

Stylman, V. & Jalolahti, J. 2018. Vocational competence in the Vocational Qualification in Horticulture. Helsinki: Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

The evaluation focuses on vocational competence in the upper secondary level Vocational Qualification in Horticulture. The evaluation data was obtained from vocational skills demonstrations and supplementary data describing the arrangement of such demonstrations. The results describe grades awarded for the demonstrations and the activities relating to the arrangement of the skills demonstrations. The evaluation focused on all students who had started studying towards a Vocational Qualification in Horticulture in vocational upper secondary education and training (VET) in autumn 2014 and on all units providing such VET programmes. The evaluation data was collected over the entire duration of the programme until the end of spring term 2017. Information on grades and quantitative data on the arrangement of demonstrations were supplemented with the self-assessments of VET providers. In addition, the evaluation involved analysing the demonstration and assessment plans as well as the descriptions of demonstration contents approved by the institutional bodies. In the analysis of the data and results, the evaluation team drew on the expertise of teachers working in the field.

The evaluation of learning outcomes was based on demonstrations, thus focusing on vocational competence. The evaluation was based on the vocational skills requirements and the assessment criteria specified for the programme in the Qualification Requirements. In the demonstrations, the assessment of skills focused on mastering the work process, working methods, equipment and materials, as well as the knowledge forming the basis of the work and key competences for lifelong learning. In other words, the Qualification Requirements functioned as a key starting point for evaluation.

Evaluation of learning outcomes in vocational education and training is development-oriented by its nature, and the implementation of the evaluation emphasises VET providers' active involvement and the interactive nature of evaluation. The data was collected directly in demonstrations organised by VET providers. This development-oriented nature is also reflected in the self-assessments conducted by the VET providers and the feedback reports submitted to them, which the providers can use to compare their own results with national results.

The evaluation data was collected from all training providers (15). The data covered 181 students and 830 demonstrations. The evaluation also focused on special needs students. The data covered 378 demonstrations performed by special needs students. It included skills demonstration plans from all 15 VET providers and a total of 1,089 descriptions of skills demonstrations. Self-assessment data was submitted by all 15 providers.

One half of the students (50%) received the final grade “excellent” for the demonstration, 40% the grade “good”, and 10% the grade “satisfactory”. By far the greatest number of “excellent” grades (61%) was awarded for key competences for lifelong learning. The greatest number of “satisfactory” grades (17%) was awarded to students for mastering the knowledge forming the basis of the work. The averages of the assessed VET providers varied from 2.14 to 2.55, on a scale from 1 to 3. The average of final grades awarded for the demonstrations was 2.40. The grades received by women were better than those received by men in all competence areas. Differences in the grades awarded were also observed between education providers and locations.

Special needs students had more “satisfactory” and fewer “excellent” grades than other students. The most common grade awarded to special needs students in all competence areas was “good”. A total of 71% of the demonstrations were implemented without using individually adjusted objectives.

The programme shows a reasonably good level of working life relevance. About one half (49%) of the demonstrations in horticulture were carried out at the workplaces or completing the demonstration carried out at the workplace in educational institutions. The percentage of demonstrations organised in educational institutions was slightly higher (58%) among special needs students. There were considerable differences in the locations of skills demonstrations between the different qualification units. According to education providers, both the availability of workplaces matching the qualification objectives where competence could be acquired and the availability of workplaces where skills demonstrations could be arranged was fairly good.

Students reached higher grades when a working life representative participated in the assessment, and the students performing their demonstrations in the workplace, rather than at educational institutions, were awarded better grades. The evaluation highlighted development needs related to workplace instructors’ assessment skills and teachers’ working life competence. Development needs were also detected in the integration of vocational subjects and common qualification units, in the monitoring and assessment of skills demonstrations and in the development of skills demonstrations.