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QUALIFICATION STANDARDS, TRAINING STANDARDS IN FINLAND

In Finland only legislative norms are regarded as qualification standards or training standards. In the case of vocational teachers such a norm exists, which is not the case for on-the-job instructors. This Finnish teacher or trainer training underlines competencies rather than certification.

1. Teachers in Vocational Institutions and AMK Institutions

Vocational teacher education (e.g., the length of education) was unified in 1985. Since 1996, vocational teacher education has been organised in vocational teacher education colleges operation in conjunction with AMK institutions (polytechnics). In Finland the term vocational teacher denotes all teachers who are active at various vocational institutions from initial vocational training up to the tertiary level (AMK institutions). Vocational teachers teach theoretical subjects as well as more practically oriented subject or subjects integrating the two.

Qualification requirements

The qualification requirements of all vocational teachers are made up of three parts. Teachers are required

1. to hold a Master’s degree or a polytechnic degree;
2. to have a minimum of three years of work experience in the field corresponding to their assignment;
and
3. to have the pedagogical studies of 35 credits (= vocational teacher training).

A Polytechnic (AMK) teacher needs to have a Master’s degree to become a lecturer (AMK lecturer) and a doctor or licentiate degree for a post of a senior lecturer (AMK senior lecturer).

Under certain conditions, pedagogical studies may also be completed while already teaching.

The scope of vocational teacher education is 35 credits. The aim is to provide the students with knowledge and skills to their own field of teaching, taking into account the development of professions and working life. The studies include basic studies in education, vocational subject pedagogic studies, teaching practice and other studies.

Students can complete the education in one year by studying full-time or flexibly as multiform education in 1 to 3 years, and link their studies to the development of their own teaching methods and the working environment of the institution.

According to the OPEPRO¹ study in 1999, for the most part, teachers in upper secondary level vocational education were formally qualified for their work. About three quarters (76%) of teachers fulfilled the requirements of the decrees governing qualifications in all respects. The most common deficiencies in formal qualifications concerned pedagogical education: almost 12% of respondents either did not have it at all or had not finished the studies in question. Slightly less than 10% of respondents had not completed an appropriate educational qualification, whereas teachers without the required work experience only accounted for less than 1%.

Teaching Methods

The majority of individuals entering vocational teacher education already function as full-time teachers. Therefore, an attempt has been made to connect the teacher education with the development of teachers' own work and the working environment of their institution. Students attending teacher education complete their studies as flexibly as possible, using various multiform arrangements, while continuing their work. The aim is to draw up a personal study plan for teacher education together with each teacher student.

Evaluation, Certificates

It is up to the organiser of teacher education to decide about the evaluation and certification. Studies in vocational teacher education are primarily evaluated on the principle of pass/fail. Some institutions may have a three-level scale from 1 to 3 (1=satisfactory, 2=good, 3=excellent).

Professional Mobility

Teachers of vocational subjects can either work in vocational institutions, AMK institutions or vocational adult education centres. AMK institution teachers are usually required to have taken a Licentiate or Doctor's degree. Pedagogical studies of 35 credits that are part of all teacher education are uniform: they provide pedagogical qualifications to teach in any type of institution.

There are also valid agreements between the Nordic countries on the common Nordic labour market, concerning teachers in comprehensive schools, general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions. Teacher groups mentioned in the agreements are qualified to work in all the Nordic countries with the same benefits and terms as the teachers of the country concerned. In some cases, a teacher may be required to complete certain additional studies prior to being granted the qualifications, and the qualifications may also be restricted.

¹ Anticipatory project to investigate teachers' initial and continuing training needs - OPEPRO

Gender issue

At present, there is no plan to take into account the gender issues in the development of qualification standards in Finland. According to the OPEPRO study of 1999 51.1% of all vocational teachers are women and 48.9% men. The gender division between different vocational education sectors is similar to the one in the responding assignments in the labour market outside of schools. When comparing different vocational sectors, most of the teaching staff in the fields of natural resources and transport consists of men (technology and transport 85.9% and natural resources 72.3%). Correspondingly, 93.8% of teaching staff in social and health care and 88.5% in the field of tourism, catering and household are female. In the other vocational education sectors the differences are not quite so notable.

The gender division of vocational subjects teachers is considered only in the following cases: (i) there are merely male or female teachers in the education sector or (ii) there are significant changes in the number of male or female teachers compared with the gender division with the historic perspective.

2. Training of On-the-job Instructors

The development of the on-the-job instruction is ongoing in Finland. The Education and Development Plan of the Ministry of Education sets ambitious goals for training of on-the-job instructors during 1999-2004. In five years 20,000 on-the-job instructors will participate in training of two credits on average. In addition, there will be shorter-term training. A permanent system will be created for on-the-job instructor training.

The development of the two credits framework for study programme and the training of the instructors is supported by the European Social Fund. The Ministry of Education recommends the use of the framework for study programme, but the programme is not a norm or a standard. The framework for study programme has been prepared together with experts from education administration, social partners and representatives of teacher training polytechnics.

Vocational teachers working in cooperation with the on-the-job instructors can participate in the above mentioned training. The goal of the Development plan is that 10,000 teachers will participate in training of an average four credits relating to on-the-job learning. The aim will be to arrange common training for on-the-job instructors and teachers. With the support of the National Board of Education the teachers have the possibility to participate also in training of four credits, which follow similar kind of framework study programme. If the teachers participate in both on-the-job instruction study programmes of two and four credits, the programme of two credits can be part of the four credits training.