

## ET 2020 NATIONAL REPORT FOR ESTONIA

### A. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ET 2020 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1a. On the basis of your country's assessment of the overall relevance and added value of the four ET 2020 strategic objectives, please describe which changes you would like to introduce in these strategic objectives, or in their implementation, notably in light of the economic and jobs crisis and the evolution of the EU's overall growth and jobs strategy. (*max. 1 page*)

It is proposed not to introduce any changes and to continue with the same priorities.

1b. Building on the existing European agendas and mandates of the ET 2020 Working Groups, as well as on your analysis and proposals developed in response to the questions below, please specify the **two key priority areas** you would propose to focus European cooperation on during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of their expected added value for the Member States. Please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestions. (*max. 1 page*)

Quality as a cross-cutting theme in general, vocational and adult education.

## 2. Lifelong learning and mobility [ET 2020 strategic objective 1]<sup>1</sup> (max. 2 page)

2a. Please provide **an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed** in the design and implementation of lifelong learning strategies, to support validation of non-formal and informal learning in line with Council Recommendation 2012/C 398/01, and to improve transitions between the various education and training sectors and increase transparency and recognition of learning outcomes. Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

The measures taken in the previous period to increase employment and improve transitions between various education levels and educational institutions focused on ensuring that prior learning and work experience are recognised much more than before. In Estonia, the qualifications acquired in general, vocational and higher education have been described on the basis of learning outcomes (competences). The principles of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (recognition of prior learning and work experience; in Estonian: *varasema õpi ja töökogemuse arvestamine* (VÕTA)) have been defined by legislation. Qualification awarding bodies, including educational institutions and awarding bodies of vocational qualifications, prepare their procedures for the recognition of prior learning and work experience (VÕTA procedures) following these principles. Educational institutions may recognise prior learning and work experience both on the completion of the curriculum and when awarding qualifications. Educational institutions must inform students about the conditions of and procedure for the recognition of prior learning and work experience, including the terms and cost of assessment as well as the conditions of contesting the results, and ensure that all applicants have access to the necessary information, guidance and counselling.

In vocational education, learning gained through work-related, hobby or other daily life activities is proved by reference to or presentation of completed works, a portfolio of samples, a copy of a professional certificate, employment contract, certificate of appointment or any other documentary evidence. Similar approach is used in higher education. In the period 2009-2013, different universities fully accepted more than 35,000 applications for the recognition of prior learning and work experience (prior learning), non-formal learning (including continuous education and training), informal learning (including work experience), multi-component recognition (a combination of formal, non-formal and informal learning recognition). Students have the right to apply for prior learning and work experience to be recognised as the completion of the entire study programme, except for the final thesis. The recognition of prior learning and work experience is not used on university enrolment. The Vocational Educational Institutions Act, which entered into force in 2013, provided that persons aged 22 and above who have not completed basic education may enrol in a vocational educational institution to commence studies on the basis of a curriculum enabling the acquisition of vocational secondary education, provided that the school finds that their knowledge and skills are adequate for further studies. In general education, the recognition of prior learning and work experience is a new phenomenon and there is no established practice.

We have observed that in order to be more competitive in acquiring education and entering the labour market, young people are eager to, and also need to, describe their knowledge, skills and practical experience acquired through youth work and hobby activities. A good indicator is the growing number of registered users of the portal [www.stardiplats.ee](http://www.stardiplats.ee) (launched in 2010), created to facilitate the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through youth work. We have also taken steps to increase the awareness of employers about the recognition of commencement of studies on the basis of a curriculum enabling the acquisition of vocational secondary education: information events and training targeting employers; guidance materials concerning the benefits and recognition of youth work when employing young people, which should improve employers' awareness about the value of youth work as non-formal learning<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sector-specific assessments should be reported only in part B of this questionnaire.

<sup>2</sup> Source: [Aruanne noorsootöö strateegia eesmärkide ja rakendusplaani täitmisest 2012. aastal](#) (17.06.2013)

In general, very good progress has been made in implementing VÕTA in Estonia and it is widely used in nearly all sectors of education. VÕTA has made (re)entering education more flexible, enabling to take into account the knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education, making it easier to continue education for those who have discontinued their education and providing adult learners the opportunity to combine work and studies. VÕTA enables learners to complete their studies within a shorter timeframe, improve their position in the labour market, use the resources of educational institutions, employers and learners more efficiently, use their individual, social and economic potential fully and make informed decisions when planning their career and studies.

#### Estonia's priorities and challenges for the next period:

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2014–2020 was approved in 2014. The Strategy addresses the main bottlenecks in the implementation of lifelong learning – finding a solution to which is critical for society and affects the achievement of a number of strategic objectives. The Strategy widely defines lifelong learning as encompassing the whole range of learning: formal education (pre-school, basic, upper secondary and higher education), continuous education and training, retraining, non-formal and informal learning. New knowledge and skills are acquired through workplace learning, informal learning, hobbies, youth work, participation in civil society organisations or in the virtual space, either individually or together with others. The measures focus on creating flexible forms of continuous education and training as well as retraining, shaping key competences and developing assessment tools (including tools for self-assessment of competences). We are planning to develop assessment models for assessing the digital competences of teachers, students, heads of school and adult learners and to implement a system for the recognition of such competences. Opportunities are created for entering the teacher's profession through alternative learning paths and work experience. The curricula of formal and continuous teacher training are brought in line with the digital competence models. From the perspective of the recognition of prior learning and work experience (VÕTA) it is important to educate teachers about how to make decisions that ensure the high quality of VÕTA.

The importance of non-formal and informal learning is also emphasised in the Estonian Youth Work Development Plan for 2014–2020, adopted at the end of 2013. Youth organisations, youth centres and hobby schools provide a number of opportunities for acquiring social competences. Voluntary activities which require an active youth initiative, such as youth projects, contribute to the development of knowledge and skills and provide valuable life and work experience. This is confirmed by the impact analysis of the Youth in Action programme (2012<sup>3</sup>). The new development plan will provide better opportunities for young people to develop their creativity, show initiative and participate in joint activities. The development plan will also ensure better recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through informal learning in formal education and the labour market and promote the use of teaching materials developed in the course of youth work and other existing instruments in formal education.

These important measures will facilitate the implementation of the Lifelong Learning Strategy, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the Council Recommendation 2012/C 398/01.

2b. Building on the experience with the European actions and tools in the area of validation and recognition of skills and qualifications, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the area of the validation and recognition of skills and qualifications during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We would like to focus on the issues of the validation of key competences, including self-assessment, in order to find, building on various instruments/initiatives, a single solution that supports mobility and the functioning of the Single Market. A key competences validation system should be developed

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.jugendinaktion.at/images/doku/ra\\_y\\_policybrief\\_121012.pdf](http://www.jugendinaktion.at/images/doku/ra_y_policybrief_121012.pdf)

together with a system of monitoring the need for skills in order to determine which skills are actually valued and required. We consider it very important that counselling services encompass the provision of the relevant information about qualifications, curriculum outcomes and the labour market. A coherent approach, which links monitoring, forecasting and validation to each other, brings added value to all actors in the labour market and education as well as to target groups and stakeholders. Cooperation with third countries is important.

### 3. Quality and efficiency in education and training [ET 2020 strategic objective 2]<sup>4</sup> (max. 2 page)

3a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed to **promote equitable and efficient investment in education and training (with a possible reference to the methodology used)**. Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

The need for matching better education system outcomes with the labour market was addressed in discussions with different stakeholders who participated in development of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. One of five strategic objectives in the strategy is: **bringing lifelong learning opportunities in line with labour market needs**. Flexible learning opportunities and high quality career services with diversified choices implemented in line with the labour market needs are expected to contribute to the increase in awareness of Estonian people of learning paths and opportunities for professional fulfilment. This measure should also help to increase the number of people with professional qualification in different age groups.

By a decision of February 2014 of the Government of the Republic it was agreed to **develop a coordination system for monitoring and forecasting labour needs and for skills development in order to better match labour market demands and education/training offered by the educational system (OSKA system)**. The system will be based on the existing qualifications system and launched by using the ESF funds. The Minister of Education and Research will be responsible for the implementation of the system, while the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications and the Ministry of Social Affairs will be involved in the implementation on equal grounds. The activities under the OSKA system will be organised by the Estonian Qualifications Authority. The draft Professions Act Amendment Act, which is a prerequisite for establishing the OSKA system, will be submitted to the Government for approval this summer and is expected to enter into force in 2015.

**The methodology for combining quantitative forecast data on labour market needs and qualitative labour market monitoring data was developed and piloted** under the aegis of the skills task force, which was led by the Government Office. Completed by the end of May 2014: a) **Methodology** for interpreting the existing quantitative data on labour market and education and for using qualitative studies to supplement those data; b) The methodology was piloted in 10 areas of activity for which also **an analytical summary of labour needs was prepared**.

The relevant ministries have agreed on the following division of responsibilities regarding the OSKA coordination system:

1. Developing the methodology for the skills monitoring system – Government Office;
2. Monitoring labour market needs and preparing forecasts necessary for ensuring economic growth (macro forecasts) – Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications;
3. Ensuring the functioning of the lifelong learning system to facilitate the development of skills required in the labour market – Ministry of Education and Research;
4. Ensuring the functioning of the labour market measures necessary for the development of skills required in the labour market – Ministry of Social Affairs.

In recent years, the Estonian Government started to make significant reforms in respect to equitable and efficient investment in almost all education and training sectors. Actual impact and effectiveness of the reforms introduced in general education, VET and higher education cannot be identified due to the fact that we are in a transition period with their implementation. In general, efficiency and quality of education and training are the cornerstones for the reforms in all three educational sectors. Below the sector-specific launching points (challenges), aims and ex-ante forecasts of possible outcomes are presented in more detail.

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<sup>4</sup> Sector-specific assessments of quality and efficiency are asked in part B of this questionnaire.

As a result of the reform started in 2011 **in higher education**, quality has become the overarching objective in the higher education system. The overall aim of the reform is to increase the fairness of the higher education system and the efficiency of studies, reduce the division between the various fields of higher education and increase the accountability of institutions of higher education in ensuring the quality of education. A new funding system was introduced: the concept of state commissioned education and the complicated mechanism of coefficients and basic costs of a student place that served as its basis were abolished and the new financing system was implemented as of the 2013/14 study year. Institutions of higher education who receive state funding will make decisions regarding the number of student places created for each field based on their profile and function. Should the state have a specific shortage of graduates in a certain field, it can establish its needs in performance contracts. The new financing system makes it easier for the state to specify the functions and areas of activity of the institutions of higher education, to reduce the level of duplication and to provide support for nationally important areas of growth.

From the perspective of students in HEIs, the reform means that all students who have fully satisfied the requirements of their curriculum can study for free in Estonian-medium curricula as of the 2013/2014 study year. In order to retain their free student place, the students will have to meet the requirements of their curriculum in full each semester. If a student is unable or unwilling to meet the requirements of the curriculum in full, the institution of higher education has the option of demanding compensation of the study costs by the student up to the maximum limit established by the Government of the Republic. For various reasons, the students are usually unable to meet the requirements of the curriculum in full while studying abroad. In order to promote mobility our legislation provides exceptions in regard to the study period spent abroad. The aim of the new needs-based study allowances measure (applicable for students enrolled starting from 2013/14) is to support higher education studies of students of socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Also, new type of scholarships are introduced to motivate students to study in STEM areas (e.g. smart specialisation), starting from 2014.

Our ex-ante assumptions are that the reform would help to decrease the drop-out rates due to the study allowances and need-based allowances. Also placing quality in the centre of the reform, including more strict admission criteria, would help to change the attitudes of the future students – the students might need to be better prepared for the admission and more dedicated to learning during the studies. We also expect universities to provide more support to their students.

**In VET**, as of 1 September 2013, new Vocational Educational Institution Act (adopted by Riigikogu on 12.06 2013) and new Vocational Education Standard (adopted by the Government of the Republic on 26.08.2013) are implemented. The state-commissioned education and funding system of vocational education are in the process of modernisation, aiming at enhancing the quality of VET and making VET more practical, efficient and in higher conformity with the requirements of the labour market. Renewed vocational education curricula will be following a learning outcome-based approach proceeding from the updated professional standards, will be brought into conformity with the Estonian qualifications framework, and conditions will be created for shortening the total study period. Key-competences-based approach to teaching and learning as well as stronger links between different types of education will be supported. The implementation of the reform of vocational education system and renewed curricula will make the use of the funds allocated to VET more cost-effective and efficient.

We expect the reform to contribute to the decrease in dropout rate in VET and to the increase of the share and total number of students graduating with professional examination, and also to the increase of the share of basic school graduates in vocational education. Through better availability of career services the employment of graduates in vocational education will be substantially improved.

In 2013, the amendments to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act were adopted. The aim is to further improve the quality and attractiveness of **general education** and to prevent and reduce the school drop-out rate. The amendments also address the following challenges in the general education system: the unclear distribution of tasks, obligations and responsibility among the main actors in general education; dissatisfaction of teachers of Estonia with their salaries, workload and arrangement resulting in a low popularity of teachers profession; students, teachers and parents complaining about basic and upper secondary school curricula overload; undesirable side effects of

funding system in combination with an ineffective school network, lack of transparency of spending of allocations made by the state to local governments – funding system not supporting the performance of educational tasks – as a result, small upper secondary school sections in some local governments, which offer little choices and weak competitiveness to their students, are often being maintained at the expense of basic schools.

The implementation of reform foresees optimising the educational institutions network, incl. the functional separation of basic and upper secondary education; revisiting the teacher's profession, incl. the increase in quality of teacher education alongside ensuring decent salaries for teachers; implementation of a funding model (in general education) that would ensure graduates a fair access to higher and vocational education and support its quality; strengthening the role of the board of trustees in organising the activities of the school; strengthening the school leadership; support to the implementation of a new curricula (syllabuses are adopted in 2013/2014), etc.

Significant progress has been made in ensuring that each county has a state upper secondary school. To date, there are five state upper secondary schools established and several agreements signed to establish new schools and optimise the general education networks in many regions.

3b. You are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the area of effective and efficient funding of education and training during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We suggest focusing on effectiveness of resource use in teaching and learning on the first and second levels of education. The analytical framework developed by the OECD for the Review of Policies to Improve the Effectiveness of Resource use at Schools could be utilised to deliver the policy insights and promote the dialogue between the MSs on the topics of governing resource use, (re)distribution of resources, resource utilisation and management at schools.

3c. Please indicate how your country is planning to give a follow-up to the new evidence in particular from OECD's 2013 PIAAC and PISA surveys. Please indicate the aims and expected outcomes of the follow-up measures.

PIAAC and PISA surveys have shown that education in Estonia is of a good quality: the skills of our students who have completed basic and secondary education are above average compared to their peers in other developed countries, whereas the results of our young people with higher education rank as average. International comparisons, however, have also shown where our problems lie – there is a lack of problem-solving skills and creativity in using different skills in new contexts, the decline in age-related skills proficiency is too rapid, and older generations have lower information-processing skills and lack the courage to use ICT.

Both surveys have had an important impact on the development of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Pursuant to the Strategy our goals are to implement an approach towards learning that supports each learner's individual and social development, learning skills, creativity and entrepreneurship at all levels and in all types of education. We intend to make the evaluation and remuneration of teachers and school leaders proportional to their professional qualifications and their effectiveness in their performance. The lifelong learning strategy also foresees the integration of a digital culture in learning processes at all levels of education and in all curricula. New directions in pedagogical and organisational education that are inspired by technological innovation will be approached systematically. In order to support the objectives and reaching study results outlined in the curricula of basic schools, upper secondary schools and vocational institutions, the availability of digital learning resources will be ensured. Various measures will be implemented to promote equal opportunities for lifelong learning to everyone, to decrease the impact of socio-economic status and learners, of language of instruction and of regional aspects on the learning outcomes. The concrete

measures to achieve these goals and expected outcomes as well as indicators, are outlined in the Strategy<sup>5</sup>.

To add to these goals and activities under the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Estonian Government put emphasis on attracting young people towards STEM education and guiding them to become researchers and engineers. Under the Estonian Research and Development and Innovation Strategy 2014-2020 we will continue implementing measures<sup>6</sup> aimed at improving the image of the R&D profession and thus attracting young people to become researchers. In order to achieve this aim it is important to ensure attractiveness and high quality of learning math and sciences at school but also to provide adequate career information about the career opportunities in the public and in the business sector. It is important to engage potential employers in taking part in popularisation activities; and to encourage research institutions, businesses and schools to work together aiming at improving students outcomes in MST and supporting schoolchildren's extracurricular education in this area.

In Estonia, the growth in the share of graduates in MST since 2000 is about 50% higher than the EU average growth. However, the number of students entering MST education fields still remains problematic, although they have displayed rising trends over the last two years. Furthermore, the share of female MST graduates is above the EU average with an improving gender balance. These improvements show the effectiveness of the measures implemented during the previous programming period.

#### **4. Equity, social cohesion and active citizenship [ET 2020 strategic objective 3] (max. 2 pages)**

4a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed to provide access to good quality mainstream education for all (including measures to prevent and combat segregation), to provide widespread and equitable access to quality early childhood education and care, particularly for children from a disadvantaged background (incl. from low income households, migrants, marginalised groups), and to implement inclusive educational approaches for an increasingly diverse society adapted to the needs of learners from various backgrounds. Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 is based on the principle that the state must ensure equal opportunities for all people to receive high-quality education. Consideration of special needs, flexibility and transparency of learning opportunities, also openness, tolerance, as well as gender equality are considered as significant principles in developing of lifelong learning system.

However, there are a number of social, linguistic, gender as well as economic and regional barriers in the Estonian educational system which limit such equal opportunities. Ensuring equal opportunities for children and young adults with special needs remains to be a problem. Only too often, continuous education and training as well as retraining are not available to the target groups who need them. Despite some improvement, drop-out rates remain high. In order to increase the number of people participating in lifelong learning, funding should take better into account the possibilities, needs and

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<sup>5</sup> The Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020: <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=12617>

<sup>6</sup> Key measures implemented to achieve this objective during the programming period 2007-2013: **Pupils' Inventor Contest; Contest for Young Scientists; Science communication programme TeaMe (2009-2015)** - financed by the European Social Fund, the TeaMe Programme promotes young people's interest in science and technology (S&T). It targets young Estonians (14-26 years), general education and secondary school teachers, journalists covering science and technology (S&T) topics, researchers, scientists and engineers; **TeaMe Call (2009-2015)** - provides public funding for science communication events, science camps, technology days, and get-together activities for university students and school pupils; **the Gifted and Talented Development Centre at the University of Tartu (GDTC)** - offers pupils interested in science an opportunity to further develop their scientific knowledge and skills. Talented basic and secondary school pupils can choose from various courses offered in the GDTC curriculum. The GDTC has developed teaching courses for teachers and schools supporting individualised learning.



specifics of target groups. The Strategy emphasises the issue of high drop-out rates among male students needs to be addressed.

We have started the reorganisation of the schools network in order to ensure the provision of basic education to all children near home and versatile high-quality upper secondary education in all counties. The state has also ensured places in boarding school facilities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. A system of learning and career counselling is being launched. The measures are designed to ensure all students at the 3rd level of basic education (years 7 to 9) access to career studies and counselling and to create conditions for people who do not speak Estonian, have not completed upper secondary education, are unemployed or have disabilities, etc. to acquire qualifications. Students of Russian-medium general education schools and people whose mother tongue is other than Estonian are provided career information and counselling and information about professions, employment, unemployment and wages. When providing vocational and career counselling, the established gender stereotypes should be avoided.

From 2013, all former Russian-medium **upper secondary schools** transferred to Estonian as the main language of instruction (60% of the curriculum is taught in Estonian). In vocational education, transfer to Estonian as the main language of instruction will start in 2014. Transfer to Estonian-medium education will improve the Estonian language proficiency of Russian-speaking youth, thus improving their access to education and the labour market in Estonia. A monitoring plan has been prepared in order to assess the results of the transfer and to ensure the provision of high-quality education in accordance with the national curriculum. About 20% of all basic school students attend Russian-medium schools. We will continue, as a matter of priority, to extend integrated subject and language teaching (including language immersion), promote Estonian language learning and use of Estonian as the main language of instruction in Russian-medium schools and support students of Estonian-medium schools whose native language is other than Estonian. Integration is supported by training provided to teachers and heads of school as well as by the teaching materials development programme and other actions undertaken under the Lifelong Learning Strategy. Greater attention should be paid to convergence of schools with different languages of instruction through joint activities.

As regards the reorganisation of general education, we will continue promoting internationalisation by supporting **European School and introducing IB studies**. The objective is to provide high-quality international education to children from international backgrounds. We have established a European School to facilitate the moving of employees of international organisations and companies to Estonia. It is also important to ensure the availability of pre-school places to children of foreign employees.

We have also prepared a new measure for immigrants - an adaptation programme funded from the European Social Fund. The aim of the programme is to gather all information necessary for foreigners into one single portal. The adaptation programme is an action plan aimed at facilitating the adaptation of foreigners. The programme consists of a basic information training module (Estonian society, culture, state, etc.) and thematic modules (e.g. family, work, entrepreneurship, studying, etc.). Foreigners are also provided beginner level language courses and information about other services available to foreigners. The adaptation programme is expected to be launched in 2015.

As of 2012, 85% of children aged between 18 and 24 months were attending pre-school child care institutions or nurseries. The deficiency of places is a problem mainly in larger towns - about 1/3 of local governments has waiting lists for pre-school child care institutions. A motion to amend the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act has been put forward in order to ensure equal opportunities in pre-school education and to improve accessibility of pre-school education. The draft legislation is pending in the *Riigikogu*. After the amended act is adopted, local authorities will have the obligation to amend their acceptance and exclusion procedures to provide for part-time places in pre-school institutions. Part-time places are expected to reduce pre-school institutions waiting lists. Abolishing age-based grouping enables to alleviate the shortage of places in pre-school child care institutions and ensures that children can attend the same group and be with their teachers and friends until they start school. The national curriculum for pre-school child care institutions, which entered into force on 1 September 2008, provides that the primary principle of learning and teaching is to take into account each child's individual needs and development potential. Learning and teaching activities are prepared and carried out by taking into account the individual development: abilities, linguistic and cultural

background, age, gender, health, etc. Therefore, grouping by age is not relevant. Quite the opposite, attending a group that models on society, i.e. has children of different ages, needs and abilities, is conducive to the development of children's social skills.

4b. You are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the area of equity and social cohesion in education and training during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We are interested in adding the following aspect into the framework of the inclusive educational approaches: cooperation between the receiving countries and countries of origin of new-immigrants and diaspora communities on integration issues and facilitation of re-immigration and transnationalism, including support to multilingualism. In Estonia, discussions were started on how the Estonian families and children living abroad could be better supported in the realisation of their educational and cultural needs provided the increasing tendency of transnationalism and circular migration. In addition, we would like to focus more on such issues as digital divide and gender equality in education.

## **5. Creativity and innovation [ET 2020 strategic objective 4] (max. 2 pages)**

5a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, how your country contributes to

- embed entrepreneurship education at all levels of education and training and to implement the knowledge triangle;
- advance digital skills of teachers and learners;
- improve the openness of education, by fostering the use and development of Open Educational Resources including MOOCs and other new modes of delivery of education, as well as enhancing ICT infrastructure and connectivity in educational institutions; and
- enhance language teaching and learning across all levels of education and training.

Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in these areas.

### **Entrepreneurship education**

In the period 2007–2013, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications supported the development of entrepreneurship education (continuous training of teachers, development of textbooks and methods, etc.) under various measures of the Structural Funds. The Ministry of Education and Research has prepared a legislative framework to support entrepreneurship education. In general education, the national curricula for basic and upper secondary schools include elective subject syllabuses for economic and entrepreneurship studies. The national curricula for basic and upper secondary schools include a cross-curricular theme “Civic initiative and entrepreneurial spirit”. Developing entrepreneurial skills is included in the syllabuses of all subjects, not only in the syllabus of entrepreneurial studies.

In vocational education, career planning and introduction to entrepreneurship are included in the curricula of all courses. According to the vocational education standard, learning outcomes for initiative and entrepreneurial skills are included in the curricula of all levels of vocational education.

Under the administrative agreements signed with higher educational institutions, all public universities must increase the use of the competence of entrepreneurs and practitioners in order to link practical skills with theories. It is very important to ensure that entrepreneurship education is attractive and not limited to economic and business studies. Therefore, universities must ensure that subjects and methods which teach the skills and attitudes required to achieve the learning outcomes of the first and second levels of higher education are included in their curricula, including student placement and involvement of practitioners. Our aim is to ensure that different (non-economic) study programmes include a module of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. In addition, the University of Tartu (in cooperation with other universities and partners) is responsible for the development of entrepreneurial education in Estonia. This includes curricula and teaching materials that develop entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship education as well as teacher training in cooperation with entrepreneurs/practitioners.

A teacher’s motivation and skills are decisive in developing students’ motivation to learn. In order to develop entrepreneurial spirit and creativity in students, a teacher has to be competent, i.e. able to use digital tools in teaching. Proposals are being prepared according to which specific modules concerning the development of entrepreneurial spirit are included in teacher training study programmes. Based on the assessment of the recent developments in entrepreneurship education field a more coherent and systematic approach and a methodological leadership in this topic are needed. In order to address this challenge and proceed in a more coherent way a programme for systematic development of entrepreneurship education at all levels of education is under development and will be implemented with the support of the new period of ESF funding. The main objective of the programme is to guarantee that entrepreneurship education is integrated into all levels of education. Entrepreneurship education will be conducted systematically across educational levels. As an outcome, graduates will acquire better skills for entrepreneurship, their skills and competitiveness on the labour market will also be improved. Entrepreneurship studies’ (incl. entrepreneurship as a transversal skill) common methodology and courseware based on the best practices will be developed and implemented.

Additionally, a well-functioning traineeship placement system (planned to be supported from the structural funds) would contribute to the development of entrepreneurship in education by supporting the realisation of curricula (mainly in VET and higher education) in a manner that gives a graduate the required qualification and skills for entry into and successful coping in the labour market. So far the volume of practical training in curricula is insufficient; the proportion of practical training and the level of practical training organisation are uneven; the involvement of the representatives of the demand side in the development of curricula has been insufficient.

### **Digital skills of teachers and learners**

The Digital Agenda 2020 for Estonia points out that computer and Internet usage in Estonia is slightly one-sided: according to a diversification index, Estonia is close to the EU average (6.2 vs. 6.1), but lagging behind the Scandinavian countries. The internet is mainly used for communication, information searches and entertainment. It is less used to improve personal competitiveness and well-being (e.g. through smarter consumption or Internet-based learning opportunities). This also applies to students.

PIAAC 2012 indicated that our computer skills and confidence in using computers as well as the level of problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments is quite good. One in four adults has good and very good problem-solving skills. However, 30% of people either cannot or dare not use new technology. In Estonia, ICT is used for work less (63% of all employed people use a computer at work) than the average of all countries that took part in the PIAAC survey (69%) and significantly less than in the Nordic Countries (about 80%). Therefore, there is room for development.

The PISA 2012 survey revealed that while Estonian students actively use the Internet and social networks, many do not have the opportunity to use the Internet at school. When at school, 33.29% of students do not use the Internet at all and 51.41% use it for up to one hour. As regards this indicator, Estonia ranks 14th among all PISA countries. Teachers' skills of using digital technology is a separate problem. According to the PIAAC survey, the functional literacy and numeracy of Estonian teachers were average and their problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments were below the average. It is estimated that only one in four teachers could cope in a technology-rich environment (2nd and 3rd levels of problem-solving skills in technology-rich environments).

To address these challenges one of the focuses of the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy is on supporting the use of digital technology in learning and teaching. The aim is to better integrate digital culture in learning processes at all levels of education and in all curricula. New directions in pedagogical and organisational education that are inspired by technological innovation have to be approached systematically. The prerequisite here is supporting the school leadership, teachers and learners with support in the area of educational technology in all educational institutions.

Assessment models for digital competencies (for teachers, students, school leaders, adult learners) will be further developed and implemented, and a system of recognition inculcated. More specifically: The students' digital competences will be assessed at the end of the 3rd and 4th stages of school; digital competence models will be implemented, curricula for the initial and in-service education of teachers will be brought in line with these competence models; a system of assessing and recognising competencies (including digital competences) that have been acquired through self-learning or practical experience will be developed. New professional standards for teachers were adopted in 2013. The standards serve as a basis for the development of formal and continuous teacher training plans and for assessing would-be teachers' readiness for working in the profession. The cross-cutting competence of teachers is the ICT competence and teachers are required to improve their ICT skills<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> From the spring of 2014, a system of awarding the teacher's profession to people who wish to work as teachers without completing teacher training and to teachers who wish to acquire higher qualifications by proving their competence through the qualifications system was launched. In Estonia, the awarding body is the Estonian Association of Teachers. The Association has prepared the conditions of awarding the qualification of a teacher. Teachers who wish to apply for a qualification must submit to the qualification board a portfolio of their competences. The Association of Teachers recommends submitting the portfolio in an electronic format (e-Portfolio).

## **Openness of education**

According to the national curricula for lower and upper secondary schools, students' digital skills must be developed in all subject classes. In the previous period, the following projects and activities related to the development of digital teaching were supported in Estonia: 1) the development of repositories for e-learning materials at koolielu.ee (general education) in the e-learning development centre (higher and vocational education). The repositories include the digital learning resources in different fields of education - this is a system of knowledge sharing between educational institutions and teachers; 2) over the last period, syllabuses and teaching materials were developed for upper secondary school elective courses, at least 50% of which are taught in a digital environment (3D drafting, programming and IT applications, geographical information systems, robotics, mechatronics, etc.). The teaching materials can also be used in the Moodle environment and everyone has free access to them; 3) a conceptually new approach to learning and digital materials for teaching data processing and statistics in lower and upper secondary schools were developed with international cooperation. The new approach to learning developed with cooperation between the Wolfram consortium and the University of Tartu focusing on using the power of math to solve real-world problems, whereas using the computer makes learning statistics significantly easier. Computer-based statistics will be included in the curriculum and mainstreamed by 2018. Student materials will be made available to all (OER); 4) the programme of developing higher educational textbooks in Estonian. These are open educational resources (OER) which are made available in digital format to all; 5) the development of an examinations' information system and a methodically developed bank of assignments/problems; 6) various programmes designed to improve students' ICT skills (Teadustiiger, Robotika, etc.); the development and dissemination of OER in different sectors (e.g. the Ministry of Finance is dealing with financial literacy and the Ministry of the Environment is running an environmental education programme).

Over the coming years, Estonia will focus on the availability of OER in general and vocational education, building on the experiences of universities in developing and using digital educational resources (methodology and technical solutions). All educational resources the development of which is supported by the state will be based on open source code, i.e. the aim is to ensure that the digital educational resources developed by using public funding are available to all and without charge.

In order to continue the development, the objective (pursuant to the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy) is to apply modern digital technology in learning and teaching in a more efficient way and with better results, to improve the digital skills of the whole population and to guarantee access to the new generation digital infrastructure. Over the next period we will promote the development of OER and ensure that these resources are available to all through a designated portal of OER/educational ecosystem. The aim is to improve the quality of education by ensuring the availability of OER to all learners and equal opportunities for all schools to use the OER. By 2020, general and vocational education schools should have and use a wide range of high-quality educational resources, which enables them to diversify learning/teaching and improve the relevant learning outcomes/competences.

An ambitious endeavour is a cooperation agreement signed between Estonia and Finland in order to remove boundaries between our educational resources and to enable exchange of educational resources. The joint project, called EduCloud, enables each country to use the OERs developed /used in the other country, both for a charge and free of charge. The aim of the joint project is to coordinate and make compatible with each other the relevant information technology solutions and activities as well as to agree on standards and procedures. The cooperation programme also focuses on joint activities aimed at disseminating and exchanging best practices and using digital solutions in communication.

## **Language teaching and learning across all levels of education and training**

The objectives of the Estonian Foreign Languages Strategy 2009–2015 are: to increase motivation among people in Estonia to study different languages so that the majority of the population is fluent in at least two languages in addition to their native language; to diversify the opportunities that are available to people to study foreign languages in terms of teaching methods, study locations and choice of languages; to improve the quality of language studies in both formal and non-formal education; to guarantee the availability of suitable study materials for different target groups; to

guarantee high-quality training for language teachers and to improve the reputation of language teachers in society and to create a modern and effective system for the recognition of language skills.

Teaching and learning foreign languages – foreign language syllabuses, tests and examinations – are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Many schools use the European Language Passport levels for assessing learning outcomes.

Today's priorities are supporting and promoting early language learning. The project "German in pre-school", launched in 2007, has been very successful; in the autumn of 2014, a similar project "French in pre-school" will be launched.

Other important issues are integrated subject and language learning and specialised language learning. An increasing number of subjects (or part of subjects) are taught in a foreign language at all levels of education. In addition, specialised languages are taught and learned in vocational and higher education, which enables graduates to be more successful in the labour market and creates preconditions for international mobility.

As regards the number of foreign languages taught, the Estonian education system is among the first in the EU. The share of people who are fluent in more than two foreign languages is steadily increasing, while the share of those who speak only their native language is decreasing. General education schools teach 10 different foreign languages. The most popular foreign languages are English, Russian, German, French and Finnish.

Estonia has made great efforts to promote the learning of several foreign languages: from 2014, all upper secondary school leavers can take an internationally recognised language proficiency test in French, German or Russian instead of state examination in the relevant foreign language. Those who pass the test are awarded an international language proficiency certificate, which is recognised by the universities of other countries. In 2014, an international test in German was taken by more than 100 students, in Russian by 250 students and in French by more than 100 students. A student does not have to sit a state examination in a foreign language if he/she has passed one of the 16 international foreign language proficiency tests recognised in Estonia.

5b. Building on the experience with the European actions and tools in the area of transversal skills and taking into account the projected outputs of the relevant ET 2020 Working Group, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the area of transversal skills during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We would like to focus on ICT skills. ICT intensive sectors have driven both employment and economic growth in Europe. ICT has the highest growth potential in the Estonian (and European) economy. We would like to focus on the horizontal application of ICT through all occupational sectors with a clear link to national qualification standards. The latter enables also more coherent approaches in Europe when referring to the European Qualification Framework. It is important to update vocational and higher education curricula to allow for the acquisition of speciality-related IT skills, and also increase the scope of ICT related research in specialities outside ICT.

## **B. SECTORIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE ET 2020 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

### **6. School Policy (max. 2 pages)**

6a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed **to reduce early school leaving including a follow up on the 2011 Council Recommendation on reducing early school leaving (ESL), in particular to create and implement comprehensive strategies on ESL that balance prevention, intervention and compensation,<sup>8</sup> to enhance teacher competences and professional development, and to strengthen the quality of school education.<sup>9</sup>**

Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

[Please refer to part 3a for a general overview on **reforms in school policy domain.**]

We have started to pay more attention to the activities aimed at achieving the main objective of basic and upper secondary schools – to prepare students for different roles as family members, employees, citizens and carriers of culture and to increase creative thinking, entrepreneurial spirit and problem-solving skills. For the purpose of implementing the national curricula, we have tools for assessing students' general competences and guidance materials for implementing cross-curricular themes and formative assessment.

We have prepared study programmes for elective subjects to be included in the national curricula – entrepreneurship education for basic schools, which focuses, besides providing basic knowledge about entrepreneurship, on developing entrepreneurial spirit, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. We have also developed materials for learning/teaching financial literacy. An elective study programme for developing critical thinking and research skills for the 3rd level of basic education is being prepared.

In order to develop research skills based on the knowledge and skills obtained during the 1st and 2nd levels of basic education, the 3rd level syllabus for natural science has been updated. The syllabus supplements experience-based learning, forming the relevant world view and emphasising the practical aspect of learning natural sciences. The physics syllabus for upper secondary schools has also been updated in order to reduce the share of theoretical studies and to better integrate physics with other natural sciences. In order to ensure equal opportunities, we are developing tools for supporting Estonian language learning in Russian-medium basic schools.

#### **Early school leaving**

In order to support education acquisition and to prevent ESL, the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act guarantees educational support services to all students, enabling them to get psychological counselling, speech therapy and study counselling.

The drop-out rates from mainstream basic schools have stabilised (in 2008–2012 the dropout rates were 0.9%–0.6%–0.5%–0.5%–0.6% respectively). This indicates that support measures (establishment of counselling centres, implementation of the principles of inclusive education, including support measures implemented under the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, teacher training, etc.) have served their purpose. Drop-out rates from the 1st years of upper secondary schools have

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<sup>8</sup> In this context, countries could assess measures for the analysis and monitoring of early school leaving processes, supporting groups especially affected by it (e.g. children with migrant or minority background), ensuring that strategies cover both general education and VET, and ensuring involvement of all relevant policy sectors and stakeholders.

<sup>9</sup> In this context, countries could assess measures improving governance and leadership in the schools, monitoring of school's performance, the co-operation with parents and the local community as well as measures to embed the transversal key competences (such as team-working, learning to learn, communication) as much as possible into the school education?

stabilised at around 1%: in 2008–2012, the drop-out rates were 0.9%–1%–1.1%–1.4%–1.1% respectively).

Drop-out rates from vocational education are considerably higher than in general education. The main reasons for discontinuing vocational education are: wrong choice of profession, mismatch between abilities and requirements (lower average performance than in those who enrol in upper secondary schools), economic reasons (because studying at a vocational school means higher costs for families, students often prefer to start working if an opportunity presents itself).

To reduce drop-out rates, more effective career and professional counselling already in basic schools is required. We need to continue developing career studies and other career services and to improve the availability of such services. According to the providers of career services and teachers, both adult learners and students need more assistance and support in particular regarding the labour market information, i.e. they need counselling to enter and compete successfully in the labour market and information about the labour market situation, changes and future prospects.

Linking vocational education and vocational higher education to professional experience, concentrating on professional preparation and familiarising oneself with the future working life is also of importance in reducing ESL.

[Please refer to part 7a for an overview on career services measures in youth guarantee part and part 9a for an overview on measures for adult learners].

### **Teacher competences and professional development**

In recent years, discussions held in Estonia have been focused on the teaching profession, professional development of teachers and heads of school, competitive salaries and recognition of the professions of teachers and heads of school. According to the strategic vision, the teachers and heads of school working in Estonian schools in 2020 are self-respecting, dignified, motivated and professional. Participation in continuous training is important to all teachers and heads of school.

The distribution of teachers by gender in general education and vocational education indicates that the majority of teachers are women (only 14.1% of teachers in general education schools are men). In academic years 2008/09 and 2011/12 the number of young teachers (up to 30 years of age) in general education schools decreased by 201 people, i.e. the share of young teachers decreased from 11.4% to 10.3%. However, in the last three academic years the number of young teachers remained at the level of 2011/12, i.e. the decrease has stopped. The number of young teachers in pre-school child care institutions has increased.

When thinking about the next generation of teachers it is important that the best upper secondary school leavers choose the teacher's profession. In order to improve the reputation of the teacher's profession, the lifelong learning strategy emphasises that teachers' salaries must be competitive and the organisation of work such that the profession of a teacher and of a head of school is considered to be a reputable one and an attractive choice for the best. In 2013, the funds allocated from the state budget to local authorities were earmarked, i.e. the money can be used only for teachers' salaries. At the beginning of 2014, the minimum salary of full-time basic and upper secondary school teacher was raised.

Recruitment of teachers is supported by the new programme for novice teachers, under which novice teachers are paid special allowance. In 2008, a teacher training scholarship programme was launched in order to recognise the importance of the teacher's profession and support students who train as teachers. In 2013, new professional standards (competence models) were agreed on, which are based on a common understanding of the professionalism of teachers. The professional activity of teachers is described on three levels: teacher, senior teacher and master teacher. Describing the competences of the three levels will strengthen the position of the teacher's profession in society. The teacher's profession is looked at from a wider perspective: besides the compulsory competences, senior teachers and master teachers can act as trainer teachers or researcher teachers. A teacher may manage projects and lead subject and/or vocational and/or professional associations, participate in teacher training as a



teacher of university students or a trainer of acting teachers, supervise practical training and advise university teaching staff members, develop learning materials and organise educational research<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, new qualification requirements were established for heads of school, deputy heads, teachers and support specialists in general education by a regulation of 2013 of the Minister of Education and Research.

6b. Building on the experience with the European actions and tools in the area of school policy and taking into account the projected outputs of the relevant ET 2020 Working Group, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the school policy area during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

Motivation and competence of a teacher is a key factor when motivating students to learn. This is taken into account when developing basic skills and continuous training programmes. Besides initial training and continuous training, the following activities are aimed at supporting teachers' professionalism: seminars, project-based training, developing the skills of using the existing teaching materials. All these activities are designed to improve the professional competence of teachers. Another aim is to prevent early dropping out, implement updated syllabuses and to develop general competences in students.

The Government considers it essential to continue focusing on STEM education. A high value is placed on knowledge-based engineering education, which is based on basic skills in math, physics, natural sciences and IT. To that end, we need to popularise research and engineering activities, to interest young people in research and technology and to create opportunities for them to develop their interests, as well as to provide high quality teaching throughout their education.

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.innove.ee/UserFiles/%C3%9CIdharidus/Kutsestandardi%20rakendamine%20ja%20eneseanal%C3%BC%C3%BCs.pdf>

## 7. Vocational Education and Training (max. 2 pages)

7a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed to support the objectives of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, to implement the educational dimension of the Youth Guarantee, and to ensure that VET provision is in tune with labour market/skills needs and in support of innovation policies. Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

[Please refer to part 3a for a general overview on reforms in VET domain.]

The Estonian Human Development Report 2012/13 indicates that Estonia is characterised by very limited availability of skilled labour compared to other countries. On the one hand, this is a result of the small size of the labour market, but based on various international comparisons, the problem is also the fact the workers' skills do not correspond to the demands of the economy. The Human Development Report specifies that besides the education system, the problem is the small role played by active labour policies in the education of skilled labour<sup>11</sup> - the development of the professional qualifications system, state-commissioned education, the definition of fields where re-training is required. **An analysis of the field of education** suggests that basic school leavers tend to opt in favour of general education. Students who choose vocational education and those who prefer general education schools are clearly differentiated based on their marks on the completion of basic education. Very few of those whose average mark is higher choose vocational education<sup>12</sup>. In recent years, the average age of vocational students has increased significantly because there are more students aged 20+ who wish to acquire vocational or professional skills and improve their competitiveness in the labour market.

The new Lifelong Learning Strategy foresees development of both apprenticeships and the placement system (traineeship)<sup>13</sup>. In Estonia, **apprenticeship studies** are less common than traditional school-based programmes. Workplace-based study-schemes are not used widely. In the academic year 2012/13, students enrolled in workplace-based studies made up only 2 per cent of total VET students, this is 583 persons from 25 699 (baseline: 10.11.2013; data source: Estonian Education Information System) students. It is planned that 8 000 apprenticeship study places will be created and 6 000 apprentices will acquire qualification in the period 2015-2020. This measure will help in reducing the share of people without professional qualification or vocational training; and a workplace-based study form will also be more widely used in Estonia. The LLL strategy foresees also an **analysis of share of traineeships in curricula** on both the higher and vocational education level, according to the needs of the labour market, and respective amendments will be proposed.

### **Educational dimension of the Youth Guarantee**

Measures supporting the preparation of young people for working life and coping on the labour market have been targeted for: 1) improving the quality of education, supporting the successful study experience and bringing those who have dropped out back to education; 2) improving the skills and knowledge of young people through youth work; 3) systematic development of career services; 4) offering labour market services to unemployed young people.

Career services (career information, individual and group counselling) enable young people to make informed career choices and increase their readiness for active long-term participation in the labour market. Across all Estonian counties, 17 information and counselling centres offer free youth-targeted

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<sup>11</sup> Estonian Human Development Report 2012/2013, p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> Tark ja tegus rahvas 2014, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Please refer to p 5a for more details on traineeship system.

career services. The goal of these services is to guarantee that young people have access to timely and appropriate information regarding education and the labour market, and to support young people in self-exploration and decision-making to develop their skills. The primary target group of career services are senior students of basic schools, upper secondary schools and vocational schools. In 2012, young people from this target group received individual counselling on 8 696 times, and 28 195 young people participated in group counselling. In 2012, the information and counselling centres had 8 936 direct contacts with young people, and 37 570 contacts via career information lectures, career days and fairs. Career info is also accessible online in the Rajaleidja portal (“pathfinder”, [www.rajaleidja.ee](http://www.rajaleidja.ee)). Students can get career-related advice and employment exchange services also from the information portal Tudengiveeb (“student web”, [www.tudengiveeb.ee](http://www.tudengiveeb.ee)) that connects Estonian higher education institutions and employers.

In preparation for working life youth work (non-formal and informal learning) plays also an important role; measures increasing young peoples’ contact with working life and developing their social skills are of utmost importance. Each year, more than 4 000 young people aged 13-26 have the possibility to participate in work camps for youth, thus acquiring practical work experience and get training related to labour legislation. In 2012/2013, over 53 000 young people aged 7-26 participated in the activities of hobby schools, offering development possibilities to match different interests of young people.

During 2007-2013, support from EU funds helped to increase the efficiency of local youth work institutions in solving young people’s problems and the possibilities of young people to acquaint themselves with working life. The website Stardiplats ([www.stardiplats.ee](http://www.stardiplats.ee)) has been set up, helping young people to describe the acquired knowledge and skills to employers. To develop social skills, young people can volunteer in the activities of youth organisations. In addition to youth work in Estonia, each year several dozens of young people have the possibility to work in youth work organisations outside Estonia via the European Voluntary Service.

In addition to the existing measures preventing youth unemployment, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Social Affairs have outlined supplementary measures for the following ESF period (2014-2020) to prevent and decrease youth unemployment. When planning supplementary activities, the aim is to increase the co-efficiency of different measures and to focus on disadvantaged target groups.

The Youth Guarantee is supported by extensive regional strategies and development plans. The Youth Field Development Plan 2014-2020 and Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 contain several goals and activities supporting the Youth Guarantee. The Youth Field Development Plan aims to: 1) increase opportunities for the development of creativity, initiative and joint activity of young people; 2) increase the involvement of young people and improve their employability; 3) support for the active involvement of young people in the community and decision-making; 4) ensuring the development of high-quality youth policy and youth work. The Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 contains several principles and objectives that help youth to transfer from school to employment (guaranteeing the accessibility of high-quality education corresponding to the needs of the labour market; enhancing training organisation; offering information and counselling services to shape conscious choices).

7b. Building on the experience with the Copenhagen process and the Bruges Communiqué and taking into account the projected outputs of the relevant ET 2020 Working Group, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the area of vocational education and training during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) under the Bruges communiqué in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We would like to take forward the issue of quality in VET aiming at bringing the output of VET in line with labour market needs and tackle the skills mismatch challenges. Skills mismatch is the general challenge faced by Estonia and the EU. There are different kinds and forms of skills mismatch identified in Europe, and the issue is very high in the policy agendas of EU countries. However the cooperation should be continued regarding the possible policy implications and responses with a special focus on quality in VET.

## 8. Higher Education (max. 2 pages)

8a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed to increase tertiary education attainment and quality,<sup>14</sup> and to support higher education institutions pursuing comprehensive strategic approaches towards internationalisation that include internationalisation of curricula and strengthened strategic partnerships within and outside Europe. Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

[Please refer to part 3a for a general overview on reforms in higher education domain.]

### **Internalisation in higher education**

According to the final report on the interim assessment of the strategy for the internationalisation of Estonian higher education<sup>15</sup>, Estonia has made significant progress in making Estonian higher education more international.

Short-term mobility measures under which Estonian students study abroad for up to one year have been very successful. About 2,347 scholarships were awarded last year under different mobility schemes, which enabled about 3.6% of students to be mobile. Under the Erasmus programme, Estonian higher education institutions have achieved a significant balance between the numbers of Estonian students studying abroad and foreign students studying in Estonia (in the academic year 2012/13, 1,153 Estonian students went to study abroad and 1,159 foreign students came to study in Estonia). The number of students who study in Estonia for the whole study period is increasing - in the academic year 2013/2014 there were 2,230 foreign students studying in Estonian universities (about 3.7% of all students).

In order to achieve greater international visibility, Estonian universities joined the joint platform *Study in Estonia* - they participate together in education fairs and training programmes and organise information and marketing events. Estonian higher education is introduced by a central information portal [www.studyinestonia.ee](http://www.studyinestonia.ee) and in major cross-border social media channels, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. According to the OECD education statistics publication published in 2013,<sup>16</sup> 5,653 Estonian nationals are studying in higher education institutions of OECD countries and OECD partner countries (data of 2011). These are young people who continue their education abroad in order to obtain the relevant certificate. "Brain drain" may become a problem if the young people who study abroad decide not to return to Estonia.

Internationalisation is one of the priorities of the administrative and performance agreements signed with higher education institutions. The aim of the internationalisation of learning and research is to facilitate the development of human resources, diplomatic relations and to support economic growth and improve the reputation of the country through the export of higher education. At the level of individuals this means better collaboration skills, improved language proficiency and intercultural competencies and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The internationalisation of higher education is supported by doctoral studies and the programme DoRa, as well as by the Kristjan Jaak scholarship programme, which enable to involve foreign teaching staff in order to improve the quality of teaching, support visits of Estonian teaching staff to foreign universities, support the mobility of master and doctoral students and the development of cooperation networks. Internationalisation, cooperation and competitiveness of Estonian research

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<sup>14</sup> In this context, countries could assess measures to increase entry rates to higher education, to improve completion rates of students in higher education, and to address quality.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.praxis.ee/fileadmin/tarmo/Projektid/Haridus/RVhind/KH\\_RVstrateegia\\_vaehindamine\\_lopparuanne.pdf](http://www.praxis.ee/fileadmin/tarmo/Projektid/Haridus/RVhind/KH_RVstrateegia_vaehindamine_lopparuanne.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators, Table C4.7 (web only) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932850718>

activities are also supported by doctoral schools which focus on increasing the efficiency of doctoral studies, including improving the quality of tutoring through international and national cooperation.

Strategic partnership is also supported under the programme of internationalisation of research, which aims at supporting cooperation with Asian countries and Asian studies at three Estonian universities (the University of Tartu, Tallinn University and Tallinn University of Technology).

In **June 2013**, the amendments were adopted to the Aliens Act. The amendments to the Aliens Act entered into force on the 1st of September 2013. The aim of the amendments were to simplify the arrival of highly educated labour, students and scientists in Estonia (and their short-term stay or settling in Estonia), and to simplify the process of commencing the studies of students from third countries in Estonia as well as enable them to work during studies and acquire employment in Estonia after graduation. One of the important amendments to the law is the abolition of the requirement to apply for a work permit by these students who already have been issued a residence permit for study. Additionally, they can stay in Estonia after completion of their studies and defending their degree and find a suitable job. Upon extension of a temporary residence permit for study for the last study year the temporary residence permit may be extended for longer than one year but not for longer than six months after the completion of studies. The notion of a top specialist and establishing of special conditions gives an employer an opportunity to easier get top specialists from all over the world to join their teams.

8b. Building on the experience with the agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems and taking into account the projected outputs of the relevant ET 2020 Working Group, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the higher education area during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We would like to take forward the issue of **strengthening strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building in higher education**. Internationalisation of higher education should strongly serve two main objectives: increase in the quality of higher education and support of economic and competitiveness growth of the country. Integrating foreign students into the labour market through work-based traineeship and helping them to find jobs after graduation increases the pool of skilled labour force needed for growth. In order to succeed, universities have to strengthen and establish more long-term strategic partnerships with the business sector. Visibility in a highly competitive higher education market can be best achieved through strategic cooperation between businesses, higher education and research institutions aiming at contributing to international competitiveness.

## 9. Adult Learning (max. 2 pages)

9a. Please provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has developed to improve the quality, participation and efficiency of adult learning and to provide basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills) and outreach to low-skilled adults (e.g. national targets, specific funding programmes etc.). Please provide an indication of the most significant remaining challenges to overcome in this area.

In the field of adult education, efforts have been made to provide **better access for adult learners to both formal and non-formal education**. In recent years, the number of 25-64 year olds participating in lifelong learning has steadily increased, reaching 12.7% in 2012 (in 2007, the participation rate was 7%). The growth stopped in 2013 when the participation rate was 12.5%<sup>17</sup>.

The resources from the European Social Fund have significantly improved the education opportunities for adult learners - about 70,000 people have improved their skills in continuous training courses provided free of charge. The ESF programme “Adult professional training and development activities” has enabled about 35,000 adults to participate in professional training at vocational schools, while nearly 35,000 adults have developed their key competences and social skills under the programme “Adult training at informal education centres”. Training programmes were appreciated by participants, were popular and “sold out” quickly. The relevance and high quality of such training programmes is confirmed by the fact that the drop-out rates were very low - about 5%.

Since 2012, the ESF programmes focus more on providing training to adults who have lower levels of education. The programme “Adult training at informal education centres” significantly increased the participation rates among that target group: While in 2011 only about 5% of participants had completed only basic education, in 2013 the share of such people was 10%. Similarly, the share of learners who had completed general upper education and vocational education increased from 27% in 2011 to 34% in 2013. The programme “Adult professional training and development activities” also increased the number of participants who had not completed upper secondary education: from 34% in 2009 to 45% in 2012.

In addition, the funds of ESF were used to support the continuation of education of adults who had discontinued vocational or higher education. Under the programme KUTSE, 472 learners acquired a profession (85.7% of them were 25 years old or older), while under the programme TULE, 336 learners completed their discontinued education in 2013 and 308 still continue their education.

The Adult Education Act was approved by ministries at the beginning of 2014 and is expected to be adopted by the end of 2014. The Adult Education Act regulates primarily the provision of non-formal education; the provision of formal education is regulated by other legislation. The main objective of the Act is to make the provision of education more transparent for learners and donors. The new Act requires education providers to make their activities more public:

- Each education provider must have a website at which they publish their curricula, training providers and their qualifications, bases for the organisation of studies (admission conditions, conditions for paying and returning fees, etc.), the description of the learning environment, the statutes of the organisation.
- Each curriculum must be based on outcomes and inform learners about which new knowledge and skill they will have acquired upon completion of the curriculum.
- Certificates must be informative and clear. A certificate must include diverse information about what was learned so as to enable current or future employers to get a clear picture of

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<sup>17</sup> This indicator differs from the figure indicated in EU statistics (12.6% in 2013). The main reason for the difference is that Statistics Estonia corrected the number of population in January 2013 based on the results of the census (as it is a share of the total number of 25-64 year old people, the share of those participating in lifelong learning also changes). The data of previous years were also retrospectively corrected.

which knowledge and skills the employee has; the recognition of prior learning and work experience and the procedure of professional qualification examinations will become simpler.

- Each continuous education institution must select/develop a quality assurance system and publish their quality assurance procedures.

Adults participating in formal education or continuous education will have the right to apply for a study leave.

The current procedure for awarding education licences will be replaced by registration of continuous education institutions in the Estonian Education Information System. Electronic procedures are significantly more convenient for educational institutions. In certain cases, where it is required by special legislation, continuous education providers must apply for a continuous education licence.

In the future, only those providers of continuous education will receive support from the state budget that have been registered in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) and comply with the requirements of the Adult Education Act. Study leaves are also granted only if the education provider is registered in the EHIS: The draft legislation extends the right of the Minister of Education and Research to commission continuous education (so far, continuous education could be commissioned only from vocational education institutions).

One of the objectives of the **Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020** is to ensure equal opportunities for all to participate in lifelong learning, i.e. more attention must be paid to creating conditions for less competitive people. An important challenge is to **increase the participation in lifelong learning among people with lower levels of education**. In 2013, one in five (20%) adults aged 25 to 64 who had completed higher education participated in lifelong learning, while the share of people who had completed only basic education was 4.5%.

The new strategy foresees the provision of career services to all adults (besides young people). So far, career services have been provided only to the unemployed. According to the strategy, the authorities responsible for the development of the new system are the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Research; counselling will be provided by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Based on the new strategy, an ESF measure is being prepared aimed at improving the competences of adults. The main proposed activities are:

- Bringing adults with low education levels back to formal education.
- Offering continuous education and retraining to adults to enable them to acquire qualifications (the priority target group are people who do not have any qualifications or whose qualifications are outdated).
- Developing the key lifelong learning competences of adult population.

Additional support measures and development activities have also been planned in order to ensure the relevance and high quality of education and to facilitate the participation of more problematic target groups.

9b. Building on the experience with the European Agenda for Adult Learning and taking into account the projected outputs of the relevant ET 2020 Working Group, you are invited to specify a maximum of **one concrete European-level issue** to be taken forward within the adult learning area during the next ET 2020 work cycle (until 2017) in light of the expected added value for the Member States. In case you decide to propose an issue to be taken forward, please provide a brief policy rationale for your suggestion, preferably with an indication of a specific output that you have in mind.

We would like to take forward the issue of quality in adult education with a special focus on non-formal learning and in connection to workplace innovation (re-skilling and up-skilling of people aiming at retaining their competitiveness in the longer run and utilising their full potential). The input from the skills demand analysis and forecasting exercise should be taken into consideration when addressing the quality issues in adult education.

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10a. Please describe and provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of how your country has integrated education-related elements in other national policy areas and actions aiming to stimulate growth and jobs.

Educational policy measures contribute to the achievement of the objectives of “Estonia 2020” and “Sustainable Estonia 21”. The new Lifelong Learning Strategy has an important role in achieving the objectives of the competitiveness programme “Estonia 2020”. The Lifelong Learning Strategy is linked to virtually all Estonian development plans. Direct links are described on the graph below, which highlights the most important common areas:



10b. Please provide your country’s assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the ET 2020 governance, working methods and tools. Would you have suggestions for the introduction of alternative governance, working methods and tools to increase ET 2020’s effectiveness and efficiency? (This question must be seen in a broad perspective, going beyond the functioning of the new generation of ET 2020 Working Groups, and including any aspect to which your country would like to raise attention related to ET 2020 governance, working methods and tools).

We find the new architecture of ET 2020 governance promising in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. We would like to invite the Commission to take forward the issue of efficiency of working



methods (limiting travel), including appropriate use of ICT tools. Particularly we welcome the Webinars in the work of ET 2020 Working Groups.

The work done by ET 2020 Working Groups, by Directors General meetings in different sectors, and by other networks and institutions involved in ET 2020 and European Semester governance should be more coordinated and aligned, including links between ET 2020 and European Semester activities, and policy and programme activities (Erasmus+, ESIF, etc.).

We would like to stress the importance of avoiding duplication and decreasing the administrative burden of Member States regarding the reporting obligations. We welcome the mapping exercise the Commission has launched in respect to reporting and we look forward to the follow-up for this exercise.

10c. Please describe and provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of measures your country has taken to promote partnerships with stakeholders, civil society, social partners and business to stimulate the modernisation of national education and training systems?

All the stakeholders and social partners were actively involved in the development of the new lifelong learning strategies and the work continues on sectorial and horizontal programmes. In addition to the work on strategy, the following specific initiative was launched in 2013 aiming at promoting partnerships with stakeholders, civil society, and social partners **in general education**. “Huvitav Kool” (Interesting School) initiative integrates three important elements of high quality general education into a single framework: the implementation of national curricula, supporting the professional development of teachers and the external evaluation of schools. The initiative aims at making Estonian schools attractive and enjoyable for pupils, parents and other actors in education, in particular teachers. The initiative takes into account the public and community expectations regarding schools and teachers and promotes the effectiveness of teaching. As a result of the initiative, the content of education is more appreciated by the main stakeholders; they are more interested in educational policy matters and motivated to share the success. The public is more eager to support schools and is actively interested in the organisation of inclusive and high quality education.

10d. Please describe and provide an assessment, whenever possible supported by evidence-based indications of effectiveness and impact, of the contribution of the 2007-2013 Lifelong Learning Programme and ESF to the ET 2020 objectives in your country, and of your country's approach to link funding from Erasmus+ and the European Structural and Investment Funds in the 2014-20 period with policy priorities (ET2020 objectives).

LLP has promoted the internationalisation of the (Estonian) European education system, contributed to its modernisation and to improvements in quality. Mobility supported by LLP within all the sectorial programmes contributes to personal development, but also supports the broader development of Europe's economies and societies. Participation of persons and institutions in LLP offered schools and individuals' motivation, increased openness towards and understanding of other cultures, helped develop creativity and acquire new teaching methods, gain knowledge of different educational systems. For outgoing VET and HE students participation in an LLP programme is often the first opportunity to study abroad which afterwards leads to new connections and helps to find further study or job possibilities abroad. Students being on exchange come back more self-confident, they are more open minded and cooperative, more ready to support future incoming students. Positive feedback from outgoing mobility is the best promotion for the programme giving future students the courage to go abroad. Communication, contacts with colleagues from other countries raised awareness of multicultural, multilingual societies, contributed to the development of foreign language skills of pupils, students, staff members and teachers. International cooperation helped master skills for working in a multicultural environment, created greater self-confidence.

Our approach to link funding from Erasmus+ in the 2014-20 period with policy priorities is still under discussion, ESIF measures are described in more details in other sections of the report.