

# Professional Development Training Programme

## PD for Statisticians

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### 1. Why PD for Statisticians?

The field of statistics currently faces new challenges, one of which is the harmonisation of contents and methods at both the European and global levels and another is keeping abreast with the fast pace of technological development. Customer orientation and new kinds of products and services are required. Advanced methodological skills and the ability to work together with researchers are vital in improving the quality of surveys.

The needs of decision makers and those of the modern information society change rapidly. The competence of statisticians and their traditional work as producers of statistics are challenged, too. Personnel training and in-house courses are important tools for improving working skills but they are often too narrow or restricted to be able to promote strategic competence. Bigger investments are needed from both employers and employees in raising the level of know-how in a wider sense. From an individual's viewpoint, working at a statistical office is highly motivating. There are opportunities for keeping up and broadening one's skills alongside the daily work. Thus, an individual's professional development depends to a great extent on the personal goals set by him/herself.

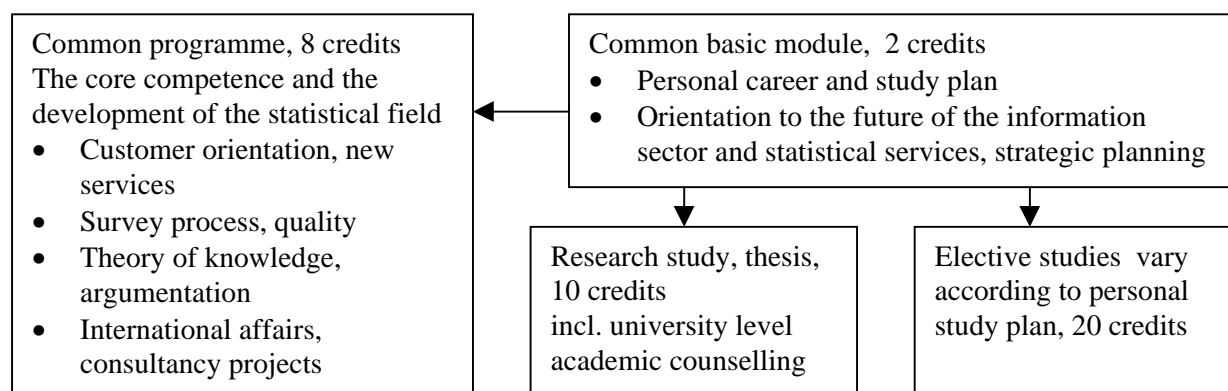
Professional Development (PD) refers to the entire development process of an individual connected with his/her profession. PD is not a single course but rather a continuing education system. The personal PD study plan will be drawn up by the student, his/her employer and the PD advisor. PD programmes are a part of the academic further education system, constituting independent degrees which can be added to other degrees, e.g. MSc (Econ), PD.

Statistics Finland launched its PD Programme for Statisticians in 1997. The goals for the training was set together with the provider of training, The Institute for Continuing Education at the University of Helsinki. The Institute organises the tailor-made, compulsory modules of the programme, such as the common courses and thesis seminars. The PD Degree Board is an authorised body set by the University to control the contents and the scientific level of the programme.

In this context, a statistician is defined in a very broad sense of the word. The training is directed to all academically qualified staff at statistical offices. The first study group of twenty participants included users of statistics, like information specialists and other generalists, as well people in middle management. Only one third of them produces statistics or works as methodologists in surveys. Multi-professionality is a fruitful thing in this context, as also is heterogeneity in other respects - age and seniority. This should provide a good basis for mutual, co-operative learning during the team learning periods.

### 2. The contents and duration of the PD Programmes are flexible

The scope of the PD Programme is 40 credits (one credit equals 30-40 hours' studying input). It corresponds with one year's full-time studies, but is meant to be completed in three to six years, because all the participants work at the same time and because development tasks relating to the participant's work are an important aspect of this kind of training.



**Figure 1. Postgraduate Diploma PD for Statisticians**

Various learning methods are characteristic of the PD Programme. They may include university examinations, courses at adult education institutes, company in-house training and completing task force assignments with others in the study team, preparing thesis, benchmarking projects, working as a trainee or other studies abroad, writing an article for a scientific journal or giving a presentation at a conference. Mere participation in a course is not enough in a PD Programme. Writing a reflective learning report is a method of analysing one's own learning process, and how good use could be made of the new knowledge in practical work.

### 3. First experiences are good

The participants gave their first feedback after six months of study, when the orientation period was behind. Although everybody had been well motivated, drawing up one's own study plan, specifying one's own areas of interest and preparing a draft thesis had not been easy.

In the first year, the core contents of studies included strategic planning and management, the service process, new customer demands and the future possibilities of information technology. According to the participants, the most rewarding experience was the study project, which the Director General of Statistics Finland had ordered from them. They were asked to create a future vision for official statistics, including analyses on various optional subjects, such as Internet strategy, Challenges of the EU and the EMU to official statistics and What does the information society mean to statistics.

These project reports were made by teams of four members each, which was regarded as a successful method of instruction. Working as a team was time consuming, but demonstrated well the differences in work orientations and in the concepts used by experts from various backgrounds. As a result, interactive, reciprocal learning took place. The simulation game of a knowledge company, through which marketing and financial process as well the principles of human resource management were taught was also regarded as a good method of teaching.

The module "Quality of a Modern Survey Process" was a challenge to the teachers and instructors, because there was no previous experience or reference to follow. The module included a teamwork, where four statistical systems or products were analyzed using quality approach and quality criteries. The teams received very good feedback, when the reports were shared in different forum at Statistics Finland.

### FRENCH RÉSUMÉ

*Statistique Finlande a lancé le Programme de Développement Professionnel DP (40 unités de valeur) destiné aux statisticiens en 1997. Le Programme de DP est organisé par les unités de formation et de recherches à l'Université de Helsinki.*