Foreword

Estonia has experienced extensive reform in its vocational education and training (VET) system in recent years. As a result, Estonia's VET system is very well-designed: the engagement of employers is strong, in particular through a system of occupational qualification and standards, which underpins the development of programmes. About 25% of students at the upper secondary level are enrolled in a vocational programme, delivered by 30 different VET providers. There is a relatively new apprenticeship system that is growing quickly. Educational and labour market outcomes are also good: young Estonians do extremely well on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), and unemployment rates are very low. Despite Estonia's efforts in reforming their VET system, however, some concerns remain. This OECD review assesses both the strengths of the Estonian VET system and the challenges it faces, making proposals for how those challenges might be addressed.

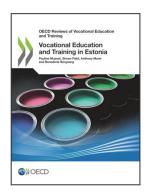
Chapter 1 provides an overview of Estonian VET reform and the remaining challenges. Compared to the general education route offered by upper secondary selective institutions and higher education institutions, VET is perceived as low social status. In order to be more attractive, it needs to improve its offer to those who wish to pursue higher level technical skills and allow progression into further learning opportunities. Dropout rates remain high and few young people choose the apprenticeship route.

Chapter 2 recommends the expansion of work-based learning within VET programmes and youth apprenticeships, and the separation of upper secondary institutions from basic schools, to remove the risks of bias in the decisions of students on whether to pursue general education or VET. It also proposes measures to tackle dropout, including financial incentives to institutions and targeted support in numeracy and literacy. Chapter 3 recommends improving pathways between VET and other programmes, including those delivered by higher education institutions, and further action to enhance equity in provision in order to ensure fair access to post-secondary and higher education by gender, region and mother tongue. These approaches should be designed to attract into VET more students with good school performance, and raise the status of VET in general. Chapter 4 recommends improving career guidance, making some elements of it mandatory before grade 9, for all schools and all students.

This report was drafted by Pauline Musset, Simon Field, Anthony Mann and Benedicte Bergseng, with the OECD Centre for Skills overseeing the final draft. Elisa Larrakoetxea and Jennifer Cannon provided valuable administrative support. The OECD is very grateful to all the hundreds of people throughout Estonia who gave their time to take part in meetings with the visiting OECD team and contributed their knowledge and ideas to this exercise. Particular thanks are owed to Katrin Rein, Helen Põllo and Anneli Roose from the Ministry of Education and Research, who were most directly involved in facilitating the work of the OECD and the missions, and Kaie Piiskop and Kersti Raudsepp from Foundation Innove, for an excellent background report. The OECD also wants to thank the European Commission for their support, in particular Mantas Sekmokas and Dana-Carmen Bachmann.

Within the OECD, Anthony Mann supported the preparation of this report as head of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Adult Learning team within the OECD Centre for Skills, overseeing the final draft. The report benefited from many helpful comments and advice from Cécile Bily and Tanja Bastianić from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills and Caroline Klein and Zuzana Smidova from the Economics Department. Support throughout the exercise was received from Montserrat Gomendio as head of the Centre for Skills, Dirk van Damme as head of the Skills beyond School Division, Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills and Stefano Scarpetta, Director of the Directorate for Employment. Labour and Social Affairs.

This report has been co-funded by the European Union. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Union or of the OECD member countries.



From:

Vocational Education and Training in Estonia

Access the complete publication at:

https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9fac9-en

Please cite this chapter as:

Musset, Pauline, et al. (2019), "Foreword", in Pauline Musset, et al., Vocational Education and Training in Estonia, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/db42b6f6-en

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