

Case study: Vocational adult education in Rural Institute of Central OstroBothnia (RICOB) and experiences applying the Competence Based Qualification system in agricultural and forestry education.

Vocational Adult Education and Training in Finland in general

Qualifications in vocational adult education and training are mainly taken in the form of competence-based qualifications.

The competence-based qualifications system came into force in 1994, and competence tests have been arranged since then. The system has been developed in close cooperation between teachers and representatives of working life. The system aims to maintain and enhance the vocational skills of the adult population, to equip adults to engage in an occupation as self-employed people, to develop working life, to promote employment and to support lifelong learning. Competence-based qualifications include *vocational qualifications*, *further vocational qualifications* and *specialist vocational qualifications*. Adults may demonstrate their vocational skills in competence tests regardless of how and where they have acquired the skills. Although taking part in competence tests does not require formal preparation, many participants participate in preparatory training to rectify gaps in vocational skills learnt at work and to enhance vocational skills. The students participating in preparatory training are provided with individual learning programs. At present, there are 358 qualifications (183 of them further vocational qualifications and 123 specialist vocational qualifications) included in the structure.

The requirements for the competence-based qualifications are specified and confirmed by the National Board of Education. The modules of the qualification, the vocational skills required in the qualification and the assessment criteria are determined by the requirements.

Qualification Committees are responsible for arranging and supervising the competence tests. The National Board of Education appoints the members of the Qualification Committees from among experts in each sector. The body organising the preparatory training decides on the contents of the training for the competence-based qualifications. The instruction is planned and the syllabuses are drawn up in the form of modules according to the requirements of the competence-based qualifications.

In 20051, ca 52 000 adults took part in competence tests.

Vocational adult education in Rural Institute of Central OstroBothnia

In Rural institute of Central Ostrobothnia (RICOB) we have started the competence based exams already 1996 and over 100 students have gotten diplomas through this system. We have the rights to organise competence test's in 6 vocational 4 further and 3 specialist qualifications. Annually 100 to 300 adults study in our programmes and short courses. Most of our adult students are taking over farms or fur farms in near future. For this process they need at least 20 credits of education. But in RICOB we prefer to offer the whole exams to ensure multiple skills which are needed in running enterprises in the long run. Also many forest owners are interested in basic exam in forestry. In basic forestry exam groups there are no such demands to study just a part of the exam. It is also possible to study many courses by e-learning and quite many students use that possibility. Our Institute has been coordinating national e-learning projects between vocational institutes for 5 years. Sustainability is part of curriculums as a general emphasis and also included in each course.

In RICOB we are creating and launching new strategy for personalisation the adult education in all levels. This includes three phase personalization process. First phase happened during applying to education and is done by course secretaries and teachers in co-operation with possible students. We try to identify the applicant's personal skills. Whether they are obtained in formal education or in informal ways should not matter. For this phase we have developed skills charts which are derived from national and local curriculum's. First we survey the skills with applying forms in which students describe their skills on a certain exam. Then we personally talk to the students and complete the charts and create personal learning program

Second phase includes personalization of completing the competence tests. Here we schedule the competence tests to personal study programme and one's personal needs. Also we control that the competence evaluated is according to national curriculum and we recognize present skills. The recognition can happen by addressing formal documents or portfolios. These are evaluated by a team which has members of employer's employees and education. If the skills are adequate we propose to the qualification committee to approve the skills. Sometimes we ask for additional documents or recommendations. Competence test will be carried out in normal working life situations. Preferably in students own enterprises. We have tried this for last 6 months in agricultural education and we are getting a lot's of new experiences and knowledge. In forestry education adult's have done exam's in their own forests for a few years already.

Third phase in personalisation is dealing with obtaining the needed skills. In this phase we plan the preparatory education and on the job learning. Also personal constraints in learning are taken into account. For example difficulties in reading or writing are taken into account. Students are given possibilities to show their skills in suitable ways. Studying is also bound to students existing or future enterprises. Most of the assignments are dealing with developing their own enterprises.

Whole personalisation process takes a lot of time and the role of teacher is changed quite much. The responsibility of running the process is given mostly to the students. That will create one problem. What is the real ambition of starting young farmer to study to get wide skills when they are studying while working. Some people are only interested in getting needed 10-20 credits which is enough for state subsidies for taking over an enterprise. It seems that also the e-learning possibilities are favoured by students who want only minimum amount of study weeks. Also their motivation seems to be lower and that creates problems on finishing studies according to personal programs.

Learning is a social process. Individualising and personalising studies too much has its downsides also. Students may lose those important learning opportunities what they get when they take whole program and gather to school twice a week during wintertime. Coffee and lunch breaks are the best times for learning by sharing experiences with other students.

Although sustainability is included in every course it is the teacher who makes the final choice what part of sustainability he/she stresses in his/her teaching. Since compatibility is one of the leading themes in new EU agenda economical part of sustainability might be more important in the future. What it's the right balance in sustainability anyway?

Another bottleneck in adult education is the financing of the studies. For further exams and specialist exams there are several ways of financing the studies. Straight state financing can cover only part of our financial needs. Noste program offers financing for people aged between 30-59 years with no education after comprehensive school (Noste is a separate program which is financed nationally in order to raise the education level of elderly people.). Apprenticeship training is possible but it is less economical for the institutions in natural resources sector. In RICOB where

we offer large scale of studying possibilities there seems to be a constant lack of financing in adult education.