

## Transitions from Initial Vocational Education and Training Qualifications to Working Life in Finland – Observations and Reflections from an International Expert Panel

### 6.3 Limited institutional structures for employer involvement

An aspect of the Finnish system with its high degree of decentralisation and trust is that cooperation between providers and working life can be organised and structured in different ways. In comparison to other countries, the institutional structures for collaboration between providers and working life, as well as the structures for employer involvement, are less established.

The interviews showed, on the one hand, that there are several examples of collaboration at both local and regional levels that work well, but on the other hand indicated that there are differences between providers in how well it works. In several interviews it was confirmed that the level of cooperation varies or that there is a need to improve it.

For example, it was described how cooperation depends on personal relationships and that a heavy responsibility lies with individual teachers. From the employers' and companies' perspective, the need for easier and less bureaucratic ways to contact the education sector was highlighted. In two interviews the interviewees described various attempts to strengthen cooperation, but explained that these efforts have not worked sufficiently well or did not continue once the funding ended.

The interviews indicated that there are differences between different occupational fields. For example, it was mentioned that the unemployment rate in technical fields is high due to poor linkages, while it is better in the health care sector where the link between providers and employers is stronger. The interviews also indicated that there is weaker cooperation in fields dominated by smaller companies.

One of the reasons for the changes in financing, with increased elements of performance-based funding, is to strengthen the incentives for providers to establish strong cooperation with employers.

A central question in this context is, of course, what the purpose of cooperation should be – in what ways it is valuable for providers and, in particular, for working life. When asked about collaboration between providers and employers, most of the interviewees focused on cooperation related to work-based learning and, to some extent, skills anticipation. Other types of cooperation with employers – for example creating vocational modules tailored to specific employers' needs, company involvement in teaching, or student/work-life activities – were not mentioned. Nor was any involvement from employers in matters relating to monitoring the quality or outcomes of vocational education. We are, however, aware that the competence demonstrations where employers are involved in the assessment of the quality of the students' skills, work well.

This type of cooperation may require more long-term and stable structures in order to develop and function well. The opportunities to build more stable structures for this type of cooperation are likely to be greatest in occupational fields where the demand for labour is high. There are also examples of cooperation structures in other countries that may serve as inspiration, for example in the literature on 'collective skill formation' (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2012).

### **Sweden: Strong structure for employer involvement with local steering committees**

The employer involvement in higher vocational education (Yrkeshögskolan) programmes in Sweden is high. Employers contribute to both the shaping and running of the programmes. The programmes are tailored to suit an evolving labour market and the range of programmes and specialisations will therefore change over time. Each programme has a local steering committee where employers representatives are in the majority. The steering committee takes an active role in shaping curriculum content and in quality management of the programme. Through their involvement in the steering committees, employers are directly involved in analysing the attractiveness of the programme and the percentage of students that graduate from the programme. They are also involved in monitoring and analysing how well the programme meets the needs of the labour market. An important source of information for this analysis is collected by the provider, who is responsible for tracking the employment outcomes of graduates, including information on whether they are employed in the field for which the programme prepared them. Employers also take part in the programme by offering placements for work-based learning and providing guest lectures and other activities for students regarding working life.

From 2024 to 2028 there is a pilot where programmes for adults at IVET-level are provided within a similar framework with steering committees where employer

of NVET study programmes is to respond to labour market needs and to complement the VET already provided today at upper secondary level. Another purpose is to enable students to quickly find work in deficit professions.

- Information on Higher Vocational Education (Yrkeshögskolan) [in English](#)
- Information on National Vocational Education and Training (Nationell yrkesutbildning) [in English](#)
- Further information on Higher Vocational Education (Yrkeshögskolan) and National Vocational Education and Training (Nationell yrkesutbildning): [Startsida - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan](#)

### **Sweden: Vård- och omsorgscollege – an arena for collaboration between education and working life**

Vård- och omsorgscollege (VO-college) is an arena for collaboration between education and working life that focuses on strengthening the quality and relevance of health and social care education. It operates at national, regional and local level and brings together public employers, private employers and trade unions with education providers.

VO-college is involved in aligning curricula with employer needs, raising the quality of skills, and developing structures for validation of prior learning and measures to attract students to the field. VO-college has an important role in facilitating high-quality work-based learning. It is used for coordinating placements for work-based learning, certifying employers and training supervisors/mentors to ensure high quality training for students during their work-based learning. VO-college also offers structures for quality assurance and is involved in other measures regarding skills supply.

VO-college is governed by a national association jointly run by trade unions and employer organisations. The national board, composed of representatives from these organisations, is ultimately responsible for operations, supported by a national office and an advisory council.

- Information on Vård- och omsorgscollege: [Vård- och omsorgscollege](#)
- A similar platform for collaboration has been established within the technical field: [För svensk industris framtid | Teknikcollege](#)