

Summary of accreditation of curriculum groups in vocational education and training in 2011-2013

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Accreditation of curriculum groups in vocational education and training continued until the end of 2013 as a pilot round based on the current organisation thereof.

In autumn 2013, the sixth assessment period is already underway in accreditation, wherein five curriculum groups are being assessed and three institutions of vocational education and training are participating for the first time. Thus, 15 curriculum groups and curriculum groups from 139 institutions will have been accredited by the end of 2013. 35 educational institutions providing vocational education have already taken part.

The numeric indicators of accreditation have grown rapidly, and most institutions of vocational education and of professional higher education that provide vocational education have experience of accreditation.

The three accreditation years (2011-2013) are reflected in the following figures:

- accreditation has taken place in **15 curriculum groups** in total;
- **139 curriculum groups** have taken part in accreditation;
- **35 educational institutions providing vocational education** have taken part;
- approx. **100 assessment experts, incl. 58 representatives of employers**, have participated in the work of assessment committees;
- the Vocational Education Assessment Council adopted a total of **139 accreditation decisions** during its June and December sessions; and
- larger vocational education centres already have **extensive accreditation experience**, e.g. 12 have been accredited at the Narva Vocational Training Centre and Tartu Vocational Training Centre, while 10 have been accredited at the Pärnu County Vocational Training Centre. Since accreditation to date has been voluntary, all schools that have not passed up any opportunities to receive an external assessment of their curriculum groups – despite the tight schedule (e.g. accrediting four curriculum groups in one period) – should be acknowledged.

The accreditation results for 2011-2013 varied to a significant extent by curriculum group (Figure 1).

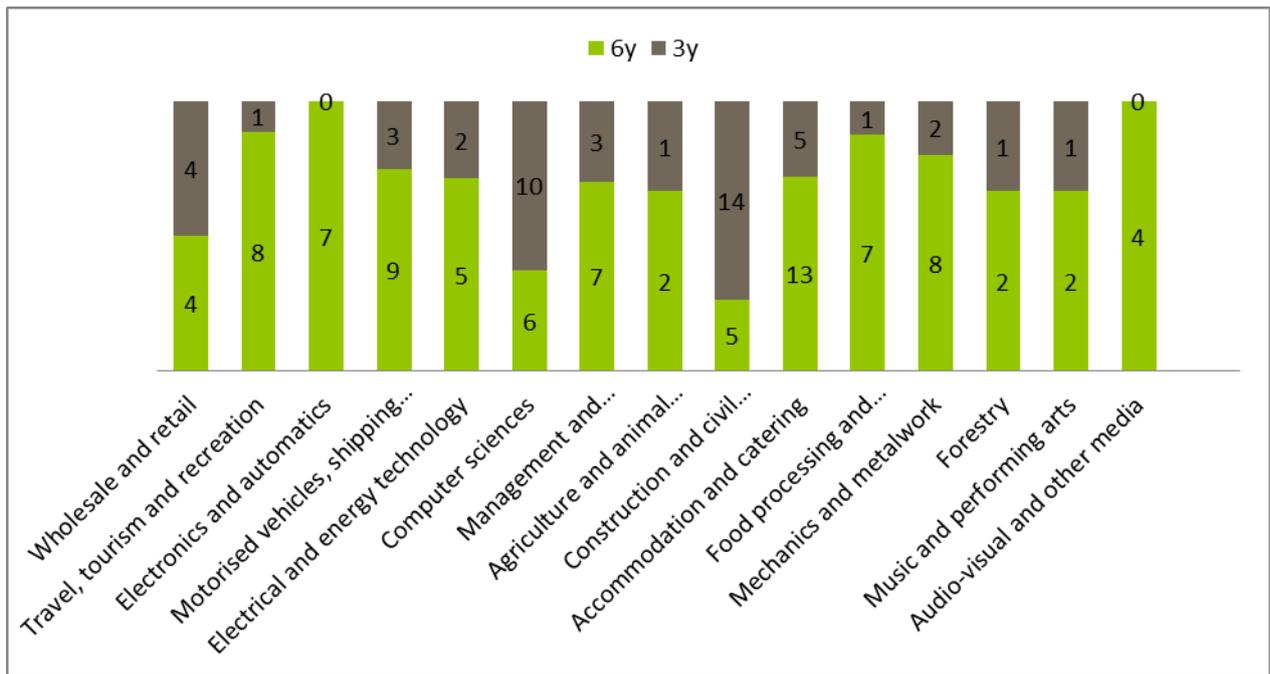


Figure 1. Accreditation results of curriculum groups in VET (2011-2013)

When comparing the accreditation results of 15 curriculum groups, i.e. the proportion of study programmes of institutions which received six-year full accreditation and three-year conditional accreditation, the study programmes as a whole differ significantly. For example, in the curriculum group for construction and civil engineering, the committees assessed the curriculum groups of just five of the 19 participating institutions as being worthy of full accreditation. However, the results of the curriculum group for accommodation and catering were the reverse of this – only five of the 18 participating institutions were accredited for three years. Results were divided equally for wholesale and retail: four full and four conditional accreditation decisions. A positive example is the curriculum groups for both electronics and automatics and audio-visual and other media, where all of the decisions were in favour of full accreditation.

We are glad to see that so far a red line is yet to appear on the graph – at no point have the committees proposed to the assessment council not to accredit a curriculum group. The voluntary ‘pilot years’ have mainly been an opportunity for VET institutions to learn how to develop and ensure the quality of their curriculum groups. And just as in grading in schools, a ‘C-’ should clearly draw attention to shortcomings.

The results of the curriculum group as a whole certainly reflect the current state and needs of the relevant economic sector and job market. In regard to the quality and sustainability of vocational studies in a specialty, the assessment committees were mainly convinced by state-of-the-art study bases, the development work of study programmes that takes the needs of the region and target group of students into account, productive cooperation with employers (in the region) in planning, conducting and evaluating studies, incl. internship, and development of vocational teachers.

Just as specialties differ in their nature, different curriculum groups have their own problems and areas for development, as noted in accreditation. It has become traditional for the study programme centre of the Innove Foundation to organise a feedback seminar following the accreditation of a curriculum group. During this seminar, assessment experts from the field, employers and schools provide summarised feedback as input for the development of the curriculum group as a whole. Materials from the seminars are available on the website of the foundation¹.

Based on the assessment committee reports, the **main development areas across curriculum groups** can be consolidated as follows:

- **Study content and methods** – study methods and equipment are not up to date; new technology (devices, materials and methods) is not reaching teachers and students.
- **Organisation and content of internship** – the actual content of internships does not conform to the goals of the study programme, cooperation with internship bases is not consistent and does not ensure the achievement of learning outcomes, the monitoring of internship is insufficient and the productivity of internship is not assessed.
- **Lack and overburdening of vocational teachers** – vocational teachers are overburdened, they have no time to participate in development work, their qualifications lag behind the rapidly progressing job market and there are very few young vocational teachers.
- The curriculum group of a school **often has no uniform or clear direction for future development**, so goals are indistinct and immeasurable, feedback and

¹ <http://www.innove.ee/et/kutseharidus/kutsehariduse-rok/opetajakoolitus/arierialad>

assessment are unsystematic and the ambiguity of improvement plans does not support sustainable development. In other words, based on the conclusions laid out in the reports, the weakest links in the PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-adjust) were the first and last stages.

Curriculum group-based accreditation has proven that the level and development needs of different curriculum groups may be different and very specific within the same school, based on the target group of students, the characteristics and expectations of the region, the availability and level of vocational teachers and other factors. In planning balanced development, internal and external evaluation centred on curriculum groups enables priorities to be set which are substantiated at the school level, and to plan specific improvements for the subsequent development period. Current results by school are confirmation of this: Tartu Vocational Education Centre has obtained full accreditation in all 12 curriculum groups accredited so far – a so-called green line throughout – while full accreditation has also been granted to Kuressaare Regional Training Centre (seven curriculum groups), Haapsalu Vocational Education Centre (four groups) and Võru County Vocational Education Centre (five groups).

The database on the EKKA website² gives everyone the opportunity to review reports in more detail. It has all of the current reports for schools' curriculum groups and assessment committees as well as the decisions of the assessment council.

Feedback of schools on assessment visits

The EKKA requests feedback from those who meet with assessment committees in the electronic environment immediately after a visit (i.e. before the school receives its assessment report, so that the responses are not influenced by the results). More than 1000 participants in interviews have provided feedback on the work of assessment committees to date, incl. employers, vocational teachers and representatives of students. Based on their comments, it can be said that the thorough preparation and competence of the committee members and their establishing of an open, friendly and constructive environment during visits are particularly valued by schools. Precise use of time, relevant questions and adherence to the agreed schedule are also acknowledged.

² <https://wd.archimedes.ee/andmebaas>

The committee members acting as a team also contributes to the success of a visit, which the schools notice, as evidenced by a comment from a representative of management: *“All of the members of the committee worked as one team. They were very open and supportive. They had a positive attitude, which helped alleviate the inevitable tension among those being assessed.”*

The same themes also arise in critical comments: committee members not having prepared sufficiently, not being aware of the context or having an arrogant or prejudiced attitude towards those being assessed. In some cases, dissatisfaction was caused by inefficient use of time during the interview or a lack of focus on study work in the curriculum group.

Comments show that the visits of the committees are awaited in schools: *“Such visits should definitely be arranged, because they play a major role in the school’s development. „Vocational teachers have highlighted the added value the visits provide: “We had a pleasant conversation. We were able to discuss things, and we were given a lot of good suggestions for improvement. „An example of students’ opinions should also be mentioned here: “It took quite a long time, but for something like this, it’s all worth it.”* Feedback from schools has proven to be a valuable lesson for EKKA in training assessment experts and planning school visits.

Feedback and expectations of school directors regarding accreditation process

Since many institutions of vocational education already have extensive accreditation experience, we invited school directors to a round table in May 2013 to discuss what added value curriculum group-based accreditation offers schools and what expectations the directors have of the accreditation process. They said that accreditation has primarily promoted leadership, responsibility and a role in planning the development of the specialty at the level of the curriculum group, as well as giving management an overview of curriculum group(s) as a whole. **They would like to see the results of the accreditation process, which is both time-consuming and labour-intensive, properly taken into account by school owners, employers’ associations and partner organisations.** One possible example was that accreditation results could form the basis for assessing the productivity of school directors, incl. as a basis for appraisals.

The views of directors of institutions of vocational education regarding the external evaluation system as a whole reflected a feeling that different forms of external evaluation in (vocational) education should be more interconnected and conducted with optimal use of time and resources from a school’s point of view also.

In 2014, the accreditation of curriculum groups in vocational studies will continue based on the new Vocational Education Institution Act and the standard of vocational education. It will be mandatory for all schools providing vocational education in order to extend the right to conduct studies. All full accreditation from previous years will be retroactively valid as of 01.09.2013.

The curriculum groups participating in accreditation in 2014 (based on the new standard of vocational education) and the timetable of schools is available on the EKKK website at <http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee/kutsekoolile>

Accreditation based on curriculum groups has justified itself as a means of ensuring the quality of vocational studies and is needed for the development of vocational education. It has represented both an opportunity to learn and a valuable experience for all involved.