

Vocational education and training promotes lifelong and continuous learning in Finland



The legislation on vocational education and training in Finland is based on the principle of lifelong learning that continues throughout individuals' whole career and life. In Finnish context, we use the concept "continuous learning". Students' individual circumstances, goals and the skills they have acquired in the past are taken into account whenever training is planned. Individual learning pathways are designed to help students gain an occupation or progress in their career. In addition, vocational education and training provides knowledge, skills and competences that students can tap into when they need to learn new skills in the future.

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PATHWAYS

Students in vocational education and training have very different backgrounds. Many apply for a programme directly after completing their comprehensive school education, some plan to learn a new occupation while others wish to progress in their career. As a result, students' knowledge, skills, competences, and prior learning vary a great deal, but so do the objectives set for their studies.

A personal competence development plan (PCDP) will be drawn up for students

starting their education on how to achieve their objectives in the best possible way. For example, the content and schedule of studies will be agreed with the student on the basis of the national qualification requirements. Sometimes it is necessary to rethink the plan and decide whether the qualification that was initially chosen really meets the student's needs. Students can then be guided to complete a qualification that is best suited to them.

As the continuous learning approach gains momentum, our under-

In vocational education and training, the approach to learning is centred on the idea that students are competent and goaloriented agents.

Continuous learning is not only about the development of skills over time, but also about how learning environments adapt to the individual's situation in life.

standing of how education and training works will also change.

- Education will no longer depend on a certain place or time. Skills suitable for a vocational qualification can be acquired in multiply learning environments and in formal, nonformal and informal way.
- Vocational education and training is part of a continuum in which prior learning is identified and teaching is focused on new skills.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ACCORDING TO LIFE SITUATION

In continuous learning, it is essential that students can accumulate knowledge in different environments, also outside school. Learning environments may include, for example, workplaces, leisure activities or virtual environments, in addition to the facilities at the educational institution. Vocational education and training can take place in a wide range of places and with varying timetables, provided that the learning environments enable the students to learn the required knowledge, skills and competences.

QUALIFICATION STRUCTURE SUPPORTING CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The qualification structure in the Finnish vocational education and training comprises three different types of qualifications: initial vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. Initial vocational qualifications are, as a rule, intended for those who are new to the field, while further and specialist vocational qualifications are aimed at those who already have acquired



the basic skills but who are looking to progress in their career. A threetier qualification structure can respond to people's lifelong need to develop their professional skills. In many fields, further and specialist vocational qualifications have been designed to lead to the next level of education, complementing and deepening the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in initial vocational qualifications.

Continuous learning is promoted in that vocational qualifications ensure eligibility for further studies. Accordingly, all those who have completed a vocational qualification may apply for higher education programmes. Common units such as mathematics, Finnish or Swedish language, information technology or foreign languages have been included in all initial vocational qualifications as compulsory units. They improve students' ability to progress to the next level of education and offer tools for further learning.

In addition to the qualifications, training may be offered that does not lead to

a qualification but advance or supplement students' professional knowledge and skills.

SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT

The objectives of vocational education and training are to raise the general level of professional knowledge, skills and competences in Finland on one hand, and to support individuals' professional growth and lifelong learning on the other. However, these objectives cannot be achieved unless all students are guaranteed the right learning conditions.

Students do not always have sufficient learning skills for studying or completing a vocational qualification. Studies supporting learning skills can be provided in subjects such as mathematics, Finnish, information technology or foreign languages. If necessary, students can also receive support for developing their study skills or life management skills. For example, students can be supported by preparatory education and training or studies that improve their learning skills.

Qualifications and units are utilised flexibly so that they help students achieve their goals.