

# Conclusions and recommendations of the National Audit Office

## Future workforce 2030 – Taking future competence needs into account in the steering system of basic education

In the audit, the National Audit Office examined whether the steering of basic education has taken account of the skills that are essential for future working life. In this audit report, these skills are also referred to as “future competence needs”, and they refer to the general competence requirements that the OECD has identified as important in future working life. The audit was targeted at the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). The audit assessed particularly their information-based and norm-based steering in so far as they relate to the contents of basic education.

The key norms steering the contents of basic education are the Basic Education Act and Decree, the Government decree on the national objectives of basic education and the distribution of lesson hours in basic education, and EDUFI's national regulation, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, which defines the key objectives for basic education. Information-based steering refers here to, for example, the information provided by EDUFI to education providers and teachers with the aim of helping the education providers to promote their activities and productivity. Information-based steering is not legally binding, and the steered entity can thereby decide whether it complies with it.<sup>1</sup> EDUFI is responsible for steering and developing basic education at central government level.

## Following the 2014 curriculum update, the significance of skills needed in future working life has grown in the steering of basic education

Since the comprehensive reform of the curriculum for basic education in 2014, the skills needed in future working life have played a key role in the norm-based steering of basic education. In the 2014 reform, EDUFI and the expert stakeholders involved in the work introduced broad-based competence areas as entities to be taught and marked in connection with subject-specific knowledge. Broad-based competence refers to an entity formed by knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will<sup>2</sup>, and it has largely the same objectives as those identified by the OECD as essential for future competence needs.

<sup>1</sup> The NAOF about information-based steering (in Finnish):

<https://www.vtv.fi/app/uploads/2018/07/02153654/perusopetuksen-ohjaus-ja-rahoitusjarjestelma-192-2009.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014 (in Finnish). <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/perusopetuksen-opetussuunnitelman-perusteet>

## The knowledge base of the core curriculum has been built together with key expert stakeholders

EDUFI prepared the core curriculum, which defines the objectives and contents of basic education, together with key expert stakeholders. EDUFI engaged a large group of educationalists, teachers, and representatives of education providers and teachers' trade unions in the work. The most important group not represented in the curriculum work was pupils. This was because pupils of basic education age do not have a national representative body. During the core curriculum work, EDUFI opened a website where anyone had an opportunity to comment on the contents of the core curriculum.

Organizations located in the seven largest municipalities were over-represented in the subject-specific working groups.

## EDUFI supported the implementation of the new core curriculum at first, but the amount of support decreased when the local plans were completed

The steering provided by EDUFI regarding the contents of education was mainly sufficient at the time when the core curriculum and local curricula were drawn up. However, the amount of support started to decrease at the latest after the local curricula were completed. This was despite the fact that EDUFI had reformed the core curriculum thoroughly in such a manner that, in addition to subject-specific knowledge, the education was to promote the so-called broad-based competence areas. The broad-based competence areas include the skills needed in future working life which have been identified by the OECD and which have also been used as the audit criteria.

The decline in steering is reflected, for example, in teachers' experience of the issues that have helped them to promote the pupils' development in the mastering of the future competence needs. The teachers do not feel that the support provided by EDUFI has helped them to any significant degree in everyday schoolwork and in promoting the mastering of the competence needs. Schools have mainly relied on their teaching staff's skills in promoting the future working life skills. Some education providers engage in strong regional cooperation: neighbouring municipalities draw up regional curricula in cooperation and organize continuing training for teachers. However, models for monitoring the curriculum are not developed in regional cooperation.

In EDUFI's roadmap for the core curriculum process, the support measures planned for the implementation end in 2016, i.e. at the time when the first grades introduced the local curricula drawn up on the basis of the reformed core curriculum for basic education. The last grades introduced the new curricula only in 2019.

## Education promotes the mastering of future competence needs, but there are worrying differences in pupils' competence

Based on the audit survey, teachers have the basic prerequisites for promoting the competence needed in future working life in an effective and equal manner, but they are concerned about the haste, major differences in pupils' initial competence level, and various disturbances in teaching. There are major differences between pupils and schools in the mastering of the future competence needs – often due to the pupils' backgrounds.

Effective promotion of the mastering of the future competence needs in education has required that the following conditions, in particular, have been met: sufficient time must be reserved in the teaching situation for promoting the mastering of the future competence needs, teachers must have sufficient competence to promote the mastering of these competences, local curricula must clearly oblige the schools to promote the future competence needs, and EDUFI must clearly define each competence need.

It has been possible to promote the skills relevant for future working life in an equal manner when there has been sufficient time for teaching and there have been no major differences in pupils' initial competence level due to their background. Cooperation between teachers has also contributed to equality.

## Recommendations of the National Audit Office

1. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education ensure that, when the national core curriculum for basic education is updated in the future, education providers are provided with adequate and consistent support for its implementation even after the completion of the local curriculum.
2. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education improve the conditions for cooperation between education providers, for example by further developing practices and digital tools that enable the education providers to share good practices in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of local curricula.
3. The Finnish National Agency for Education develops, in cooperation with the education providers, a model for monitoring the implementation of local curricula to support the consistency of the implementation of the core curriculum for basic education.