

Interviewing Mr. Kari Puumalainen,  
Principle of Ylä-Savo Vocational Institute

**Please introduce yourself:**

My name is Kari Puumalainen. I have a personal touch-point to environmental questions. I used to work as a project manager in a national project in which all main players of Finnish environmental sector were participating. The purpose of the project was to plan new ways to collect and recycle electric and electronic waste. And to find new business innovations from that sector.



**Why is the Green Transition considered essential within the vocational sector?**

Green Transition is a global challenge we must take seriously. In VET institutes we teach people who will be employed to companies where Green Transition is already an important factor. We can not be trusted and respected VET institution if we do not take these matters to account. It is not only the teaching but also our own organization has to set an example. Many of the environmental and sustainability issues are now recommendations in Finland but I believe they will be regulations and laws in the future. We need to be prepared for this.



**What do you consider to be the most important focal points when it comes to creating a sustainable future within the Finnish vocational sector?**

First one has to understand. To understand what is the big picture, why are these things important. After that it is possible to change attitudes. And with the attitudes comes ability to learn. The same goes in an individual but also organizational level.

## **What are the main initiatives (examples / cases) supporting the green transition in the vocational sector in Finland at a national level?**

There are several publicly funded projects around this theme, both national and EU funded. This supports our actions towards sustainability matters. Green Transition has been written into the regulation that sets the foundation to our degree programs, that is why we can not close our eyes from it.

And Green Transition/sustainability are more and more visible in the requirements of our degree programs. One more thing is a national VET institute quality competition in year 2022 – the theme is sustainable development.

## **Do you have any ideas of initiatives, which are strengthening sustainability within the field of transportation?**

Self-moving machinery which are lower in emissions. Discussion on should transportation be moved from roads to railways. Electric engines have become more popular and common.



## **How do we prepare VET teaching staff and management for the green transition?**

First one has to have an understanding why this is important. After that it is possible to change attitudes and learn. Green Transition has an important role in YSAO strategy. It is easy for anyone to observe the effects of climate change in the Northern nature.



The simple things in Green Transition are recycling and separating waste. But one should have the knowledge to see the big picture and go to the main questions: How to do things so that one does not produce any waste? For example in YSAO we have taken the trays off from the student cafeteria. This has had a significant impact on food waste, the usage of dish washer and also the staff work force.

## **Which role does the teaching staff play in creating a sustainable future within the vocational sector?**

They are the key players. A teacher meets so many people. He/She sets an example to students, in action but also in attitude.

**From a strategic point of view: How do we go from knowing about the sustainable development goals (SDG) to implementing them into the teaching framework?**

We have to focus on the main elements and see sustainability as a wider issue that impacts on everything we do. It is not only the environmental issues but also wellbeing, culture and economics. For example the high price of electricity. We need to do those little things like turn off the lights but as a managerial level in a VET institution we need to find the big factors. And remember that sometimes saving 1€ could cause problems that takes 2€ to fix it. Like once we turned off the air-conditioning for weekends to save electricity. Yes, we did save a lot but it turned out the buildings got ill and took us much more then what we had saved to fix that problem.

**How do you view the strengths of the dual system – cooperating with companies around the green transition in the VET sector?**



The big companies are much further ahead than the schools. When we co-operate we get to know the standard and take that knowledge to our school. If a company sets sustainability demands to its sub-contractors it is an example we can use as a school. In Finland all this communication and co-operation between schools and businesses is relatively easy because we have mutual trust. We share things openly and help others to learn. We develop together.

**What do you consider to be the greatest challenges when it comes to furthering the green transition within the vocational sector?**

The attitude. In Finland trust is a thing that supports development. But we do have strong governmental regulations which is more the stick than the carrot. These regulations effect negatively to the attitudes of people and organizations.