

Conclusions and recommendations of the National Audit Office

Effectiveness of youth workshops, and resources and efficiency of outreach youth work

The audit examined the results and effectiveness of youth workshops in 2013–2016, and the allocation of the resources and cost efficiency of outreach youth work in 2014–2017. Both outreach youth work and youth workshops are tailored activities that aim to help young people facing the risk of social exclusion. Both activities are mainly organized by municipalities, and they are supported by discretionary government transfers. Almost all municipalities in Mainland Finland provide outreach youth work and youth workshops. According to the Programme of Prime Minister Marin's Government¹, the operating conditions and financial resources for outreach youth work and youth workshops will be reinforced within the next few years. In the Government's project for extending compulsory education, youth workshops will be one of the study and support forms included in the compulsory education.²

About half of the young people are either studying or employed after the coaching period in accordance with the targets

Youth workshops are targeted at young people during their transition to the next level of education: either those who do not have an upper secondary degree or those who have completed their upper secondary education and are about to move to the open labour market. It was found in the audit that youth workshops reach these young people in accordance with the targets set. About 60 per cent of those who started workshop coaching in 2013–2016 had not taken an upper secondary degree. About half of the young people who started the coaching period in 2013–2016 had had months of unemployment in the previous year.

Every other young person who completed the workshop coaching was either a student or employed on the open labour market by the end of the year following the last workshop period. About one third of the young people were unemployed, and about one fifth were inactive, retired, or in military or non-military service.

The coaching periods in youth workshops are of different lengths, depending on the young person's needs. The length of the coaching periods that started in 2013–2015 was about 150–160 days on average. As a rule, the young people participated in one coaching period, but slightly under one third of them participated in two or more coaching periods. About 20 per cent of those who participated in workshop coaching had repeated coaching periods.

The coaching periods promoted studying and completion of degrees and qualifications but had no impacts on employment or income

Particularly 21–24-year-olds and young people with an upper secondary degree started to study for another upper secondary or tertiary degree after their workshop coaching. In addition, 17–20-year-olds and young people without an upper secondary degree completed their upper secondary education more often than the control group within a year after the coaching period. Based on the audit results, it seems that workshop coaching guides slightly older young people who have already

taken an upper secondary degree to either specialize in another field of upper secondary education or continue to tertiary education.

Workshop coaching was not found to promote young people's employment rate; in some cases, the employment rate was even lower and unemployment rate higher among those who had participated in the coaching than in the control group. The weaker employment situation was also reflected in the participants' earnings, which were somewhat lower in the treatment group than in the control group during the years following the coaching period.

If workshop coaching is to be used as one study and support form when the compulsory education is extended to 18 years, the preparation of the reform should focus on developing the workshops so that they would provide even better support for those under 18 years of age in their upper secondary studies and in completing their education. This would reduce the risk of social exclusion in one of the target groups of the reform of compulsory education.

Outreach youth work in municipalities is not directly related to the service need

One of the goals with the development of outreach youth work has been nationwide service provision. As the Regional State Administrative Agencies pay the discretionary government transfers primarily on the basis of the number of outreach youth workers in the municipality instead of the service need in the region, there are municipalities that are unable to meet the service need. Some municipalities could also increase the efficiency of their outreach youth work to some extent. Based on the audit, the provision of outreach youth work is not related to the socio-economic factors representing the service need among young people, such as the share of 17–24-year-olds not in education or training or the share of 18–24-year-old without employment. These factors have not had an impact on the cost differences between organizations, either. According to the results, the organizations could have helped as many young people with 5–6 per cent lower costs. The most inefficient organizations could have saved slightly over 10 per cent in costs.

Recommendations of the National Audit Office

The Ministry of Education and Culture should

1. continue to develop the youth workshops activities so that they would more clearly support under 20-year-olds and young people without an upper secondary degree in their studies and in completing their upper secondary education,
2. allocate discretionary government transfers to outreach youth work according to local needs, whereby the funding would steer the activities and increase their efficiency.

¹ Inclusive and competent Finland – a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government.

² <https://minedu.fi/oppivelvollisuuden-laajentaminen>. Read on 19 December 2019.