

Vocational Institutions as Promoters of the Green Transition

The green transition poses a significant challenge to the working life. Across all industries, there is a need to swiftly move towards a carbon-neutral circular economy and combat biodiversity loss. The business sector has embraced this challenge, with various industry associations developing their plans to reduce emissions and accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

At the forefront of the green transition are large, internationally operating companies, for whom customers' sustainability demands become a genuine competitive advantage. These companies usually have the resources to anticipate and implement necessary changes. However, the responsibility requirements and actions of large companies also impact smaller subcontractors in production and service chains.

Transitioning to a sustainable economy requires changes in all workplaces, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often lack dedicated resources for environmental management. Vocational education can play a crucial role in supporting businesses and organizations in their sustainability transformation. We are actively engaged in regional and national networks related to this theme, collaborating with various stakeholders in North Savo, such as the resource-wise guidance group of Kuopio City and climate, circular economy, and bioeconomy groups.

Environmental knowledge to workplaces via students

Savo Consortium for Education's (SAKKY) vision is to be a driver of a sustainable future. We train professionals with environmental expertise across different fields and have established sustainability competence commitments that outline the key environmental knowledge and skills acquired during studies. During workplace learning, collaboration with employers is essential, supporting them in recognizing and assessing relevant sustainability aspects and initiating sustainability efforts. Students can, for example, assess waste management, sorting guidelines, energy efficiency, chemical management, or develop sustainability plans.

SAKKY promotes green transition

In addition to vocational training, direct and rapid changes in the workplace are necessary. SAKKY promotes this through supplementary training, employment services, and collaborative projects. Businesses need support in initiating environmental work and ensuring the continuity of their sustainability initiatives. SAKKY's regional and national development projects have assisted organizations in systematic environmental work, developing models and tools for responsible practices in the workplace.

SAKKY has collaborated with companies in North Savo to promote environmental responsibility in several development projects. Feedback from businesses indicates strengthened environmental knowledge among personnel, increased use of renewable energy, growth in sustainable procurements and subcontracting, and improved waste sorting with the support of these projects. Energy-efficient solutions, such as heat recovery, LED lighting, and sensor lights, have been implemented in many organizations. Projects have also assisted public organizations in implementing low-carbon, resource-efficient, circular economy, and responsibility goals in their procurement requirements, with significant economic and employment implications for the region.

To enhance environmental responsibility competencies and readiness for the green transition in workplaces, SAKKY offers supplementary training. At SAKKY, we have trained environmental coordinators for workplaces and personnel in machine shops to promote circular economy practices. In 2023, we will

initiate additional training programs for small and medium-sized enterprises in the machine and metal industry and the transport sector. These training programs aim to provide participants with concrete models and tools for developing sustainability in their workplaces.

Development and co-operation on national level

SAKKY is also involved in national development work, particularly in promoting sustainability in professional kitchens. We have developed programs such as the 'Portaat luomuun' (Steps to Organic) initiative and the Environmental Passport for food and cleaning services. In the fall of 2023, a sustainability program will be launched to help food services assess, develop, and report on their sustainability initiatives. Additionally, SAKKY is planning and implementing a national training tour, 'KasvisPro,' in 2023 for public food service providers.

Five years ago, SAKKY introduced the 'Ekokompassi' environmental system to North Savo, with the region's first companies adopting it. We served as the regional coordinator for Ekokompassi for a couple of years, contributing to the national development of the system and representing the needs of local businesses and organizations.

In conclusion, SAKKY actively participates in regional and national networks, collaborating with various stakeholders. We encourage providers of vocational education to act as promoters of sustainable solutions.

Savo Consortium for Education, SAKKY, administers Savo Vocational College and Varkaus general upper secondary school. Annually, approximately 15,000 students benefit from our comprehensive offerings.

Our tailored training programs align with the needs of the workforce, and we actively contribute to workforce development. SAKKY employs 780 staff members. Our campuses are located in Kuopio, Iisalmi, Varkaus, and Siilinjärvi, but we also organize training programs nationwide. We are constructing our new campus buildings following the criteria of the environmental label Joutsenmerkki (Swan Label).

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