

## *Inspiration from abroad*

### Inclusive Finnish vocational education and training

*Anu Raudasoja, Sanna Ryökkynen*

Finnish vocational education and training (VET) is knowledge-based, customer- and work life-oriented (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). Its purpose is to provide all applicants in need of vocational training with an individual educational pathway. All students regardless of age, gender, religion, nationality, state of health or disability are welcome to Finnish VET. Therefore, the backgrounds of the students are very different, as some students come to study their first profession and others are career-changers or lifelong learners. The training is organized in an inclusive manner so that all students are equal members of the studying community, and their individual needs are considered when planning their individual study path.

Personalisation is a central practice to ensure equality and equity in Finnish VET. This means that each student is encountered as an individual with different skills, competences, strengths and needs. A personal competence development plan (PCDP) will be drawn up for each student. The student's previous competences are assessed and recognized when drawing up the plan, in such a way that things previously learned do not need to be re-studied. When making a PCDP, the student's individual needs are also considered, and can be supported by inclusive teaching methods or, if necessary, by providing special support for their study. Teachers usually formulate the PCDP together with the student, student's family, and non-teaching services providers. The student's preferences, for example, for different learning environments and study methods are considered carefully. Because Finnish VET is closely connected with work, the dialogue with work-life representatives should be continuous throughout the student's study in the VET system. Workplace instructors may sometimes participate in drawing up the first PCDP for a student, specifically when the student already has a workplace when he or she begins studying at a vocational institution. The workplace instructors are also invited later when it is known for which workplace the student is going to acquire skills.

Providers of inclusive VET must ensure that teaching and guidance for students are achievable both at the vocational institution and in the workplaces. As a result, it is important that teachers and work-life instructors are aware of the five dimensions of accessibility. These are psychic, social, physical, pedagogical, and digital accessibility (Table 1).

Psychological accessibility is important in VET for students to feel valued, heard, and understood. The relationship between vocational teacher and student must be confidential and equal (see Ryökkynen, Pirttimaa & Kontu, 2019; Wrede-Jäntti & Westerback, 2020). The role of the vocational teacher is to encourage students to take on an active role, in which they can use their existing knowledge and skills to consider and outline their future. Concurrently, students describe their current competence identity and begin to build a new competence identity through interaction with vocational teachers and different learning communities, such as workplaces. Every student should have equal opportunities to participate in the planning of their own future, from their own perspective and in a mentally safe environment, in VET (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014; Lignell, 2013; Raudasoja, 2021).

Table 1  
*Accessibility dimensions in education*

Psychological accessibility	Social accessibility	Physical accessibility	Pedagogical accessibility	Digital accessibility
Mental well-being	Social belonging	Yard, parking and accessways	Operating culture and interaction	Paying attention to different users
Feeling valued	Attitudes	Entrance	Personal study plan	Subtitles of videos
Being understood	Accepting atmosphere	Emergency exit	Objectives and content	Description interpreting
Ability to utilise knowledge and skills	Integration	Signs and services	Teaching and guidance	
Will be heard	Prevention of discrimination	Learning environments	Support	
Equal opportunities	Professional ethics	Accessways and shared facilities	Learning environments	
	Values		Equipment and materials	
	Equality		Time	
			Evaluation methods	

The social accessibility of VET is based on vocational teachers' values, attitudes, and professional ethics, which must also consider human rights along with equality and non-discrimination legislation. In vocational institutions, it is important to evaluate practices to ensure an accepting operating culture and multidisciplinary guidance for all students. The vocational teacher should be sensitive to the dialogue with the student and consider the student's holistic life as part of the guidance. Student inclusion and social networks are important in building the future, and they also prevent exclusion. Staff at vocational institutions should discuss ways to promote inclusion so that students can have confidence in a unified operating culture for all teachers (Metsola, 2007a; Raudasoja, 2021).

Physical accessibility is an important part of VET. Physical accessibility refers to the accessibility of the operating environment to all actors. The promotion of physical accessibility begins at the entrance and continues from there to the yard and parking area. The entrance to the building must be clearly marked, and accessibility can be supported by various signs. Interiors, walkways, public spaces and any work or study environment must be functional and accessible to all. Physical accessibility also refers to the accessibility of the sound environment, which also promotes psychological and social accessibility. Emergency exits must be ensured as part of physical accessibility. Physical accessibility is often overlooked in the dimensions of accessibility, even though it plays an important role in what is achieved through VET (Eskola, 2007; Finnish National Board of Education, 2014; Raudasoja, 2021).

Accessibility in teaching and guidance must be part of the operating culture of the vocational institute and working life. It supports open interaction and positive student engagement. When a PCDP is developed, it must support the student's goals so that he or she can commit to its implementation. The plan should consider the student's preferences about learning environments and methods, as well as materials, tools, and available time. The individual needs of the student are considered through inclusive teaching and guidance and special support, which may also include positive special treatment to take account of real equality. Considering the individual needs of the student requires multidisciplinary cooperation with educational institutions and workplaces, for example in terms of teaching staff, in order to create the best solution for the student for the future (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014; Metsola, 2007b; Raudasoja, 2021).

Considering digital accessibility in information, counselling and guidance is the last dimension of accessibility. Digital accessibility considers the requirements of different students for digital services. The usability of online services, which are used a lot in teaching and guidance, with various devices is already considered during the design phase. The accessibility of online services-related materials must be ensured, for example, by subtitling videos and changing text files to a format that is supported by reading programs. The accessibility of materials connected to online services must be ensured, e.g., so that videos are subtitled, and text files can be changed to a format that is listened to by read programs. Teaching and education should be multichannel and accessible in vocational education and training in such a way that they can be adapted to the student's needs.

In the different learning environments of vocational institutions and working life, accessibility can be considered in many different ways. These are often easy solutions, but teachers and workplace counsellors need to be aware of them. Building an inclusive operating culture in VET is a process that progresses piece by piece. It necessitates a shared understanding and collaboration between stakeholders. This essay is among the outcomes of the GIVE Erasmus Plus project, whose general objective is to contribute to innovation in the VET sector in order to advance the social inclusion of individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups.

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Anu Raudasoja, Ph.D., works as the head of the vocational special needs teacher and student counsellor education degree programme at HAMK University of Applied Sciences. She has worked in the field of special education since 1997. Her main interests are in vocational education: teacher education, inclusion, special support, guidance, continuous learning, and quality systems of educational institutions.



MMus Sanna Ryökkynen is a doctoral researcher in the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Helsinki. She has worked in the field of special education since 2006. She now works as a senior lecturer at HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Edu Research Unit. Her main interests are in vocational education: teacher education, student experiences, interests and wellbeing, intensive special support, inclusion.