

## *Foreword*

Estonia has experienced extensive reform in its vocational education and training (VET) system in recent years. As a result, Estonia's VET system is very well-designed: the engagement of employers is strong, in particular through a system of occupational qualification and standards, which underpins the development of programmes. About 25% of students at the upper secondary level are enrolled in a vocational programme, delivered by 30 different VET providers. There is a relatively new apprenticeship system that is growing quickly. Educational and labour market outcomes are also good: young Estonians do extremely well on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), and unemployment rates are very low. Despite Estonia's efforts in reforming their VET system, however, some concerns remain. This OECD review assesses both the strengths of the Estonian VET system and the challenges it faces, making proposals for how those challenges might be addressed.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Estonian VET reform and the remaining challenges. Compared to the general education route offered by upper secondary selective institutions and higher education institutions, VET is perceived as low social status. In order to be more attractive, it needs to improve its offer to those who wish to pursue higher level technical skills and allow progression into further learning opportunities. Dropout rates remain high and few young people choose the apprenticeship route.

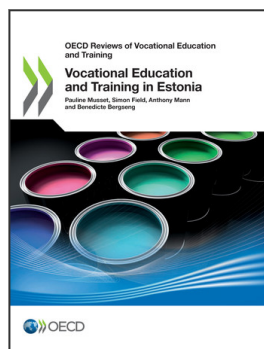
Chapter 2 recommends the expansion of work-based learning within VET programmes and youth apprenticeships, and the separation of upper secondary institutions from basic schools, to remove the risks of bias in the decisions of students on whether to pursue general education or VET. It also proposes measures to tackle dropout, including financial incentives to institutions and targeted support in numeracy and literacy. Chapter 3 recommends improving pathways between VET and other programmes, including those delivered by higher education institutions, and further action to enhance equity in provision in order to ensure fair access to post-secondary and higher education by gender, region and mother tongue. These approaches should be designed to attract into VET more students with good school performance, and raise the status of VET in general. Chapter 4 recommends improving career guidance, making some elements of it mandatory before grade 9, for all schools and all students.

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