Vocational education and training will be reformed to meet the needs of students and working life. The Government submitted a proposal for a new act on vocational education and training to the Parliament on 24 April.

The objective is to reform vocational education and training so that it could better than nowadays respond to the changes occurring in working life and meet the future competence needs. Individual study paths would be created for both young people and adults already in working life. The significance of training occurring at workplaces would be increased, and a new training agreement model would be created. A new funding model would be introduced to decrease discontinuation of studies and to improve the effectiveness of VET.

The existing acts on vocational upper secondary education and training and vocational adult education and training would be repealed. The provisions governing vocational education and training will be brought together in a single act so that it would form a consistent whole. Furthermore parts of labor policy education would be transferred from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment to the Ministry of Education and Culture and made part of the new vocational education and training system.

"The reform of vocational education and training is the biggest reform in the field of education in two decades. It will create a system that responds more flexibly to the changing training needs in working life. The reform will also decrease the discontinuation of studies and young people’s social rejections. Individual study paths and closer collaboration with working life will improve the effectiveness of education and training and facilitate students’ employment. The reform was drawn up in a difficult economic environment. It is, however, a welcome and necessary reform and it will reinforce the professional skills of people in Finland,” Minister of Education and Culture Heikki Aho announced.

Quick access to employment
In future, students could acquire skills in the way that best suits them. Students would focus on the acquisition of missing skills, which would shorten the duration of studies especially for adult students. A process plan for competence development would be shown up for every student. The plan would chart and recognise the skills previously acquired by a student and outline what kind of skills the student needs and how they be acquired in different learning environments. The plan would also include information on the necessary support measures. The plan would be shown up by a teacher or a guidance counsellor together with the student.

Qualification system will be reformed
The current three-tier qualification structure (vocational upper secondary qualification, further vocational qualification, and specialist vocational qualification) would be retained. In future the qualifications would, however, be more linked-based, and thus would be needed to create new qualifications if new competence needs occur. The number of qualifications would decrease from the current 300 to 100. Students would have more freedom of choice within a specific qualification than now. Vocational qualifications would still provide eligibility for higher education.

Vocational education and training could create training preparing for vocational education, training preparing for working life and independent living as well as other vocational training that does not need to be qualified.

Practical demonstration of skills as the method of completing a qualification
An as a rule occupational skills would be all vocational qualifications be shown by demonstrating them in an actual, practical work situation. The performance would be assessed by a teacher assigned by the education provider and a representative of the working life. In case of common industries and pre-apprenticeship training, performance would be assessed and determined by the teacher in question. Students would receive special support due to training difficulties, disability, illness or other reason would be extended to cover also students pursuing further and special vocational qualifications.

More guided training at workplaces
According to the proposal, training at workplaces would be arranged as apprenticeship training based on a fixed-term contract or in the form of training agreements without a contractual employment relationship. The latter would replace the current on-the-job training. Different combinations of training agreements and apprenticeship training would be possible.

Guidance of students at workplaces would be improved through collaboration between teachers and workplace counsellors.

Year-round admissions
Most students would want to vocational education and training through a flexible year-round admission system. The national joint application procedure organised each spring would be central primarily for vocational school graduates and other people without any vocational qualifications.

Completed qualifications and access to employment as basis for funding
According to the proposal, a single coherent funding system would be established for all vocational education and training. The system would encourage education providers to increase the number of students who discontinue their studies, increase training at workplaces, shorten the duration of studies, and provide more education in those fields where labour force is shortest in the need.

The funding would be divided into intended core funding, performance funding and effectiveness funding as well as strategy funding. Core funding would be based on the number of students, and performance funding, based on the number of completed qualifications and requalifications, would account for 50% and 50% of the intended total funding, respectively. Effectiveness funding would account for 50% and depend on students’ access to employment, pursuit of further education and mobility from students and the labour market. The core funding would guarantee that vocational education and training would continue to be provided in all fields and all students also in future. The funding system would take into account the differences in the costs for providing education, such as cost differences between qualifications or sectors, costs for arranging special support, labour policy education, and training for prisoners.

The central government funding for vocational education and training would be determined annually in the Budget instead of the current system where the funding is based on the actual costs.

More authority and responsibilities for education providers
The proposal aims to lessen bureaucracy. All vocational education and training would in future be generally a single core model for education providers. Education providers would have more freedom in deciding how they wish to organise the education they provide. The new legislation would reduce overlaps in the administration and planning, which would free up principal and teachers’ time from administrative duties to teaching. The processes of skills acquisition and demonstration would be streamlined.

Teachers’ work would become more versatile
Individual study paths would make the guidance and support provided for students more important than before. Teachers, as experts in pedagogy, are to build evaluating paths for students together with the cooperation with working life. Teachers would also offer other work personally and provide guidance for students outside the educational institute.

Reforms have been prepared in an open and participatory manner
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The aim is that the new act will enter into force on 1 January 2018. The government proposal has been prepared in close cooperation with stakeholders. More than 500 representatives of different stakeholders participated in the work.

Inquiries:
Mika Tammilehto, Director-General, tel. +358 295 30308
Matias Martimo, Special Adviser, tel. +358 44 269 3113 (requests for interviews with the Minister of Education and Culture)

Material on decisions will be made available online as soon after the government plenary session as possible (in Finnish).

Read more about the reform of vocational education and training online https://minedu.fi/en/article/-/asset_publisher/ammatillisen-koulutuksen-reformi-uudistaa-koulutuksen-vastaamaan-o...

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