



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

UNEVOC

International Centre  
for Technical and Vocational  
Education and Training



## Work-based learning and skills demonstrations during COVID-19

Promising Practice 2021

## Context

### TVET in Finland

Finland's policy objective for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is to guarantee equal educational opportunities for all students and to increase and maintain the vocational skills of the population. TVET also supports lifelong learning and personal development, and aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for further studies and employment. In Finland, 72% of all secondary school students are enrolled in vocational education and training.

### Work-based learning opportunities

In Finland, TVET students learn and are assessed by a teacher and working life representative in work-based situations where they must demonstrate skills and competencies through practical tasks in order to graduate from their course. Therefore, making work-based learning opportunities available was of great importance once the COVID-19 crisis began.

### Adapting programmes to COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis not only caused TVET institutions to transition to distance learning, but also affected the operations of the companies and organizations where students complete their work-based training. It was important to find flexible solutions that would allow work-based learning and skills demonstrations to continue despite the crisis, and thus ensure students' graduation.

## Objectives

The overarching objective was to enable TVET students to continue their courses and to graduate despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included:

- Providing flexibility and adaptation to allow a form of work-based learning to continue for all students
- Online or in-person skills demonstrations via workplaces and institutions
- The continuation of assessments via the use of video calls in workspaces (where permitted), or else in settings similar to authentic work situations

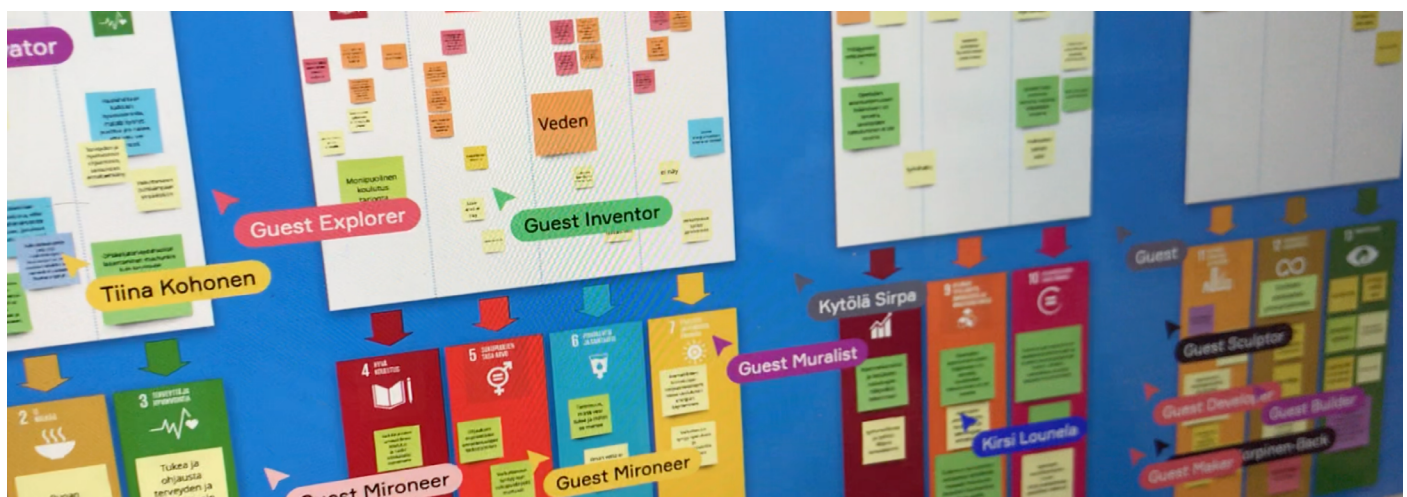


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## Overview

**Implemented by:** Omnia Education Partnerships (OEP)

**Where:** Finland

**Theme:** Work-based learning; COVID-19 response

**Status:** Programme active since March 2020

*Omnia Education Partnerships (OEP) is the international consultancy and training arm of Omnia, the Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo Region, a UNEVOC Centre in Finland. OEP aims to transform Finnish education and training best practice into global next practice for public and private sectors.*

*OEP compiled a case study for UNESCO on Finnish TVET as a resilient model of training during COVID-19. This Promising Practice shares information specifically related to the work-based learning component of that case study.*

## Work-based learning during COVID-19

From early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, there was national-level consensus in Finland that students' learning and graduation was paramount. The onset of the pandemic and subsequent social distancing measures, however, caused many institutions and workplaces to close their doors. The development of COVID-safe working practices became crucial.

In Finland, TVET providers are afforded a high level of autonomy that allowed them to respond rapidly to the new reality caused by the pandemic and to adopt innovative ways of working for learning and assessment. TVET providers adjusted their programmes in accordance with local needs and worked closely with companies to tailor actions based on the level of disruption. In some sectors and locations, work-based learning and apprenticeships continued as initially planned, whilst amendments to students' learning plans were inevitable in others.

The companies and institutions put procedures for social distancing and good hygiene in place with measures including:

- only allowing smaller groups of students to work together
- arranging virtual orientation weeks
- generally avoiding unnecessary contact between students and staff

Most employees and students were allowed back on site at the companies where they were working, however, the teachers were not. Adjustments to the normal assessment processes were required with workplace mentors learning to livestream videos of students performing practical tasks to their teachers and subsequent assessment discussions also being held online.

In some sectors, students could not continue work-based learning, so other solutions had to be found for skills demonstrations and assessment. As a result of a temporary change in Finnish legislation, TVET institutions were allowed to adjust their assessments to allow students to demonstrate their competency by performing practical tasks. These assessments took place in sites similar to those of authentic work situations, such as a landscape and design student planning and implementing work on campus grounds, or a healthcare student organizing a pop-up online campaign to promote healthy living.

## Outcomes and impact

### Continued learning

The majority of students continued to progress in their TVET studies despite the pandemic. Teachers at TVET institutions were proactive in their approach and, together with supporting companies, were able to provide online training for students. Around 80% of students reported they were able to continue with their work-based learning in places where the education provider and the employer worked together to provide COVID-safe working environments.

### Amended legislation

A temporary change to legislation in Finland (valid until 31 July 2021) allowed TVET providers to arrange skills and competence demonstrations within the education provider's premises when work-based training was not possible.

### Online learning

Professional development in the area of digital skills has been widely accessible in Finland since 2010. At the same time, TVET providers have been encouraged to advance digitalization strategies, including goals for cloud-based services, device policy and staff training. This facilitated the roll out of distance and online learning solutions in recent years. Although not a significant part of Finnish TVET, distance learning was common practice even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

### Graduation

The flexibility provided by the change in legislation facilitated students' progress and timely graduation. In a survey conducted in June 2020 by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, the National Union of Vocational Students in Finland and the Finnish National Union for Students, 71% of TVET students said they will graduate on time, 16% were unsure and only 13% said their graduation will be delayed. In the case of delays, TVET providers have estimated that the duration of delay is typically between one to three months.

# Challenges and insights

## Supporting companies

Not all companies were used to such a high degree of digital interaction. TVET institutions had to work closely with them to provide the support needed for both training and assisting with alternative arrangements for assessment.

## Resilience in crisis

TVET teachers in Finland have a high degree of autonomy for planning, teaching and assessment. In a crisis situation, this enables flexible solutions which, in turn, support resilience. As a result of this practice, students are more confident in choosing TVET studies knowing that the system is resilient enough to support learning in all circumstances.

## Legislation

Without the change in Finnish legislation, TVET teaching and assessment throughout the pandemic would have been far more challenging. The relaxation of the legislation allowed for greater flexibility and adaptation to the current situation.

## The future

As a result of the demonstrable effectiveness of these new measures, it is hoped that the amended legislation will not be reversed and this innovative and agile new model of learning and assessment will become standard practice in Finland post-pandemic. Innovative forms of assessment are here to stay and the amended legislation will perhaps become the new norm, allowing for continued flexibility.

## Learn more

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To learn more about OEP, visit: [www.oep.fi](http://www.oep.fi)

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