

Overview of participation of adults in vocational training

What is the educational and professional background of the adults who commence the acquisition of vocational education and how does their progress on the labour market change after graduation?

Summary

Almost one-third of the working-age population of Estonia does not have vocational or higher education. Giving an education to people without professional qualifications is a possibility that would help improve the development opportunities of the Estonian economy.

What did we investigate?

The National Audit Office analysed how many adults are acquiring vocational education and in which specialties, the educational and professional background of the adults who start acquiring vocational education, and whether their choices of specialties and progress at school are similar. We also investigated whether the acquisition of vocational education has benefited people in their careers, and the role of the state in offering vocational training to adults.

Why is this important to taxpayers?

More than 100 million euros is spent on vocational education every year¹ and an estimated one-third of this amount or more than 30 million euros per year is spent on teaching adults. The majority of the people who are acquiring vocational education (98% in the 2014/2015 academic year) are studying in state-commissioned student places.

The objective set in the Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 is to reduce the share of people without professional or vocational education in the 25-64 age group to less than 25% by 2020. The share of such people in 2014 was 30.2%.

The aim is to improve the level of people's skills and knowledge with vocational training and to make it comply with labour market requirements. The state has created opportunities for everyone to acquire free vocational education in any and as many specialties as they wish, irrespective of their earlier level of education and the specialty they have already acquired. For people, this means that they can educate themselves in several specialties using the state's money. For the state, this should express an expectation to improve people's knowledge and skills so that labour market requirements can be more effectively met.

What did we find?

- The analysis of the indicators that characterise the labour market situation of adults who have acquired vocational education revealed that the **acquisition of vocational education generally has a positive impact**. The number of people who had registered as unemployed decreased and the number of people who earned income from work, income that is higher than the average or were engaged in enterprise increased in the 12 months after the studies.

¹ The amount spent by the government sector on vocational education in the last three years has been 108 million euros on average. 67.7 million euros of this on average has come from the state budget, 11 million euros from other sources of financing (e.g. state agencies, foreign aid projects and revenue from economic activities), and 28 million as foreign aid from the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund.

- However, vocational education does not improve the situation of all adults on the labour market. The adult vocational school graduates who did not have any professional qualifications prior to acquisition and earned a lower income or had been unemployed are still in a weaker position on the labour market even after the acquisition of vocational education. The situation on the labour market improved for 20% of such people.
- There are few so-called hobby students. The specialty choices of the people who had earned a stable and higher-than-average income on the labour market and who started acquiring vocational education are aimed at professional self-development.
- Many adults with vocational education (36%) or higher education (20%) have started acquiring vocational education alongside adults without professional education (44%). The share of people without any professional or vocational qualifications among those who were admitted to vocational educational institutions has decreased since the 2010/2011 academic year, mainly on the account of entrants with higher education. The most popular specialties among adult vocational students are business services, horticulture and tourism, food and accommodation services.
- The adults who have started acquiring vocational education are mainly people who would like to improve their position on the labour market. The year before commencing their vocation studies, 73% of them had been registered as unemployed, had earned low wages or not earned at all.
- Approximately one-third of adults have dropped out without completing their studies. Most of them are adults who did not have any professional qualifications and were in a weaker position on the labour market. The main reasons for dropping out that were highlighted include an inability to cope with studies in addition to family and work, and the unfavourable attitude of employers towards school attendance.

What should attention be given to in the future?

In offering vocational education to adults, the Ministry of Education and Research should turn more attention to the following circumstances:

- how to get more people without professional or vocational education, people inactive on the labour market and people with an unstable or low income into vocational schools and how to support them so that they do not drop out and so that they do acquire vocational education;
- how the acquisition of vocational education by people who are highly educated and already successful on the labour market influences the access of those without vocational or professional qualifications to vocational educational institutions in terms of both the content and cost of studies;
- how to assess the practicality of the costs of vocational education incurred to date and their impact on the state's economic development, increase in added value and improvement in the employment rate in the state as a whole and at the regional level.