



# **“DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A STATE RECOGNITION SYSTEM FOR INSTITUTIONS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING”**

## **A DOCUMENT BY THE CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP OF THE CONTENT TEAM**

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# State Recognition in Vocational Education and Training. A Concept

## Table of Contents

1. Fundamentals of state recognition .....	3
1.1. Main objectives of the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System, 2009–2013.....	3
1.2. Quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET).....	3
1.3. Approach to an educational process and school .....	5
2. The objective, nature and results of state recognition and definitions.....	7
2.1. Definitions.....	7
2.2. The objective and results.....	7
2.3. A comparison of the valid system of education licences and proposed changes.....	8
3. The process of state recognition .....	9
3.1. The organization and conduct of accreditation .....	9
3.2. Assessment criteria .....	10
3.3. Assessment methods .....	11
3.4. State recognition stakeholders.....	11
3.5. State recognition participants .....	11
3.6. Parties to state recognition and their tasks .....	11
Annex 1. Curriculum development in VET .....	13
1. National curricula.....	13
2. School curricula.....	14
3. Compliance of school curricula with national curricula .....	14

## 1. Fundamentals of state recognition

In development plans for the Estonian vocational education and training system (for the years 2005–2008 as well as 2009–2013), extra emphasis has been placed on issues regarding quality. Objectives concerning the quality of vocational education establish the development of a quality assurance system and introduction of quality management principles at both state and educational institution levels, including regular internal and external evaluation of institutions of vocational education and training (VET institutions), involving social partners.

### 1.1. Main objectives of the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training System, 2009–2013

- 1.1.1. The system of vocational education and training (VET system) is flexible, accessible and corresponds to the needs of learners.
- 1.1.2. Education is of high quality and competitive.
- 1.1.3. The VET system is closely connected with society, economy and the labour market.
- 1.1.4. Organization of the VET system is purposeful, effective and sustainable.

### 1.2. Quality assurance in vocational education and training (VET)

There are several European initiatives that require reliability and transparency of education, VET included, in order to be implemented—the Copenhagen Declaration, European Qualification Framework (EQF), free movement of labour, a single education area and lifelong learning. The achievement of these goals is supported by VET quality assurance systems of Member States, based on common methodology and agreed indicators.

The Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) for VET, built on the experience of Member States in quality assurance in VET and reflecting a consensus achieved in key issues of quality assurance, was prepared under the leadership of the European Commission in 2003. The CQAF is a set of recommendations to help Member States to develop, improve and evaluate their quality assurance systems and activities. The principles of the CQAF were approved by the Council of the European Union in 2004. In 2009 the CQAF was modified, renamed European Quality Assurance Reference Framework (EQARF) and approved by the European Parliament and the Council as a recommendation to Member States for developing their VET quality assurance systems. Analogous to developments in other EU Member States, Estonia has also developed a system of indicators<sup>1</sup> to facilitate assessment of the VET performance and described a quality assurance model for VET based on the CQAF model (see Chart 1).

To develop quality assurance tools and pool experience in VET at the European level, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Vocational

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<sup>1</sup> Performance indicators of educational institutions approved by Directive No. 1031 of the Minister of Education and Research of 20 October 2009. Performance indicators can be seen by schools in public view of the Estonian Education Information System at the address [ehis.ee](http://ehis.ee).

Education and Training (ENQA-VET<sup>2</sup>) was launched in Dublin in 2005 by the EU Member States, EEA/EFTA countries, candidate countries, and representative organizations of employers and employees. The network has been engaged in the pooling of experience concerning quality assurance in VET, harmonizing concepts between Member States and further developing the CQAF model. Estonia also belongs to this cooperation network.

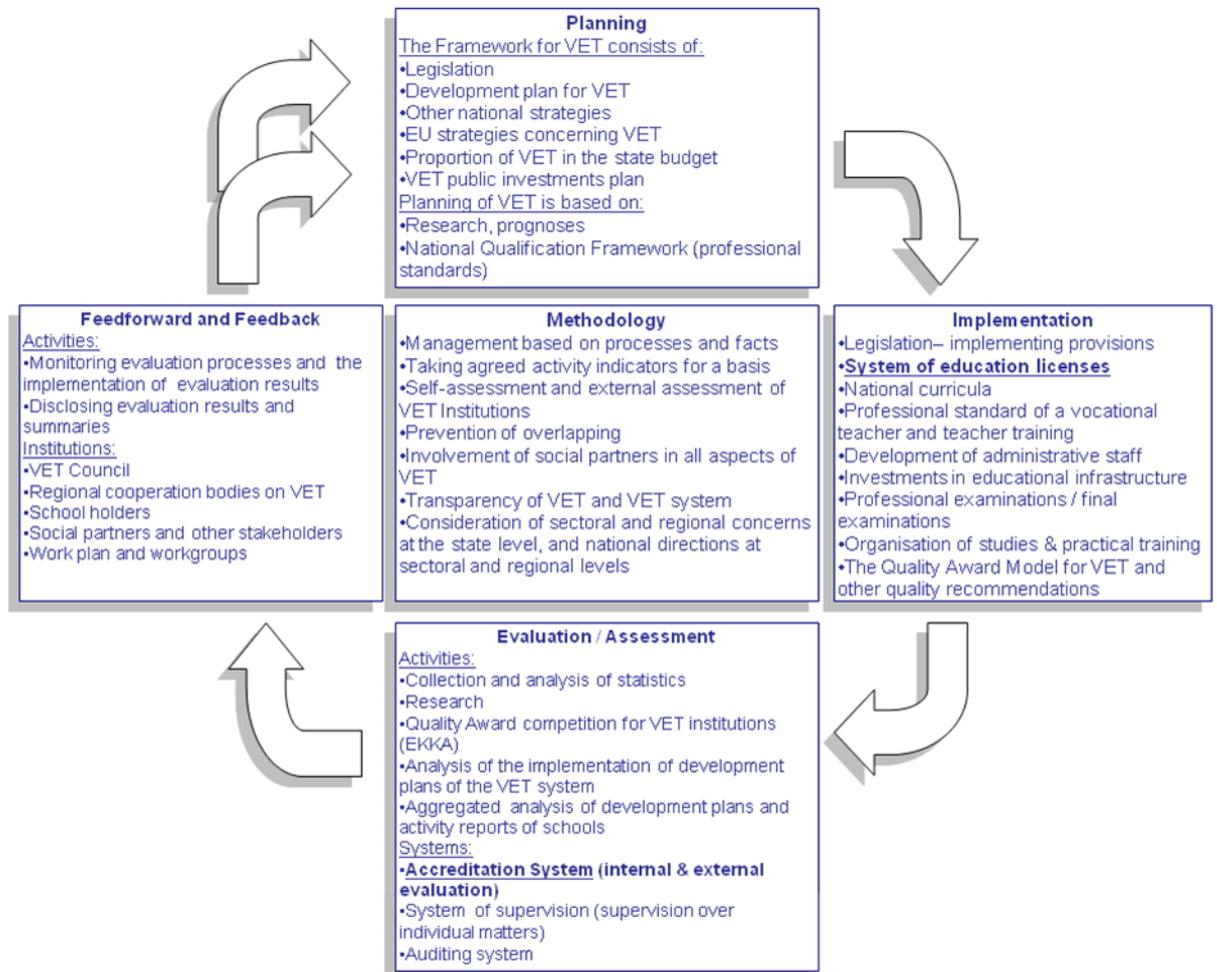


Chart 1. Quality assurance model for VET system

The model provided in the chart above is presented in terms of interlinked processes and divided into five sections. General principles (methodology), on which the whole system is built and that provide principles for implementing individual components, stand in the centre of the model. The arrows located between the groups characterize the order of the groups and components and their relationships—the components of one group are inputs for the components of another one. The components of a “Feedforward and Feedback” group can feed input to components of all other groups—therefore several arrows are shown here.

The model shown in Chart 1 (an extract from Annex 4, “Model of the quality assurance system for the Estonian vocational education and training”, to the Development Plan for the Estonian Vocational Education and Training

<sup>2</sup> See [www.eqavet.eu](http://www.eqavet.eu)

System 2009–2013, adopted by Order No. 386 of the Government of the Republic of 11 September 2009) reflects the utilization and planning of different tools for quality assurance in VET and an improvement-oriented approach as well. Point 6—Accreditation system (internal and external evaluation)—of the chart’s third section “Evaluation/Assessment” will hereinafter be called “State recognition”. This Concept forms the basis for the development and introduction of the above point.

State recognition is closely related to point 2—System of education licences—of the chart’s second section “Implementation”, but it will not be addressed in detail in this Concept. The overview of changes in a system of education licences is provided in section 2.2 of this Concept.

### 1.3. Approach to an educational process and school

Quality is defined as conformity to a subject’s needs and expectations. The central subject in an educational process is a learner, but teachers, employers and other relevant stakeholders cannot be left without attention either.

In implementing a curriculum, in addition to the development of a learner’s professional competence, it is important to develop his/her attitudes, general competence and vocational skills as well. While planning a state recognition process, preparatory training and instructional materials, it is important to consider the ideas set out in this section. Both internal evaluation and accreditation of a school should support student-centred learning and a constructivist approach to the educational process as well as a school’s development into a learning organization.

The lists below are presented as keywords to keep the focus. The keyword common to all subsections is “development”.

#### 1.3.1. An extract from § 2, “The objective and tasks of vocational education”, of the Vocational Education Standard:

(1) The objective of vocational education is to create opportunities for the development of individuals who will have knowledge, skills, experience, attitudes and social readiness to work and prerequisites for continuing their studies and for lifelong learning.

(2) Vocational education’s task is to prepare responsible employees of initiative who:

- 1) cope well in a changing learning, living and working environment;
- 2) apply the acquired knowledge in their work and are oriented to achieve results of quality;
- 3) appreciate their chosen vocations and professions and wish to improve their vocational and professional skills;
- 4) are familiar with development trends of a chosen vocation and profession and are able to apply the obtained knowledge in their work;
- 5) have economic, business and legal knowledge;
- 6) know and follow the principles of communication and customer service;

- 7) are able to communicate professionally in the Estonian language and, arising from the requirements of the professional standard, in at least one foreign language;
- 8) are able to work ergonomically, while preserving the environment;
- 9) are able to use information technology resources;
- 10) are responsible for their own and co-workers' security and cope with danger situations;
- 11) are able to make ethical and legal choices;
- 12) tolerate a diversity of attitudes and values.

### 1.3.2. Educational process supporting the development of learners, or student-centred learning

#### 1.3.2.1. Educational process

- Is attention paid to attitude development, social skills and key competencies in addition to professional education?
- How is it learned?
- How is it taught?
- Results

#### 1.3.2.2. People (teachers, etc.)

- Who teaches?

#### 1.3.2.3. Learning environment

- Is it based on the objectives of an educational process? Is it safe and secure?
- Where does a learning process take place?
- What learning tools are used?

#### 1.3.2.4. Opportunities arising from learners' needs

- Forms of study
- Types of study
- Opportunities for lifelong learning (adult education, etc.)
- Learning support
- Counselling
- Other appropriate opportunities

### 1.3.3. School as a learning organization

#### 1.3.3.1. School regarded as an entity

- Implementing a school's mission, vision and strategy at the curriculum group level
- How does a school as an entity ensure (in a very broad sense) sustainability of a curriculum group? A curriculum group is evaluated, keeping in mind the entity (the whole school as a background)

#### 1.3.3.2. Cooperation in supporting a learner's development and educational activity

- Internal (including between curriculum groups)
- External (including with other schools)

## **2. The objective, nature and results of state recognition and definitions**

### **2.1. Definitions**

- 2.1.1. State recognition—a tool for quality assurance in VET that includes internal evaluation, accreditation and granting of the right to conduct studies.
- 2.1.2. Internal evaluation—self-evaluation and internal control of a school aimed at the continuous development of the school; while preparing for accreditation, self-evaluation is carried out by curriculum group.
- 2.1.3. Accreditation—external evaluation of curriculum groups, based on self-evaluation and conducted by external independent assessors, on the basis of which a decision on the extension of the right to conduct studies is made.
- 2.1.4. Education licence—a term used, pursuant to the procedure currently in force, to denote the right to conduct studies.
- 2.1.5. Accreditation authority—an agency that processes a school’s request for extension of the right to conduct studies, prepares for and conducts an accreditation process and submits accreditation results to a relevant body who decides on the extension of the right to conduct studies.
- 2.1.6. Assessment committee—an independent committee formed by an accreditation authority for the external accreditation of a curriculum group and comprised of employer representatives of a relevant sector and education experts.
- 2.1.7. Request—a valid application submitted by a school to an accreditation authority for extending its right to conduct studies, and on the basis of this application, an accreditation process will be initiated.
- 2.1.8. Report on a curriculum group—a document concerning a curriculum group, prepared as a result of internal evaluation, and serves as one of the bases for accreditation of a curriculum group.
- 2.1.9. Assessment committee report—a document, prepared by an assessment committee, which includes results of the evaluation of a curriculum group and a proposal with justifications for the extension of the right to conduct studies for a full period, extension for a limited period, or for a rejection of the extension.

### **2.2. The objective and results**

- 2.2.1. State recognition is a quality assurance tool used to create a feeling of certainty toward educational quality of institutions providing vocational education and training (hereinafter “schools”) to VET (including, in a narrow sense, school) stakeholders, primarily to customers and employers. A focus is on the quality and sustainability of:
  - 2.2.1.1. implementation of curricula;
  - 2.2.1.2. methodology of teaching;
  - 2.2.1.3. development of students;

- 2.2.1.4. development of curricula and educational process;
- 2.2.1.5. educational outcomes.
- 2.2.2. State recognition is curriculum group oriented and includes:
  - 2.2.2.1. internal evaluation;
  - 2.2.2.2. accreditation;
  - 2.2.2.3. an extension of the right to conduct studies.
- 2.2.3. State recognition is based on the results of accreditation, established by a directive of the Minister of Education and Research and includes granting a school the right to conduct studies. There are three choices in extending this right:
  - 2.2.3.1. to extend for a full period (for six years);
  - 2.2.3.2. to extend for a limited period (for one to three years);
  - 2.2.3.3. not to extend the right to conduct studies (a school loses the right to admit new students; current students must be ensured the completion of the curriculum and graduation in the school, in cooperation with another school or in another school).
- 2.2.4. The utilization of results of state recognition:
  - 2.2.4.1. feedback and input for further activities of a school and a school holder, including for planning of in-service training for teachers, managers and others;
  - 2.2.4.2. planning of investments and development funds;
  - 2.2.4.3. determination and utilization of state-commissioned education.
- 2.2.5. Compliance with national requirements (e.g., curricula with national curricula and teachers with qualification requirements) is a prerequisite for gaining state recognition and therefore it is not addressed in the course of accreditation.
- 2.2.6. Accreditation is not conducted for teaching and learning which takes place in prisons. A decision on the right to conduct studies is made on the basis of teaching and learning in a school.

2.3. A comparison of the valid system of education licences and proposed changes

The major proposed change compared to the valid procedure for education licences<sup>3</sup> lies in the fact that, according to the new procedure, there will be no need to reapply for an education licence for each curriculum after its nominal period of study is over; but the right to conduct studies will have to be extended after an established period of time.

<b>Valid procedure</b>	<b>Proposed changes</b>
An education licence	A right to conduct studies
Private and municipal VET institutions	All VET institutions
Based on a curriculum	Based on a curriculum group
Conditions for issuing an education	Conditions for granting of the right to

<sup>3</sup> Formally an education licence gives a school the right to conduct studies.

Valid procedure	Proposed changes
licence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the curriculum is in accordance with the requirements (with the national curriculum and the Vocational Education Standard)</li> <li>- the teaching staff complies with qualification requirements</li> <li>- educational infrastructure is sufficient to achieve curriculum objectives and is in accordance with requirements</li> </ul>	conduct studies (so-called initial education licence): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the curriculum is in accordance with the requirements (with the national curriculum and the Vocational Education Standard)</li> <li>- the teaching staff complies with qualification requirements</li> <li>- educational infrastructure is sufficient to achieve curriculum objectives and is in accordance with requirements</li> <li>- the necessity for starting instruction in a curriculum group is justified</li> </ul>
On the basis of a compliance check of documents	On the basis of a compliance check of documents and a school visit
An education licence is applied to each new and existing curriculum for its nominal period	The right to conduct studies is applied in the case of starting instruction in a new curriculum group; it must be extended at an established period.
Valid until the end of a nominal period of study	Extendable
Is not extended nor renewed	On the basis of an accreditation, it is extended for a full period (six years) or limited period (1–3 years) or is not extended. The basis for an extension decision lies with accreditation.
A simple procedure, and the number of education licences is not large, because it does not extend to public schools	The procedure must be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- simple in order to cope with a large number of accreditations</li> <li>- reliable in order to achieve the confidence of the parties interested in vocational education and VET institutions</li> </ul>

### 3. The process of state recognition

A detailed description of the process has been set out in a document named “The Accreditation Process, Its Parties and Tasks”.

#### 3.1. The organization and conduct of accreditation

An accreditation is conducted by an independent assessment committee (HK) formed by an accreditation authority (AKA). The cooperation and

communication between assessment committees within a curriculum as well as between curriculum groups is crucial. AKA ensures it through the organization of work of the assessment committees.

HK is comprised of three experts:

- 3.1.1. one to two experts in a profession related to the curriculum group, representing employers of a corresponding sector (assigned by a relevant professional council);
- 3.1.2. one to two experts from the field of a curriculum/school/education.

**3.2. Assessment criteria**

The assessment is carried out in two views—a current and a development view—by five assessment fields supported by performance indicators. An objective of using the current view is to get information about school performance and the objective of using the development view is to get information about school’s sustainability in a curriculum group.

		Current View	
		Sufficient	Insufficient
Development View	Sufficient	To award a full accreditation for 6 years	Not to award an accreditation or to award conditionally for 1-3 years
	Insufficient	To award a conditional accreditation for 1-3 years	Not to award an accreditation

**3.2.1. Assessment views**

**3.2.2. Assessment fields (a core process and support processes)**

- 3.2.2.1. Educational process (a core process)
- 3.2.2.2. Leadership and management
- 3.2.2.3. Management of human resources
- 3.2.2.4. Cooperation with interest groups
- 3.2.2.5. Management of resources

For the assessment of a current view, predetermined assessment criteria and a four-point scale are used.

Descriptions of assessment fields, criteria and methods have been set out in a document named “Assessment Criteria”.

The documentation related to accreditation has been addressed in a document named “Instructional Materials”.

The list of mandatory performance indicators used in internal evaluation and accreditation is set out in the Annex to Directive No. 234 of the Minister of Education and Research of 5 October 2009.

### 3.3. Assessment methods<sup>4</sup>

3.3.1. An analysis of documents, including the analysis of the report and data of a curriculum group.

3.3.2. A school visit:

3.3.2.1. interviews with teachers, students, employers and alumni;

3.3.2.2. observations (the teaching and learning environment, support structures, educational activity, etc.).

### 3.4. State recognition stakeholders:

3.4.1. students;

3.4.2. employers and employees (professional and industry associations, representative organizations, etc.);

3.4.3. parents;

3.4.4. members of a community/society;

3.4.5. school holders;

3.4.6. sponsors.

### 3.5. State recognition participants

3.5.1. Members of assessment committees—conduct the external evaluation of a curriculum group and prepare an assessment report.

3.5.2. School teams—conduct the internal evaluation and prepare a report on a curriculum group.

3.5.3. State officials—organize and regulate a state recognition process.

3.5.4. Internal evaluation advisors—advise schools on conducting internal evaluation and preparing for accreditation.

### 3.6. Parties to state recognition and their tasks

3.6.1. A school—conducts an internal evaluation, includes an internal evaluation advisor if needed, prepares a report on a curriculum group; initiates a procedure for accreditation by requesting an extension of the right to conduct studies in a curriculum group and submitting required documents to an accreditation authority; prepares for the school visit by an accreditation committee; has the right to reasonably contest the composition of an assessment committee and the assessment committee report.

3.6.2. An accreditation authority (*akrediteerimist korraldav asutus*, in short AKA)—processes a school's request for an extension of the right to

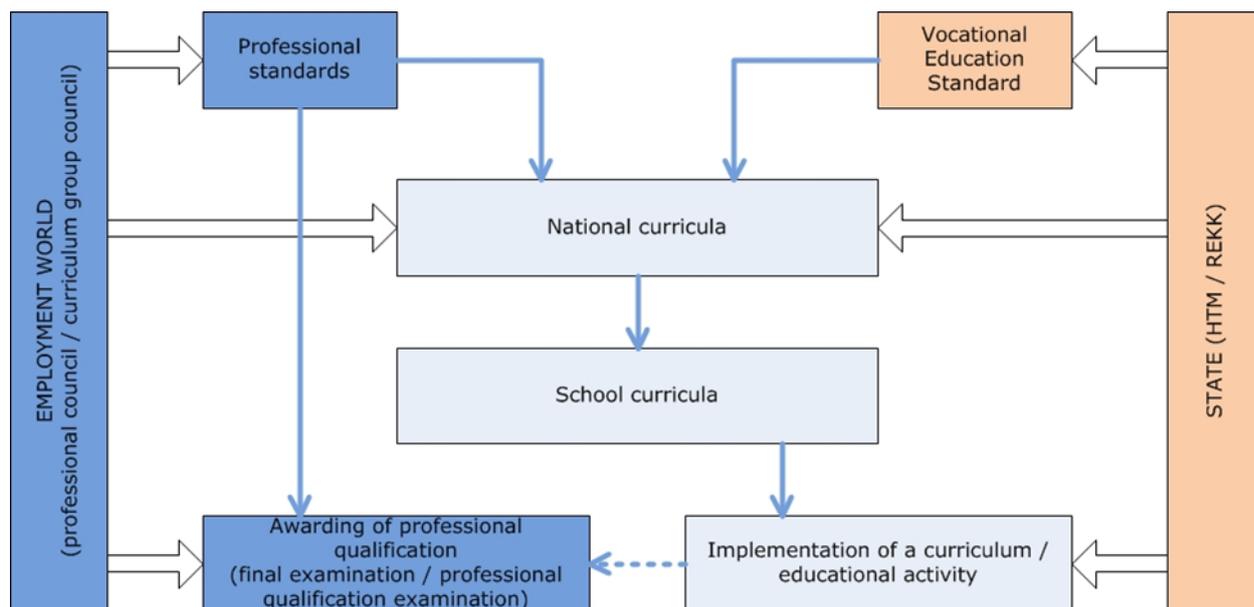
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<sup>4</sup> Assessment methods are set out in guidelines.

conduct studies; requests from the External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research evidence regarding compliance of a school's curricula and teaching staff with requirements; forms an assessment committee and approves its organization of work; prepares the documentation needed for accreditation; arranges the logistics related to a school visit; asks for a school's opinion on the composition of an assessment committee and the assessment committee report; if needed, processes a school's opinion on the assessment committee report; forwards, to a decision-making body, proposals contained in an assessment committee report along with the report and the school's opinion on the report, as well as other necessary documentation related to the extension of the right to conduct studies; develops internal evaluation and accreditation processes and contributes to the enhancement of the competence of participants.

- 3.6.3. External Evaluation Department of the Ministry of Education and Research (*haridus- ja teadusministeeriumi välishindamisosakond*, in short HTM's VHO)—a supervisory unit of the Ministry of Education and Research who maintains the curriculum and education licence sub-register of the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) and, on the basis of a directive by the Minister, makes an entry in EHIS next to the relevant curriculum group of the school concerning the right to conduct studies in the curriculum group.
- 3.6.4. An assessment committee (*hindamiskomisjon*, in short HK)— assesses the curriculum group in a school on the basis of a report on a curriculum group, a school's development plan and its action plan, other documents as well as a school visit; submits an assessment committee report containing the assessment results and the proposal for extending the right to conduct studies to AKA.
- 3.6.5. A decision-making body (not specified)— decides to extend the right to conduct studies in school's curriculum group for a full period, a limited period or not to extend it, based on an assessment committee report and the school's opinion thereof forwarded by AKA, and an additional opinion requested from the Vocational and Adult Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research (HTM's KTO), if needed; on the basis of its recorded decision, composes a draft of a directive for the Minister of Education and Research and forwards it for approval; forwards copies of the Minister's directive to AKA, the appropriate school, the appropriate school holder, HTM's KTO and VHO.
- 3.6.6. Vocational and Adult Education Department of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research (*haridus- ja teadusministeeriumi kutse- ja täiskasvanuhariduse osakond*, in short HTM's KTO)—provides, if needed, an additional opinion on the extension of a school's right to conduct studies in a curriculum group from the point of view of the national VET system.
- 3.6.7. Minister of Education and Research—approves by his directive the decision on extending a school's right to conduct studies in a curriculum group; may, for good reason and with justifications, return a draft of the directive to the decision-making body for a review.

## Annex 1. Curriculum development in VET



*Thin blue lines represent the inputs arising from legislation. Thick contour arrows represent a direct contribution to the development of a specific document.*

### 1. National curricula

1.1. National curricula are developed based on the requirements of professional standards.

An extract from the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (KÖS):

§ 11. National curricula for vocations or professions

(2) The Ministry of Education and Research shall prepare the national curricula for vocations or professions in cooperation with social partners of the vocational education and training system on the basis of the Vocational Education Standard and professional standards.

1.2. The educational content of national curricula is developed by working groups established by a directive of the Director of the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (REKK) and approved by the curriculum group councils. Curriculum group councils make proposals to the Minister of Education and Research for establishing or modifying national curricula.

An extract from Directive No. 645 of the Minister of Education and Research of 2 August 2006 “Approval of the formation, functions and organization of work of curriculum group councils”:

2. The main function of councils is to support the development and implementation of national VET curricula and the achievement of educational objectives of VET institutions.

3. Councils may include representatives of VET institutions, other educational institutions, employers, employees and professional associations.

## 2. School curricula

### 2.1. School curricula are based on national curricula and the Vocational Education Standard.

An extract from the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (KÕS):

#### § 13. School curriculum

(1) A school curriculum is the source document for studies related to the corresponding vocations or professions, which is developed on the basis of the requirements specified in the Vocational Education Standard and the corresponding national curriculum and which shall determine, in addition to the provisions of the national curriculum, the list of elective subjects together with a brief description of their volume and content and the opportunities and conditions for choosing elective subjects.

(4) A school curriculum shall be registered in the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) founded on the basis of subsection 36<sup>6</sup> (4) of the Republic of Estonia Education Act.

### 2.2. Information to be submitted in a school curriculum and its basis.

An extract from the Vocational Education Standard (KHS):

#### § 6. Requirements for school curricula

(1) A school curriculum consists of a general part, general and basic skills modules determined by the national curriculum and elective studies modules.

(3) A school curriculum sets the objectives, content and learning outcomes of general, basic and elective studies modules and the principles for module assessment.

#### § 7. Curriculum modules

(2) A module is an integral content unit oriented to learning outcomes, which defines, in conformity with qualification requirements, the knowledge, skills and attitudes.

## 3. Compliance of school curricula with national curricula

### 3.1. School curricula registration in EHIS.

An extract from the Statutes of EHIS (approved by Regulation No. 265 of the Government of the Republic of 5 August 2004):

§ 38. Curricula and programmes subject to entry in the study programme and education licence register.

The sub-register of study programmes and education licences shall contain information concerning curricula, joint study programmes, residency programmes, education licences, the right to conduct studies in a study programme group and results of accreditations of institutions providing the opportunity to acquire pre-primary, basic, general secondary, vocational secondary, higher or leisure education as well as the opportunity to complete vocational education and training or residency.

§ 41. Procedure for submission of information

(2) Curricula and programmes shall be entered in the register after the curriculum or residency programme has been registered or the education licence has been issued.

(3) Education licences shall be entered in the register after the education licence has been issued.

(10) The Ministry of Education and Research and the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre shall have the right to require additional details of the information submitted by holders of educational institutions or leisure schools if it is insufficient for processing a curriculum or residency programme. The Ministry of Education and Research and the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre shall inform the educational institution of incomplete or inaccurate information via e-mail. The time limit for entering the curriculum or residency programme in the sub-register shall extend by the time needed for completing the information and documents submitted for registration of the curriculum or residency programme.

### 3.2. Ensuring compliance of school curricula with national curricula.

An extract from the Statutes of EHIS:

§ 41<sup>2</sup>. Procedure for submission, processing and registration of application documents of curricula of public VET institutions and education licences for vocational education curricula of private and municipal VET institutions.

(1) Public VET institutions, private VET institutions and municipal VET institutions shall, pursuant to the procedure established by legislation, submit the curriculum and application documents necessary for requesting an education licence electronically in a PDF (Portable Document Format) file to the sub-register. The time of submitting the curriculum to the register is deemed to be the time of commencement of the process.

(2) The chief processor of the register<sup>5</sup> shall verify compliance of the composition of submitted information with legislation, and forward the curriculum to the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre for its opinion.

(3) The National Examinations and Qualifications Centre shall provide its opinion on the curriculum, verifying compliance of the curriculum and teaching staff with the requirements established by legislation.

(4) The National Examinations and Qualifications Centre shall forward the conforming curriculum to the chief processor of the register who shall enter the curriculum of a public VET institution in the register. The curriculum of a private VET institution and municipal VET institution shall be forwarded by the chief processor of the register to the education licence committee formed by the Minister of Education and Research. After the education licence has been issued on the basis of a Minister's directive, the chief processor of the register shall enter the curriculum in the register.

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<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Education and Research, specifically the chief expert of the External Evaluation Department in the field of vocational education and training