

# Skills for the Baltic wood industry – European quality in vocational education and training

by KAROLINE SCHLEGEL



**Skilled-Up Latvia**  
Baltic Business Quarterly talked to Artūrs Bukonts, CEO LKUEA, Latvian Association of Independent Timber Harvesting Companies, Latvian Association of Woodprocessing Entrepreneurs and Exporters, and the Association “Latvian Wood”.

## What is your role in the project?

The main role is to be the mediator between the industry and the project, to bring students and companies into this project.

## Why do you participate?

There was no such training available before and of course I saw that this is something that would be necessary both for the industry and the education system. In Latvia, we had some attempts at this learning in projects and so on but basically, I don't see this as the kind of typical practical training that we had before. When they begin the training, the trainees do not have companies in their background. They look for companies only in the third or fourth year to go and do some practical things there and the idea for our project was that the trainees are already working in the company and are looking for further education. That has the advantage of the trainees already knowing

*In October 2019, the training of the EU project was launched in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Two thirds of the training will take place in companies in each country, as well as during mobility visits to companies in other Baltic States and one third takes place in the schools. Participants in the first training sessions included 50 representatives from different manufacturing companies. They will be piloting the work-based learning program (WBL) at level EQF 5 in the woodworking industry for the next two years so that it can meet the educational needs of the industry and become available to a wider audience.*

the workplace and the challenges, and are ready to look for the most effective solution. In addition, they already have some authority with regard to the knowledge.

## What are the aims of the project?

Our aims are to provide some further education to people who are already working in the wood industry in company production in order to raise them up to production managers or chief managers. In smaller companies, you normally have one manager for the whole production process and in larger enterprises you have different managers for different processes and so we came up with the idea of increasing the educational standard to make it suitable and worthy for both.

## How is the project going?

It was quite a challenge in the Baltic countries to bring all three different countries in a position to be seen as one. The first challenge was to bring the three different systems together and create something that can be equal in all countries. The next challenge was to introduce it to companies. I was positively surprised that the program we

created before was something the companies welcomed very well. I have an example: We finished with the first of ten modules this year in March. The first module was Industrial Technology and was a very large module. The best thing that showed at the end of the first module was having trainees who already implemented this new knowledge in their companies, including solutions in inner logistics, energy efficiency and process management.

## Would you already say that the project is a success?

Of course it's a success because of the experience we gained through the project. And we also made new contacts and are looking forward to doing more of this in the future. We already know that next time, in October, when we start the training with the second group, we will do a few things a bit differently, especially the organization. But we will strive to maintain the quality, which is a bit difficult when working from home and we hope there won't be a shortage of students because of this special situation.

### Which companies are taking part in the project?

On the Latvian side, we have 18 trainees from 12 different companies. And what's interesting is that we have quite a wide range of companies; some make furniture, others make windows. The trainees have very different backgrounds but they are all learning the same processes and they really enjoy learning from each other. Additionally, we have 36 lecturers who aren't officially linked to the project, but are included in it so there is plenty of influence from many different sides. During the whole project, we stay in close contact with the companies and inform them on how everything is going.

### Could you please name some of the companies?

SIA "IKTK", SIA "Konto", SIA "KRAUZERS", SIA "MARKO KEA", SIA "Eliza K", SIA "Reliņš", SIA "Troja", AS Latvijas Finieris, SIA "Dāvana Luks", among others.

### What are the plans for the future?

The project ends next year in October and I am really looking forward to taking the best from this project in order to improve progress in the first module or mix up some of the modules and continue.

### Skilled-Up Estonia

**Astrid Org, project manager at the Centre of Competence for Wood Processing and Furniture Manufacturing TSENER of Võru County Vocational Training Centre.**

A good project affects the organization like a refreshing breeze. It brings with it new ideas, new acquaintances and also financial support for the realization of good

ideas. Regarding the project that started in the late autumn of 2018, we can say that we have now crossed the "equator". Our first training group – 20 people from 11 different companies – will continue to study in the autumn, while preparations are currently underway to open a new group in September. A survey of employers in the region's timber sector showed that training for primary managers is most needed. Indeed, many of our learners are self-learners at their workplace and have never attended any training related to their job. The motivation of the students to participate in the training is high and the drop-out level is minimal. We are now creating and testing the "First-level manager at the timber sector" curriculum, based on the experience of the Lehrinstitut Rosenheim in Germany and the cooperation of partners. The curriculum can be adapted according to local needs and opportunities, of course. Initial feedback from students and employers has been positive – so we will continue in the same spirit.

### Skilled-Up Lithuania

**Dr. Giedrius Gecevičius, Dean at the Faculty of Technology, Kaunas University of Applied Sciences, Lithuania.**

The wood industry is one of the most important sectors in Lithuania with an annually growing number of companies and employees. However, a lack of middle or higher-level digitization, sustainability and social responsibility competencies is the main reason for not fully exploiting the wood industry potential in the Baltic countries. The "Skilled-Up" project could be a very positive and successful example of such skills development with more than 50 students and around 30 companies in Lithuania. During the project's



courses, students already acquired soft and hard skills, as well as theory and practice in fields such as Industrial Design, Planning Control & Quality Systems, Communication Methods, Occupational Safety and Health, Environmental Protection. As a result of the COVID-19 virus and lockdown, we also started the distance learning process and it was a big challenge for the students. In any case, we can be proud of successfully managing this task to enable students to acquire the necessary skills. I strongly believe that this project is a good beginning for a new European quality training concept for the wood industry in the Baltic countries and all of Europe and will benefit from a high value-added economic development.

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