7. Reform of VET Teacher Training in Latvia

During the last decade, Latvia has experienced substantial changes in its VET sector in order to adapt to European Union standards. Until the late 1990s, there had been no standardised concept concerning VET teacher training in Latvia.

Traditionally, teachers at vocational schools had:

(a) graduated from a pedagogical college or university. Therefore they taught subjects of general education, mostly without any consideration of a vocational school’s specific profile.

(b) completed a specialised training program at a university of applied sciences or a university. They taught professional subjects of the relevant professional profile (i.e., pedagogical training was no prerequisite).

(c) obtained vocational qualification, acquired job experience, and were then certified to teach at a vocational colleague.

The Law on Vocational Education (1999), with revisions (2000), aims at providing the necessary qualifications for the training of teachers at vocational schools. (This includes additional pedagogical training at a university, or at least 320 lessons at a pedagogical further education course.)

According to the Law on Education and the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations (CMR), which come into force on 3 October 2000, teachers without pedagogical training and the relevant qualifications were not to be allowed to teach at vocational schools, as of 1 January 2004. This came about because only 67% of teachers at vocational schools were pedagogically qualified in the academic year 2002/03.

Actually, the new requirements for teaching at vocational educational establishments were already made known back in 1999. This gave teachers 5 years to fill in any gaps in their academic background, if so desired. The regulations at that time allowed a foreman to work as a VET teacher without an academic degree, although they were required to have pedagogical training.
This allowed them to teach at a vocational school or upper vocational school. This changed however in 2003, when a graduate diploma from a university of applied sciences became the minimum qualification for anyone teaching at vocational schools.

At this point, a historical review is necessary. At the beginning of the transformation of the former Soviet-model education system to the European Union standards in the early 1990s, it was not taken into account that there was a major difference between a vocational school (arodskola), an upper vocational school (profesionala vidusskola), and the so-called ‘Technicum’ (tehnikums). With its educational content, the ‘Technicum’ was similar to a ‘Berufskolleg’, which is one level higher than an upper vocational school.

In Latvia neither a special training for instructors nor a regulation on training are required for trainers and instructors.

The apprenticeship training is carried out by professional teachers (arodskolotajis) at the schools but the qualifying work experience training of 960 lessons takes place under the guidance of an experienced foreman without pedagogical qualification) in the companies. Most of the teachers at vocational educational establishments had completed the ‘Technicum’ in the 1980s or even earlier, have taken part in further education courses in order to acquire the background knowledge in pedagogics. As of the academic year 2004/05, they will no longer be allowed to teach at a vocational school due to the lack of a higher education diploma. This claim would be justified if the situation at Latvia’s vocational educational establishments was different.

Latvia is facing a devastating lack of junior staff, a major part of VET teachers has already reached the age of retirement, and it is hard to expect that an engineer will take up pedagogical training in order to earn five times less than he could in the private sector.

Despite the long history of this problem, which has been discussed at all different levels, the future appears rather pessimistic. Since 2000, five institutions of higher education have offered vocational teacher training programmes.

The Institute for Humanities at Riga Technical University offers a programme in this area. The admission requirement is a university entrance qualification in a specific field of interest. The programme lasts 2 years (in which 82 credit points are awarded). The programme at Liepaja Pedagogical College is also 2 years (with 80 credit points) after 1 year of studying at Liepaja Pedagogical Colleague, a certificate is awarded which entitles one to teach vocational subjects.

Vocational teacher training programmes are offered as fulltime and part-time programmes. Part-time programmes are the most popular choice. However, the demand to qualify VET teacher in Latvia is enormous.

In Latvia there is a broad network of vocational educational establishments that cover all regions of the country. Until 1 July 2004, responsibilities for