



Press Release I

Reforms in vocational education and training are urgent

The participation of school leavers in vocational training has plummeted to an alarmingly low level. Youth unemployment remains high compared to other countries. The qualification requirements of companies are high and continue to grow, whereas the educational level of school leavers tends to decline. Because of social problems and learning difficulties in general schooling, a high proportion of young people fail to meet the demanding challenges of vocational training. The aim must be to integrate all young people for both social and economic reasons, because everyone is needed.

At the same time, more and more companies are complaining about the lack of qualified skilled workers. This shortage will increase considerably in the future. For demographic reasons, the number of people leaving the labor force for reasons of age will in future be significantly higher than the number of younger people growing into working life. In Latvia, the number of people aged fifteen to forty-four will fall by about 25% by 2030. As the demand for labor rises at the same time, the lack of qualified junior staff is increasingly acting as a brake on growth.

Significant improvements in skills and coping with the growing shortage of skilled workers and entrepreneurs must be given the highest political priority. In the view of the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, far-reaching reforms of education policy are urgently needed to strengthen innovation and secure growth and prosperity for all.

In view of this serious situation, the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, together with the internationally active Baltic Sea Academy, is organizing an education conference in which foreign experts from various Baltic Sea countries will take part and present their experiences and proposals. At the conference concrete solutions and successful projects will be presented and entrepreneurs will present their situation and proposals. Experts will develop proposals for vocational education and training reforms in Latvia.

The public conference "Small and medium-sized enterprises shape the future - New paths in vocational education and training" will take place on 18 October 2019 at 8.30 -14.00 h.

Guests are very welcome. Participation including business lunch is free of charge. However, we kindly ask for prior registration in writing, online or over the phone.

Press Release II

Qualification ensures prosperity and growth for all

Policy strategies for urgent reforms of vocational education and training

Youth unemployment in Latvia remains alarmingly high, while more and more companies are complaining about the lack of qualified skilled workers. Significant improvements in skills and coping with the growing shortage of skilled workers and entrepreneurs must be given the highest political priority. In the view of the Latvian



Chamber of Crafts, far-reaching reforms of education policy are urgently needed to strengthen innovation, ensure growth and prosperity for all.

In view of this serious situation, the Latvian Chamber of Crafts, together with the international Baltic Sea Academy, organized an education conference in Riga on 18 October 2019, attended by Latvian entrepreneurs and experts as well as foreign experts from various Baltic Sea countries. As a result of the conference, ten concrete policy strategies for urgently needed reforms of vocational education and training in Latvia were developed.

1 Improving the quality of general education

In schools, vocational orientation must be accepted as a compulsory subject and repeated internships in companies. All young people can and must be integrated into vocational training and working life through quality improvements and individual support.

2 Compulsory vocational counselling

Sound vocational guidance must be developed and intensively implemented as a compulsory task for schools, vocational schools, employment services and other educational actors. The competences of young people must be determined comprehensively and reliably; teachers and parents are not in a position to do so. The use of a professional navigator is recommended, with the help of which the young people's competences can be determined in a sound manner and compared with the competence requirements of all occupations, so that targeted, individual counselling can take place. With the help of such a professional navigator, which can be used immediately in Latvia, the very high dropout rates in vocational education and training and studies can be significantly reduced and high integration rates achieved, according to experience abroad.

3 Consistent introductions of dual vocational training with 75% of the training period in companies and 25% in vocational schools

All countries with genuine dual vocational training (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Norway) have low youth unemployment. The first pilot projects for dual vocational training in Latvia confirm this success and must be used to create nationwide, adapted dual vocational training systems.

4 Transfer of state competences to economic self-administration

The chambers should be designed as public self-governments of the economy and be entrusted by the state with all competences for the implementation of initial and continuing vocational training. The chambers can carry out these tasks much more efficiently and more closely to companies and make indispensable contributions to improving quality and intensifying vocational qualification.

5 Differentiations in vocational education and training

No one may be outsourced, every young person has at least one strength. In order to specifically promote individual talents, at least three different requirement and performance levels should be created in vocational education and training, so that



those with learning difficulties can be integrated and strong learners can be recruited for vocational training. In an open, fully permeable system, everyone can achieve any level of educational attainment in accordance with his or her ability, although in different ways.

6 Qualification of teachers

Every company that provides training must have an employee as a trainer with pedagogical qualifications or recognized further training. Comprehensive further training is also required for teachers at vocational schools with the introduction of a dual system.

7 Quality improvement and strong intensification of continuing vocational training

The share of the labor force in continuing training in Latvia is only around one tenth of that in other countries, e.g. Sweden. A strong intensification and improvement in the quality of lifelong learning is essential. To this end, Latvia urgently needs to create comprehensive human, technical and spatial capacities (see 10. Strategy).

Qualifications as a technician or master craftsman are outstanding further training courses for recruiting excellent managers and entrepreneurs.

8 Increasing the participation of women and older people in the labor market

The significantly lower labor force participation of women and older people compared with other countries must be significantly increased. There is also an urgent need for specific promotion of women in management positions or as entrepreneurs. Experience abroad shows that in countries where women and older people have a high level of participation in the labor market, innovation and productivity are significantly higher in companies.

9 Introduction of dual courses of study

Small and medium-sized enterprises are only able to recruit a limited number of young entrepreneurs, managers and specialists from graduates of colleges and universities because academically trained people lack practical experience and vocational qualifications. Therefore, Latvia needs to implement dual study programs that combine vocational training or a professional activity with a recognized course of study in accordance with Bologna.

10 Establishment of education and innovation centers of excellence and competence

With the arrival of low-birth cohorts and the introduction of dual vocational training, personnel, technical and spatial capacities are freed up at vocational schools. Instead of abandoning them, they should be used as a nucleus for the urgently needed development of regional education and innovation centers. These should be run jointly by vocational schools, universities and chambers and take on the following priority tasks:

- Comprehensive career guidance for young people and job seekers with the help of a career navigator.



- Implementation of dual vocational training for different levels of requirements and performance.
- Quality improvement and intensification of continuing vocational training.
- Promotion of the labor market participation of women and older people.
- Implementation of dual courses of study.
- Promoting innovation and carrying out research and development tasks specifically for small and medium-sized enterprises.

These strategies are currently being successfully implemented by chambers with their partner organizations Hanse-Parlament - an association of 50 chambers from 13 North Eastern European countries - and Baltic Sea Academy - an association of 18 universities from 9 Baltic Sea countries. These forward-looking results must now lead to the fact that in Latvia the establishment of competence centers for vocational education and training is also used directly for the reliable implementation of the 10 strategies outlined above.

Politics, business and society in Latvia must address the outstanding importance of education policy and recognize that investments in human capital bring the safest and best interest rates.

Latvia's considerable opportunities can only be exploited with the highest innovations and outstanding qualifications. Education promotes innovation and competitiveness and includes the most important promotional task for small and medium-sized enterprises. The consistent, rapid and reliable implementation of this comprehensive education policy program must therefore enjoy the highest priority in Latvia.