

National Focus Group Meeting Estonia

Authors: Katrin Männik, Lilian Rückenberg, Krista Loogma, Liisi Hansen;
P4 Tallin University;
P11 Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
10th May 2018.

Table of Contents

Introduction	p.1
First focus group	p.2
Second focus group	p.3
Innovative approach to higher apprenticeship	p.3
Conclusions: advantages and challenges of higher apprenticeship	p.4

Introduction

Generally, in the Estonian education context the 'apprenticeship' is understood in two ways:
a) As part of the curriculum (this is particularly the case in IVET)
b) Apprenticeship as a separate track of education (töökohapõhine õpe/apprenticeship training).
In VET, this type of education was legally introduced in 2013 ("Töökohapõhise õppe rakendamise kord" <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt129122013002?leiaKehtiv>). However, it has not legally introduced at HE level yet. Within the Estonian higher education system, two types of HE institutions can be distinguished: professional/applied higher education institutions and universities, regulated by the Standard of Higher Education, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act and the Universities Act. (https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/higher_education_system_2013.pdf).

However, the government has introduced the ESF Programme "The systematic development of the practical training and apprenticeship learning in VET and HE" (PRÕM), 2014-2020. The aim of the PRÕM is to develop the system of practical training in a way that is consistent, transparent and meets the needs/requirements of the stakeholders at VET and HE. The second aim of the programme is to provide the learner with the experience of the practical work (e.g. teaching) in the work environment. (<http://www.tlu.ee/et/Avatud-akadeemia/arendustegevused/programmidjaprojektid>).

Recently, pilot programmes of apprenticeship training in HE (higher apprenticeship) have been introduced in professional HE. Three out of four Estonian cases are pilot projects of the national programme PRÕM. Three of the cases have been started during the autumn term of 2017 and 1 case will start in autumn 2018. For all cases, the state provides financial support for piloting professional HE establishments (schools). Generally, schools are the main actors in the programme, initiating, coordinating and holding the responsibility for the development of the curricula. Nonetheless they cooperate with enterprises and the Innove agency, which represents the state. It is also important to mention that most students in the programme, are currently already working at the enterprises that are taking part in the piloting. Four cases are conducted by different schools and applied in different sectors as follows:

1. Tourism and hospitality industry (EEUAS), restaurants and hotels;
2. Tallinn University, Foundation “Young People to School”, professional practice in teachers’ continuous education program;
3. Health care (occupational therapists), (Tallinn Health Care College, THCC);
4. Tallinn Technical University (TTU), Business IT (MA).

Various models of HE apprenticeship have been applied, depending on the specific sectoral background of enterprises, and the particular contract between the school, the student, and the enterprise. The latter is regulated by the terms of PRÖM programme, and most importantly, the contract is the result of negotiations between schools and enterprises. In some cases enterprises get paid to cover the costs related to the supervision of students and also the costs related to the replacements of students in the periods of studies in a school.

Altogether there have been two focus groups conducted in Estonia:

The **first focus group** (March, 13) was a single-case focus group based on the Tourism and hospitality industry (EEUAS), restaurants and hotels. In this case, approximately half of learning is school-based (conducted by university teachers) and half is company-based/work-place learning (conducted and guided by company supervisors). Majority of students in this pilot project were already employed by the enterprises, taking part in the project. All stakeholders’ (enterprises, school, and students) representatives participated. EEUAS has the leading role in this process as the leading designer of the curricula. During the learning process supervisors in companies have to instruct students while performing their tasks as well to be involved in the assessment process. The representatives of employers are part of the commission in charge of the final examination and involved in the development of the curricula.

The feedback from the focus group outlined both positive and challenging aspects of the case. In principle, there are many strengths of this approach:

- This is a positive and useful experience for students;
- Students have opportunities to combine work and learning;
- It provides additional value for the workplaces as far as the practical tasks are related to the workplace practices;
- The social relations at the workplaces are improving;
- Students appreciate also the possibility for reflection and group work during the studies.

There were also challenges, brought about from stakeholders:

- Very hard workload for students, as they have “double” load and therefore, students need to develop better skills of time-management, and self-analysis;
- Problems with pedagogical skills and competences of workplace supervisors. Although the companies’ representatives/supervisors have good occupation-specific and professional skills, most of them lack sufficient instructional competences to guide and support students’ learning in the workplaces;

- According to some students, the workplace supervisors sometimes lack the commitment to their new role of supervisor, to which they are not yet accustomed. However, the variety in this sense is rather big;
- Both enterprises and schools pointed out that students themselves have to take more responsibility for their learning and assignments and better mediate (share information) between school and workplace. Students also have to be more (pro)active by informing the companies about the content of assignments they have to conduct at the workplaces, as well as of their needs for feedback, etc.

The schools have to consider the possibilities to improve the existing approach: 1) better support for workplace supervisors by the school, better motivation and involvement of workplace supervisors into the teaching process, such as arranging seminars and introducing teaching materials and methods for them; 2) better support for students with regards to time planning, self-analysis etc.

There are also some sector-specific circumstances that may influence the arrangement and quality of higher apprenticeship, such as most enterprises in the sector are small enterprises having particular difficulties in replacing students as well as in ensuring the quality of supervision.

The **second focus group** (May, 10) brought the representatives of all cases together.

Generally, the feedback from the second focus group brought about mainly the same aspects as they were obvious in the first focus group. Additionally, some employers (particularly hospitals as employers in the third case) emphasized, that this model does not suit them because of the difficulties to replace the students in the 5-day study periods in the school.

Although schools acknowledge the earlier learning and work experience in the study as much as possible, the students' workload is too high and therefore the quality of studies suffer. One employer of the 3rd case indicated that 4 years of studies for occupational therapy is way too long, considering that all the students have already finished the occupational therapist assistant training and are usually working in this field. Work experience should be taken into account much more in this case.

The process of trilateral contracting has been rather difficult despite the overall agreement about the compensation of costs for enterprises. Every case has specific solutions in this regard. In three cases there is compensation for the enterprises and/or for workplace supervision foreseen by the contract. However, Tallinn Technical University does not plan to pay for enterprises, arguing, that enterprises are eager to take part in the programme and will profit from the programme by the improving the staff's qualifications.

The 4th case will start in the autumn term, 2018. However, the plan for the project contains some innovative features. While in the other cases the existing curricula have been applied for higher apprenticeship, Tallinn Technical University plans to compile specific curricula for the case. Additionally, they will keep all subject voluntary.

Innovative approach to higher apprenticeship

All the cases, except for one (business IT), have implemented already-existing curricula for apprenticeship as well as for school-based learning. That produces most of the problems as often the curriculum does not fully fit the needs of apprentices and employers. But Tallinn Technical University is planning a different approach with regards to the business IT major, starting from September 2018. They plan to give more freedom to students, who are already working to fit their specific needs. The main strength of the system is the structure of the study programme. There are many aspects that make the programme as supportive as possible for the students who work and study at the same time.

- a) The specialization is based on Europe e-Competence Framework 3.0 (www.ecompetences.eu), which means that it's need- and evidence-based;
- b) There are no mandatory subjects, only elective and free subjects. So that the studies are very individual and based on students' needs;
- c) Masters' theses are based on enterprises real-life projects and problem solving;
- d) Problem study and other modern teaching methods are mainly used.

The structure of business IT curricula:

	IT management	Economy/ entrepreneurship	Mathematics	Specialization	Specialization
1. Semester	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject
2. semester	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	masters' seminar I
3. semester	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	elective subject	masters' seminar II
4. semester	free subject	free subject	masters' thesis (18 credit points)		

Conclusions: advantages and challenges of higher apprenticeship

Advantages

- This kind of education form strengthens cooperation between universities and companies/employers. It allows universities to understand better what the expectations and needs of employers may be.
- It is beneficial to all three parties (school-employer-student) as most of the learning is very practical and allows students to work on real-life challenges and problems as school assignments.

Challenges:

- Students are absent from too many face-to-face classes. As they are mainly already full-time workers on the field in which they are studying and it is very difficult for employers to find replacements.
- The work-load is too high for students, it is very hard to find a balance between school, work and personal life. Need for better time management skills.
- Uneven quality of workplace supervisors (mentors). The mentors need more training.