



## **Overview of modularisation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) curricula in Estonia**

### **Modularisation: general framework**

Reformation of Estonian VET began in the early 90s, right after Estonia regained independence.

Central problem with Estonian VET reformation has always been curricula development. Many international projects have been carried out, in order to develop modern curricula. Many experts and specialist from Estonia, Finland, Denmark, Ireland and other countries were included in the process. Also, many VET institutions were included. At the same time, creation of national curricula management system began. First VET curricula that were created in cooperation with Irish experts were implemented in 1997. Estonian curricula index was established in 1998. Curricula were encoded based on UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED.

In 1999 first VET standards were acknowledged by Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Estonian VET act (19.12.2000) enacts general framework for elaboration of VET qualification standards and requirements for acquiring these standards.

Estonian VET curricula creation began in the end of 1990s.

Since 2002, development of VET curricula has been responsibility of Estonian National Examination and Qualification Centre.

Centre´s main tasks regarding VET include: coordination of creation and development of national VET curricula, VET curricula implementation, including teacher consultations.

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Curricula fields and groups are specified according to ISCED 97 standard. All Estonian VET institutions use module curricula.

In 2006, with directive of Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (02.08.06 and 24.11.06) 24 curricula councils were created. Councils advise the Ministry and Estonian National Examination and Qualification Centre about VET curricula, creation of learning materials and VET teachers' training. Councils' main task is to support development and implementation of national VET curricula and see to it that all related goals are achieved. Council members are representatives of VET institutions, other educational institutions, employers and other related associations.

In 2006 Estonian Government enacted VET standards that state all requirements for basic and secondary VET education.

Estonian VET institutions provide:

1. vocational education pre-training (basic introduction of vocational education in basic and secondary school curricula);
2. vocational education in basic and secondary schools (15-40 study weeks);
3. vocational education for persons without basic education to whom schooling obligation no longer applies (20-100 study weeks);
4. vocational education after basic education (40-100 study weeks);
5. Secondary vocational education (at least 120 study weeks, including 40 study weeks of general education subjects. Vocational education is 50% of curricula);
6. Vocational education after secondary education (20-100 study weeks).

Workplace learning and apprentice training were first implemented in Estonia as project based learning forms – PHARE 2 pilot project in 2004-2005 and ESF project since 2006. Vocational education has been a general learning form since 2007. Vocational education is based on a contract between learner, school and employer used since 2007.



**National VET curriculum** determines VET goals, tasks, requirements for starting and finishing studies, curriculum modules and their capacity. It gives a short description of different possibilities, conditions and specialising possibilities. National curriculum is based on VET demands stated in VET standard.

VET institutions compile a curriculum for every VET field, basing it on national VET standards and national curriculum and considering different learning forms.

**School curriculum** is registered in Estonian Education Information System. Capacity of studies is calculated in study weeks. Basic education subjects are a separate part of secondary VET curriculum.

VET curricula are based on basic education curricula. Capacity of basic education subjects is at least 40 study weeks. That includes 32 (33) study weeks of compulsory basic education subjects and 8 (7) study weeks of vocational education subjects that support basic education subjects.

School curriculum consists of general part, national curriculum stated general and basic skills modules and by selection study modules. School curriculum sets goals for general, basic and selective subjects, learning contents, results and module assessment principles.

Vocational education content in curriculum is presented in modules. **Module** is a result oriented contents unit of curriculum that states vocational education knowledge, skills and attitudes. Module contains one or several subjects or themes. Module capacity depends on module goals and contents. Capacity is always a whole number. Minimum capacity is one study week. One study week equals 40 hours of studying.

There are general, basic and elective subject modules. General subject modules state common skills and knowledge of different study fields. Basic study modules state skills and knowledge



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necessary for vocational or professional field. General and basic study modules include the amount of basic education subjects necessary for acquiring vocational field or speciality. Elective studies modules state skills and knowledge that support and expand vocational education skills or are connected to additional qualification. Elective modules can form 5-30% of curriculum.

Studies are carried out as lectures, practical training and independent studies. Independent studies form at least 10% of total studies. Practical training forms about 25% and practical studies 25% of the whole study capacity.

Curricula are divided into study fields, streams and curricula groups based on ISCED 97 standards. National curricula are based on curricula groups.

At the moment, project “Development of VET institutions’ curricula” is being carried out. Project is supported by Estonian National Examination and Qualification Centre and EU Structural fund measure 1.1.

Main goal of the project is to develop modules of vocational education fields, to compile manuals for implementation of curricula and to train vocational education teachers. During the project, following activities are carried out: putting together work groups and national network of specialists, development of basic skills and knowledge, methods and manuals in order to implement modules, training of vocational education teachers. Goal of the project is to bring curricula into accordance with labour market needs and even out vocational education content.

Schools have already used vocational education curricula contents in their curricula. In the beginning of 2007 Estonian Ministry of Education and Research imposed 5 national VET curricula. School has to bring their curricula into accordance with national curricula within 6 months time.



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One of the goals of VET development plan for 2005-2008 is to develop and systemise curricula system. Both national and schools curricula is module study based. Today's curricula allow to acquire necessary general and basic skills and specialising in frames of curriculum.

### **Modularisation in VET: example of Kuressaare Vocational School**

Kuressaare Vocational School is a vocational education centre of Saare county. The school has over 1000 students in basic or secondary vocational education study and 500 students in continuous learning or retraining. School offers a variety of vocational education possibilities regarding region's needs. In initial vocational education studies are carried out in 3 field departments. The school has 18 curricula for secondary vocational education, 14 curricula for vocational education after secondary education and 15 curricula for workplace learning. All curricula that are implemented at school and registered in EEIS are module curricula in accordance with national VET standards.

Curricula development at school is responsibility of head of department, but also teachers and employers of the school are included in the process.

Kuressaare Vocational School has participated in national and international VET curricula development programs since 1991.

Among these: DEVS (*The Danish Development of the Estonian Vocational Education System*) 1993-1995, Phare VET reformation program 1995-1998 etc. Kuressaare Vocational School has cooperated with several partner schools in Finland. At the moment, Kuressaare Vocational School is represented in national curricula councils and work groups.

Although all curricula implemented at Kuressaare Vocational School are module based and in accordance with curricula models, there are many differences in study organisation. On one hand, there are many different curricula (37), but on the other hand, limited resources set barriers for better implementation of module study. There are also differences in preparation of teachers. Module contents and capacities differ. From the point of view of organising



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studies, it is easier if each module is associated with one subject and one teacher. In that case it is not much different from subject centric studies. The best examples of module based study implementation are in social welfare and food and beverage fields.

In **social welfare** field modules are implemented and working. Leading teachers Sirje Pree and Kai Rannastu have been doing development work since 1994. There are 3 curricula in social welfare: social welfare (80 study weeks), child welfare (40 study weeks) and adult welfare (40 study weeks). Studies can be organised in a very flexible way because 90% of the first and second year studies coincides with child welfare and adult welfare studies. Theme modules are: children, disabled children, adolescents (child welfare curricula) and elderly, disabled adults, persona development (adult welfare curriculum). These modules are consistent and have been developed using most suitable methods. Methods consist of theoretical studies, practical studies and practical training. Students can start their studies either with child welfare curriculum or adult welfare curriculum. They can study welfare from “birth till death” or “death till birth”. After completing both curricula, they have an opportunity to continue with social welfare studies. Considering that most students have previous work experience in their study field, this kind of learning form is ideal for them. It allows them make different choices.

To make sure that school curriculum is in accordance with national curricula, school had to make some changes in their curriculum.

There have been some problems with general module grade on students' certificates. Grade is not very informational for employers that do not know the curriculum contents.

Very important part of working in welfare is first aid class. With general grade, grade of first aid class is not showed on certificate, one can only see grade of working environment.



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Years of development of social welfare curriculum has really paid off-students find curriculum attractive and it is in accordance with employers' expectations. This is known because of positive feedback from post graduates and employers.

Curriculum development is a constant process and the key is dedicated leaders and teamwork.

In food and beverage department leading teachers Eeve Kärblane, Eve Holsmer and Õile Aavik and head of department Maret Õunpuu have been developing curricula for more than 10 years.

They also have partners from other parts of Estonia and other European countries.

The first curriculum in this field was that of food service. It was developed during Phare VET Reformation project in 1995-1998. This curriculum was later used as an example for national curriculum. Chef and hospitality curricula have been used for two years. They are constantly improved, experimented and school is always looking for ways to get better results.

Skills based modules can be obtained all at once or divided into different parts during one study year. When students complete one module, module assessment takes place. It is done by module "round table". All teachers that were part of the process assess students. They use different methods, mostly tests, but also demonstrations of skills and knowledge and study portfolios. Kuressaare Vocational School is a pilot school in Estonia in hospitality field. Teachers of that field have participated in national curriculum development.

Teacher cooperation and coordination during implementation of curriculum is extremely important.

In hospitality, students take specialized language classes. Synergy in teachers' cooperation influences studies positively. Module curricula have proved their quality, but there is also need for more improvements. As the head of department says: "The more you do it, the more



you understand that this is the right way”.

Graduated students are valued and demanded in labour market.

In workplace learning, module curricula have been used since 2005. Curricula conception have been modified and developed and current module curricula are mostly subject modules. School was part of Phare 2 program pilot project, wherein curricula compilation and implementation was consulted by experts from Finland, Holland and Ireland. In these countries there is a lot of experience in organising workplace learning. In Kuressaare Vocational School workplace learning is carried out in sales assistant ´s, waiter ´s, hospitality worker ´s, mason ´s and finisher-painter ´s subjects. Capacity of the studies is 10 study weeks. One third of that is carried out at school and two thirds at the workplace. This study form is characterised by constant cooperation between school and employer. For example – theoretical studies are assessed by school and employer.

Limitations in implementing module studies in Kuressaare Vocational School are due to:

- a) Homogenised study administration (schedules, spaces etc) that does not always allow the best chronological order;
- b) Contradiction with study information database, e-school (e-journals) does not support administration of module studies.
- c) Teachers´ lack of cooperation and readiness to implement module studies.

Dedicated leaders are the key factor in implementation and development of module curricula. Key factors are also correct planning, organising and teachers ´ cooperation. There is a national legal framework, creating and implementing of national curricula is being done constantly. This creates better base for implementing module study also in schools.





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Estonian National Examination and Qualification Centre [www.ekk.edu.ee](http://www.ekk.edu.ee)

Ministry of Education and Research [www.hm.ee](http://www.hm.ee)

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Interviews conducted at Kuressaare Vocational School 13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> of August 2007:

Piret Pihel, head of department of economics

Kaie Kesküla, head of department of art & handicraft (until June 2007)

Maret Õunpuu, head of department of service studies

Kai Rannastu, vocational teacher of social welfare studies Sirje Pree

Ave Paaskivi, project leader of workplace learning