

**LATVIA**

**Summary**

**Country Report on the Vocational Education and  
Training system, REFERNET Cedefop**

**and**

**Summary report on Vocational Education and  
Training (VET) for learners with Special  
Educational Needs (SEN)**



## CONTENTS

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>1 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM</b> .....   | <b>4</b> |
| 1.1 Definitions.....  | 4        |
| 1.2 Diagram of the education and training system.....   | 5        |
| 1.3 Objectives and priorities of the national policy development areas of VET.....  | 5        |
| 1.4 Institutional and legislative framework for IVET .....  | 7        |
| 1.5 Types of teacher and trainer occupations in VET .....   | 7        |
| 1.6 Systems and mechanisms for the anticipation of skill needs .....  | 7        |
| 1.7 Practices to match VET provision with skill needs .....   | 7        |
| 1.8 Guidance and counselling for learning, career and employment in IVET.....   | 8        |
| 1.9 Funding for initial vocational education and training .....   | 8        |
| 1.10 References .....   | 8        |
| <b>2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</b> .....  | <b>9</b> |
| 2.1 Population .....  | 9        |
| 2.2 Organisation and Provision of VET programmes.....   | 9        |
| 2.2.1 <i>IVET system options for SEN learners: lower and upper secondary levels, apprenticeship training and other youth programmes.</i> .....  | 9        |
| 2.2.2 <i>Different types of educational/VET settings</i> .....  | 9        |
| 2.2.3 <i>The curricula of VET programmes, the assessment procedures, types of qualifications and assessment criteria (e.g. flexibility on curricula composition and individual adaptations, diplomas etc.)</i> .....  | 9        |
| 2.3 VET programmes and employment.....  | 10       |
| 2.3.1 <i>Strategies and practices used to match the local labour market needs with the skills acquired by learners in the course of the VET programmes</i> .....  | 10       |
| 2.4 Data (relating to learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 years old and enrolled in VET programmes in the academic year 2010/2011 and relating to their transition to employment) 11   |          |
| 2.4.1 <i>Data on the number of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 years old who are enrolled in VET programmes, at national and/or local level.</i> .....   | 11       |
| 2.4.2 <i>Data on how many of these learners are enrolled in mainstream VET programmes, how many are enrolled in special units within mainstream VET settings and how many are enrolled in special VET programmes.</i> .....   | 11       |
| 2.4.3 <i>Data on the number and percentage of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 who are enrolled in VET programmes, in comparison with the number and percentage of the general youth population of the same age enrolled in VET programmes, at national and/or local level.</i> ..... | 11       |
| 2.4.4 <i>Brief definition and explanation of “drop out”. Data concerning the drop out rate of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 who are enrolled in VET programmes, in comparison with the drop out rate of the general youth population, at national and/or local level.</i> .....    | 11       |



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|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2.4.5 Data on the transition rate of learners with SEN from VET to employment in comparison with the transition rate of the general youth population from VET to employment at national and/or local level ..... | 11 |
| 2.5 Legislation and policy .....   | 11 |
| 2.5.1 Brief description of existing legislation .....  | 11 |
| 2.5.2 Main objectives and priorities of the national/regional policy relating to VET for learners with SEN and the transition from VET to employment .....   | 12 |
| 2.5.3 Roles and responsibilities within the institutional framework.....   | 12 |
| 2.5.4 The actors involved in improving standards and evaluating the VET programmes on offer for learners with SEN, relating to the job market.....   | 13 |
| 2.6. VET teachers, trainers and other professionals .....  | 13 |
| 2.6.1 Information on the VET staff (teachers, trainers, career counsellors, transition officers etc.) .....  | 13 |
| 2.6.2 Information on the careers/employment guidance and counselling services offered to learners with SEN who are enrolled in VET programmes .....  | 13 |
| 2.7 Funding .....  | 14 |



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## 1 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

### 1.1 Definitions

**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION** (*profesionālā izglībība*) – in the Latvian context the term has the same meaning as stated in the international definition. Education mainly designed to allow participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding necessary for employment in a particular occupation or trade. Successful completion of such programmes leads to a labour-market relevant recognized vocational qualification. Mostly, the term “vocational education” refers to upper-secondary education, while “professional education” is used to refer to higher level education programmes. Students are admitted to VET programmes (ISCED 2A, 2C) without consideration of their previous education but not earlier than in the year in which they turn 15.

**FURTHER EDUCATION** (*tālākizglībība*) – continuation of previously acquired education and professional skill improvement in conformity with the requirements of the specific profession (Education Law, 1998).

**POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION** (*pēcvidējā izglībība*) – in Latvia the programmes (ISCED 4) lie between the upper-secondary and tertiary levels of education, as well.

However, nationally they are qualified as upper-secondary programmes. The further vocational programmes (1-3 years long) and professional improvement programmes (at leads 160 hours long, which may be as a part of qualification) fall in this category. These programmes are oriented only to acquisition of professional knowledge and skills. Educational process and assessment is organised likewise to other upper-secondary education programmes. The students are usually older than those at level 3.

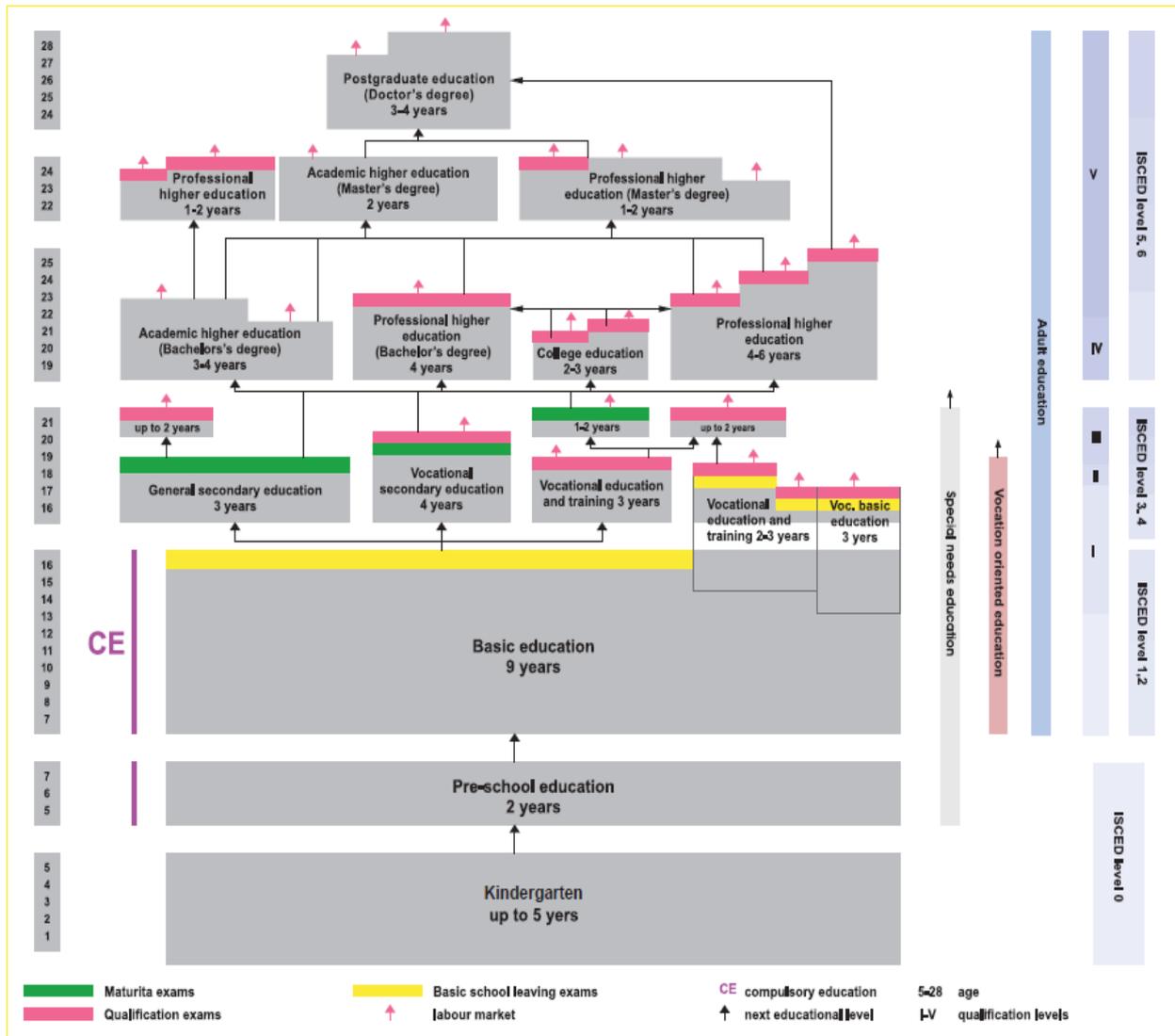
**TRAINING** (*apmācība*) – the term is more applied to separate courses, e.g. professional improvement or further education programmes for adults with vocational and practical orientation, or particular educational processes, while “VET” is referred as “vocational education”.

**INITIAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING** (*sākotnējā profesionālā izglītība*) – formally organised vocational education, mostly at upper-secondary education level, which is similar to the international definition, i.e. education undertaken after full-time compulsory education (mainly 9 years long primary and lower-secondary education) to promote the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to entry an occupation. The management and legal basis of initial vocational education are not separated from continuous vocational education; therefore, frequently initial vocational education is referred as “vocational education”.

**APPRENTICESHIP** (*mācekļu apmācība*) – in the Latvian context, the term has very similar explanation as in the international definition: systematic, long-term training alternating periods in a school or training centre and at the workplace; the apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and may receive remuneration. The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation according to education programmes developed by the Chamber of Crafts and the Ministry of Education and Science. An apprenticeship system exists on a small scale mainly in the crafts sector in traditional professions, e.g. builder, potter, lathe operator, carpenter, and it is regulated by the Law on Crafts (*Par amatniecību*, 1993). Apprenticeship qualifications do not provide access to regulated professions nor do they give access to continue in the formal education and training system.

## 1.2 Diagram of the education and training system

### The Education System in Latvia



## 1.3 Objectives and priorities of the national policy development areas of VET

Current policy strategies follow the objectives from the Guidelines for the Development of Education for the Period of 2007-2013 (Izglītības attīstības pamatnostādnes 2007.-2013. gadam, 2006):

- introduce and finance teacher assistant posts to provide support to pupils (Forms 1-6) with learning difficulties;
- provide additional support for those with low levels of education and training;
- prepare a structural model for higher education programmes with additional available places;
- provide continuous state investment for arranging and modernising education establishments;
- increase the role of social partners in VET.



Priorities in relation with Vocational education teachers (Concept on the Education Development in 2002-2005): raising teachers' salaries and improving teacher training (offer pedagogical education) and improving professional development system. In 2002, Vocational Teacher Occupational Standard was approved and consequently, four universities started implementing Vocational Teacher Education Programmes.

Priorities in relation with anticipation of skills needs and qualifications: defined in the National Development Plan and Development Programmes. The next steps in terms of reviewing the Latvian situation include the implementation of the following planning documents: Long-term Economic Strategy of Latvia for 2001-2030, National Economy Single Strategy for 2004-2030, Common Declaration for Employment Priorities of Latvia 2003 (issued by the government and European Commission), National Action Plan on Employment for 2004, National Development Plan for 2007-2013, The Law on Unemployed and Job Seekers (2002).

The major policy document in vocational education at present is the concept "Raising attractiveness of vocational education and involvement of social partners within vocational education quality assurance" (Profesionālās izglītības pievilcības paaugstināšana un sociālo partneru līdzdalība profesionālās izglītības kvalitātes nodrošināšanā, 2009) developed by the MoES. The Concept aims at outlining solutions for key challenges in vocational education policy and reaching agreement between state and social partners regarding most appropriate solutions for the problems.

In order to gain attractiveness of vocational education it is necessary:

- to ensure flexible offer of vocational education programmes according to short-term labour market demands;
- to structure vocational education programmes into moduls
- to introduce a credit point system;
- to adjust the professional qualification levels to the European Qualification Framework;
- to ensure the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside formal education and training;
- In order to ensure vocational education with the labour market demands it is very important to involve social partners and professional; organisations in development of vocational education content, assessing the quality of education (licensing and accreditation), as well as granting vocational qualifications.

According to the Conception, a group of expert works on a new draft Law for vocational education.

### **The process of VET optimization**

On 6 January 2010 was 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 VET institutions and their distribution in regions (to reduce the number of vocational education establishments from 73 in 2010 to 35 in 2015);

- differentiating the education institutions. Will be established: vocational education competence centres, vocational education institutions specializing in particular area, vocational education institutions providing basic skills;
- improving infrastructure and updating material and technical base
- enabling the effective use of all the resources.

#### 1.4 Institutional and legislative framework for IVET

At present (2012), vocational education system is managed by the following state institutions: **the Cabinet of Ministers** (*Ministru kabinets*), **the Ministry of Education and Science** (*MoES*), **National Centre for Education** (**Valsts izglītības satura centrs**), **State education Quality Service** (**Izglītības kvalitātes valsts dienests**), **National Tripartite Sub-council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment** (*Profesionālās izglītības un nodarbinātības trīspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*)

##### Legislative framework:

The Education Law (*Izglītības likums*, 1991, 1998, 2001) regulates the whole system of education, determines the rights and duties of the state, local governments, public organizations, professional associations, individuals, educational institutions, parents and students, as well as levels and types of education and types of educational institutions.

Vocational Education Law (*Profesionālās izglītības likums* 1999, 2001) sets out the principles for organising, implementing and awarding qualifications both for initial and continuous vocational education. For the first time, the Law recognises an active role for social partners in vocational education. It also states the different pathways for pursuing vocational education, the structure of programmes and the funding principles.

#### 1.5 Types of teacher and trainer occupations in VET

**Teachers in the initial vocational education** system are: teachers of general subjects or of a vocational subject. Practical training is taught by vocational subject VET teachers. According to the Register of Occupational Standards, there is vocational education teacher, teacher of social sciences, teacher, and social teacher and the law only identify one type of teacher and trainer in all the vet system: vocational education teacher. There are two types of programmes depending whether the teacher is training to be a general subject teacher in a VET school or a teacher of a specific vocation.

#### 1.6 Systems and mechanisms for the anticipation of skill needs

Information on skill needs is collected partly, but not systematically, at national level. In the terms of the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualification system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (*Nozaru kvalifikācijas sistēmas izveide un profesionālās izglītības efektivitātes un kvalitātes paaugstināšana*), the research of 14 sectors was conducted to plan education and training provision. In some regions or sectors employers’ surveys are conducted by employment services to identify short-term annual needs.

#### 1.7 Practices to match VET provision with skill needs

Skills needs are taken into account when drafting vocational qualifications through the definition of occupational standards for different professions. Standards are developed by representatives of educational institutions and social partners through working groups organized by the Ministry of Education and Science. Occupational standards are confirmed by the National Tripartite Subcouncil for Cooperation in Vocational Education



and Employment (*Profesionālās izglīšanas un nodarbinātības tīrspusējās sadarbības apakšpadome*) and by the Ministry of Education and Science (*Izglīšanas un zinātnes ministrija*). Every 5 years standards are assessed and updated by education providers, employers, students, government organisations, quality assurance agencies and external experts. Representatives of the MoES and other ministries, the Latvian Union of Local Governments, the Employers Confederation, non-governmental field organizations, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions and vocational education providers take part in developing occupational standards.

Necessary occupational knowledge, skills and competences are researched in 12 economic sectors in terms the ESF project “Development of sectoral qualifications system and increasing the efficiency and quality of vocational education” (2010-2013). The aim of project is improving vocational education quality and efficiency regarding the need of economic sectors, creating also sectoral qualifications system. The project supports several activities: the establishment and activities of Sectoral Experts Councils; research of competences and skills in economic sectors for making education demand; development of sectoral qualifications system; development or improvement of sectoral occupational standards for basic professions; development of the relevant professions and basic requirements for specialization qualifications; introduction of modular system in the development or improvement of vocational education programmes for acquiring a basic profession, relevant profession or specialization including continuing vocational education programmes; improving examination; piloting validation and recognition system of knowledge, skills and competence acquired outside formal education.

### **1.8 Guidance and counselling for learning, career and employment in IVET**

The White Paper on the Improvement of the Career Guidance System (approved in 2006) has been developed by the Ministry of Welfare in cooperation with three other ministries. The National Forum (NF) on guidance and counselling was established in 2007 involving the policy makers from relevant ministries, guidance providers, social partners and clients.

Ministry implemented the ESF National programme project “Fostering the Implementation of Vocational Guidance Provision and Careers Education in the Educational Sector” (2005-2007) with the objective to improve accessibility and quality of careers education at educational institutions of all types and levels. In schools, the career education enters under the responsibility of class teacher.

### **1.9 Funding for initial vocational education and training**

Initial vocational education financing is determined by the *Education Law (Izglīšanas likums, 1998)*, the *Vocational Education Law (Profesionālās izglīšanas likums, 1999)*, the *Crafts Law (1993)* and regulations of the Cabinet (*Ministru Kabineta Noteikumi*), as well as by statutes of certain vocational education institutions. Subsidies come from the state general budget, local governments and private sources. Amount of state subsidies is determined by the Cabinet of Ministers in conformity with number of persons in education and minimal educational cost per one learner. VET is free for full-time students at institutions operated by the state or local governments. Students also receive a grant determined by the Cabinet of Ministers.

### **1.10 References**

Kinta, G., and Ramina, B (2011) and **not published yet** (2012): Latvia. VET in Europe. Country Report within the Framework of ReferNet Latvia. Thessaloniki: Cedefop.



## 2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

### 2.1 Population

The amendments to the Law on General Education, which came into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2011, state that 'special needs' is the need for appropriate support and rehabilitation, providing learners with the opportunity to complete educational programmes in accordance with their health, abilities and level of development.

This definition relates to learners between the ages of 14 and 25.

### 2.2 Organisation and Provision of VET programmes

*2.2.1 IVET system options for SEN learners: lower and upper secondary levels, apprenticeship training and other youth programmes.*

Following completion of compulsory education, learners with SEN can continue their education and acquire the chosen vocational qualification, depending on their health condition:

- Attending vocational school, where learners with SEN are included in mainstream VET courses
- Attending vocational classes in a special school.

*2.2.2 Different types of educational/VET settings*

- a) Special VET units attended by learners with SEN within mainstream educational/VET settings,
- b) Special educational/VET settings addressed to learners with SEN.
- c) Others

a) There are 39 vocational schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science, where learners with SEN (with visual impairments, hearing impairments, limited movement and other kinds of special needs) are integrated into mainstream VET courses.

b) The Social integration State Agency (under the authority of the Ministry of Welfare) consists of Vocational Secondary school and College. The Social integration State Agency offers professional adequacy and job simulation tests. After passing them, learner may, depending on the test results, their previous education and their health, choose VET training programmes (basic vocational, vocational secondary (upper secondary) and college level training programmes. Learners with SEN receive psycho-social assistance to assist them in acquiring VET programmes. The Social integration State Agency provides graduates with assistance in placement and job finding.

c) Vocational classes in special basic (compulsory) school.

*2.2.3 The curricula of VET programmes, the assessment procedures, types of qualifications and assessment criteria (e.g. flexibility on curricula composition and individual adaptations, diplomas etc.)*

The National Standard of Vocational Education and the Occupational Standards determine the curriculum content of vocational education programmes.

There are vocational qualifications, in which learners with SEN carry out very simple tasks under supervision. These lead to National Qualification Level 1 (EQF level 3). The main qualifications are the following:



baker assistant, cook assistant, carpenter assistant, repairer, fitter assistant, stitcher, dressmaker assistant, agricultural worker assistant, book repairer, construction worker, hotel chambermaid, domestic servant, shoemaker assistant, shop worker. National Level 1 (EQF level 3) – theoretical and practical training that prepares students for performing simple tasks in a certain area of practical activity.

In the 2009/2010 academic year, 5 new sample Basic Vocational education programmes for learners with intellectual disabilities (disabilities of mental development) were drawn up by the National Centre for Education - an institution under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science. The Sample programmes are for the following qualifications: Carpenter assistant, Hotel chambermaid, Domestic servant, Shoemaker assistant, Shopping hall worker. The programmes are adapted for learners with SEN. The duration of these programmes is 2 years (it is only 1 year for non-disabled learners). All programmes include practical training and professional subjects such as: technology studies, materials studies, job safety and health protection studies, environment protection, native language and communication, maths for the profession, professional foreign language and computer studies. The ratio of theory to practice is 35:65.

Both Occupational Standards and sample curricula are developed in cooperation with professional associations representing different economic sectors. Based on the relevant standards and sample programmes, schools develop their own training programmes in accordance with the needs of the local labour market.

All graduates who have passed the professional qualification examination receive a certificate of basic education and National qualification Level 1 (EQF3). The students with a certificate in basic vocational education are eligible to apply for further studies at secondary education.

In order to receive the final document - Certificate of vocational education (without rights to enter Higher education), which leads to National Qualification Level 2 (EQF 4) learners have to pass a professional qualification examination. In order to receive the diploma of vocational secondary education (with the right to enter Higher Education), which leads to National Qualification Level 3 (EQF4) learners have to pass 4 centralised examinations in academic subjects and professional qualification examination.

The final qualification examinations, which conclude the vocational education programmes and consist of theoretical and practical parts, are drafted in line with occupational standards. Representatives from relevant sectoral organisations (employers, workers) are represented in the examination commission.

## **2.3 VET programmes and employment**

### *2.3.1 Strategies and practices used to match the local labour market needs with the skills acquired by learners in the course of the VET programmes*

Skills needs are taken into account when drafting vocational qualifications, through the definition of occupational standards for different professions. Standards are developed by representatives of social partners and educational institutions and are confirmed by the National Tripartite Sub-Council for Cooperation in Vocational Education and Employment. All programmes are created based on the occupational standards to ensure the acquisition of all the knowledge, skills and professional competence mentioned in the occupational standards.



## **2.4 Data (relating to learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 years old and enrolled in VET programmes in the academic year 2010/2011 and relating to their transition to employment)**

*2.4.1 Data on the number of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 years old who are enrolled in VET programmes, at national and/or local level.*

There is no data about the number of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 years old who are enrolled in VET programmes at national level.

*2.4.2 Data on how many of these learners are enrolled in mainstream VET programmes, how many are enrolled in special units within mainstream VET settings and how many are enrolled in special VET programmes.*

In the 2011/2012 academic year, 299 learners with SEN were enrolled in mainstream VET programmes.

Source: All data for questions 7 – 8 is taken from the statistics report of the Ministry of Education and Science. The data is available on the website: [www.izm.gov.lv](http://www.izm.gov.lv)

In the academic year 2010/2011, there were 935 learners with intellectual disabilities in VET programmes in special schools.

*2.4.3 Data on the number and percentage of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 who are enrolled in VET programmes, in comparison with the number and percentage of the general youth population of the same age enrolled in VET programmes, at national and/or local level*

Number of VET learners – 35767 (including those with SEN) at national level.

Number of VET learners with SEN enrolled in mainstream VET programmes – 1234.

3% of all learners in VET were learners with SEN.

Number of compulsory and secondary school aged learners (including those with SEN) at national level – 216307.

Source: Statistical data of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The data is available on the website: [www.izm.gov.lv](http://www.izm.gov.lv)

*2.4.4 Brief definition and explanation of “drop out”. Data concerning the drop out rate of learners with SEN aged between 14 and 25 who are enrolled in VET programmes, in comparison with the drop out rate of the general youth population, at national and/or local level.*

No data is available.

*2.4.5 Data on the transition rate of learners with SEN from VET to employment in comparison with the transition rate of the general youth population from VET to employment at national and/or local level*

No data is available.

## **2.5 Legislation and policy**

### *2.5.1 Brief description of existing legislation*

The Law on Education adopted in 1998 identifies special education as general and professional education adapted for persons with special needs and health problems, or with special needs. Chapter 8 of this Law defines the implementation of educational programmes of special education. The provision of educational services for children with



special needs and the procedures of identification of special needs are defined in the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers.

The official definition of special needs in Latvia is contained in the amendments to the Law on General Education. The amendments came into force on 3 August 2011. 'Special needs' is the need for appropriate support and rehabilitation, providing learners with the opportunity to complete educational programmes in accordance with their health, abilities and level of development. There are two types of pedagogical medical commissions – the State Pedagogical Medical Commission (SPMC), formed by the Ministry of Education and Science, and Municipal Pedagogical Medical Commissions, formed by district or town municipalities. The commissions consist of different specialists – special teachers, psychologists, doctors and social workers. They assess different aspects of a child's performance.

The competence of the SPMC and municipal commissions is defined in the Regulations issued by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The commissions can identify the following special educational needs:

- learning disabilities (difficulties);
- hearing impairments;
- visual impairments;
- physical disabilities;
- language impairments;
- intellectual disabilities (disabilities of mental development), ;
- mental health disorders;
- severe and multiple disabilities
- chronic illnesses.

Learners with disabilities who enter VET programmes within mainstream settings are not obliged to inform the school about his/her disability. The school must admit the student regardless of whether he/she has a disability.

The students who are admitted into programmes in special schools for learners with intellectual disabilities must have a statement from a pedagogical medical commission.

### *2.5.2 Main objectives and priorities of the national/regional policy relating to VET for learners with SEN and the transition from VET to employment*

In the national programme "Equal Opportunities for All", it is stated that young people with disabilities should have opportunities to acquire education in accordance with their abilities, health and level of development. They should be supported in becoming responsible adults and active citizens.

### *2.5.3 Roles and responsibilities within the institutional framework*

The National Board of Persons with Disabilities comprises five ministries – Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Regional Development and Municipalities, as well NGOs for persons with disabilities and other public organisations. The Board initiates policy developments relating to young people with disabilities. The ministries have to agree on all regulations that are developed in this field.



Regional governments may take the initiative to open or close any educational programmes in any schools in their territory. They can financially support students in VET programmes and provide transport and accommodation fees for hostels if necessary. After a student completes the programme, the local government can assist in finding a workplace and make a grant available.

Social partners are usually involved in specific vocational education schools and can provide training places, pay grants and otherwise support students financially.

#### *2.5.4 The actors involved in improving standards and evaluating the VET programmes on offer for learners with SEN, relating to the job market*

The Occupational Standards and Vocational education curricula are developed in cooperation with the professional associations representing different economic sectors.

## **2.6. VET teachers, trainers and other professionals**

### *2.6.1 Information on the VET staff (teachers, trainers, career counsellors, transition officers etc.)*

With regard to the demands of vocational education, teacher education and qualification, the amendments to the Vocational Education Law (in force since January 2004) stipulate that all vocational education teachers are required to acquire a teacher (pedagogical) qualification. More specifically, these issues are outlined in the Cabinet Regulations on Demands for Necessary Teacher Education and Professional Qualifications (2000, 2010).

At present, all vocational education teachers must fulfil one of the following criteria:

- have vocational upper-secondary education or a master crafts level qualification awarded by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, as well as teacher education for basic education level;
- have professional higher education and teacher education or higher education acquired through programmes: 1) leading to a professional qualification in the relevant field if teacher practical training is included in the programme, or teacher work experience of six years, or the course of pedagogy or psychology; or 2) leading to a master's or doctor's degree in pedagogy or a relevant field, for secondary education level;
- have vocational upper-secondary education or a master crafts level qualification awarded by the Latvian Chamber of Crafts and higher teacher education (in vocational education programmes or relevant subjects and practical training of vocational secondary education programmes – teacher education) – for secondary education level.

According to the latest amendments to these regulations (September 2010), vocational education teachers without a pedagogical qualification need to acquire 72 hours of long pedagogy courses in a Higher Education Establishment instead of 320 hours of long courses of various themes arranged in different institutions.

### *2.6.2 Information on the careers/employment guidance and counselling services offered to learners with SEN who are enrolled in VET programmes*

The Social integration State Agency offers professional career counselling and employment guidance through professional adequacy and job simulation tests for all persons with SEN in Latvia. The Agency has a network of 7 support centres (Cirava, Jelgava, Cesis, Barkava, Viesite, Rezekne and Daugavpils) which are located in each of 4



Latvian regions. The Agency collects information about job places and investigates the regional labour market.

There are no career counsellors in Special school and Vocational educational establishments.

In Special schools, social workers are used to help learners in career assessment by organising the following activities:

- visits to job places
- meetings with employers from the State Employment Agency
- career consultation
- visits to day centres
- cooperation with parents

## **2.7 Funding**

The financing of education institutions depends on the ownership of these institutions. There are three types of education institutions – state, municipal and private. The state owned institutions are funded by the state budget, in accordance with the Law on the State Budget for a particular year.

Municipal education institutions (the majority of Special school) receive funding from two main sources – the local budget (maintenance) and the state budget (teacher salaries and social taxes).

Private education institutions are funded by their founders. The state and municipalities share the costs (teacher salaries and social taxes) of these institutions if the curriculum they provide is licensed by the Ministry of Education and Science.

The majority of vocational school is state-owned; therefore, the national budget is the main source of funding. Subsidies for vocational education also come from local governments and private sources. State subsidies are determined by the Cabinet of Ministers regarding the numbers of students and the relevant per capita costs.

Education institutions (vocational, general and special schools) may receive additional funding in the form of donations, provision of paid services and other incomes, which have to be used for institution development, purchasing learning aids and equipment, stimulating students materially and paying teachers implementing vocational basic and vocational secondary programmes.

Learners with SEN who are integrated into mainstream VET programmes have the opportunity to receive scholarships in initial vocational education, as provided for by the Cabinet Regulations on Scholarships.

Learners in vocational classes in Special School have free school meals and accommodation.