

Salla Pöyry: **Stop training for yesterday's jobs**



The implications of globalisation and technological advancement have been dramatic for the European educational environment. The labour market is evolving ever more rapidly – making it all the more challenging for future participants to predict what skills will be in demand. Vocational education is one of the areas that require a critical re-evaluation.

Vocational education, by definition, prepares students for a specific trade. Thus graduates have less professional flexibility upon graduation. Yet some of the trades that they are being trained may not be in demand any more. Locally, this could be due to refer to the relocation of production facilities driven by capital mobility and globalisation. Broadly, this might refer to areas where technology and digitalisation are replacing human labour.

A problem stems from the fact that existing educational structures are often highly rigid. Educators and public servants lack the ability and incentives to acknowledge market developments. Accepting change can endanger the employment prospects of the educators or civil servants in charge. Making the necessary adjustments is obviously a difficult task.

Therefore we should strive to factor in all available information when setting annual student quotas, or designing curriculums. This involves improving co-operation and the exchange of information between the future employers and educators. The sovereignty of educational institutions should not be questioned, but we need to promote information exchange at a greater intensity and a higher frequency than before.

At the same time, education programs of varying length (sometimes shorter) with greater practical (outside-classroom) components that can be updated at a faster pace should be considered – all to better reflect the reality that graduates ultimately will face.

The lack of discussion and public awareness renders students blind in the face of change. In today's world, most will work in a number of different jobs during their lifetime. We need to accept and embrace the concepts of change and life-long learning rather than resist them. Instead of clinging to the world as it was, we need to adjust social support structures to better accommodate this reality.