

# Reform of continuous learning

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT****STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN** FINLAND

## Timeline

**2019 Design****2020 Approved/Agreed****2021 Implementation****2022 Implementation****2023 Implementation****2024 Implementation****ID number 36311**

## Background

Technological development, especially digitalisation, significantly changes the labour market, professions, and skills requirements. The working age population is especially affected, but the changes also have an impact on the skills requirements of those entering the labour market. It is estimated that within 10 years nearly half a million (the Finnish population is 5.5 million) people will need retraining or systematic continuous professional development. At least as many will need more specific competence development.

According to the Government Programme 2019-23, continuous learning responds to the need to develop skills at different stages of people's lives and careers. To raise the employment rate, Finland needs a supply of skilled labour.

Financing of education and guidance needs to better support learning in the workplace. Common principles for recognising prior learning acquired outside formal education need to be set out. Services need to be created to facilitate lifelong guidance, and such services also need to focus on supporting groups that are currently underrepresented in adult education.

## Objectives

The government aims at increasing opportunities for retraining, continuous professional development, and professional specialisation education throughout working life, at developing apprenticeship training as a channel for reskilling and for adult education, and at providing flexible opportunities to study in higher education institutions. It also aims at developing study leave and financial aid for adult learners and improving the opportunities for studying while looking for a job.

## Description

The reform of continuous learning, in line with the Government Programme for 2019-23, is prepared by a parliamentary group that includes members from all parliamentary parties. Labour market organisations, education providers and other key organisations and ministries are represented in the monitoring group.

Policy areas:

- (a) provision and financing of education;
- (b) identification of prior learning and students' income;
- (c) increasing opportunities for retraining, continuous professional development and professional specialisation education throughout working life;
- (d) developing apprenticeship training as a channel for reskilling and for adult education;
- (e) providing flexible opportunities to study in higher education institutions;
- (f) providing study leave and financial aid for adult learners;
- (g) improving the opportunities for people to study while looking for work.

### **2019 Design**

In February 2019, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group to draw up:

- (a) a description of the principles, and a model for, continuous learning;
- (b) recommendations on measures that:
  - (i) encourage learning during the working career (incentives on provision of education, service system and income);
  - (ii) increase systematic planning of learning during the working career;
  - (iii) enhance opportunities to develop competences during the working career;
  - (iv) focus on vulnerable groups: those who lack support from their employer or have low basic skills, and those who are underrepresented in education;
- (c) a recommendation for a model, based on anticipation data, to respond to retraining and continuous education needs.

### **2020 Approved/Agreed**

The Strategy for lifelong guidance 2020-23, jointly published by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, tied in with the objectives of the government related to education, employment, wellbeing and inclusion. Based on the strategy, measures aimed to widen access to guidance, strengthen lifelong career management skills and enhance skills assessment, upskilling and career development in the working life. The objective was to create a well-functioning digital service for continuous learning that makes better use of shared information on education, the labour market and competences.

### **2021 Implementation**

The Act on establishing a Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment entered into force in September 2021 with the aim to promote the competence development of working-age people and the availability of skilled labour through:

- (a) analysing the competence and labour market needs of working life;
- (b) financing education and training intended for working-age people;
- (c) developing information, advisory and guidance services;
- (d) supporting regional and other cooperation.

Located at the premises of the Finnish National Agency for Education and serving as a separate organisational unit for the agency, the service centre also participated in the development of a digital service package for continuous learning.

### **2022 Implementation**

In 2022, the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment launched the recruitment of most of its staff. The Board of the Centre approved operational focus areas for year 2022. First calls for applications of funding were opened in April 2022.

In 2022, the centre implemented six government grants financing more than 170

projects; three procurements of competence services, two of which were of energy technology related training and one for trade sector; an outreach intervention pilot project, linked with extensive research carried out by ETLA Economic Research and the Labour Institute for Economic Research LABORE (see details below); and a regional pilot project: short-term training of management in seasonal agriculture work.

The Outreach Intervention Pilot Project comprised research by the ETLA Economic Research, the Labour Institute for Economic Research LABORE and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment has tendered for service providers, who contacted companies and arranged group guidance sessions for them. A total of at least 1 200 group sessions are to be held in small and medium-size companies all over Finland. At least one person with only a basic-level degree must participate in each session.

In 2022, the centre started developing a new type of digital information platform for the anticipation of needs for continuous learning funded from the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The basis of the platform is to provide timely, reliable and customer-oriented competence anticipation information, where short- and medium-term information about skills needed can be combined and scaled both regionally and nationally. The platform to offer precise information about changes in needed skills, also categorised by industry. In 2022, customer needs and situations for using the information were mapped, the most important cases of use were defined, a data strategy was drawn up and suppliers of the technical implementation of the analytics system and information service were tendered for. The programming development began in January 2023.

The financed projects and services of the centre started during the fall of 2022. According, a total of approximately 17 000 people are to participate in these services. The training services constituted parts of a degree or smaller entities and could be completed while working.

The centre also launched a feasibility study of increasing participation in education by sharing education information and group guidance at workplaces for those with basic education certificate. The project consisted of two randomised field experiments.

## **2023 Implementation**

The government published the final report of the project to reform continuous learning. According to the report, the objectives and guidelines of the continuous learning reform were crucial, but their implementation and achievement still required resources and investments. The actual reform project ended in March 2023.

In 2023, the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment released a beta version of Skills Needs Compass and its contents developed during the year. This new service provided reliable and up-to-date information on future skills needs from the perspective of continuous learning.

In addition, the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment funded projects relevant from the perspective of employment and continuous learning. The goals of the projects included, for example, strengthening the availability of workforce, combating unemployment, and ensuring the workforce is prepared with skills to meet the demands of the future labour market.

Work was done on the Digital service package for continuous learning operated by Ministry of Education and Culture, significantly through pilot experiments, and an ecosystem model, laying the foundation for future actions and development.

## **2024 Implementation**

The Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (JOTPA) established its activities. In 2024, JOTPA granted VET education providers funding to improve the availability of skilled labour and to promote digitalisation and green transition.

The work on Digital service package for continuous learning developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture continued in 2024. The digital service was named Competency Path (Osaamispolku). The core objective was to build a digital service to support individuals in making educational and career choices and maintaining and developing their competence throughout their careers and lives. The goal was also to promote a better match between work, competence, and demand and supply of education. For example, a completely new forecasting section was created by EDUFI in Vipunen, a national service offering statistical data on education.

## Bodies responsible

- Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment
- Ministry of Education and Culture
- Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
- Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)

## Target group

### Learners

Adult learners  
Older workers and employees (55 - 64 years old)  
Unemployed and jobseekers  
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment  
Low-skilled/qualified persons  
Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

### Education professionals

Adult educators  
Guidance practitioners

### Entities providing VET

Companies  
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)  
VET providers (all kinds)

### Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

## Thematic categories

### Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning  
Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs  
Lifelong guidance  
Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET promoting equality of opportunities

## Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

## Subsystem

CVET

## Further reading

[Ministry of Education and Culture article 'Reforming continuous learning'](#)

[Press release of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture, 17 December 2020](#)

[The government has decided to raise the leaving age in compulsory education from the start of the autumn term 2021 \(Brochure\)](#)

[Lifelong guidance to support people on educational and career paths, Ministry of Education and Culture press release](#)

[Strategy for lifelong guidance 2020-23](#)

## Related policy developments

2022 **Completed**

### Programme for quality and equality in VET

The programme to develop quality and equality in VET is mainly implemented through comprehensive development projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The projects are mainly wide-ranging network projects with one coordinator.

 FINLAND

#### Type of development

Practical measure/Initiative

#### Subsystem

IVET CVET

2024 **Completed**

### Extension of compulsory education

Preparations to raise the minimum school leaving age to 18 years of age and introduce free upper secondary education help avoid discontinuing education due to the financial costs of

attending VET.



**Type of development**

Regulation/Legislation

**Subsystem**

IVET CVET

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/36311>