

# VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

## OVERVIEW

Vocational education ensures practical and theoretical preparation for work in a particular profession, allows obtaining professional qualification and ensures further professional development.

Upon completion of basic education programme one can acquire vocational education in:

- vocational basic education programmes – students study 3 years and acquire a partial vocational secondary education only and professional qualification of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level. Upon completion of vocational basic education programme young people can start working as well as continue their studies to acquire the general secondary education;
- vocational secondary education programmes – students study 4 years and acquire vocational secondary education and professional qualification of the 3<sup>rd</sup> level. Upon completion of vocational secondary education programme young people can start working or continue their studies in higher educational institutions.

Several vocational institutions offer young people to acquire professional qualification after graduating the secondary school and qualification can be acquired in 1-year or 2-year long vocational education programmes.

Vocational education institutions offer pedagogic correction programmes to those young people who have difficulties in acquiring general education subjects and those who have not completed the basic education programme. Usually the length of the pedagogic correction programme lasts for 2 to 3 years and allows students to acquire basic education and professional qualification of the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> level.

The characteristic feature of vocational education is specialization in the particular professional area in order to acquire the corresponding profession. Therefore in vocational education institutions there are students from different counties of Latvia, and vocational education institutions offer their students possibility to live in hostels. Every student who studies at vocational school receives a grant with minimum 7 LVL per month.

In order to ensure the conformity of vocational education to the needs of labour market the collaboration among vocational education institutions and the employers has been initiated and as a result, the possibilities for professional practice are guaranteed and common educational programmes are developed.

To enhance the prestige of vocational education institutions, to apply professional qualification in action and to enhance the competitiveness of vocational education, the competition “Young Professionals” is organized together with associations of different branches and professional organisations for vocational school students to demonstrate their professional qualification. The winners of this competition participate in international competition “EuroSkills”. Professional qualification competitions test students' skills and knowledge, help to exchange experience among vocational school teachers, promote cooperation between professional organisations and employers.

## PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN FIGURES

Study year	Students	Teachers	Educational institutions**
2007/2008	38876	4687*	104
2008/2009	38819	4918	104
2009/2010	36660	4250	96

\* The data for study year 2007/2008 do not contain the number of teachers working in private vocational schools

\*\* inter alia, colleges offering secondary vocational education opportunities

## DEVELOPMENT

On 16 September 2009 the government approved the conception of “Enhancing attractiveness of vocational education and forming a partnership with social partners to ensure the quality of vocational education” which is meant to gain prestige of vocational education, namely to ensure flexible offer of vocational education programmes according to short-term labour market demands, to structure vocational education programmes into modules, to introduce a credit point system, to adjust the professional qualification levels to the European Qualifications Framework as well as to ensure the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education and training. The conception envisages ensuring the compliance of professional education with the labour market demands by determining partnership and responsibility of state institutions, social partners and professional organisations in development of vocational education content, assessing the quality of education (licensing and accreditation), as well as granting professional qualification. According to the views mentioned in this conception, a group of experts work on a new draft Law for vocational education.

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On 6 January 2010 the government approved "The Framework for optimization the net of vocational education institutions for the years 2010-2015" with the aim to ensure further adjustments in the system of vocational education and to improve its quality by:

- ensuring optimum number of vocational education institutions and their distribution in regions,
- differentiating the vocational education institutions,
- improving infrastructure and updating material and technical base,
- enabling the effective use of all the resources.

As a result of optimization and differentiation of vocational education institutions the following centres will be established: professional education competence centres, vocational education institutions specializing in particular area, vocational education institutions providing basic skills and integrated educational institutions managed by municipalities to carry out different general and vocational education programmes as well as training for adults and professional development.

In order to establish the unified and comparable content and procedure for general and vocational education quality assessment (accreditation), the project is carried out to develop regulations "Procedure for accreditation of general and vocational education programmes, educational institutions and centres".

In order to increase the efficiency and the quality in the system of vocational education and general secondary education, the action plan for implementation the "Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for the quality in education" for the years 2010-2013 is developed and approved. There are four action points stated in the plan – the development of electronic learning resources, the development of educational information system, increasing the competence of ICT among pedagogical staff as well as to provide and update the ICT infrastructure of education system. There are four action points stated in the plan – the development of electronic learning resources, the development of educational information system, increasing the competence of ICT among pedagogical staff as well as to provide and update the ICT infrastructure of education system.

## SUPPORT FROM STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN 2007-2013

- 25 000 students undergoing vocational basic education programme will receive grants;
- 5 000 teachers from vocational schools will undergo professional development training in their speciality and in the field of IT;
- the branch qualification system will be developed, 80 Standard Classification of Occupations will be developed and revised, 20 primary vocational education programmes will be developed and 35 professional development programmes will be revised;
- 53 vocational education institutions will be renovated, 10 will be adjusted for physically disabled students;
- modernisation of classrooms for professional training and workshops will take place in 8 places of imprisonment.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

International cooperation in vocational education is carried out with the aim of broadening knowledge and further education opportunities of students and pedagogues, exchanging information and good practice about policy making and implementation in other countries to increase the quality of education, foster efficient governance and management, meet the needs of young people and adult learners according to their individual abilities, interests, the labour market demands and the economic development of the country.

- To ensure this, participation of education institutions and individuals in different European Union programmes in the field of education and training is promoted, including the projects of the sectoral programme *Leonardo da Vinci* of the European Union Lifelong Learning programme 2007-2013. Latvia became a fully participating member state in the Leonardo da Vinci Programme in 1998. Through the promotion of international cooperation the programme aims to improve vocational education systems and methods, to establish a unified assessment system within Europe and to promote innovation.
- For the Call for Proposals 2009 84 projects submitted by the vocational education institutions of Latvia were approved, including: 26 – related to initial vocational training, 26 – for people in the labour market, 31 – professional development projects for skilled employees. Major cooperation partners for students mobility are Germany, Finland, Turkey and new EU Member States. The most popular education programmes are hotel and restaurant management, catering, construction, tourism.
- Latvia is participating in the project „Vocational Education. Policy and practice in education for people with special needs” of the European Special Education Agency.
- With support of the Ministry of Education and Science and social partners in 2009 vocational education students of Latvia successfully participated in the competition „EuroSkills” and Baltic professional skills competitions.
- Latvia is interested to develop co-operation to support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training system, to facilitate personal development, employment prospect and participation in the European labour market, to enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for employers and individuals and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees.

## CONTACTS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

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