

Professionals needed for business and industry in Lapland – finding joint solutions to changing competence requirements

Tuija Ohtonen, Lic. (Social Sciences), Acting Director, Responsibility area for business and industry, labour force and competence, ELY Centre for Lapland

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Business and industry in Lapland are experiencing a period of strong growth with improved employment rates and reduced unemployment over a number of years. There are more vacancies and even a shortage of competent workers in many professional fields. Last year, a total of 21,000 open positions were reported to the Employment and Economic Development Office of Lapland (TE Office). Plenty of jobs are also available in nearby areas in the northern regions of Sweden and Norway.

The economy in Lapland is firmly rooted in forestry, steel, tourism, trade and extraction. Positive development and new ventures can also be seen across a wide range of other fields, such as testing activities. SMEs have made investments, and the prospects of businesses in terms of financial development, turnover and profitability are good. In Lapland, we have the means to position ourselves as pioneers in the success of currently growing fields, such as the circular economy. The strong growth in tourism is expedited by Lapland's appeal, new products and services as well as the region's improved accessibility and increased accommodation capacity, among other factors.

New jobs are mainly emerging through companies and entrepreneurship. The private sector is also gaining strength with the public sector outsourcing some of its tasks to the markets. Workers are needed for a variety of positions in tourism and services, as well as industry, transport, construction, prospecting and car testing. The labour needs of currently-planned bioeconomy projects spread their effects across multiple fields. Workers are also needed in the public sector, and the demand for labour is constant in social welfare and health care, for example.

The difficulties in securing competent workers are already threatening the growth of business and industry. The population base in Lapland is narrow, the age structure is top-heavy and there is a relative dearth of professionals within the region itself. Labour is needed in all areas of Finland, and the competition for proficient workers has tightened. The proportion of foreign labour is increasing. Lapland has a strong positive image which should be leveraged to draw workers from other parts of Finland and abroad. It is important to employ a variety of means to bolster competence in the region. Every opportunity must be seized to improve employment rates among jobseekers and immigrants.

Improving the availability of competent professionals through cooperation

The changes in business, industry and the labour market are multifaceted and affect a variety of areas from professions, work content and operating methods to competence requirements. Competence needs are changing due to new products and services, internationalisation and digitalisation, among other things, and the changes affect employees, companies and entrepreneurs alike. Employees are expected to have strong expertise in the field while being multi-skilled, flexible in changing conditions and customer-oriented in their activities. New forms of business activity, such as light entrepreneurship, and various project efforts will gain more ground in the future. The use of staffing services has become more commonplace in Lapland. The competence needs of companies are related to marketing, business operations and the development and quality of work processes, for example.

To stay in the game, you must update your competence throughout your career. Basic vocational education is a firm foundation for tailoring competence to meet the needs of various work tasks. Those without it have a weaker standing in the labour market. Solid competence is important for finding employment, whereas factors, such as age, do not make as much of a difference. Diversified competence and the willingness to work outside one's hometown also improve employment opportunities.

The measures to improve the availability of proficient workers and meet the demand for changing competence requirements require wide-ranging network cooperation. The ELY Centre and TE Office are planning and implementing measures together entrepreneurs, staffing companies and education providers. These efforts are supported by a variety of projects, trials and pilots. The role of educational institutes is key in the creation of the competence needed in working life.

Excellent examples of improvement measures include using the results of competence surveys conducted for companies, partnership agreements between schools and employers, projects and company internships among teachers and students, self-motivated and labour policy training, and non-degree-oriented competence development efforts. The labour shortage in tourism is being met with a diverse variety of means. In Kemi and Kemijärvi, education working groups for major projects are preparing measures for projects that are currently in their preparatory stages. The ELY Centre's Digistep project is finalising an action plan for the wider utilisation of digitalisation. House of Lapland is carrying out a project that leverages Lapland's appeal to draw professionals from other parts of Finland and abroad. Trials and pilots tailored to the needs of companies and other employers are being implemented throughout Lapland.

It is essential to meet the changing competence needs in business-based, result-oriented and, most of all, flexible ways. The significance of joint anticipatory efforts among regional developers is emphasised in the changing operating environment. We also need strong innovation activities and Lapland's strong capability in smart specialisation.

Municipalities bear the responsibility of promoting regional vitality. The service level and appeal of each municipality affect the decisions of both companies and individuals. The image and attractiveness of various fields and professions can be leveraged to influence regional mobility. Employers are responsible for ensuring the quality of employment relationships, management and work processes. Together we can beat everyone!

More information and reading tips:

Biannual Lapin luotsi report <http://luotsi.lappi.fi/lapin-kehitysnakymat1>

Annual Lapin luotsi report <http://luotsi.lappi.fi/lapin-suhdanteet>