

Achieving the Lisbon Goal: The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems

Country Report: Latvia¹

Edited by: Philipp Grollmann and Klaus Ruth (ITB, University of Bremen)

This report is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: **Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET**, prepared by the **Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission**. This report is not intended as an official view. But rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET systems in Europe.



¹ This report is based on an expertise submitted by Ilze Trapenciere, University of Latvia in Riga, and available literature as well as supporting documents gained through the ETF, Torino.

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Theme 1: Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon

1. Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET)

The main objective of vocational education and training is to create opportunities for the population to acquire skills and knowledge which meet labour market requirements and which improve competitiveness in changing socio-economic conditions.

The government's *priorities* in vocational education development are:

- establishment of a centralised examination system in vocational education;
- improvement of the administrative system for training;
- strengthening of central support institutions for training;
- establishment of regional vocational training support institutions;
- modernisation of vocational education curricula;
- improvement of the accreditation of vocational education curricula and training establishments;
- organization of professional up-grading for teaching staff at vocational education establishments.

It means that there is no particular strategy to improve the attractiveness of IVET, increase the flexibility of IVET.

a) Raising the status of IVET

b) Improving the attractiveness of IVET

c) Increasing the flexibility of IVET

IVET basic vocational programs accept students without limitations of previous education. To enter basic vocational education program, a student should turn to age 15 on the school year when he/she wants to enter the program and there should be a vacancy.

d) Main barriers to achieving these objectives

These are mainly financial barriers.

2. Reducing the number of early school leavers

There are three aspects of too early leave from education – children who do not attend school; early school leavers, drop-outs.

1. Number of children not attending school is quite approximate. According to the data from local governments 1800 children of compulsory education age did not attend schools and had not completed basic schooling in September 2001. (Compulsory school age is defined in a following way – until receiving basic education (9years) or staying in basic education until age 18). Number of children who do not attend school for longer time period might differ during the school year.

2. The current level of early school leavers in Latvia was 19.5% in 2002 and even higher than the unfavourable EU average of 18.8% (in acceding countries only around 8.4% of the population aged 18-24 leave school with only lower secondary education). Achieving the European benchmark of 10% require substantial action and sustained commitment. In 2003, the rate has decreased to 18.1%.

3. The drop-out rate is high in VET being one of the most unfavourable among all ACCs. The drop-out rate in VET was 14.6% in 2001/02. About half of drop-outs are first year students, and this situation is quite stable during several years. The major reasons of dropping out is seen as low level of proficiency, as a result of very poor basic education background of students entering the VET schools, combined with weak vocational guidance in schools.

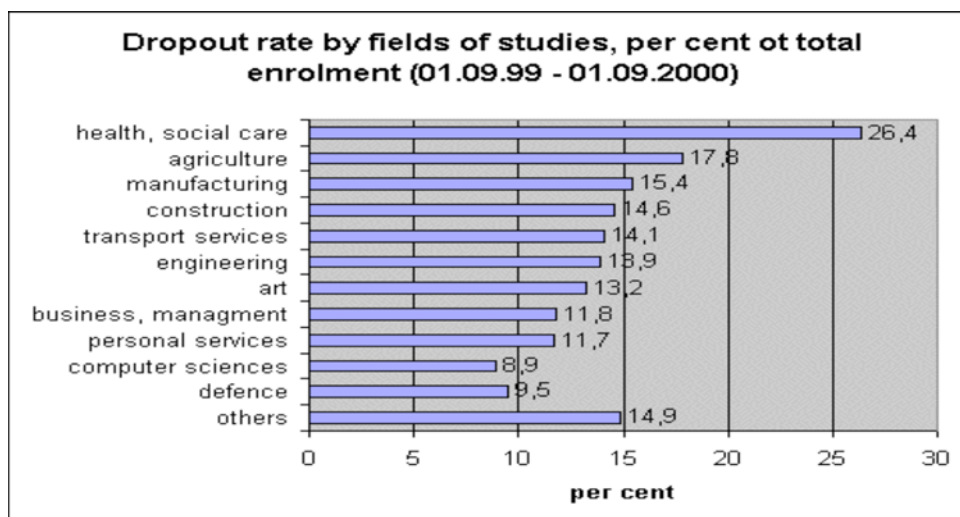
a) School leavers at the earliest opportunity and with few or no recognised qualifications

Almost all young people are provided the opportunity to follow a training programme of their choice. However, every year approximately 14% of the total number of students leave vocational education establishments before completing their training programme. Some of these young people continue their education at other education establishments, however, this makes up only 13% of the total number of early leavers.

Statistical data show that during the 1999/2000 academic year, a total of 6.7 thousand students, or 14% of the total attending vocational education establishments, left school before completing the full training programme. A comparison of data on school leavers among various groups of training programmes shows that one in four students (26%) left training programmes in medicine, health and social care, one in six students (18%) left agriculture programmes, one in seven students (15%) left manufacturing technologies training programmes.

The lowest proportion of school leavers (9%) are trained in computer science programmes. These programmes also have the highest competitive coefficient (2.2).

Figure 1.



The problem of early school leavers can't be solved strictly within the confines of the vocational training system, because these students don't just disappear, they go on to increase the numbers of the employed, or in the worst case, become criminals. In any case the labour market has no particular need for such people without any professional skills, as this age group – 15 to 24 years old – has the highest proportion of jobseekers (22.2% in May 2000). This means that among those young people who aren't attending any type of school, one in four is also unemployed.

The large number of early school leavers points out two problems. First, it is possible to finish primary and secondary school with very low marks, but the upper secondary vocational education standard proscribes that the final mark in all subjects cannot be lower than "four" – which is "almost average". For example, of the students enrolled in vocational education establishments under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science in the 2000/2001 academic year, 33% had a mark of "three" – "weak", or lower in at least one subject area in the leaving certificate of the previous education establishment that they had finished. Neither general nor vocational education establishments offer students the opportunity to supplement their knowledge in subject areas where their prior knowledge is insufficient, which is why they leave school, as they cannot follow their studies. Secondly, the capacity of the vocational guidance system is insufficient – very often young people have no idea whether they are suited to the qualification they have chosen, and what it is that people in this field actually do. In many cases the choice of training programme is determined by several factors (for example, the school is close to or far enough away from home, there is no competition to enrol in the given programme, a friend is studying the same thing, the young person is

undecided and relies on the advice of family, etc.) other than the wish to link one's future to the chosen profession.

Modular training programmes, which are slowly emerging also in Latvia, could be one of the solutions for returning young people to the education system even after a break, or, by making it easier to switch programmes, they would feel less restricted by the chosen course of study. The characteristic behaviour of the teenager, which often includes impulsive and categorical decisions, also must be taken into account. This means that the vocational training system has to increase internal mobility, that is, the possibility to more easily transfer from one programme to another in case a young person has understood that the chosen programme is no longer of interest.

The MoES has developed several ways how school drop outs can return to education. First, children can attend so called „evening schools” that provide education from 1-12 grade. Second, so called pedagogical correction classes are introduced. Third, the basic vocational programs were introduced. However, a student has to reach 15 years before starting the program.

Besides, starting from September 2004, VET schools may open new vocational programs for students with low success of formal education. The number of students in these classes will be smaller – 16 (in comparison with 25 in regular programs).

There are rather small opportunities to receive education in prison. In prisons very few programs are operated (only on the basis of secondary education) and less than 200 prisoners are involved. At the same time, the average education of prisoners is 6-7 classes, and the average age of prisoners is around 26 years.

VET Development Programme 2003-2005

3. Increasing VET at tertiary level

The first level of higher vocational education (college) programme (newest type of initial VET) was introduced in 1999. Since 2001 first level higher vocational education programmes are accredited as higher education programmes and are provided by higher education institutions. The same credit point system as for academic higher education programmes is used for first level higher professional programmes. It is possible to continue studies in second level higher professional programmes.

At tertiary level VET is offered as higher professional education (HPE) programs. They are divided into 2 groups: first level of professional higher education (2-3 years at college) and 2nd level – altogether 4-5 years in higher education.

The determination of the objectives of HPE programmes is the outcome of an agreement between HPE disciplines and occupational areas concerned.. HPE

curricula are designed in close cooperation with the occupational area, practical training is a substantial component integrated in the HPE programs.

The number of colleges (1st level of HPE) is increasing, and in 2002/2003 there are 37 colleges, with the total number of students – 118944. In this sector there is high proportion of private education (17 private colleges, number of students 27199). Private colleges offer education and training in Latvian and Russian. 1st level of HPE offers full time and part time studies.

4. Incentives for employees to update knowledge & skills

According to the decision of Latvian government a Tripartite Council of Vocational Education was established and this Council participates in the adaptation of all legal acts related to VET issues. They work on vocational standards, licensing and accreditation of VET programs, VET teachers.

a) Initiatives and measures of government

Although overall investment in education in Latvia is high (as proportion from GDP), public financing of Continuing Vocational training (CVT) and labour market training for the unemployed remains at comparatively low level. There is no exact data on the total investment in continuing education, but according to data of the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB) annual spending of the state budget devoted to adult education institutions has decreased substantially between 1999 and 2002. Government does not offer visible benefits for enterprises who organize training for their employees.

Ministries provide training for civil service employees at the State Administration school.

b) Initiatives and measures of employers

Rather small proportion of employers offer and provide training for their employees. These are only the large (mainly international companies or joint ventures. According to Eurostat Latvian enterprises invest only 1.1% on average of their labour costs in continuing training courses (which is lower than EU countries ranging from 1.2% in Portugal to 3.0% in Denmark)

The Confederation of Employers participates in the development of qualification exams at VET schools, and employers participate in the exams.

c) Initiatives and measures of other stakeholders

Private funding by participants is almost as high as funding by enterprises, and made up more than 50% compared to the state budget contributions in recent years. No more information available.

d) Examples of the contribution of VET to successfully promoting inclusion

Promotion of inclusion will start with the access to ESF projects. A specific national Action plan on social inclusion is developed at the Ministry of

Welfare, and a National plan on Social Inclusion within VET system. Their priorities are related with development of Social pedagogical programmes in basic vocational education and training and secondary vocational education programmes, and related with the IVET training for disabled. (At present there is only 1 VET school and 1 VET college offering programmes for disabled, and some programmes accept some types of disabled young people).

Social Inclusion is one of the priorities of government for ESF. However, no projects have started.

5. Meeting the challenges of an ageing population – innovations and initiatives in VET that are being introduced to encourage older people (55+) to remain at work longer and to participate in training and other forms of lifelong learning.

Ageing population may attend adult education programs in the districts that offer such programs. However, they have to pay themselves for the education.

Informal learning is the most popular way of education for this category.

In 2002, 8.2% of the population aged 25-64 participated in education and training, compared with 5.0% average of 9 acceding countries (Estonia 5%, Lithuania 3%). In Latvia women participate more than twice (10.9%) than men (5.2%) in education and training.

Continuing training in enterprises plays quite important role. Latvia ranks third among ACC as regards the share of enterprises providing some kind of continuing training. However, 26% of Latvian enterprises provide course for their employees.

Within training for unemployed, all unemployed may apply for retraining. In 2002, about 14% from all registered unemployed wished to participate in training, but only one third of them had such opportunity.

Data from LLL study by age groups show that about 1% of people older than 45 are involved in formal education. Participation in non formal learning is the most wide spread among age groups 25-34 and 35-44. Informal learning attracts more than 1/3 of people aged 45-64 and 1/5 of retirement age people. More information will be available after the publication of "Life long learning in Latvia" in a few weeks.)

6. Effectiveness and efficiency of VET

The Education Development Concept for 2002-2005 has set the goal to increase cost effectiveness in each stage and each type of education, and also estimates the need for additional funding between 2003 and 2005 in

order to implement the reform concept (around 13 mil. LVL (about 20mil.EUR) in 2003, and 17 mil. LVL (about 26.2 mil EUR) in 2004 and 2005. The largest part of this budget is envisaged for further development of higher education. According to VET Development Programme 2003-2005, additional funding of 7.7 mi. LVL (11.8 mil.EUR) is needed for 2004-2005 in order to improve quality and accessibility of VET.

The recently launched VET System Development Programme (2003-2005) has set the main target of the VET system in terms of effective use of VET funding:

- to increase expenditure on VET from state budget in order to reach the minimum level of expenditure per student set by CoM (90% of necessary funding reached by 2005)
- renovation of VET school buildings (20 in 2004 and 20 in 2005).

MoES has admitted that the present administrative fragmentation prevents from efficient development of VET (VET development Programme 2003-2005, p. 19-21). At present VET schools are under jurisdiction of different ministries (MoES, Ministry of Culture (MoC), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Welfare (MoW), etc.). State financing per student in schools of MoES is 649.2 LVL per year, schools of MoC – 1540.2LVL, schools of MoA 858.6 LVL. Therefore MoES has decided that all schools (except MoC) should become under the MoES where the efficient planning could be realized, unique criterions could be elaborated for the quality assessment, professional qualifications. MoES expect higher employers' participation in the insuring the quality of VET programmes, and expect coordinated actions among employers, employees' organizations in order to develop the VET system. According to plans of MoES, all VET schools of MoA are becoming under jurisdiction of MoES starting from mid 2004. MoEs plans to increase transparency of finances of VET schools. MoES plan to facilitate the role of social partners in the development of VET policy, and the methodology of public procurement in vocational education.

Theme 2 Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes

7. Improvements in learning processes and contents

The majority of the real improvements in learning processes are coming from the participation in the International Educational programmes – SOCRATES, Leonardo da Vinci. Particularly valuable are the teacher exchange programs, student exchange and pilot projects. So far,

innovations in teaching and learning methods are not published. The best examples are available mainly in Leonardo Project reports.

8. Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning

Up to now, as a rule, documents of formal education/training are necessary to apply for a job.

So far the basic documents of recognition of informal learning are drafted. However, it is not implemented yet. System of awarding vocational qualifications should be improved through giving more rights and responsibilities to Professional organizations (incl. Chamber of Craftsmen). At present Chamber of Craftsmen have the right to award qualifications. The diploma from Chamber of Crafts is valid for the VET teachers (besides the Pedagogical education). Informal learning is not formally recognized.

9. Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision

In 1999, VET system has introduced a system of licensing, accreditation and education standards aiming to ensure the quality of vocational education. The vocational education and upper secondary vocational education standards were already passed in 2000, and the basic vocational education had to be passed in 2003.

All VET programmes need to be *licensed* by the MoES. The only exceptions are state and municipal founded educational establishments that provide adult non-formal education programmes.

For the control of the education process and in order to issue state recognized certificates and professional qualifications all VET programmes need to be *accredited* by the Accreditation Commission (which is different from the licensing Commission) appointed by the Minister of Education and Science. Validity of accreditation lasts from 1 to 6 years. Licensing and accreditation takes place since 2000, and in 200-2003, total 350 VET programmes and 170 institutions were newly accredited.

Education Inspectors *monitor* whether education providers follow the legal requirements of VET. They are responsible for formal part of education.

Since 2001 first level higher vocational education programmes are accredited as higher education programmes. The accreditation of colleges as higher education institutions started in 2002. In 2002/03 number of accredited colleges was 11 (6 state, 5 private).

Assessment and certification

Students need to pass a qualification exam to receive a vocational qualification. The exam consists of 2 parts: a test of theoretical knowledge and a test of practical skills. Through the Professional Education Center the MoES is in charge of the drafting of theoretical examination questions and the

evaluation of the test questions by professional associations. The qualifying exams are held by educational establishments or training and examination centers.

VET system Development Programme (2003-2005) has set the main targets of the VET system. Regarding the *quality of VET* the main targets are:

- to start the system of **centralized general subjects' exams** for secondary VET programmes (target to involve 50% of all students at that level in 2004 and 100% in 2005);
- to elaborate the contents of **centralized qualification exams** in 60 professions;
- VET teachers' training related to professional upgrading (300 teachers in 2004, 600 in 2005), to general skills upgrading (same figures) and specific teacher training to deal with drop-outs (160 in 2004, 320 in 2005).

The development of quality assessment of VET aims at comparability of vocational education and vocational qualifications obtained in Latvia and EU countries, so that VET graduates would be able to compete in the EU labour market or continue their education in other countries.

There are some indicators proofing the quality of VET and correspondence of VET with the labour market. For example, in 2002, 764 VET graduates were registered as unemployed (5.3% from the total number of VET graduates in 2002).

10. Professional development and status of teachers and trainers

The number of VET teachers is 5693 (68% female teachers) (2002/2003), in 2002/03 81% of VET teachers had higher education.

The status of VET teachers and trainers is that of public employees. According to the Labour Code teachers should have permanent job contracts with employers. The number of classes per year is 720. (as written in the Regulations of Cabinet of Ministers (CoM) No. 73).

Until September 2004 teachers' salary depends on education/qualification and pedagogical experience. The salaries for school year 2004/2005 are under discussion at the level of Committee of State Secretaries.

In 2002/03 5,693 teachers were employed at vocational education establishments. The ratio of pedagogical staff to students is 1:12.

There are two types of VET teachers: teachers of general subjects and teachers of vocational/professional subjects.

Teachers of general subjects should have education in teacher training programmes (higher professional education), and they have a right to work both at general and at vocational education establishments.

Teachers of professional subjects generally have completed higher or secondary vocational education programmes in the given profile, and they must have additional teacher training.

The Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 347 of 3 October 2000 “Regulations on the required education and professional qualification of teachers” determines the educational and professional requirements for teachers of vocational education according to the level of education in which they are working:

- *Basic vocational education* – secondary vocational education in the relevant profile plus pedagogical training;
- *Secondary vocational education* – higher vocational education in the relevant profile plus pedagogical training, or, for vocational education programmes – secondary vocational education in the relevant profile plus pedagogical training;
- *Higher vocational education* – teachers of first level higher education programmes require higher vocational education in the relevant profile and pedagogical training or academic education (a master’s degree) in the relevant scientific area plus pedagogical training. These requirements will take effect as of 1 January 2004.

Table1: Pedagogical staff at vocational education establishments

School year	Total	Of the total number of pedagogical staff (%)			
		Vocational training Instructors	General subject teachers	with higher education	with pedagogical training
1998/99	5430	27	52	74	55
1999/2000	5380	25	53	75	53
2000/01	5439	23	55	77	60

Source:

Education Institutions in Latvia at the beginning of the school year 2000/2001 – Riga, CSB, 2001.

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The number of pedagogical staff at vocational education establishments who have completed higher education is increasing. At the beginning of the 2000/01 academic year 60% of the teaching staff have any pedagogical training at all. The transition requirements allow time for all staff to acquire appropriate pedagogical training.

Training for teachers of general subjects.

Teachers were trained at 8 Latvian higher education establishments during the 2000/01 academic year. In order to acquire the education necessary to teach, one must complete either a second level higher vocational education programme in teaching, which includes the compulsory content of the bachelor programme of study, after which a teaching qualification is conferred, or a second level higher vocational education programme in teaching following the acquisition of a bachelor's degree or vocational qualification in another area, after which a teaching qualification is conferred.

Training for teachers of professional subjects.

Five Latvian higher education establishments – Riga Technical University, Liepaja Teacher Training College, Latvian University of Agriculture, Rezekne School of Higher Education and the Riga School of Teacher Training and School Administration – offer a specialised training programme of vocational pedagogy for vocational training instructors with a secondary vocational education background. These are programmes in which students learn pedagogy and psychology to earn the qualification of vocational school teacher.

Teachers of professional subjects who have completed higher education in a certain profile can acquire professional teacher training within one year at the University of Latvia Teacher Training Centre for Mature Students, or complete the standardised part of the bachelor's degree programme in pedagogy within two years at the Daugavpils Teacher Training University or the Rezekne School of Higher Education. Both of these options are intended for persons

who are already employed in the vocational education system and who wish to improve their vocational qualifications. In Latvia there is only one training programme which partially prepares teachers specifically for work in vocational schools, that is the Rezekne School of Higher Education programme of professional studies in teaching of household and introductory economics with one additional major in work at vocational education establishments.

In-service training for teachers of general and professional subjects.

In-service training for teachers is offered by the Teacher Training Support Centre (TTSC). In 2001, 81 in-service training programmes were funded from the national budget. Participants do not have to pay for participation in these courses. Courses specifically aimed at vocational school teachers are organised by the Professional Education Centre.

There is still considerable difficulty in continuing training for vocational education teachers in their subject area, because they not always have access to new technologies and working methods. This area is still wide open for co-operation between schools and employers.

Starting from January 2004, all the VET teachers are requested to have a document on: higher education (or at least secondary specialized education) in the specialty and higher pedagogical education or the teacher is receiving training. The pedagogical training for the VET teachers could be taken as continuing/ in service training. Pedagogical training is offered by the Center of Professional Education (affiliated to the MoES) and private service providers. In private training centers teachers are requested to pay for their studies. Pedagogical training for VET teachers who have higher education could be organized according to 10 modules. Teacher has a right to chose the sequence of training modules. However, teacher must take all 10 modules.

Dept of VET, MoES understands the need of involvement of social partners in the traineeship of VET teachers at enterprises and practical placement of VET students at enterprises. MoES plan to use ESS for the implementation of this strategy.

VET teachers of general education subjects need to have higher education in the subject they teach. For example, as a rule, teacher of math is not allowed to teach computer science. (I have heard that MoES might change this or soften the rules, if teacher has taught the subject for more than 6 yrs, and had in-service training in didactics of computer science).

Like in general education, VET teachers are requested to have regular in-service training.

Dept of Vocational Education and training, MoES plans to use funding from ESS for the improvement of professional competencies of VET teachers.

Theme 3 Building European Competences for a European Labour Market

11. Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy

a) Main challenges to achieving the Lisbon employment objectives

The main challenges for Latvia according to the *Kok Report*:

- lower employment level than in EU (par 12.4%);
- problem of non declared employment
- different access level of services in different regions;
- ensuring balance between the systems of taxes and benefits;
- need for development of active employment measures;
- access to training
- possibilities of risk groups (youth and people with low education) to enter the labour market
- employment opportunities of ethnic minorities.

b) Policies and strategies being developed to tackle these challenges

The Latvian Minister of Welfare has accepted the *Kok Report* and supports the majority of the recommendations, except of the assumption about the situation of ethnic minorities in the labour market. Latvian National Development Plan for the ESF has prioritized “development of entrepreneurship and innovations”. It includes activities for the development of innovations, development of infrastructure of entrepreneurship, financing SME and research on the related areas.

These challenges are included in the Joint Declaration of Latvia and EC about the priorities of Employment Policy (JAP) (signed 06.02.03). The social and economical analyses and definition of political objectives in relation with decreasing social exclusion is prioritized within Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM).

To increase employment, right chose of profession and increasing compatibility, at present every Latvian inhabitant has a right for the free services of National Center of Career Choice (Profesion_l_s karjeras izv_les centrs). Besides, State Employment Agency (SEA) has developed a data base of free work places and SEA organizes the active labour market measures. However, the active measures are available only to those persons who have been registered as unemployed. The active labour market measures are as follows: vocational training, requalification or development of qualification, temporary public works, measures for increasing compatibility, activities for specific groups of population, particularly for people aged 15-25, disable persons, pre-retirement age persons (less than 5 years to retirement),

persons who are registered at SEA for more than 1 year; and other target groups in accordance with the National Employment Plan.

One of the priorities of Latvian Development Plan is “Development of human resources and promotion of employment”. This priority includes several activities for the development of for the development of education and training, decreasing risk of social exclusion and facilitation of equal opportunities.

The obstacles standing in the way of reforming the VET in relation to achieving the Lisbon objectives are:

1. Consensus within Government for the appropriate political decision was missing.
2. The administrative territorial reform is very slow and has not decided yet.
3. Too little financing from the State budget. When VET receives requested financing from ESF, the situation will improve slowly. However, it takes time to reorganize the VET system.

12. Involving stakeholders

a) Role of stakeholders or social partners in the planning of VET at national, sector and company level

Latvia like other Eastern European countries does not have a long tradition of social dialogue. The Free Trade Union Federation (LBAS) and Latvian Employers Confederation (LDDK) were established after the renewal of independence. They participate in the development of new legislation in the field of social policy. The appropriate draft laws are discussed in the tripartite consultative council with participation of LBAS and LDDK. The consultative council of the social partners operates at 5 levels:

- legislative level;
- executive level;
- interest level;
- professional level;
- enterprise level.

In some cases the local governments organize local tripartite bodies, which investigate employment problems, education/training of unemployed as well as the demand for definite professions in their territory. Social dialogue in vocational education at the branch level is at its initial stage whereas the process of social dialogue at the enterprise level is closely linked to the collective agreements concluded.

Social partners – Latvian Confederation of Employers, Free Trade Union Federation were represented in the Working group for drafting of the new concept on the vocational education. These organizations have co-operation projects with foreign partners of different countries and it is of good help to use their experience in reforming the vocational system in Latvia. There has

been a PHARE project (2002-3) on development of Tripartite collaboration in Latvia.

Basic principles of social dialogue are determined by several legislative documents.

In October 1993 the Tripartite Consultative Council of Employers, State and Trade Union whose activities are regulated by its Statutes was set up following the Decree No. 70-r of the Cabinet of Ministers of LR. Tripartite Consultative Council is the highest body of tripartite framework. This is a result of the composition of the Council where- generally- besides the Minister of Welfare, the President and Vice-Presidents of both social partner organisations (LDDK and LBAS) are participating.

The Tripartite Consultative Council has mainly the umbrella function for the Latvian tripartite system. The planned frequency of the Council meetings was roughly ten times a year, but this objective was not possible to achieve because of the restructuring of the ministries.

The responsibility for organising the meetings of the Tripartite Councils, lies with a permanent secretariat and a secretary (a civil servant of the Ministry of Welfare).

Tasks of the Tripartite Council are :

- to analyze the social economic situation in the country;
- to analyze and prepare proposals for submission to the Council of Ministers for labour and socio-economic legislation acts.

The Parliament passes plenty of normative acts and the objective of the Tripartite Council is to harmonize the interests of all the three partners and to make decisions binding for all the three partners- workers, employers and the government in order to reduce social strain in the country.

The Tripartite Council is a coordinating, consultative institution made of the representatives of employers', Trade Unions and the Government. It can be a mediator in the conflict situations between partners, reconsider issues of social- economic development if some of partners would like submit to the Council. It functions independently and in its functioning it complies with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, legislative documents of the Council of Ministers, ILO Conventions and Recommendations, which have been ratified by the Republic of Latvia and with its own Statutes.

Institutional reforms

First, it is related with establishment of a National Educational Council including representatives of different education branches and social partners. Objectives are:

- 1) Specification of functions and duties of the partners,
- 2) VET strategy,
- 3) Co-operation with educational institutions of other levels,
- 4) Research of the labour market.

The purpose is to organise VET infrastructure.

The Social partners' functions are:

- to nominate their representatives to the National Educational Council;
- to consult working groups for the preparation of new standards;
- to participate in financing and preparation of new curricula;
- to provide in-company training;
- to support teachers qualification;
- to inform about new technologies;
- together with the support institutions develop final qualification descriptions and tests.

Involved organizations

The development of involved organizations should be favoured by assigning financial resources. The functions and duties of these organizations have to be defined. Mechanisms for close co-operation between VET and social partners, thus providing functioning and development of VET have to be formed instead of just episodic co-operation with the social partners. All of the organizations mentioned above are involved in the drafting on new law on professional education.

The distribution of tasks within the various interest groups has to be specified:

- a. sectoral employer's organizations deal with analysis and studies of their specific interests;
- b. Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is involved in education on specialties related to business and economics. Like in most of the Chambers of Commerce of EU countries (Germany, France, Spain etc.) vocational education is one of the main priorities of LCCI. The committee on vocational education was established within the Board of the LCCI in 1995. Vocational education is also one of the priorities of the co-operation project between LCCI and Southwestfalen (Germany) Chamber of Commerce (1997-2000).
- c. Latvian Self-Government Association participates in the specification of the regional development tendencies so that particular regional needs for VET are met;
- d. Latvian Chamber of Craft is involved in the professional education by a Law on craftsmanship adopted in 1993. Trade education and craftsman qualification can obtain in state or private trade schools or in the craftsmanship enterprises under guidance of craftsman. The training programmes are developed and affirmed by co-operation between Chamber of Craft and MoES. Latvian Chamber of Craft was involved in drafting of new law on professional education

Social partners are participating in the Committee on licensing and accreditation IVET Programs, accreditation of vocational training institutions, development and acknowledgement of IVET and continuing VET programs.

13. Transparency, recognition & mobility

a) Credit frameworks

The implementation of a credit framework is not much discussed within the VET system. It is still at the level of planning. Dept of VET, MoES plan more active involvement in CEDEFOP activities in this respect.

The credit transfer system (ECTS) within the higher education is quite well discussed and developed in Latvia.

b) Implementation of Europass

The issue of *Europass* is at the very beginning. Before joining the EU, Latvia was not involved in the implementation of the decision of 99/51/EC. In February 2004, Latvia was invited to organize/nominate the National institution that could start activities in relation with the implementation of decisions of 99/51/EC. During 2004 Latvia has to develop so called "National Europass Contact Point" and has to start preparation for the implementation of the Europass. Ministry of Education and Science has delegated the functions of Europass to the Academic Information Center. Latvian government supports the implementation of Europass because it "would facilitate the recognition of the professional and academic qualifications in other European countries and will increase the mobility opportunities of Latvian population"². Latvian position is positive in this respect because Latvia will gain from the participation in the implementation in the development of European educational policy which aims at development of knowledge based economy.

Latvia fully supports that "an inquired transparency of qualifications and competences will facilitate mobility throughout Europe for lifelong learning purposes, therefore contributing to the development of quality education and training....". However, MoES hypothesize that Europass portfolio will not essentially influence the Latvian labour force mobility.

The Latvian Ministry of Education and Science so far has not identified any problems related with implementation of Europass. However, no budget or any real activities have started.

MoES cannot respond whether the transparency of qualifications will improve the recognition of qualifications. MoES presumes that facilitation of transparency of qualifications needs wider actions than formal recognition of qualifications because it will allow evaluating academic, professional and other kinds of knowledge (incl. knowledge of foreign languages).