

Workshops on VET Teachers and Trainers: Key Actors to Make Lifelong Learning a Reality in Europe

Regional-specific background paper country cluster 2: The Situation of VET Teachers and Trainers in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia

Overview of the VET systems

With the exception of Finland, all countries in this cluster share the background of a transformation process from a socialist regime and command economy to a democratic system with a market economy. In all countries a school-based system of vocational education and training prevails.

In Estonia initial vocational education and training exists at upper secondary level (ISCED 3B) and post-secondary (non-tertiary) level (ISCED 4B). The programmes are school-based and organised by special VET institutions. Practical training in enterprises is an integral part of the school-based programmes and takes place on the basis of contracts concluded between the VET institution, the student and the enterprise. Apprenticeship training does not play an important role in Estonian VET and has been implemented only in pilot programmes.

In Finland there is a system of upper secondary vocational qualifications with alternative learning pathways. All vocational qualifications may be obtained by school-based programmes, apprenticeship training or competence assessment. Each qualification is worth 120 credits, including 20 credits for workplace learning. On-the-job learning is focused, supervised and assessed study carried out in service or production capacities at the workplace. The objective is to familiarise students with real working life to enhance their employment opportunities. Apprenticeship training is based on a national core curriculum or the guidelines for the relevant competence-based qualification, either of which can form the basis for the individual learning programme. The complementary theoretical studies, which account for approximately 30% of the total time, may take place at VET institutions, adult education providers or other educational institutions.

Latvia has a system of basic vocational education at the lower secondary level and initial VET at the upper secondary level. In the upper secondary vocational programmes theoretical instruction and practical training are combined on a 50:50 basis. Apprenticeship training exists only at a small scale and predominantly in the crafts sector. However, there is no connection to the other parts of the education system, and vocational qualifications obtained by apprenticeship are relevant only for the labour market.

In Lithuania, IVET at upper secondary level comprises level 2 and level 3 programmes (both ISCED 3). Level 2 VET programmes are designed for pupils who have finished basic school and have achieved the leaving certificate and only wish to obtain a qualification. Pupils range from 15/16 to 17/18 and programmes last for 2 years. Level 3 VET programmes are designed for pupils who have finished basic school and have achieved the school leaving certificate and wish to obtain a qualification and general upper-secondary education. Pupils range from 15/16 to 19/20 and programmes last for 3 years. For both types of programme most of the training time is spent in schools. In the last year of study, however, 15 weeks should be spent in an enterprise or at school-based workshops. There is no apprenticeship training.

In Poland initial vocational education is mainly school-based, and there exists a variety of

upper secondary schools that offer vocational programmes. The most important types are technical schools and supplementary technical schools, which award vocational qualifications in combination with upper secondary school-leaving certificates. The basic vocational school offers vocational qualifications that are not associated with a general school-leaving qualification. Practical vocational training usually takes place in the form of practical classes in the vocational schools, which account for about 50% of the teaching time assigned for vocational subjects. These classes are supplemented with training placements in enterprises, which last about four weeks and take place once or twice during the training programme. Apprenticeship training is of relatively low importance, accounting for less than 10% of all young people attending vocational education and training, and takes place mostly in SMEs in the crafts sector.

In Slovakia there are different types of vocational study programmes available as full-time studies, part-time or evening studies and post-secondary studies. There are two types of secondary schools offering full-time vocational education and training: secondary vocational schools and secondary specialised schools. Both of them provide different degrees of secondary education. Vocational in-company training in the sense of apprenticeship is not provided in Slovakia. Initial vocational training forms an integral part of the school system and even continuing training is often carried out by vocational teachers and vocational schools. There are examples of cooperation between schools and enterprises, but even in-company training in terms of work placements is remains an exception.

Specific issues related to VET teachers and trainers

Given that vocational education and training in this country cluster is predominantly school-based, there is a difference in all of the countries as regards the extent to which VET teachers on the one hand and trainers on the other hand can be identified as professional groups with a standardised qualification. Typically, the qualification requirements for teachers are more clearly spelled out than those for trainers so that trainers, unlike VET teachers, are often a quite heterogeneous group.

In Estonia, most teachers in vocational training institutions are trained in higher education institutions. The diploma awarded provides evidence of teaching skills. There are two types of trainers in VET institutions, namely, teachers of general subjects and vocational teachers. The role of the vocational teacher is to manage the process of vocational training (supervision, assessment etc.), to prepare study materials, and to prepare and update subject syllabuses and curricula. The knowledge and skills required of vocational teachers include a profound knowledge of the theory and methods of the professional field in question as well as awareness of the general developments in the profession, the ability to link theory and practice as well as general and vocational subjects, the ability to co-operate with employers, and the ability to carry out tests and to organise final examinations.

The practical part of vocational training, which takes place in enterprises, is supervised by vocational trainers or workplace supervisors. Their task is to provide students with practical skills and theoretical knowledge at the workplace in a real work situation. They help students to adapt to working life and provide feedback to the VET provider on the performance of the students. There is currently no training system for trainers in companies, and the training of trainers is not systematically embedded in the formal education system. The creation of a workplace supervisors' training system is one of the objectives of the Estonian Vocational Education Development Plan 2005-2008. In the meantime there are training courses for in-company trainers which are organised by some VET institutions. As regards continuing education and training, trainers in companies have the opportunity to be accredited as adult educators at various levels, but it appears that these certificates are not very significant in terms of career development or status enhancement of trainers. Trainers typ-

ically do not develop a distinct professional identity.

In Finland it is also the case that only the qualification profiles of VET teachers are regulated whereas those of in-company trainers, i.e. trainers in apprenticeship and workplace instructors for school-based programmes, are not. The requirements for general and vocational teachers were harmonised in 1999 with regard to pedagogical qualifications. All teachers in all types of formal education institutions must have pedagogical studies worth 60 ECTS points. These pedagogical studies are usually taken alongside the subject-specific ones. The education of vocational teachers is always consecutive, building on work experience and the university degree. When student teachers apply, they are already professionals with having had a career and substantial experience in a certain field.

There are no formal qualification requirements for trainers/workplace instructors. These posts tend not to exist in school-based VET as colleges and adult education centres have teachers who are responsible for all training, including student supervision during periods of on-the-job learning in enterprises. For apprenticeship training, apprentices work in enterprises under the guidance of a trainer, an older, experienced worker or foreman. As on-the-job learning periods and skills demonstrations are included in upper secondary qualifications, the workplace instructors' role has become more important. Most of the continuing learning of Finnish trainers is self-initiated and voluntary, and trainers engage in updating their skills and competences. A strict regulation of the in-company training in Finland, including a specification of the qualification standards for trainers, is considered impossible as this might incur a decrease in the number of training places.

In Latvia, the VET system includes vocational education teachers who are both teachers and trainers. They provide a range of programmes: vocational basic education; vocational lower secondary education; vocational upper secondary education; and professional development and continuing education. Professional training programmes are available in different occupational sectors to become a VET teacher. Graduates obtain a professional qualification or scientific degree in the branch. If the graduate would like to work in VET school he/she should continue in a pedagogical education programme (for no less than 320 hours) at a higher education institution, adult continuing education centre or other training institution. For those without a pedagogical qualification, who would like to work in VET schools as a VET teacher, there is a special programme (Vocational education teachers' professional perfection programme lasting no less than 320 hours) designed according to the occupational standard for VET teachers. To apply, prospective students must have a secondary vocational or a higher professional education level. A combination of secondary education and a master of crafts qualification are also accepted. For trainers in companies, there are no official qualification standards. However, there are some large enterprises that run their own training colleges. The teaching staff in these colleges are subject to the same standards as teachers in VET schools.

The situation in Lithuania is similar to the other two Baltic countries. Formal qualification standards exist for VET teachers, but not for trainers. There are three types of VET teachers and trainers. First, there are VET teachers in initial and continuing vocational education, who are responsible for the delivery of vocational knowledge and skills and the development of the students' personal and social skills. Teachers must either have higher education and a pedagogical qualification, or higher education and a completed pedagogical minimum programme, or a vocational qualification plus three years of work experience and a completed pedagogical minimum programme. The second type are trainers, who may work in VET institutions like schools and labour market training centres, or in companies. These trainers are responsible for practical training, the organisation of practical learning, the demonstration of students' practical operations, and the support of students in the reconciliation of theoretical knowledge and practical activities. These trainers are typically

skilled workers, who may also participate in the pedagogical minimum programme. The third type are general subject teachers in VET schools, whose formal requirements are the same as for VET teachers.

In Poland there is a variety of teaching and training professions in VET. As regards teachers one can distinguish between teachers of general subjects in VET institutions, teachers of theoretical vocational subjects, and practical instruction teachers. Teachers are not distinguished as an occupational category so that the term may include various groups of practitioners who provide practical training inside as well as outside the formal education system. Of these, only the practical instruction trainers or practical vocational training instructors have a clearly defined status and qualification standards.

Teachers teaching vocational theoretical or general subjects must have a Master's degree or a higher vocational education diploma (e.g. as an engineer) as well as proven pedagogical competence. The requirements for practical instruction teachers include a technician's certificate, a secondary school certificate and a pedagogical course or a leaving certificate from a post-secondary technical school. Practical instruction trainers need a master craftsman's, technician's or worker's certificate in combination with a secondary school certificate and a pedagogical course. Practical instruction trainers can work as practical instruction teachers only if practical instruction for a given occupation is provided at the employer's or in an individually owned agricultural farm.

In Slovakia, there are three categories of VET teachers, namely, teachers of general subjects, teachers of vocational subjects, and teachers of practical instruction. The latter category is involved in practical lessons at school, e.g. in laboratories, and practical lessons connected to workplaces. Despite the fact that VET is primarily school-based, companies are sometimes involved in the practical training of VET students and provide practical instruction by trainers either in training centres or in the companies themselves. Trainers are responsible for assisting in the acquisition of the relevant skills during the practical training.

All secondary teachers must be graduates of higher education institutions. Teachers of general subjects are prepared at universities within teacher training programmes designed for all types of schools, usually in two fields corresponding to respective subjects (e.g. Mathematics and Physics). Teachers of vocational subjects at VET schools are usually graduates from technical universities (with an Engineer's degree - Ing.) and from specific complementary pedagogical study (DPŠ, doplnujúce pedagogické štúdium) offered at universities for those interested in teaching careers. Professional (vocational) and pedagogical requirements concerning trainers are as follows: full secondary vocational education, certificate of apprenticeship, at least three years of practice and graduation from DPŠ.