

# Vocational Education and Training in Finland

Edited by Hanna Ilola, Juha Lahtinen and Kirsi Saarinen

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# Prologue

**Juha Lahtinen**, M.Ed., Head of Competence Area,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture

**When we give an introduction to the Finnish education system, the listeners are usually interested in the world-famous comprehensive education, but increasingly often also in vocational education and training. What do we mean by vocational education in Finland? What IS Finnish vocational education and training? What does it lead to, what does it consist of, who are the students, how is vocational education recognised, who can teach in vocational education? As an answer to the questions, we decided to write this book.**

Finland has a strong drive for continuous learning and for improving the skills and working life competences of both the youth and the people already in the working life. This is why vocational education is an important and valued part of the education system.

Vocational education is continuously being developed and it reflects the changing needs of the working life. General working life skills and individual study plans have taken their place alongside vocational courses. There has been a shift from content-based learning to competence-based learning, and from learning taking place only in the educational institutes to more working life focused learning.

In contemporary vocational education, learning is designed in collaboration with the educational institution, student, companies of the field, and working life partners, and students follow their own individual learning paths, which build on their previous competences. The learning path is based



on the foundations of the vocational qualifications. In this publication we describe Finnish vocational education and training. The reader will learn about the structure of studies, the role of the teacher, student experiences, as well as the pedagogical characteristics of competence-based vocational education in Finland.

The publication was edited by TAMK and the different authors represent expertise in their own fields. The photos are from Tampere Vocational College Tredu. Tredu is the second largest vocational college in Finland, and annually has approximately 18 000 students, both youth and adults. Tredu's facilities are located in Tampere and in the surrounding areas.

**“Vocational education is continuously being developed and it reflects the changing needs of the working life.**







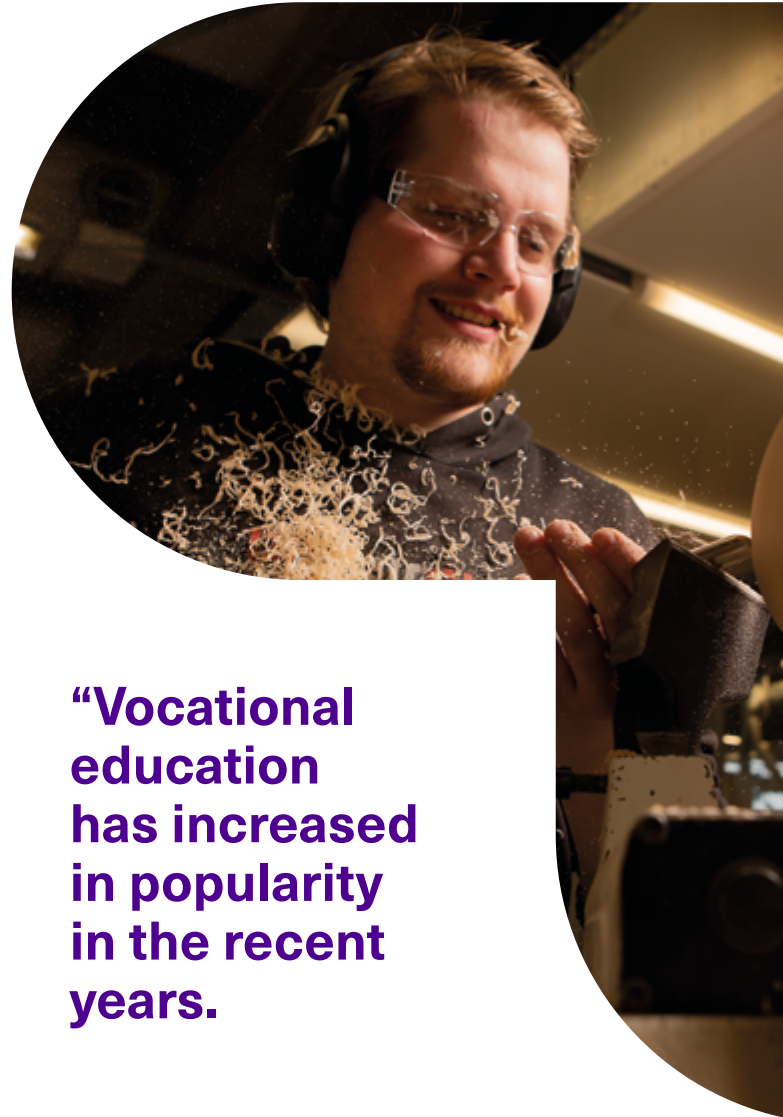
# Vocational education meets the needs of the working life

**Hanna Ilola**, Licentiate of Art (Education), Director,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Finnish vocational education is a vast and diverse system. It allows the youth and adults the possibility to gain practical competences and skills for working in different professions. Vocational education is a part of the Finnish education system, and its aim is to meet the demands of the working life and to ensure skilful workforce in different fields. It also aims to ensure the youths' and adults' readiness for continuous learning and living in changing circumstances. Finnish vocational education is of high quality, and it offers a great starting point for working life or for continuing studies in higher education. Strong working life collaboration and the students' active role in the educational process have made vocational education and training an epitome for other countries.**

Vocational education consists of many different fields and qualifications, which cover a wide range of professions. The students can choose a field they are interested in, and specialise in the vocation of their choosing.

The roles and contents of vocational education are defined by legislation. The legislation gives, for example, the following responsibilities for vocational education and training:



**“Vocational education has increased in popularity in the recent years.**



**“In Finland,  
a vocational  
teacher is a  
respected  
profession.”**

**1. Developing working life competences:** the primary task of vocational education and training is to prepare the students for the working life.

**2. Promoting all-round education:** the education offers basic competences, such as languages, maths, and knowledge of society. These are vital skills in the working life, civil society, and moving onto further education.

**3. Supporting the students' individual growth and skills by personalisation.** The students are entitled to guidance and special support in their studies.

**4. Promoting sustainable development:** the education takes the principles of sustainable development into account and supports ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable activities.

**5. Collaboration with the working life:** representatives from the working life are involved in the planning and implementation of vocational education and training.

Vocational education has reflected other phenomena in society over the years and over time has played its part in building the well-being society. The development of the educational system has increasingly emphasized collaboration with the working life and considering students' individual needs.

Digitalisation has grown in significance in vocational education. Educational institutes have started to use digital learning environments and materials. This, in its part, has enabled the students to study individually in connection with their own

goals and prerequisites. In addition, the utilization of technology and virtual learning environments has also provided new opportunities for practicing practical skills.

In Finland, a vocational teacher is a respected profession. The teacher must know the working methods of their field, as well as pedagogies. Teachers are offered continuous extension training, so they can update their competences and support their students in the best possible way.

After comprehensive school, the Finnish school system offers two paths: upper secondary school or upper secondary vocational education. The students often move directly onto the working life from vocational education, but higher education studies are also possible. The diversity of the educational system and offering different alternatives to the students enable individual paths to education and the working life. Adults can also apply for vocational education, which has increased its popularity and flexibility for career changing and for people whose life situations have changed.

Vocational education has increased in popularity in the recent years. Thanks to the changes in the educational system, vocational education is an increasingly attractive option for many people who wish to gain working life competences sooner and quickly move onto the working life. Of the youth who finish their comprehensive education, approximately half apply for vocational education.

There are 130 colleges which provide vocational education in Finland. Some of these are small and only offer a few qualifications. Others are very big, may cover the vocational education for an entire municipality, and offer dozens of qualifications. The national budget contains resources for the

education providers and the government makes the decisions on the resources. The Ministry of Education and Culture decides on the qualifications being offered, and how much education can be arranged.



# **Pedagogical principles guide vocational education**

**Jiri Vilppola**, PhD, Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**The pedagogical principles behind Finnish vocational education and training are competence-based education, personalisation, and working life collaboration. These principles have been jointly agreed upon, and since 2018 the legislation has required the educational establishments to adhere to them.**

In competence-based education, the focus is on learning goals and vocational competence requirements. The vocational competence requirements describe in clear and concrete terms what the students need to be able to do when they graduate. These requirements form the content base for personalisation and evaluation. The students' prior competences and/or competence-based assessment are also compared to the requirements.

**“Most of the students’ studies take place in workplaces.”**



Competence-based pedagogy has the following characteristics:

- 1. The competences required by the field are defined in collaboration with the working life as the starting point for the education.**
- 2. Learning is not tied to time, place, or pre-set learning processes and study methods.**
- 3. Competences are often developed in working life environments.**
- 4. Competences are evaluated before the learning process, during it, and after it in comparison with the vocational competence requirements.**
- 5. Evaluation emphasises the recognition of prior competences and the possibility for individual planning or personalisation.**
- 6. Students' self-direction and responsibility are highlighted, which creates readiness for continuous learning.**

The scope of vocational qualifications is described as competence points. They describe the scope, difficulty, and significance of the vocational qualification unit compared to the overall goals of the qualification. They do not describe the time required nor the amount of teaching.

Each student gets a personal competence development plan (PCDP). It contains information about the recognition, accreditation, gaining, developing, and demonstrating the student's competences. In addition, the plan may also include guidance and support actions the student needs in their studies.

Collaboration with the working life means planning, implementing, and developing the training and qualifications at a vocational college in collaboration with the working life. Collaboration is important for predicting the competence goals for education, and enabling the students to learn the ways of the working life already during the studies. A further goal is to offer the students evaluation in practical tasks at workplaces.

Most of the students' studies take place in workplaces. Teachers, workplace instructors, and the student agree together how the competence goals are reached at the workplace. The studying at the workplace is flexibly connected with the studies at, for example, vocational college premises, online learning environments, and virtual learning environments. Reaching the competence goals is further supported by students' independent studying.

The quality of vocational education and its connection to the working life is ensured by working life committees. They represent employers, employees, entrepreneurs, and education providers.





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# Free education consists of different forms of qualifications

**Taina Eweiss**, MBA, Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Finnish vocational education and training consists of vocational upper secondary qualifications, further vocational qualifications, and specialist vocational qualifications. There are approximately 160 different qualifications and the educational institutes also offer preparatory education.**

Vocational qualifications are wide-ranging and flexible. Their scope is expressed in competence points. Vocational qualifications consist of compulsory and optional vocational qualification units. The students can, based on their needs, complete entire qualifications, parts of it, or just a single qualification unit. The most popular vocational qualifications, when measured in numbers, are the Vocational Qualification in Social and Health Care and Vocational Qualification in Business.

The Ministry of Education decrees the requirements for the qualifications and the vocational colleges specify these by creating qualification-specific implementation plans.

Vocational upper secondary qualifications are wide-ranging and in them the students demonstrate the basic competences needed to work in different fields. In addition, the students demonstrate more specialised competences and the vocational competences required by the working life in at least one part of their field. The vocational upper secondary qualification consists of vocational and common units. There are over 40 vocational upper secondary qualifications.

In further vocational qualifications, the students demonstrate more focused competences required

by the working life, either more in-depth or for more exclusive tasks. There are over 60 further vocational qualifications.

In specialist vocational qualifications, the students demonstrate vocational competences which exceed the requirements of further vocational qualifications, or multidisciplinary competences. There are over 50 specialist vocational qualifications.


The structure of vocational education is continuously developed to meet the needs of the working life. New qualifications are formed and obsolete ones are retired. The task of the Finnish National Agency for Education is to collect predictive data, follow statistics, and analyse the feedback from colleges, students, and companies. This data is used to evaluate the changes required in the structure of education.

**“Vocational education is funded by the state of Finland.**

Vocational education is funded by the state of Finland. This means the education is, for the most part, free of charge for the students. The Ministry of Education and Culture gives funding to the education providers annually. The colleges decide how to use the funding effectively and how they ensure meeting the goals and developing their actions. The funding decisions emphasise efficiency and impact. In addition, educational institutions take part in development projects, which offer additional funding.







# **The education pays attention to the students' individual competences and learning**

**Ari Jussila**, M.Ed., Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Individualisation is an important part of Finnish vocational education. It means planning and implementing each student a study path, which meets their individual needs. The students' prior competences are also recognised and accredited. The personal competence development plan (PCDP) includes information about what competences the student still needs and how they will get them, how they will demonstrate their competences, as well as what guidance, support, or possible special support they need in their current situation in life**

Individualisation continues throughout the studies, and the decisions for the students are marked in the personal competence development plan (PCDP). The plan is drawn up in collaboration by a member of the college, the student themselves, and sometimes a representative from the working life. The plan is continuously updated and the student, teachers, and guidance counsellors all keep track of its implementation throughout the studies.

The plan describes what methods are used to gain competences during the studies. The student's prior skills are taken into account when planning the studies – if the student already knows something they do not have to study it again. The need for guidance and support are identified and recorded into the plan, as well as how the required guidance and support are arranged. The plan also includes a career plan for the student. Personalised studies start from the student's needs and their situation in life, and the studies are adjusted whenever it is possible.

**“The students are guided and encouraged through feedback to reach their personal learning goals.**

## Evaluation and demonstration of competences

Student's competences and skills are evaluated in vocational education. The student's competences are compared to the competence goals described in the vocational qualifications requirements and evaluation criteria. The student demonstrates their skills by doing practical tasks in authentic situations. This is called a competence demonstration. The college is in charge of organizing the demonstration, and the student's skills are usually evaluated by a teacher and a representative from the workplace.

Only the end result is evaluated. The aim of the evaluation is to ensure the competence requirements are met. How the competences were gained does not matter. Evaluation does not take into account, for example, taking part in classroom education.

In addition to the competence evaluation, another important form of evaluation is the evaluation of learning. The students are guided and encouraged through feedback to reach their personal learning goals. The feedback on the development of skills is given by teachers and workplace instructors. The feedback assures student that their competences are increasing.







# **Diverse learning environments support vocational development**

**Ville Palkinen**, M.A., Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Well set-up and practical learning environments are a significant part of Finnish vocational education and training. Diverse learning spaces and tools support the students' vocational development and prepare them for the working life.**

## **Workshops**

The workshops in the educational institutions are true laboratories of learning. They are equipped with the tools and devices used in the field, so that the students can practice in an authentic environment.

Vehicle technology workshops contain garage jacks, devices to test engines, as well as tools. The students can become familiar with electric installations and practice using the tools of the trade in a safe environment with qualified teachers in the electrical technology workshops.

Some of the machines in the workshops are not even available in all the companies of the field. On the other hand, especially larger companies often own machines a college cannot purchase. It is important to plan the student's individual learning path in a way which combines gaining the required skills both in an educational environment as well as at the workplace.

**“Even though practical training is important, theoretical education is also needed.”**



## **Working life oriented learning environments at the educational institutions**

Teaching restaurants and kitchens at educational institutions offer the students the possibility to practice their vocational skills in authentic situations. They can work as cooks, servers, or restaurant service producers. The restaurants are open to the public, so anybody can come and enjoy the delicious meals cooked by the students. This creates positive pressure for the students, as well as the responsibility to act professionally and to develop their customer service skills.

The teaching in the restaurant field may also take place at a workplace. Then the students work in a commercial restaurant instead of an educational institution, but still under teacher supervision.

Commissioned works are an important part of learning in many vocational fields. Vocational colleges may also produce goods for sales.

## **Classroom education and other facilities for theoretical education**

Even though practical training is important, theoretical education is also needed. Classrooms offer an environment where the students can focus on learning vocational information and skills. The classrooms contain educational technology, computers, projectors, and audio equipment. The students can take part in lectures, do group work, or take part in teacher-led discussions.

Traditional printed books also play a role in vocational education. The students can check them out from the college libraries.

## **Digital and virtual learning environments and simulations**

Digital learning environments have become increasingly important in vocational education. They offer many benefits, such as flexibility, studying regardless of time and place, as well as interactive learning experiences. Using digital tools benefits all students, as their future workplaces already use such tools.

A form of digital learning environments is virtual reality (VR), where the students can access virtual environments. For example, the care work students can practice various treatments using virtual patients. Simulators allow the students to practice using large machines and vehicles in a safe and environmentally friendly manner.

## **Entrepreneurship learning environments**

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial work methods are important success factors in the working life today and in the future. The students can found their own companies during the studies. There they can test their business ideas, learn entrepreneurship and the conventions of being an entrepreneur by working as entrepreneurs either alone or in a group. At the same time, they gain vocational qualification units. Entrepreneurship studies can be integrated into vocational or common units of the qualifications.

## **Co-operatives**

Vocational colleges may also host co-operatives, which the students can join. As members of the co-operative, the students are employed by the co-

operative. Through the co-operative, the students can offer customers services and/or goods in their own study field, while the co-operative takes care of the employer obligations.

Authentic learning environments offer the students the possibilities to develop their working life skills and entrepreneurial attitude, to gain a deeper understanding of what entrepreneurship means, learn through practice, and gain confidence.



# The studies are adapted to the student's needs

**Ari Jussila**, M.Ed., Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Toni Kinnunen is 18 years old and is studying for the third and final year to become a qualified wood artisan. He found working with his hands important already in comprehensive school and wished to continue that in upper secondary education. He applied for the studies in the spring of the final year of the comprehensive school when all comprehensive school graduates apply for studies through a joint application system.**

At the moment, the school week mostly consists of working in a workshop. There are four weekly classroom lessons. Later in the spring, he will move onto a workplace to learn more and to carry out competence demonstrations. These are a way to demonstrate and evaluate skills, but the teachers offer feedback on how the work is going already during the studies. "They also give praise," says Toni.

Compared to comprehensive school, vocational education focuses on doing something real. There is far less theoretical education and the atmosphere is more relaxed. This is why Toni enjoys vocational education. After graduation, he will do his mandatory military service, and aims to find a job after that. He hopes to be able to work with his hands in a good work environment. Toni is happy with his choices.

Mina Lähteenmäki is 18 years old, and in her third year of vocational upper secondary qualification in construction. She has also included three upper secondary school subjects into her studies. She completed most of her construction studies

**“Compared to comprehensive school, vocational education focuses on doing something real.**

within the first two years of studying, and during the second year she studied by working in various workplaces. Now, in her third year, she focuses on upper secondary school studies and prepares for the matriculation examination. Her school week consists of three days of vocational topics and two days of upper secondary school topics.

Mina aims to continue onto higher education, perhaps to study architecture. At the end of the comprehensive school, construction field was her main interest and when she found out she could combine vocational and upper secondary school studies, that was her choice. The combination of upper secondary school and vocational studies gives Mina a good starting point for higher education studies.

Combining two fields of education takes commitment, responsibility, and a lot of work from the student, and Mina has managed well. "I can plan my time when it comes to studies, and I also do sports actively." Her parents supported Mina's choice, even though they were a bit worried about how she would cope.

Mina feels that studying the upper secondary school subjects is similar to studying in the comprehensive school. "We study similarly in a classroom, but of course the students are more responsible for their studies. In vocational studies, we get to do, and concrete doing is the best. And of course getting a profession and being able to do things." As Mina describes studying: you are allowed to do, you are allowed to learn, you are allowed to make mistakes, you are allowed to try and you are allowed to ask for help.

Hanna Laakkonen is an adult student who is studying for specialist vocational qualification in

woodwork. She is already a qualified artisan and has completed the further vocational qualifications. "One reason for applying was to be able to graduate as a woodwork specialist, which means I am actually competent. I can demonstrate my skills. The specialist vocational qualifications also open up the way to become a vocational teacher, which is an option for me in the future."

Adults study in different ways: some study during the day and other vocational colleges offer the possibility for evening studies. Hanna works full time, and studies in the evenings. The studies start at 17.00 and end approximately at 20.45. Hanna has designed her own schedule and usually studies two nights a week. The studying focuses on working at the workshop. Her family supports her choices, although sometimes her children ask about her long days.

Hanna describes her studies: "You can plan your own path and test to see if your ideas work. The studies are rewarding, and although the teachers have limited resources, they offer help, guidance, feedback, and support. The teachers know what they're doing."





# **A teacher's workday includes many types of interactions**

**Taija Salonen**, M.Ed., Senior Lecturer, TREDU

## 8.00–9.00

My workday begins with a PCDP discussion with a student who applied in the joint application system and has just begun their studies. They are studying for the vocational upper secondary qualifications in care and education sector in the field of early childhood education and family activities in order to graduate as a children's instructor. I had already booked a meeting venue from the college for this meeting. I had informed the guardians about the time of the meeting and about their possibility to attend. I had also studied the starting level analysis of the student done in a digital learning environment, and pre-filled the electronic Personal Competence Development Plan (PCDP). This way I can better focus on meeting the student and concentrate on our interaction.

I want to hear about the student's previous study experiences, relevant work experience and hobbies, as well as possible challenges when it comes to studying. I ask the student's thoughts and experiences about their study group, how well it works, and friendships. We also go through what parts of the qualification they will study, what the schedule will be, and what different ways will be used to gain the competences. I also ask about their wishes for workplace studying and write the wishes into a joint booking list. I activate the form for competence demonstration planning and write down the student's career plan. If the student has challenges in the Finnish language or concentration, I get in touch with the special needs teacher, and we find a meeting time to write the plan for special support. After writing all this down, I get the student to approve the first PCDP. This way I ensure that the information is transferred to the national database for education and training.

**“I read and reply to emails and messages I’ve got from students, guardians, working life representatives and colleagues.**

### **9.00–9.30**

I read and reply to emails and messages I've got from students, guardians, working life representatives and colleagues. I record recognition for a student's prior learning. I add the work done yesterday afternoon and this morning into my work plan. I grab a cup of coffee to go.

### **9.30–10.30**

I go into a hybrid working space, open the connection on my computer, and have a workplace guidance discussion. The discussion includes a student who started their workplace learning the previous week and their workplace instructor. I sent the training agreement to the workplace to be signed before the training period begun and agreed about the meeting time by calling the instructor. I tell the instructor about the qualification the student is doing, its vocational competence requirements, and the role of the instructor. We go over the goals the student has set for the training period, and discuss what competences they need to acquire and further improve during the period. I also familiarize the instructor with evaluation and agree about the competence demonstration schedules. I write down everything we decided.

### **10.30–11.30**

I climb the stairs to our team room and meet my colleague there. We plan the contents of a new training together. This training is aimed at assistants already working in early childhood education, who can enhance their competences through a city-offered apprenticeship training. I sit at my desk and reply to an electronic employee survey, which charts the wellbeing of city employees. I phone a municipal day care and organize a student visit.

### **11.30–12.00**

I have lunch at the restaurant run by our students. At the same time, a colleague and I discuss e.g. the feedback from the students and an up-coming collaboration meeting with the early childhood education teachers of a university of applied sciences.

### **12.00–12.45**

I go into a module room I have booked and start a Teams meeting to evaluate a competence demonstration. I have most of these discussions during the children's nap time, as most of my students are learning at daycare centres. The discussion includes the student and their workplace instructor. The demonstration took place the previous week and consisted of five shifts. In the discussion, we cover all the competence requirements of the vocational unit so that first the student evaluates their own work and then the instructor offers their observations. As the teacher, I write down justifications for the evaluations into an electronic memo and make sure evaluation is based on correct things. If needed, I ask for clarifying questions about the competences the student has demonstrated. Finally, I log the grade for the demonstration, which the evaluators decide together, and inform the student about its justifications. I also tell the student about their rights and all the procedures related to storing the grade, data transfer, and the feedback collected from the working life representatives. Finally, I thank them for collaboration and congratulate the student for a job well done. After the meeting, I send the evaluation memo to be electronically signed by the working life evaluator and record the meeting into the student's diary.

### **13.00–15.00**

I teach adult students who have enrolled through continuous application. The topic is using digital tools and technology in instructing children. I go to the teaching storage room to fetch digital tools, such as digital microscopes and tablets, which can be used to practice coding and programming skills. The students get familiar with the tools and how to work with them. We think about situations they could be used in early childhood education. We talk about the experiences of using digital tools in the working life: how are they available, how are they used, and what challenges and needs there exist for the use and skills of using the tools. Finally, we come up with ideas on how to continue with the topic later.


### **15.00–16.00**

At the end of the day, I have a team meeting. All teachers of our team are present, as well as the head of education, two study counsellors, special

needs teacher, and vocational counsellor. Some attend through a remote connection and some are present in the meeting room. The team meeting progresses along the agenda the team leader has planned. The teachers take turns acting as secretaries for the meeting. First, we check up on our student groups. We make sure each student has a named OMA teacher. The head of education reminds us of the jointly agreed upon ways of action when we make training agreements with the working life. We discuss how we implement Tredu's strategy in practice and consider the focus areas of the academic year. Finally, we go through current issues, for example how the work for the implementation plans for the new qualifications is going, and how are the collaboration needs from the working life met.

At the end of the day, I write down the work I have done, pack up my computer and work phone, say bye to my teammates and go home feeling good. A teacher's work for the day is done.





# Esteemed vocational teacher education is studied as blended adult education

**Juha Lahtinen**, M.Ed., Head of Competence Area,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**In Finnish society, teacher is a respected profession. The same applies for vocational education. The formal qualifications for a vocational teacher consist of three parts: 1) university degree or some other training demonstrating a high degree of proficiency, 2) at least three years of work experience in the field in question and 3) pedagogical qualifications.**

Five Schools of Professional Teacher Education offer pedagogical studies, or the vocational teacher training in Finland. The Schools of Professional Teacher Education all belong to universities of applied sciences. Five universities of applied sciences have been granted, by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the right to arrange vocational teacher training, special needs education teacher training, and guidance counsellor training. Vocational teacher education is very popular and there are many times more applicants than there are entry places. Universities also offer teacher education, but their teacher students are more focused on working in early childhood education, comprehensive education, and upper secondary education.

Vocational teacher education is organised as blended studies and they can also be completed alongside work. The scope of the training is 60 ECTS, and programmes are also offered in English. Vocational teacher education consists of studies in education, vocational pedagogical studies, and practical training. These are all defined by the law. Today, an essential part of the studies is utilizing digitalisation in education.

All Schools of Professional Teacher Education also offer training for vocational special needs teachers and guidance counsellors. The scope of these further education programmes is also 60 credits. All applicants must have completed the pedagogical teacher qualifications.

**“Vocational teacher education is very popular and there are many times more applicants than there are entry places.”**

# **Student counselling supports the students during their studies**

**Ari Jussila**, M.Ed., Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK



**Guidance counselling is an important part of Finnish vocational education. Each vocational college student, whether young or an adult, has the right for guidance counselling. The goal of the guidance counselling is to support the student during their studies and ensure that they have enough skills and competences they require when they move onto the working life and further education. Guidance counselling consists of, for example, developing study and working life skills, support in any choices made during the studies, and supporting the applications for further education.**

According to the legislation, educational institutions need to make sure each student receives sufficient guidance during their studies. All educational institutions have guidance counsellors, who are professionals in guidance. They have received education for it. In addition to guidance counsellors, guidance is also given by tutors and teachers. Guidance is offered both individually and in groups.

The trained guidance counsellor has the most responsibility for guidance. They are the guidance professionals. The work and tasks of a guidance counsellor vary, depending on the educational institution. This is affected by e.g. the size of the institution. All Finnish guidance counsellors are pedagogically qualified teachers, in addition to which they have studied at least 60 ECTS worth of guidance counselling studies at university level.

**“All educational institutions have guidance counsellors, who are professionals in guidance.**

The guidance during the studies focuses on maintaining the PCDP and making possible adjustments. The aim is to support the progress in studies and to find solutions to possible problems together with the student. The expectations for life after the studies have an impact on choices made during the studies. At the end of the studies, the guidance ensures the student completes the studies. It helps them to think about various options after graduation. The most common options are finding a job, continuing studies, or entrepreneurship.

Career counselling focuses on the student's competences and their opportunities to progress in their lives. The student draws up a career plan, where they look at their future choices.

## **Vocational guidance counsellor's experiences about work**

**Student counsellor Anna-Maija Lamminpohja,  
Tampere Vocational College Tredu  
19 years of experience in student counselling**

The most important part of a guidance counsellor's work is supporting the students on their path to learn, according to their own goals. The guidance counsellors look at the entirety of guidance in an educational institution, so their viewpoint is wider than that of the teachers working with the students every day. Guidance counselling begins before the studies do, and – if needed – continues after they have ended.

The prerequisite for successful guidance is dialogue between the guidance counsellor, the student, and the teachers. I offer guidance to approximately 300 students annually. This is close to the average in our college.

The work of a guidance counsellor varies a lot. A workday consists of being in touch with various people (home, teachers, support network etc.), meetings, and administrative paperwork. The key is supporting the students' well-being and that they are heard and get the help they need. The downside is that administrative work and writing everything down require a lot of time. The best feeling is seeing a student reach their goals and eventually graduate. The core of the work is appreciative interaction with human beings, whether they are students, teachers, parents, members of the support network, anybody. I am grateful I can do this work.



# Special support helps in gaining competences and skills

**Jukka Kemppi**, M.Ed., Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK

**Seija Karvonen**, Principal, Luovi Vocational College

## Support for studies

Each Finnish person has the right to continue their studies after the comprehensive school, either in vocational education, upper secondary education, or preparatory education. Each vocational education student has the right to get support and guidance for their studies. The students get guidance from their tutors, other teachers, guidance counsellors and special needs teachers. The students' well-being is supported by student health service youth counsellors, study counsellors, nurses, curators, and psychologists. The guidance and support actions agreed upon with the student are recorded in their Personal Competence Development Plan (PCDP).

## Special support

If a student requires regular or long-term support in their studies due to learning disabilities, other disabilities, illness, or other reason, they are entitled to special support. Sometimes the need for support is discovered during the studies. Special support aims to help the student to meet the vocational competence requirements of the qualification.

A special needs teacher evaluates the need for special support. The evaluation can be based on the information the student has given at the beginning of the studies, or through tests and interviews done during the studies. The education provider makes the decision for special support after talking to the student and, in case of an underaged person, with their guardian. The special needs teacher plans the support actions together with the student, guidance counsellor, and other teachers. The support actions can take many forms, for example

- support from the special needs teacher when learning new things

- clearer learning materials
- the use of different aids (audio books, illustrated instructions, concrete tools, immersive reader, or other digital applications)
- adjusted learning environments and planning a clear structure
- practicing study skills.

The needs for special support are very varied, so the support is always individually planned and implemented according to each student and recorded in their PCDP.

The student also needs special support when studying at the workplace. A training agreement is written, which lists the tasks the student is expected to do while studying at a workplace. Any support activities are agreed upon with the workplace instructor.

## Intensive special needs support

A student may receive intensive special needs support if they require individual, intensive, and diverse support due to serious learning disabilities, other disabilities, or illness. There are several factors affecting the need for intensive special needs support. The factors are a combination of the conflict between the demands of the environment and the student's own competences and possibilities – not always necessarily an illness or disability. A student who requires intensive special needs support often has restrictions in their ability to function. These restrictions may stem from learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, difficult socio-economical background, crisis in life, or severe social exclusion.

The education takes place in special needs vocational colleges and education providers, or in special groups in vocational colleges. Intensive special needs support is always planned, goal-oriented, and student centred. The support is recorded in the student's personal competence development plan.

## **Adjusted syllabus**

Sometimes, despite the support actions, the student does not reach the vocational competence requirements or learning goals. In these situations, the possibility for an adjusted evaluation is considered. In adjusted evaluation, the student is not required to demonstrate all aspects of the competence requirements. Despite adjustments, the goal is for the student to complete their qualifications.

## **Inclusion**

Intensive special needs support can be carried out in collaboration with a special needs education provider and general vocational college. This type of collaboration enables the use of learning environments and staff required to reach the vocational qualifications. This offers the possibility for the students to work together with different types of learners already during their studies. Special needs support in TUVA and TELMA education

Preparatory education for upper secondary qualification (TUVA) enables the student to get special support if they need long-term and continuous support due to learning disabilities, other disabilities, illnesses, or other reasons. The required support actions are planned individually and recorded in the student's PCDP. Vocational

special needs education providers can offer intensive special needs support. TUVA training offers the student the possibility to become familiar with various education fields, and they have the possibility to start vocational education either during their TUVA studies or after it.

The training preparing students for work and independent life (TELMA) offers the students special support as well as education and guidance based on their own goals and abilities. The aim of TELMA is not to get the students into vocational education, but to offer the abilities needed to live good, independent lives, based on the student's capacity. The aim is also to find a suitable way to participate in the working life without vocational qualifications.



# Managing a vocational institution happens on many levels

**Taina Eweiss**, MBA, Senior Lecturer,  
School of Pedagogical Innovations and Culture, TAMK



**There are very different types of vocational colleges in Finland. Some are small, others very large, and they operate in many different locations. The work of a principal in a small educational institution may be very different from the one in a large college. In a vocational institution, it is common to divide the management responsibility. The principal is the general director, who runs the operations of the entire institution and works as the personal supervisor for directors, vice-principals, and managers of education. The everyday management of education is usually carried out by managers.**

Teachers are the experts in their work, and it is important for them to manage their own work as much as possible. Shared leadership and independent teamwork are emphasised in Finland.

## **Strategic management**

The work of a vocational institution is defined by many norms coming from outside the education itself: laws, statutes, method of financing, instructions, as well as the regional and municipal strategies. However, the vocational institution may draw up their own mission, vision, values, strategic goals and focus areas, in collaboration with the management, staff, and interest groups.

**“Pedagogical management also affects the working culture of the educational institution.**

## **Pedagogical management**

Pedagogical management is the management of teaching and learning. Its focus areas are curriculum development, the competences of the teaching staff and their development, resources for teaching and learning, as well as the support and promotion of the students' learning. Pedagogical management also affects the working culture of the educational institution.

Pedagogical management is interactive. The people working in the educational institution form a community of learners, where the principal and other managers are learners alongside the other members. It is important for the management and the teaching staff to have regular conversations about pedagogical issues, in order to increase common understanding, to create operation models, and to come up with solutions.

## **Management of change and quality assurance**

The fast pace of changes and educational reforms have made management of change, future planning, and networking essential parts of management in vocational education.

The management of vocational education also includes quality control, evaluation, and development. The education providers are expected to have a working quality control system, which also includes the education providers evaluating the qualifications they provide, their education and other activities, as well as their quality and impact.

## **Interest group and network collaboration**

Wide-ranging collaboration requires the managers of vocational education to have strong competences in networking, collaboration, and interest group work.

Educational institutions collaborate with the working life, employment authorities, other vocational institutions and upper secondary schools, higher education and comprehensive education providers, as well as with the third sector. Collaboration with the student health care and welfare services, and often with the students' guardians, is also close.



# **A principal's day is filled with multiple collaboration situations**

**Antti Lahti**, Municipal Federation Director,  
SASKY Municipal Education and Training Consortium

## **Wed August the 16th, 2023**

### **08.00–09.00**

Going through the joint agreement of the TYRSKY-ESR project. Planning how we will collaborate with the other vocational education providers in the Pirkanmaa region in the next five years after the project ends. Attending were the Finance and Administrative Director Kakkuri, Director of Vocational Education Kivipuro, as well as the Development Manager Suoperä and Project Lead Kankaanpää.

### **09.00–11.00**

Visiting Sasky's new learning environment, the Haapanen Manor in Pyynikki, Tampere, with the Museum Amanuensis from Tampere Art Museum, Tiina Kuivalainen, and five other museum representatives. The discussion focused on what art could be placed on the manor walls for the students and the staff to enjoy.

### **12.00–13.00**


Going through the top-up training of practical nurses. How have the export training groups in Sasky graduated and found employment after graduation. Attending were the Head of Social and Health Care Lehtinen as well as the CEO of Aiko Academy Oy (Sasky's subsidiary) Tiits.

### **13.00–14.15**

Going through e-mails.

### **14.30–15.30**

Discussion about the payment of additional rewards for substitute teachers. Attending were the Director of General Education Simberg, Director of Vocational Education and Training Kivipuro, Finance and Administrative Director Kakkuri, and Head of Human Resources Kaunisto.



**Finnish vocational education and training is a wide and diverse system, which offers the students the possibility to gain practical competences and prepare them for work in various trades. It aims to meet the needs of the working life and ensure the availability of skilled workforce in different fields.**

**What is Finnish vocational education and training? Where does it lead to, what does it consist of, who are the students, how respected is it, who can teach there? This publication was written to describe Finnish vocational education and training and to answer the most common questions about it.**

Authors



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