

A Summary of the accreditations of curriculum groups of vocational training in 2014 based on reports by assessment committees

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Accreditations of curriculum groups of vocational training have been conducted since 2014, on the basis of the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, to extend the right of a school to provide education within the curriculum group. In 2014 a total of 66 curriculum groups were accredited, of which 78% were awarded a 6-year full accreditation. Strengths of the Estonian vocational training and needs for its improvement are reflected in the results of these accreditations.

This study by EKKA highlights the key strengths and areas for development in curriculum groups of vocational training accredited in 2014 and is based on an analysis of the summaries of assessment reports for all 66 curriculum groups. The numerical/quantitative evaluations given to schools by evaluation experts, as well as the verbal/qualitative evaluations issued in the summaries of the reports, were taken into account in the analysis. An overview of the current status of vocational training through the eyes of external evaluators offers some food for thought to heads of educational institutions, leaders of curriculum groups and key partners – professional associations and practical training facilities, as well as to decision-makers and planners in the field of vocational education and training.

Based on the analysis, it is possible to highlight the following key strengths found throughout the curriculum groups:

1. Physical and technical resources of curriculum groups are modern and of world class, supporting the quality of teaching and learning and achieving the learning outcomes.
2. Most vocational teachers are highly experienced, competent and motivated. Schools have found ways to involve practitioners in the teaching process. Support staff for learners are dedicated and knowledgeable.
3. Vocational teachers are engaged in curriculum development, and their participation in in-service trainings and thematic cooperation networks supports a transition to outcomes-based curricula and the implementation of innovations in vocational training.

4. Within the framework of curriculum reform, new outcomes-based curricula have been created and implemented which take into consideration the needs of the local labour market and the expectations of target groups.
5. Leadership and management at the curriculum group level support educational activities with specific purposes as well as the implementation of innovations in vocational training.
6. Resource planning and its optimal use are well reasoned and responsibly managed.
7. Collaboration with employers in the region is becoming more active and diverse. Results of this substantive cooperation are better highlighted and analysed by schools.

These strengths will in turn set challenges for schools to ensure a consistent quality of teaching and sustainability of their curriculum groups.

Based on the committees' assessments, the more important development needs that schools should consider when planning their specific improvement activities are as follows:

1. Rapidly evolving technology requires constant updating and improvement of modern physical and technical resources and the acquisition of new equipment and specific software. Schools need to find additional funds in order to be able to keep their training facilities up to date, in optimum use and working order.
2. An existence of specialty-related learning materials, including foreign language learning materials, and their availability to both vocational teachers and learners, need upgrading and diversification.
3. Modern teaching methods, including e-learning and digital learning tools for diversification of teaching, need increasingly to consider the learners and need to be used in a consistent manner.
4. Schools should seek opportunities to ensure that vocational teachers' professional knowledge and skills will not lag behind the rapidly evolving technologies. Practicing by vocational teachers in a working environment is not yet well planned or systematically implemented.
5. Teachers need educational technology support to create e-learning materials and to use them more actively in teaching.
6. Vocational teachers are overloaded and the workload of teaching the speciality subjects is unevenly distributed, therefore the teachers have not enough time to participate in development activities.

7. In the educational process, attention should be paid to a substantive quality of internships – objectives should be more specific, internships should be monitored and performance evaluations should be based on learning outcomes.

8. In many cases, meaningful cooperation with practical training facilities and the training of supervisors at companies are not systematic or sufficient to ensure the achievement of internship objectives.

9. There is still room for improvement with regard to systematic collection of feedback about curriculum groups from key stakeholders as well as an analysis and use of such results for specific improvement activities.

10. Prospective views of curriculum groups are often vague and unspecific – there is no common understanding of curriculum strategies; to whom, what and at what level of training will they be developed and offered.

A substantial cooperation with employers certainly is a key factor in ensuring the quality of vocational training. The evaluation experts have highlighted this with regard to developing curricula; conducting educational activities; designing, conducting and assessing practical training; as well as marketing the specialities. Employers expect that schools should take the initiative in forming partnerships and encouraging better cohesion between vocational training and the labour market.

For more information about the study: Seema, Riin; Kroonmäe, Marge; Mattisen, Heli. Ülevaade kutseõppe tasemeõppe õppekavarühmade akrediteerimisest 2014. aastal hindamiskomisjonide aruannete põhjal.