

Abstract

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Evaluation of the reform process of qualification requirements for vocational upper secondary qualification

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The evaluation examined the preparation and implementation processes related to the reform of vocational upper secondary qualifications. The aim was to evaluate the reform processes related to the qualification requirements for vocational upper secondary qualifications implemented between 2007 and 2010, and the reform processes related to education provider curricula and plans for organising competence-based qualifications. The evaluation examined the functionality of the reform process, participation of different actors in the process as well as process management. In addition, the evaluation differentiated between the national process of preparing and implementing the qualification requirements, and the process of implementing the qualification requirements at the level of education providers and organisers of competence-based qualifications.

The target group of the evaluation comprised the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education, the education and training committees and qualification committees and working groups that took part in drawing up of the requirements as well as all providers of vocational education and training. The material of the evaluation consisted of documents from the authorities, studies and project reports related to the reform of vocational upper secondary qualifications as well as surveys and interviews directed at different actors.

Reforming all vocational upper secondary qualifications at the same was an extensive process that took place on many levels. The work to draw up the qualification requirements was carried out partly by public servants in the Finnish National Board of Education and partly in qualification requirement projects by the education providers, whose work was supported by qualification-specific guidance groups set for this purpose. A follow-up group was set for the whole process. In addition, education and training committees and qualification committees participated in commenting on the requirements work at the different stages of the reform.

Drawing up the qualification requirements in the requirements working groups was effective. As the preparation of the qualification requirements for vocational upper secondary qualifications was carried out as projects by education providers, it increased participation by the education providers

and improved their possibilities to influence. Actors in vocational upper secondary education and training as well as actors in vocational adult education and training took part in the preparation of the requirements. According to the results, the participation of working life in the preparation of the requirements was considered important, although it remained lower than it was hoped. Instead, the participation and networking of education providers was as a rule considered to have succeeded and their regional representation was considered important.

The way the reform was implemented was considered rather successful as a whole, although the manner in which it was organised was considered slightly complicated. Spreading the implementation of the reform over several years posed challenges to process management. The preparation for the first qualification requirements was begun before the final guidelines were completed and this made work by the requirement working groups more difficult. The Finnish National Board of Education was considered to have a key role in the reform. However, the organisation and implementation of work could have been clearer because there were several committees and working groups, and their tasks and roles as well as the allocation of responsibilities were not entirely clear.

A competent staff, good contacts in working life, the clarity of the process, the instructions given by the Finnish National Board of Education and the clarity of the completed qualification requirements enhanced the implementation of the qualification requirements by the education providers. Tight timetables and delayed instructions as well as the education providers' scarce resources and changes in the education organisation impeded their implementation.

The following development suggestions were decided on in the evaluation:

1. The preparation of reforming qualification requirements must be developed so that the guidelines and instructions have been completed before the actual work is begun.
2. The decision on the qualification structure must be made before preparing the requirements begins.
3. The process of reforming qualification requirements must be clarified and simplified.
4. The possibilities for working life to participate in the preparation of the qualification requirements must be enhanced.
5. The different stages in the reform of qualification requirements must be communicated comprehensively.
6. The implementation of the qualification requirements must be instructed sufficiently and adequate resources must be provided.
7. The cycle in which the realisation of the reform of qualification requirements and their implementation is monitored, evaluated and studied must be faster.

Keywords: Vocational education and training, vocational upper secondary qualification, evaluation, qualification requirements, curricula, plan for arranging competence tests