



Erasmus+



# International Dimension in the Strategies and Daily Life of Estonian Vocational Schools

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Different forms of international co-operation have been taking place in Estonian vocational schools since the late 1990s, mainly with the support of various European programmes (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci, Lifelong Learning Programme, Erasmus+, etc.). Systematic targeting and strategic planning of international cooperation at the institutional level has begun in recent years. Since 2014, the European Commission has followed the example of higher education and created the Erasmus+ Mobility Charter in vocational education. The aim of the VET Mobility Charter is to accredit and recognise the VET institutions that have been successful in organising quality mobility for their students and employees as well as to encourage the development of international cooperation strategies. Therefore, the Mobility Charter has been the main impetus for the development of internationalisation strategies for the vocational schools in Estonia.

15 Estonian VET providers out of 42 submitted applications for the Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter in 2015/2016. The Charter has been issued to 7 schools.

The aim of the current survey was to map the goals of internationalisation in the strategies of VET providers that have submitted an application for the Erasmus+ Mobility Charter, in order to find out how the implementation of strategies is organised and what are the developments in the daily life of VET providers regarding the internationalisation process.

The analysis was done in three stages. In the first stage (February 2017), a content analysis of the internationalisation strategies and development plans of the abovementioned 15 VET providers was carried out. The aim was to map the main topics covered in the strategies (Table 1).

Table 1. Topics covered in the strategies of VET providers

Topic	Number of strategies
Teachers' and students' mobility	15
Staff development	15
Partnership development	15
Development of the quality of VET	15
Increasing international awareness and communication	12
Study process development	11
Curriculum development	9
Inclusion and equality	9
Knowledge sharing with other countries	4

In the second stage (March – April 2017), an online survey was carried out in all 15 schools. In the third stage (May – June 2017), a case analysis took place. The case analysis provided additional information about the state of play in the organisations. Five sample schools were selected to be interviewed. In the second and third stage of the survey, the following topics were covered:

- the process of developing an internationalisation strategy
- students' participation in international activities
- staff (incl. teachers') participation in international activities
- the main developments in schools regarding internationalisation
- developing international awareness and communication
- sharing professional expertise outside Estonia



## THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS

### **The schools consider the internationalisation of vocational education and training important.**

A variety of opportunities is available for VET schools by the European Commission and the Nordic Council of Ministers (the Erasmus+ and Nordplus programmes, etc.) for participating in international cooperation and mobility projects. About 90% of the sample schools participated in at least two programmes and 40% of the schools in at least three programmes that support international cooperation. Participation in international cooperation (incl. the mobility of teachers and students) is considered as one of the criteria in the accreditation of study programme groups. The five schools that were

interviewed emphasised that the development of a national internationalisation strategy would ensure a more systematic approach in the internationalisation of vocational education and training in general.

### **The analysis of internationalisation strategies showed that the quality of the strategies varies across schools.**

In some cases, the formulation of goals was too general; and the priority fields as well as activities were not specified. Therefore, the uniqueness and special features of the schools were not clearly highlighted.

### **Most of the internationalisation strategies of VET schools are linked to the main national education strategy documents, al-**



**though there are fewer references to sectoral or regional objectives.**

In their internationalisation strategies, the VET schools mainly considered the goals set in the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, in the Vocational Education Programme 2016-2019, and in the development plans of the schools. At the same time, only half of the schools linked their internationalisation strategies with the sectoral goals and one third of the schools with regional goals.

**It is positive that a variety of staff was involved in compiling the internationalisation strategy; nevertheless, participation of the local employers in the strategy process was not mentioned.**

Different employees responsible for international activities at the school,

such as the management, the development manager/project manager, the (lead) teachers, and in half of the schools also the students were involved in the strategy development process. The involvement of employers in the process was not mentioned, although 73% of the schools pointed out employers as important partners in implementing the internationalisation strategy.

**The goals of the internationalisation strategy are evaluated on a regular basis in 93% of the VET schools.**

About half of the schools identified the evaluation of their goals in their internationalisation strategies. However, it is not specified how the goals will be evaluated and how the results will be taken into account in future activities. Regular evaluation



of the goals provides an opportunity to map the existing obstacles in the implementation of the internationalisation strategies and to update them.

**Increasing mobility is one of the crucial goals in the strategies, but also the obstacles were revealed in the survey.**

The goals related to the mobility activities were set in the strategy documents by all schools. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that the main obstacle in increasing the number of mobile students is the growing percentage of adult students who are not able to go on mobilities due to other obligations. The heavy workload of the staff responsible for the organisation of the mobility activities can also be an obstacle.

**The students are involved in various international activities; and there are measures implemented to support them.**

In addition to mobilities, the students are involved in the hosting of foreign students; and they also participate in international events (incl. skills competitions). All schools provide additional language training courses to their students. In 93% of the schools, a flexible arrangement of studies, counselling, and cultural preparation courses are made available to mobile students as supportive measures.

**87% of the VET schools confirmed that the interest of teachers to participate in international activities has increased; and almost one third of the staff is involved. Several measures are implemented to support teachers' participation in international work.**

All schools enable a flexible work arrangement, while 87% of the schools provide counselling to the mobility participants. Additional foreign language courses are provided by 73% of the schools and cultural preparation courses by 67% of the schools. Although most schools provide additional foreign language courses, the insufficient foreign language skills of the teachers were considered by half of the schools as one of the problems in implementing the internationalisation strategy.

**Participation in international work has supported curriculum development in VET schools.**

Over the past three years, new curricula have been created and implemented by one third of the schools; and nearly two thirds of the schools have changed the learning outcomes and structure of the existing curriculum modules as a result of international cooperation.

**International cooperation has become a part of the training and development process.**

The survey revealed that over the

past three years, the majority of schools have diversified their teaching methods; have developed and/or introduced modern, interactive teaching materials for learners; and updated the learning environment as a result of international work. 80% of the schools involve foreign teachers and trainers in the teaching process – for example, foreign teachers who have come to Estonia give lessons and carry out master classes / practical trainings for a short period. 80% of the schools surveyed are implementing ECVET principles. In order to ensure the quality of the training and development process, 67% of the schools are following EQAVET principles as a result of their participation in international activities.

**The international awareness of VET schools has increased over the past three years.**

80% of the schools pointed out that it is possible to find information about their school in a foreign language on the school's website. The printed/electronic information materials were mentioned as the second most important communication channel by 73% of the schools. Only 33% of the schools used Facebook as a communication channel in a foreign language. There is room for improvement in using the opportunities and channels of the information society

(e.g., the school website, Facebook, etc.) more actively to introduce the schools' international goals and activities.

**Half of the VET schools intend to share their professional expertise outside Estonia; and the majority of the schools confirmed that they have teachers capable of teaching their subject in a foreign language.**

The survey revealed that 53% of the schools plan to share their professional expertise outside Estonia (including in third countries) within the next three years.

Half of the schools have planned providing study programmes in foreign languages in their internationalisation strategies. Currently, only one school has a curriculum for foreign students. The survey reveals that there are about 20-30% of vocational teachers in half of the schools who are able to teach their subject in Russian and about 10-20% of vocational teachers who are able to teach their subject in English. However, based on these data, it is not possible to conclude whether the schools are ready to provide a study programme in a foreign language; and, therefore, further research is needed.