</sup>). National efforts to raise participation in and prestige of VET should consider targeting the specific challenges around young women's perceptions and experiences in VET education.

### Learning outcomes

*On entry to upper secondary education, 15-year-olds in Lithuania score below the OECD average*

In the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018, 15-year-olds in Lithuania (learners in Grade 9, their penultimate year of lower secondary education) scored below the OECD average in mathematics, reading and science (Figure 1.4). Over the past decade (2009-2018), Lithuania has not experienced significant improvements in performance in reading, mathematics and science (OECD, 2021<sup>[9]</sup>). While Lithuania's performance is close to the OECD average and in line with that of with a number of other countries at the same level of economic development – notably Croatia, Hungary and the Slovak Republic – it performs significantly below all its neighbouring countries, notably Estonia, Latvia (except for reading) and Poland (OECD, 2019<sup>[10]</sup>). In 2018, more than a quarter of 15-year-olds in Lithuania (25.6%) scored below Level 2 in mathematics, which is considered the baseline for basic competence. That is a far higher share than in the neighbouring countries of Estonia, where 10% of 15-year-olds scored below Level 2, and Latvia, where the share was 17% (OECD, 2019<sup>[10]</sup>).

**Figure 1.4. Students' performance in reading, mathematics and science, PISA 2018**



Source: OECD (2018<sup>[11]</sup>), PISA 2018 Database, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/>, (accessed on 15 April 2023).

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*The gap in performance between boys and girls and between students from rural and urban areas is greater in Lithuania than across the OECD*

In terms of equity, the association in Lithuania between a student's socio-economic background and their reading performance at age 15 is in line with the OECD average, with 89 points difference between students from the bottom and top quarter of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (OECD, 2019<sub>[12]</sub>). However, Lithuania has relatively large performance differences between students in rural and urban schools that are driven by differences in students' socio-economic status. But it is interesting to note that, although the performance gap between students from rural and urban areas is almost twice as large as in Latvia and four times larger than in Estonia, Lithuania is one of the few countries in which rural students outperform urban students (after controlling for differences in students' social-economic status) (OECD, 2020<sub>[13]</sub>).

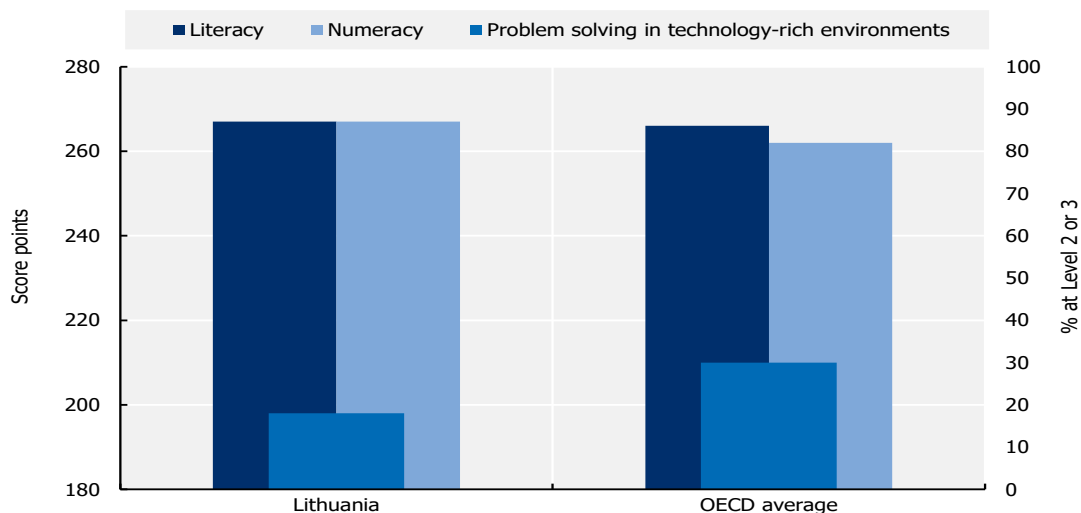
On the contrary, the gender gap in 2018 (measured in terms of the difference between boys' and girls' performance in reading) is slightly greater in Lithuania than the OECD average. While the gender gap in reading favours girls across all OECD countries, in Lithuania the gap is more pronounced, with a difference of 39 score points, compared to 30 score points across the OECD. In neighbouring countries, the gender gap in reading is slightly smaller, a difference of 31 score points for Estonia and 33 for Latvia. In mathematics, boys outperform girls on average across the OECD, but by only five score points. Lithuania is one of the few OECD countries (together with Iceland, Israel, Norway and Sweden) where girls still outperform boys, but by only 2 points (OECD, 2019<sub>[12]</sub>).

*Adults in Lithuania score above the OECD average*

The overall picture of performance in the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) shows that adults in Lithuania perform significantly above the OECD average in numeracy and slightly above the average in literacy (Figure 1.5). Compared to other OECD countries, Lithuania has fewer adults with very low levels of skills (at Level 1 or below), although there are also fewer adults with skills at higher levels compared to the OECD average. Performance among adults is relatively equitable, with age, gender and socio-economic background having a smaller impact on performance than the average across the OECD (OECD, 2021<sub>[9]</sub>).

**Figure 1.5. Snapshot of performance in literacy, numeracy and problem solving (PIAAC)**

Mean proficiency scores of 16-65 year-olds in literacy and numeracy (primary axis), and the percentage of 16-65 year-olds scoring at Level 2 or 3 in problem solving in technology-rich environments (secondary axis)



Source: OECD (2012, 2015, 2018<sub>[2]</sub>), Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) (2012, 2015, 2018), [Survey of Adult Skills \(PIAAC\) – PIAAC, the OECD's programme of assessment and analysis of adult skills](#) (accessed on 15 April 2023).

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*Upper secondary education, especially VET, seems to play a modest role in contributing to adult skills*

Among all the countries that participated in PIAAC in 2016, in Lithuania, attaining upper secondary education provides the smallest positive contribution across the OECD to an individual's performance (OECD, 2012, 2015, 2018<sub>[2]</sub>). In particular, VET seems to contribute far less to the skills and knowledge acquisition than in other countries. According to PIAAC, recent upper secondary VET graduates have lower literacy, numeracy and problem solving skill levels than VET graduates in most other OECD countries. In both literacy and numeracy, young VET graduates in Lithuania performed at almost the same level as those who did not complete upper secondary education (around 260 score points) (Vandeweyer and Verhagen, 2020<sub>[14]</sub>).

It seems that Lithuania's above-average scores in PIAAC are being driven by high shares of attainment overall. In 2015 (the year Lithuania participated in PIAAC), only 8% of 25-64 year-olds in Lithuania had not attained upper secondary education, and 39% had attained tertiary education (compared to 22% on average across the OECD countries that participated in PIAAC), and 39% had attained tertiary education (compared to 35%) (OECD, 2016<sub>[15]</sub>). Put simply, because so many adults in Lithuania complete upper secondary and tertiary education, which is associated with higher levels of performance in all countries, this drives up the country's average scores. In contrast, the positive contribution of completing upper secondary education to an individual adult's learning outcomes is significantly less than in other countries (see Chapters 3 and 4).

## **Transitions into further education and work**

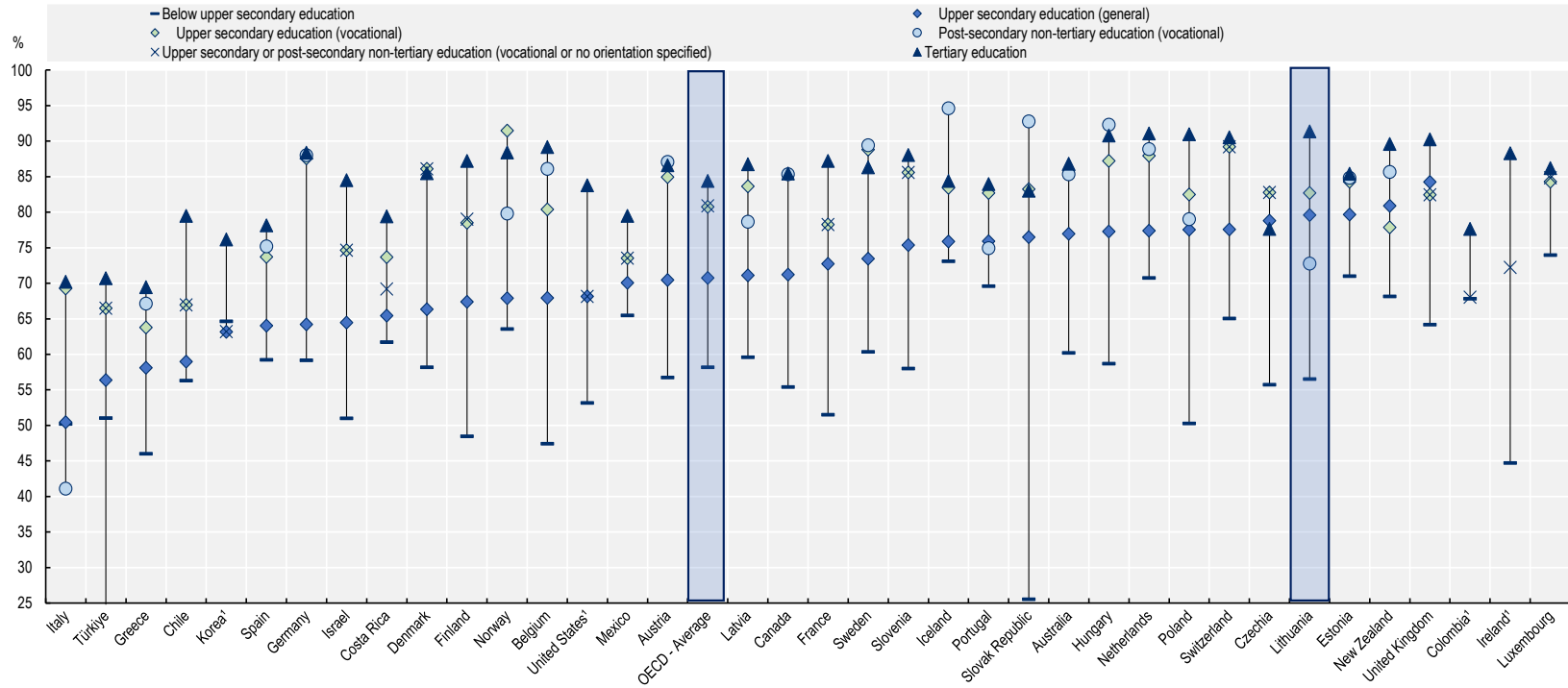
### *Transitions into tertiary education are high, but only for general upper secondary graduates*

In 2020, 50% of 20-year-olds were enrolled in tertiary education, compared to the OECD average of 39%. In the same year, among 25-34 year-olds, the rate of tertiary attainment was 58%, well above the OECD average of 47% (OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>). However, transitions into tertiary education are virtually non-existent for VET upper secondary graduates. While 97% of upper secondary vocational students have direct access to tertiary education, in 2022 only 1.7% of all VET graduates entered tertiary education, compared to 57.8% of general upper secondary graduates (Beleckienė, Kazlavickas and Palevič, 2022<sup>[3]</sup>). To access a state-funded place in tertiary education, VET upper secondary students must pass the Matura that assesses general subjects and compete directly with general upper secondary students, who have more time to acquire the skills and knowledge assessed in the Matura examinations. The significantly lower performance of VET students in these examinations shows that it is virtually impossible for VET students to achieve the bar to access tertiary education at present (see Chapters 3 and 4).

### *Employments outcomes are very positive for tertiary graduates, but less so for VET graduates*

Compared to the OECD average, overall employment outcomes are positive for young people who attain upper secondary education in Lithuania (Figure 1.6). However, the upper secondary vocational qualification does not give young people a significant advantage on the labour market. Employment rates for recent upper secondary VET graduates in Lithuania (83%) are similar to the OECD average but are 9 percentage points lower than for tertiary graduates, one of the largest differences across the OECD. In most OECD countries, young people with upper secondary vocational education as their highest level of attainment have an advantage entering employment compared to their peers who have completed upper secondary general education as their highest level of education. However, in Lithuania, the upper secondary VET programme confers only a very limited advantage for its graduates to access the labour market. In 2021, the employment rate of vocational graduates was 83%, only 3 percentage points higher than the 80% employment rate of general graduates, the smallest advantage across all OECD countries except for New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Figure 1.6. Employment rates of 25-34 year-olds, by educational attainment and programme orientation (2021)



Notes: <sup>1</sup> Data on upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education are not available for vocational education. When data on students who attained post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education are not available, joint data on students who attained upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary vocational education are used. Countries are ranked in ascending order of the employment rate of 25-34 year-olds who attained general upper secondary education.

Source: OECD (2022<sup>[1]</sup>), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en>

## Priority areas for upper secondary education in Lithuania

As the final stage of schooling, upper secondary education plays a critical role in ensuring that young people have the knowledge and skills that will enable them to engage successfully in work, adult life and lifelong learning. Given the wide variations in young adults' needs, interests and aspirations, effectively fulfilling this complex function means providing diversity in how they spend their time. Yet this defining feature of upper secondary education – greater choice and differentiation in learning options in contrast to lower levels of schooling (OECD/Eurostat/UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015<sup>[16]</sup>) – also carries with it significant risks for equity. The OECD Above and Beyond: Transitions in Upper Secondary Education project provides comparative analysis on how systems can effectively meet diverse learner needs and promote equitable outcomes through effective pathway design and the use of assessment and certification as gateways to varied trajectories of lifelong learning (Box 1.3).

### ***Lithuania achieves limited returns on its investment in upper secondary education***

Lithuania has successfully achieved the first hurdle that many countries face in developing an effective upper secondary education system. The country has one of the highest rates of upper secondary attainment across the OECD (OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>). Yet the education system, and more critically its young people, are currently receiving limited returns on the high investment in upper secondary education. Upper secondary education in Lithuania is associated with the smallest increase in learning outcomes across countries that participate in PIAAC (OECD, 2012, 2015, 2018<sup>[2]</sup>). At present, vocational upper secondary education is not an effective bridge into training, post-secondary education or work (OECD, 2022<sup>[1]</sup>). The data shows that young learners currently vote with their feet, with national targets to increase VET enrolment continually missed, perhaps reflecting the weak preparations for future progression that it provides.

### ***Upper secondary education requires purposefully designed pathways that promote deeper skills acquisition***

Upper secondary education in Lithuania needs to focus on creating differentiated pathways, where learners can acquire deeper, more specific skills to follow their interests and strengths and, crucially, which provide them with valued skills and knowledge on the labour market. This report provides suggestions for transforming the country's currently underdeveloped vocational pathway to become a purposefully designed pathway into employment or technical education. The report also suggests how the country's upper secondary certification (the Matura) can recognise a broader range of skills and knowledge at different levels.

### ***Investing in assessment expertise is essential for a national certification to continually adapt to the needs of education and society***

When it was first developed, Lithuania's Matura transformed assessment at the end of upper secondary education and entrance to tertiary education, creating a unified, standardised system for all students. However, the OECD team heard from stakeholders that today the examination items are sometimes predictable and focus on knowledge reproduction rather than assessing deeper reasoning and skills application. The introduction of a new competency-based curriculum creates the impetus to revise some parts of the Matura so that it drives the learning that the students, teachers and employers believe really matters for young people. The report suggests how Lithuania can continually invest in assessment expertise.

### Box 1.3. Above and Beyond: Transitions in Upper secondary Education project

The OECD's Transitions in Upper Secondary Education project develops analysis on how upper secondary education can be designed to meet diverse learner needs and promote equitable outcomes by developing comparative analysis on pathways and assessment and certification. Countries can engage with the project through a range of flexible options that contribute to the project's evidence base and mobilise its knowledge to support national policy making and reforms.

Figure 1.7. Analysis to support upper secondary transitions

Pathways	Assessment and Certification
<p>Supporting smooth transitions into, through and out of upper secondary education by understanding the role of, and how to promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; foundational skills and knowledge</li> <li>&gt; depth of knowledge and skills and specific competencies</li> <li>&gt; an emerging sense of future ambitions.</li> </ul>	<p>Promoting learning that matters and providing effective passports for the future by analysing how to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; assess a wide range of knowledge and skills in reliable and valid ways</li> <li>&gt; recognise breadth of student achievement.</li> </ul>

Source: OECD (2023<sup>[17]</sup>), Above and Beyond, <https://www.oecd.org/education/aboveandbeyond/> (accessed on 1 June 2023).

### ***Strengthening pathways in upper secondary education***

Lithuania places significant importance on creating valued vocational upper secondary education that is attractive to young people and provides the country's economy with strong technical skills to drive production and innovation. The country has set successive targets to raise enrolment in vocational education and has made major investments in the infrastructure of vocational schools. Despite these policies, vocational enrolments remain below the country's targets, and there are gaps in some sectors of the labour market where there are not enough graduates with the technical skills to meet national needs.

It is important to strengthen vocational education so that it becomes a distinct and respected option that enables young people to access high-quality employment or further education. This report suggests three essential actions to strengthen upper secondary pathways (see Chapter 3):

- reviewing how young people transition into vocational education, including orientation mechanisms
- rethinking how the design of vocational education can shift away from the current model, where VET has largely been added on to the existing general programme, to create valued vocational pathways through upper secondary education
- building clear pathways for progression out of upper secondary education and strategies to improve the quality of vocational programmes to support and encourage VET students to transition to higher levels of education.

### *Issue 1: Reviewing students' transitions and orientation into upper secondary education*

In most OECD systems, when students transition from lower to upper secondary education, it is the first time that they are actively engaged in making decisions that start to define their future pathways. Many factors influence students' experiences in upper secondary education and beyond, but a smooth transition from lower secondary education is the first and essential step in a successful journey through upper secondary education and into further education and/or employment.

One feature of a smooth transition into upper secondary education is when all (or almost all) students transition at the expected time (Perico e Santos, 2023<sup>[6]</sup>). Although entrance into upper secondary education in Lithuania is currently automatic and most students transition to this level of education, the system provides little support and guidance to students in choosing among general and vocational programmes. As a result, this makes it difficult for young people to make informed decisions about the upper secondary programme that is likely to best meet their needs and interests. There are few systematic tools or support to help students develop an accurate understanding of the possibilities that vocational programmes open into employment or further education. In practice, this means that vocational education tends to be the default option for students with low grades, and often from disadvantaged backgrounds, which contributes to its low prestige.

Policy makers in Lithuania are concerned that enrolment in vocational education remains lower than the average across the OECD. Additionally, with automatic entrance to upper secondary education combined with no monitoring of student knowledge and skills at this transition point, there is no way to ensure that all students are being supported to succeed in the next level of education. Improving student guidance to support transitions into upper secondary education would make students in Lithuania more aware of the options available to them and would enhance their motivation. It might also encourage more students to understand the value of vocational education and the opportunities it offers for the future, while helping to reach a better alignment in the labour market between supply and demand of skills. The current plans to introduce a threshold for entrance into upper secondary education using the examination in Grade 10 will help ensure that all students have the skills they need before transitioning. However, if the threshold is not accompanied by targeted support to the students who fail the exam, grade repetition and loss in motivation might affect students' transitions and enrolments in upper secondary education.

**Table 1.2. Summary of policy options for strengthening transitions and orientation into upper secondary education**

Policy Options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 1: Reviewing students' transitions and orientation into upper secondary education</b>	
1.a. Making personalised transition recommendations for each student based on a wide range of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring students' learning outcomes as they transition into upper secondary education</li> <li>Carefully considering how the new threshold can influence transitions and how it can be used to provide additional support</li> <li>Reconsidering the sources of information for transition decisions</li> <li>Considering how information is combined to develop a personalised recommendation for each student</li> <li>Counsellors should be external from the school and provide a non-binding recommendation</li> </ul>
1.b. Ensuring that students and their guardians play an informed role in transition decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing career-related learning from an early stage to promote subject and career exploration</li> <li>Ensuring that students and their families are supported through accessible, transparent and up-to-date information</li> </ul>
1.c. Reconsidering the structure of schooling to facilitate transitions into upper secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploring options to provide some VET in general schools</li> <li>Promoting co-operation between general and vocational schools</li> <li>Considering restructuring the education system to facilitate students' transitions</li> </ul>

### *Issue 2: Creating valued vocational pathways through upper secondary education*

Currently in Lithuania, VET is almost designed as an “add-on” to the general upper secondary programme, with general and vocational students studying a similar set of subjects and being examined in the same way in the Matura. While the reforms that will be implemented in 2023/24 will provide VET students with more choice and flexibility to adapt the curriculum to their needs and interests, the overall structure of the VET system does not encourage completion or enable learners to acquire the skills that they need for either employment or continuing education.

On the one hand, vocational upper secondary students who find the general curriculum content very demanding or uninteresting are required to dedicate at least 17 hours a week to general subjects (compared to 25 hours for general students). At the end, they take the same Matura examinations for upper secondary certification as general students, and the Matura will become even more demanding when all examinations are set at state level from 2024, replacing school-level examinations (see Chapter 3). On the other hand, because the Matura provides access to tertiary education, any high performers in vocational education who want to pursue tertiary education do not have an incentive to remain in education for the third year to obtain the vocational certification after passing the Matura. The design of the current vocational pathway is not equipping either group of students with the general or vocational skills that they need to continue their studies or to join the labour market. In systems with more than one programme at the upper secondary level, the status of vocational education is promoted by developing a distinctive identity and ethos that means it is not judged by the values of the academic track, but by the unique value of its own qualifications on the labour market (Raffe et al., 2001<sup>[18]</sup>).

This report suggests that Lithuania could consider designing two separate upper secondary VET options: 1) a more work-based programme that gives students extra support to meet minimum requirements in general subjects and prepares students to enter high-quality options in the labour market or post-secondary options at ISCED 4 (and a potential pathway into tertiary education); and 2) another more technically oriented programme that gives access to technically focused employment or the new vocationally oriented ISCED 5 tertiary qualifications. Providing clear, distinct and diverse pathways in upper secondary education would allow students to study content that is more tailored to their needs and aspirations while ensuring that upper secondary vocational graduates are more prepared and specialised for lifelong learning and employment. These changes could help improve the attractiveness of VET and the outcomes of vocational students.

**Table 1.3. Summary of policy options for creating valued vocational pathways through upper secondary education**

Policy Options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 2: Creating valued vocational pathways through upper secondary education</b>	
2.a. Providing more flexibility in vocational education to adapt to students' needs and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advancing current reforms to provide greater flexibility and adaptability in the content for vocational students</li> <li>• Reviewing the level of demand and breadth and depth of learning in mathematics and Lithuanian to ensure that it aligns with the needs and future ambitions of all students</li> <li>• Considering the demand and content in other subjects</li> <li>• Moving the Matura back to the end of the third (or fourth) year for VET students</li> <li>• Providing advice about different levels and subject choice as part of the personalised recommendation for upper secondary transitions</li> <li>• Creating more diversity in VET programmes</li> </ul>



Policy Options	Recommendations
2.b Creating a more work-based VET option that promotes acquisition of foundational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing a new vocational option with more work-based learning</li> <li>• Supporting employers to engage with apprenticeships</li> <li>• Ensuring that students are well supported to develop essential foundational skills</li> </ul>
2.c. Providing a technically focused and a more academically oriented vocational upper secondary option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing stronger preparation in technically focused VET</li> <li>• Ensuring that general content promotes strong technical skills</li> </ul>

### *Issue 3: Designing pathways with clear and sequential progression out of upper secondary education*

One of the reasons why vocational education in Lithuania is not attractive for young people is that it does not offer strong pathways into either employment or further education. National data show that the share of learners who have acquired upper secondary vocational education and continue studying at tertiary level is decreasing, falling from 36% in 2014 to 17% in 2021 (Beleckienė, Kazlavickas and Palevič, 2022<sup>[3]</sup>). The factors for this include the major disadvantages that VET students experience compared to their peers in general education in succeeding in the Matura examination that gives access to tertiary education. Moreover, VET does not confer a significant advantage to enter the labour market compared to general education.

In order to make vocational education a more attractive option to students, Lithuania could consider building clear options for progression out of upper secondary vocational education into further education by rewarding vocational qualifications for entrance into post-secondary vocational programmes, at the new ISCED 5 level in particular, and by building sequential programmes at ISCED 4 and 5 that allow students to build upon their qualifications and enhance their technical skills. At the same time, Lithuania will also need to consider improvements to the quality of upper secondary vocational education to ensure that its value is recognised by employers, creating a clear pathway for specialists to enter the labour market with strong VET skills.

**Table 1.4 Summary of policy options for designing pathways with clear and sequential progression out of upper secondary education**

Policy options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 3: Designing pathways with clear and sequential progression out of upper secondary education</b>	
3.a. Ensuring clear and diverse options of progression from upper secondary vocational education into further education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewarding upper secondary vocational qualifications for entrance into tertiary education</li> <li>• Creating ISCED 4 as a clear option for progression and a sequential programme from ISCED 3</li> <li>• Creating alternative pathways for progression for students who do not have access or need additional support</li> <li>• Ensuring students understand their options in upper secondary education and the consequences for the future</li> </ul>
3.b. Improving the quality of upper secondary vocational education to ensure its value is recognised by employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring VET teachers receive high-quality preparation in pedagogy</li> <li>• Attracting new, highly skilled individuals with vocational skills into teaching</li> <li>• Providing teachers with continuous professional development to continually build their professional skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Increasing the involvement of employers in VET programmes</li> <li>• Improving and expanding the quality assurance system in VET</li> </ul>

## **Consolidating Lithuania’s upper secondary certification to meet learners’ diverse needs and promote higher-order, complex learning**

The Matura is a respected and highly valued national certification in Lithuania. Its introduction over a decade ago radically changed young people’s experiences at the end of upper secondary education by introducing a single examination for upper secondary certification and tertiary entry, promoting fairness and reliability. Today, however, there are national concerns that the Matura items are predictable, tend to assess knowledge reproduction over competencies and are not particularly engaging or stimulating. These challenges are particularly acute now, as the country has started to implement a new curriculum which is explicitly oriented towards competency development. Evidence and experience from countries internationally consistently highlight that it is essential to align certification and assessment with the curriculum if the curriculum on paper is to become the curriculum that students learn in classrooms (OECD, 2013<sub>[19]</sub>). This concern is especially prevalent in upper secondary education, where the stakes attached to upper secondary certification mean that assessment at this level invariably influences to a large extent where and how teachers and students focus their time and energy in the final phase of schooling.

### *Issue 1. Supporting continual improvement and high-quality assessment*

When the Matura was introduced in 1998, it was a major step change in certification of upper secondary education and tertiary selection in Lithuania. It introduced a common examination for all young people seeking to enter tertiary education, ending the variability in entrance requirements across different tertiary institutions that had existed previously (OECD, 2017<sub>[4]</sub>). Stakeholders reported to the OECD team that when the state Matura examinations were first introduced, they were perceived to be innovative, engaging and assessing higher-order, complex skills.

In 2022, at the time of the OECD team’s visit to Lithuania, stakeholders expressed several challenges related to the Matura examinations. In 2022, there was a dramatic and unexpected fall in the results for the state Matura in mathematics, with 35% of candidates failing the examination (NSA (National Education Agency), 2022<sub>[20]</sub>). This created challenges for managing entry to tertiary education, since passing the state Matura in mathematics is a requirement for all the tertiary options. In the OECD’s workshops with teachers and students in 2022, both groups expressed the view that the Matura was not assessing what learners could do and was dominated by the assessment of knowledge recall. Students also shared the perception that the Matura items are predictable and rarely engaging. The country is planning to implement wide-ranging reforms to the Matura (See Box 1.1). Lithuania could consider how to develop a clear, nationally relevant vision for the Matura so that the planned reforms are able to effectively address some of current challenges that are associated with it.

**Table 1.5. Summary of policy options for supporting continual improvement and high-quality assessment**

Policy Options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 1. Supporting continual improvement and high-quality assessment</b>	
1.a. Supporting the developers of the Matura to produce high-quality items that fulfil their purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing clear specifications to guide item development and teaching and learning</li> <li>• Supporting the examinations team in the National Agency for Education custodians of the national standards set out in the specifications</li> <li>• Ensuring that the results of technical analysis are used to drive improvements</li> <li>• Introducing adjustments to promote consistent standards from year to year</li> <li>• Using the technical review process, as well as continuous review, to develop engaging items that assess competencies</li> </ul>

Policy Options	Recommendations
1.b. Developing continuous review, research and evaluation to ensure that the Matura remains fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertaking reforms as part of an established review and evaluation cycle</li> <li>• Developing a process for continuous review, research and evaluation</li> <li>• Developing the examinations team in the National Agency for Education as an independent centre of assessment expertise</li> <li>• Investigating the reasons for the mathematics 2022 results</li> </ul>
1.c. Making the most of the new digital examinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the objectives for the new digital examinations</li> <li>• Being cognizant of the equity and fairness challenges of introducing digital assessment</li> <li>• Determining a national approach for implementation</li> </ul>

### *Issue 2. Introducing alternative types of assessment*

One important consideration in the Matura's design is the range of assessment activities that students undertake. While the Matura currently draws on some different types of assessments (a project, art portfolios and oral examinations in foreign language examinations), the reliability and take-up of these assessments could be reinforced. Less than 1% of upper secondary students currently take the project as part of their upper secondary certification, and tertiary institutions do not take it into account for selection because of concerns about reliability.

Many countries have found that, as they have implemented competency-based curricula, it has led to the recognition that some competencies, in particular social-emotional skills like planning, self-reflection, investigation and collaboration, can be more readily assessed through assessments when students have to plan their work over a period of time or engage with their peers. Internationally, evidence suggests that projects can contribute to academic learning and the development of wider competencies and can be engaging and motivating for students (Drummond, 2017<sup>[21]</sup>; Kingston, 2018<sup>[22]</sup>). In Lithuania, strengthening the project assessment might help to motivate upper secondary students while developing and giving greater prominence to their organisational skills, which the tertiary sector and employers report are currently weak upon completion of upper secondary education.

Part of efforts to strengthen the project will mean reviewing its design to make it more accessible to a wider range of students, teachers and schools. Another important issue is concern about the reliability of marks from the project component, which mean that it is not considered for tertiary selection. The report discusses steps that Lithuania might take to promote greater reliability in the Matura components that will remain from 2023 onwards. It also considers the potential value and model of other types of alternative assessments that might be gradually and progressively introduced in the future.

**Table 1.6. Summary of policy options for introducing alternative types of assessments**

Policy options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 2. Introducing alternative types of assessment</b>	
2.a. Reviewing and refining the current project component	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the value of a project assignment for young people</li> <li>• Redesigning the project assessment to encourage greater student take-up</li> <li>• Considering the project assignment for vocational upper secondary students</li> </ul>
2.b. Strengthening the reliability of alternative assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing more "controlled assessment" for the project</li> <li>• Developing a robust model to moderate internal assessments</li> <li>• Providing teachers and schools with support for assessment</li> </ul>
2.c. Considering other types of alternative assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying skills that cannot easily be assessed through written examinations</li> <li>• Developing governance arrangements to ensure broad representation and consensus decisions</li> </ul>

### *Issue 3. Providing more flexible choices and options within the Matura*

Upper secondary examinations and qualifications are young people's passport to a range of different pathways, including continuing education at tertiary and non-tertiary post-secondary level, employment and lifelong learning. This means that upper secondary qualifications need to be both responsive to a broad range of prior learning – candidates may have studied different content such as general or vocational and different subjects – and facilitate access to a diverse range of future pathways.

Achieving all these objectives is clearly challenging for any examination and certification, and it is the reason why many education systems provide choices and options within their national examination for upper secondary certification. Many systems, for example, provide examinations at different levels and examinations linked to students' specialisation choices and also frequently provide distinct certification for general and vocational students as part of overall upper secondary certification. The Matura in Lithuania might draw on some of these practices to provide an examination that is more differentiated to the needs of different groups of students.

**Table 1.7. Summary of policy options for providing more flexible choices and options within the Matura**

Policy options	Recommendations
<b>Issue 3. Providing more flexible choices and options within the Matura</b>	
3.a. Defining the purpose, structure and consequences of a more modular approach to assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the function of the new intermediate assessments</li> <li>• Addressing the learning and well-being challenges of overassessment</li> </ul>
3.b. Supporting a better match between course and examination choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing greater alignment across course and examination choices</li> <li>• Moving forward with plans to provide Lithuanian and mathematics at general and higher levels</li> <li>• Working proactively with tertiary education partners to determine how they will set requirements for selection</li> <li>• Supporting students to make informed subject and level choices</li> </ul>
3.c. Meeting the needs of vocational upper secondary students in the Matura	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that the new examinations are accessible for VET students</li> <li>• Developing a dedicated upper secondary certification for vocational students</li> </ul>

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