

Country Report ESTONIA

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1. Introduction

Vocational education and training under the Soviet system formed part of a centralised planned economy and was closely connected to employment system. During the transition period the Soviet VET system was completely reformed so that today the Estonian VET system is primarily school based.

As a result of the introduction of liberal market economy most developments in VET such as developments concerning the quality of training, curricula development, HRD in VET, school's technical and pedagogical resources, partnership with enterprises, practical training, etc.) have become very diverse, inducing great variations between schools, sectors, company approaches and administration. There are also big differences among institutions, regions, sectors and types of companies (i.e. large companies versus SMEs) in arranging, supervising, monitoring and assessing the practical training provided.

Overall, the work of trainers in enterprises is poorly regulated. As a part of the qualification system basic vocational standards for adult educators have been established. Adult educators, including trainers in enterprises, can apply for adult educator qualification and pass a qualification examination. However, this acquisition of qualification is voluntary for the trainers. As concerns initial training, the work of trainers in enterprises is not regulated at all.

2. Organisation: How is the training of trainers organised, how is it embedded in the general and further education system?

Workplace supervisors of vocational students (vocational trainer – *ettevõtte praktikajuhendaja*) supervise students during their work placement. A period of practical training in a company is an obligatory part of the IVET curricula. The workplace supervisors' task is to provide students with practical skills and theoretical knowledge at the workplace in a real work situation. They help students to adapt to working life and provide feedback to the VET provider on students' performance.

A training system for trainers in companies does not exist. The training of trainers in enterprises is not systematically embedded in the formal education framework. Some VET schools closely cooperate with trainers in companies and also arrange training courses for them. However, lack of awareness of the trainer role may prevent trainers from making use of such training opportunities. Most trainers do not recognise themselves as trainers even if they are assigned as supervisor for VET students. Already from their self-understanding those trainers are completely separated from the VET system knowing nothing about curricula requirements, for example (Hiieväli et al, 2006, Leisalu, 2006). Great differences between SMEs and large enterprises in terms of the quality of training they provide also exist. Large companies often have their own training centres with internally established standards and/or rules for trainers.

As part of the further qualification system trainers working in enterprises can apply for becoming accredited as adult educator at three different levels. However, this certificate may have rather personal meaning in the context of the lifelong learning of trainers than contributing towards career development or status enhancement of the trainer.

As part of European Social Funds supported activities the Estonian Employers' Confederation supports and implements a project to foster apprenticeship training in Estonia. The aim of the project is to support curricula development and the training of trainers in companies. By 2007, about 400 trainers have gone through the training course established by the project, which are geared towards promoting and enhancing the psychological and pedagogical competences of trainers. (<http://www.ettk.ee/et/varia/opipoiss>).

How can one become a trainer and develop as a trainer?

Besides adult educator qualification standards there is no legally established standards for trainers that would recognise their professional development. At the same time, to become a trainer in most cases is not restricted and open for people with or without the qualification certificate of adult educator.

The ways to become a trainer in enterprises can be very different depending on the specific economic sector, field of economic activity, size of the company and vocational specialisation, among other aspects. The process for appointing trainers for VET students in enterprises is rather occasional. As a rule, trainers for VET student should be skilled workers, specialists or managers. Only a small proportion of trainers has a pedagogical preparation and/or has followed a training on supervising and mentoring students in a practical work context (about 17 per cent) (Hiieväli et al, 2006).

Who is taking decisions concerning the work and training of trainers?

Almost all matters concerning work and training of trainers in enterprises are decided by the employer or management. Thus the further qualification or professional development of trainers depends on the companies' initiative and awareness to induce some form of improvement. In some cases, networks and good cooperation between vocational schools and enterprises support the training of in enterprises to become more familiar with VET curricula and competent in the supervision and mentoring of students.

3. Economy

How is the training of trainers financed, who invests into the training of trainers and why?

Financing of the training of trainers in initial VET is different from CVET in enterprises. There is no common finance system of trainers in IVET. In many cases trainers in enterprises work in the trainer role next to their everyday duties without recognition and getting additional benefits.

How much money is invested in the training of trainers (percentage/GDP)?

No data available

Who benefits from the work of trainers (average income of trainers, cost-benefit analyses per enterprise/sector/region/nation)?

No data available

Which role does the work and training of trainers play as a means for economic development?

In the contexts of the social partnership and VET strategies issues addressing the situation of trainers in companies has been recognised as being very important. At the same time the issue is poorly analysed and systematically discussed. Some research centres (IER of Tallinn University, Centre for Policy Analyse “Praxis”) have carried selective analyses and research projects on trainers. In the context of improving company’s innovative capacity the role of trainers has not yet been given much attention.

4. Selection and Allocation of Trainers

How many people are working as trainers?

No data is available on the numbers of trainers. As the field is not regulated and not statistics are available it is not even possible to estimate some figures. Many trainers work do not ‘officially’ work as trainer and are not recognised as such.

What are the prerequisites to become a trainer?

No particular prerequisites to become a trainer are being defined. Becoming a trainer depends on the circumstances and emerging needs of the company. As a rule, enterprises try to find and assign people whose skills profile is suitable for supporting the students’ practical learning. The positions trainers occupy in enterprises vary considerably by sector or economic field. Trainers working in enterprises can be employed as skilled workers, specialists, managers (mid-level or high-level) or HRD specialists.

How are trainers recruited by enterprises?

In the context of IVET to comply with offering training and fulfil the relevant training duties enterprises typically select and appoint some of their employees who may be considered most suitable to fulfil the trainers’ duties as part of their everyday work.

In which main occupational areas have trainers specialised?

Generally, there is no data available. One can expect that trainers have different levels of qualification in their respective vocational area of expertise (for example, IT specialists train IT students, qualified skilled workers train apprentices, etc). Some research indicates that for example in the health care sector nurses monitoring and supporting students’ practice in hospitals have to be qualified nurses (Ümarik at al, 2006).

Are there too many/not enough trainers in different sectors of the labour market?

No data / evidences available.

5. Qualification

The activities, obligations and liability of and qualification requirements for workplace supervisors are not regulated by national legislation. Also the qualification requirements for workplace trainers are not regulated and most of the employees and workers who assume training functions have no specific pedagogical training.

Who determines the training contents for trainers?

The content of the training for trainers are partly developed and defined by schools cooperating with enterprises in IVET. In addition, the content of trainers’ continuing

learning activities can also be determined in the framework of specifically targeted projects such as those under the European Social Fund or 'Phare'. Some results of a questionnaire about training needs of trainers in service occupations are further available. Those results indicate that trainers in enterprises in particular recognise training needs in the following skills areas: communication skills, pedagogical skills, mentoring and team-working (Hiieväli et al, 2006).

Which institutions are involved in the training of trainers and how do they cooperate?

The major actors are: universities, employers' organisations and VET institutions. They cooperate mainly in the context of specific programmes or projects (Phare, ESF) or under special agreements. In most cases the organisation and individuals responsible for implementing the training of trainers are representatives of teaching professions such as qualified adult educators or VET teachers.

How do trainers acquire competences and theoretical and practical knowledge?

Trainers acquire their competences and knowledge mainly by learning while working and also from their work experience. About 17 per cent of trainers have passed some kind of continuing learning courses and have pedagogical preparation and/or undergone training for supervising or mentoring students for their work practice. Those training courses are partly leading to obtaining certificates, confirming that the trainers have passed the training course in specific subjects and equivalent to a certain amount of credit points. In most cases, if trainers have participated in training courses they appreciate the learning and find that the training was very useful and supporting them in their training job (Hiieväli et al, 2006). Still, since those courses are not a qualification requirements for trainers the certificates are generally not very important for working as a trainer. They may rather be important for trainers in terms of their personal career development.

6. Integration

The work of trainers of IVET students in enterprises is poorly recognised in Estonian society as this position is not explicitly defined and manifested. Trainers in CVET are somewhat in a slightly better position as their position and qualification requirements form part of the Estonian qualification system with the formally recognised qualification of adult educator.

7. Innovation

How is the quality and efficiency of the training that trainers provide being assessed?

Generally, the quality of trainers' work, at least in IVET and as concerns apprentices training, is not formally assessed. Some schools have introduced feedback systems to get information from students and apprentices to assess trainers' work and how they perform.

Generally, only very limited researches about trainers' work is available in Estonia. Some research has been carried out by Hiieväli, Loogma, Karu-Veskioja, Kaikkonen, which covers areas like: the educational and professional background of trainers; duties and tasks of the trainers' position; recognition of trainers; and training needs of trainers. The

aim of the Leonardo da Vinci project QUAL-PRAXIS was to investigate innovative approaches of assessment of practical training (see also Ümarik et al, 2006).

Weaknesses and strengths with respect to the training of trainers

The conclusions of a seminar that took place in Tallinn in November 1998 and involved social partner representatives from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are still relevant:

1. Enterprises that are interested and able to ensure quality practical training should be registered and licensed;
2. To improve the organisation of practical training requirements must be set with regard to the achievements and competencies to be acquired during the practical training period (http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/hrdr/init/est_01.htm#34).

In the strategy and development plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System 2005–2008 the need for evaluation of enterprises as places of practice is pointed out. From the IVET students trainers' viewpoint one of the basic problems of the training job is the poor recognition of trainers' work in enterprises. The poor payment of the trainers and lack of incentives and benefits also are major issues of concern.

8. Examples of good practice

As compared to most other areas of IVET the organisation of practical nurse training and training in the health care sector in general is much more regulated than in most other occupational areas. In many respects the practice-oriented assessment model elaborated and practiced for nurse training can be regarded as a 'good practice' example in Estonia, also in terms of cooperation between medical schools and hospitals and the training of mentors working in hospitals that is organised and supported by schools.

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ESTONIA: Summary of expert interviews

Focus: trainers/supervisors of IVET students in enterprises during their practical training

1. Introduction

What is your role/function/relationship to the work and training of trainers?

Researcher: I am more of a researcher.

Government official: If ministry workers would set requirements for training and start dealing systematically with workplace trainers, I should, to some extent, start working on that as well. I would be a part of the process.

Teacher: Relationship has mostly been based on practical training. Our students attend practical training that is divided into four periods. Before the training starts we make a contract specifying the name of the company trainer, ideas and expectations regarding the training and the obligations of both parties. We have certain partners we can count on. We also have a lot that needs developing. Since students are free to choose their training location, there are many cases where trainers do not always know the potentials, capability and motivation of students. We cannot even be sure that students are at all learning something. Students should choose a work placement recommended by schools where the quality is known.

2. Identify major issues / key challenges in a national perspective

Can you identify 3 major issues or big challenges that in-company trainers in your country face at the moment?

- The **unidentified status of trainers:** Many company trainers do not realise that their professional role is changing as they assume training functions and a key role as a trainers. They do not identify with their role and just do it in addition to performing many other work tasks. That practical training in general is poorly regulated and a lot of participants do not understand its role further contributes to the trainers' role remaining largely unidentified.
- Overall, trainers and training need to **receive more attention**. In some schools, trainers are gathered and get trained, but some schools do not even explain curriculum based goals of practical training to them. By contrast, everyone practically involved in practical training will acknowledge the role of trainer. Trainers assume a very important role and a lot depends on their performance. The outcome and quality of practical training also depends on them.
- The **payment structure for trainers:** They often train people besides their regular work and do not get any extra pay or other benefits.
- **Attractiveness of the trainer position** means that people want to become trainers. In order to achieve this management needs to become aware that training is important and that trainers need to be encouraged and motivated. On the one hand, the motivation of trainers and attractiveness of the training job could be enhanced through a national system of incentives and the recognition of their work and skills. On the other hand, schools can more systematically provide training for trainers and

make the trainer position more attractive through that. Schools could also encourage better communication between school and companies.

- Enhancing the **quality of training and the status of trainers**. Trainers need to be motivated so that their job makes sense to them. Most trainers would probably participate voluntarily in training if available to raise the quality of their work. However, in order to achieve this, trainers need to become aware of their training function and their work needs to be acknowledged. In order to increase trainers' self-awareness of their role, they need to feel that they are doing something valuable and get recognition for that.

In Estonia, all those issues need to be addressed and receive more attention. Very few studies are currently under way to address this matter. Those studies are also rather narrowly targeted and should include many more fields. Most importantly, it needs to be addressed and better understood what the consequences of these problems are: the impact on the economy, education and innovation potentials of enterprises. Practical training in companies is not monitored and nobody has an overview of what is going on and its positive and negative impacts. Because of the labour market situation, quantitatively participation in practical training generally is not a problem. In the tourism sector, for example, there is great demand for trainees, because of lack of workforce. Overall, companies have become more interested and motivated to offer training. But where there is great shortage of workforce trainees are often considered to fill the gap and that is what their training is all about.

3. Discuss in a national perspective common issues that may be of relevance across Europe

- ***IVET is school based:*** Compared to Estonia apprenticeship training is much more established in most other European countries. Vocational skills and knowledge are gained at the workplace and trainers have a more significant role. In Estonia, **most work-related learning is school-based** and skills and competences are predominantly gained in school. Only special skills are gained at the workplace. Also with regards to the formalisation of training the Estonian case is different from most European countries. Some similarities exist between the situation of Estonian trainers and trainers in Denmark, Germany and England.
- ***Qualification and competences of trainers:*** In terms of staff shortages sometimes it is difficult for companies to find adequately qualified trainers. There might potentially be more trainers or employees willing to assume training functions if the circumstances were different. One can assume that most employees who are assigned as trainers are professionals in their respective vocational field (maybe with the exception if a HR manager is assigned as trainer). Typically, trainers are skilled workers working in production, for example, with a considerable amount of professional knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, these trainers lack pedagogical skills and do not know how to pass on their professional knowledge to young trainees and colleagues. Since most vocational training is school based, the focus of such courses lies on gaining and developing social skills, not practical skills. Unless skilled workers are 'naturally born' teachers, they do not have very good social skills.
- ***Aging workforce:*** Guiding and training elderly employees can be identified as a key challenge. Practical training has mostly been reviewed and addressed in the context of initial vocational training and formal education. In fact, this issue is much broader

since everyone needs further training at some stage of his/her working life. The issue of how to train older employees is not being addressed in Estonia.

While demographic changes of an aging full-time trainer workforce may be an issue in some European countries, aging problems with trainers in Estonia do not prevail as trainers only assume training functions occasionally on a part-time basis. Furthermore, it can be assumed that employees are keener to become mentors as they are getting older. They develop an inner motivation to pass on their knowledge, skills and experiences to younger people. Vocational schools often employ older and experienced workers, who can no longer work as hard. This could also become a model for training inside companies. However, elderly trainers need to be supported in this role and up-dated to be able to also pass on modern technology, knowledge and skills. Older employees often are not familiar with recent developments in their field and may teach things that are out-of-date. They should also be supported with proper materials and methods. Support mechanisms need to be established at the national level and through better targeted training courses.

– ***Professionalization of in-company trainers /Enhancing opportunities and motivation for continuing learning***

Professionalization means two things: first, the development of competences and second the development of a professional self-understanding and definition. In Estonia trainers are not supported in their position in the company, the performance of their work tasks and their learning opportunities and opportunities for continuing professional development. Many trainers do not even realise that they are trainers, which limits their motivation and performance potentials.

In order to become a professional trainer in the Estonian context, a trainer would have to move away from his/her vocational specialisation and production to vocational education and become a teacher. This is different to countries where the main way of learning is apprenticeship based. Trainers in these countries can become professional trainers and remain with the company, while in Estonia they would need to move to a vocational school. Teachers have a professional identity. This required move presents quite an obstacle as most skilled workers strongly identify with their vocational expertise. One other obstacle is salary as salaries in companies are much higher than for school teachers.

Apprenticeship pilot projects in Estonia have shown that many trainers do not want to go back to school to study, but prefer to engage in short training courses which only take a few days. Overall, trainers have only very few possibilities for continuing learning, most learning happens randomly. Considering the Estonian labour market situation with increasing work intensification and stress the professionalization of trainers becomes difficult and complicated. Steps towards professionalisation largely depend on support from the companies and as well at the national level. Large companies at least have some resources to foster the professionalisation of their trainers.

Another major obstacle to professionalisation is the lack of a common basis such as common knowledge and experience. All trainers are from different fields with different experiences. This prevents trainers from organising themselves professionally. Consideration has been given to the advantages and disadvantages of establishing the status of professional trainers for trainers in companies. There have been concerns that the professional trainer position would induce a gap between trainers and workers and their respective their skills, knowledge and working life. It was felt that this would create a similar gap like the one between teachers and company workers and that this may overall have a negative impact on the quality of training provide.

- *How do trainers cope with the accelerated pace of innovation?*

Since trainers are company workers they are mostly able to cope with new technologies. However, a significant proportion of trainers also mostly deals with personnel issues and thus do not know that much about technology. On the other hand large parts of Estonian economy and companies are not highly innovative and often use old technology. Thus, we have no reason to worry about trainers coping with new technologies as the technologies used in Estonia are pretty much yesterdays news.

- *How are trainers being prepared to implement **new learning methods**?*

Since trainers are not pedagogically prepared, it would be a real asset if they were familiar with some basic teaching methods. Overall, they do not apply new learning methods, because they are not pedagogically prepared for training and have no knowledge about learning methods, be they old or new. In most cases, company trainers simply give their support to learners, often under quite stressful working conditions. In any case, the field of learning methods requires further research.

- *How are trainers being prepared to manage the **diversification of trainee groups**?*

There is no systematic preparation for this. Trainers with preparation can only be found in schools, not in companies. In Estonian apprenticeship programmes no one really finds out what the student is like. It is possible that through communication between the school trainers and the company trainer information about the students are shared.

- *How and to what extent are trainers organized in **professional bodies/ associations**?*

Trainers in Estonia are not professionally organised, not even most vocational teachers although a professional association for them has recently been established. Company trainers are a very diverse and heterogeneous group which may prevent them from getting organised professionally.

- *How is the **prior learning of trainers being accredited**?*

The prior learning of trainers is not formalised. However, their former work and learning experiences are taken into account by the company when selecting and appointing trainers. Companies do not just make anyone a trainer. In most cases trainers have at least professional experience. Documents and certificates are not important. The companies know their employees, their strengths and weaknesses and most importantly, who is interested in becoming a trainer. However, it also depends on the field and sector. In regulated vocational fields and possibly bigger companies formal documents that prove vocational skills are required. Larger companies would not assign the training job to someone who lacks education, knowledge and training. In tourism, by contrast, it is complete informal and anybody who is available at the moment can be appointed as a trainer.

- **Status and attractiveness of the job:** The EUROTRAINER study showed that the trainer position has no status and is not attractive. Only among peers do colleagues show respect towards trainers. Thus, everything depends on what being a trainer means to a person. A trainer's job may be attractive if it gives personal meaning and a chance to develop personally. For example, somebody may enjoy working with young people and get satisfaction from it, but this is rare. Maybe someone who enjoys working with young people gets satisfaction from it, but this is rare. In certain retail chains being a trainer may give one a chance for career development. The career

aspect is more important in big companies. Maybe someone who enjoys working with young people gets satisfaction from it, but this is rare.

– **Formal regulation / de-regulation**

The trainer job is not regulated. In terms of companies offering training, the only regulation is that practical training needs to be supervised so officially there needs to be a company trainer. Practical training is more regulated in schools. For example, practical training in schools needs to be assessed and the company trainer is part of that process. There are no demands to the work itself. There are more regulations for the practical training itself, but not for the trainer. However, some regulations are being initiated at the moment. For example, it is planned to gather trainers together and talk about training and ask students whether they are satisfied with the practical training they receive and what the weaknesses are. Some assessment will be based on a questionnaire.

– **Recognition: self-recognition / awareness of being a trainer**

A minority of trainers may have some kind of internal motivation to becoming a trainer – they have a mission and are interested in assuming training tasks. They recognise that they have a responsible role. Most trainers, however, see training as an additional task that needs to be done. They do not value it, but regard it as just another part of their everyday work and do not see anything special in it. In large companies the key role of training is somewhat better recognised supporting that the trainers become aware of their role.

– **Recognition: at the policy level (to support trainers)**

The EUROTRAINER revealed that most trainers do not have the training responsibilities in their job description as part of their work tasks. This means that there are no formal guidelines. Also at the national level there is no recognition.

– **Career of trainers (how do people become trainers/ different career pathways)**

Nobody goes to work and becomes a trainer to develop their career. In Estonia, being a trainer does not necessarily mean that you have better career chances.

In terms of career development there are many different models and backgrounds how trainers become trainers. Different patterns exist in small and large companies. A person who is responsible for personnel in a small company trains everybody and this is one model. The other model is trainers who are more like vocational teachers who have some pedagogical and social skills as well. Particularly in bigger companies skilled people are wanted. It is not a formal requirement, but it is good for the company's reputation. Beginners do not become trainers. Overall, people become trainers because of their professional level, communication skills and teaching experience. Supervisors notice when a person is not only good in what they do, but is also a good teacher, probably capable of teaching trainees. If a person is ready to teach then this is a clear message to the supervisor. The worker needs to be open, a good employee and with professional skills.

4. Good practice examples

- **Do you know of any initiatives or approaches that you would identify as a 'good practice example'?**

“I have four years experience in the IT sector and I have not seen any company that deals with trainers systematically. However, most companies were open and gave positive feedback about the idea of addressing training more systematically.”

“Car service companies that want to have a professional and positive work environment in the future cooperate systematically with schools and also provide material support.”

“People, who have been trainees, will make good trainers. In small hotels typically the manager takes care of the trainees himself. This is also a motivation for the trainees. If the practical training experience is positive, trainees usually stay and work in the same company for a longer period of time.”

5. Future trends

How do you see the evolving role of trainers in enterprises?

The trainers' role would become more important if they got more training. Management somewhat acknowledges the training efforts and this has a positive impact.

Companies will probably pay more attention to training because there is a lack of workforce everywhere. The workforce shortage will make employers realise that training is important. Trainees are future employees who are trained at their workplace and thus familiar with the corporate philosophy. Companies will need to hire people who come there for training. They will be more responsible.

At the national level, certificates to acknowledge skills, competences and responsibility would also enhance the trainer role. Some support may be induced through European educational policies and the Lisbon strategy, which recognise the key role of in-company trainers.

If we consider that practical training forms one quarter of the curriculum, much more research on training is needed. For the Estonian case, most principals of vocational schools do not manage the school (or practical training) strategically, but mostly under economic aspects. Much research still needs to be done on this matter.