Vocational education and training (VET) is targeted towards both young people ready to enter the labour market and adults already in gainful employment or outside the labour market. A vocational qualification gives general eligibility for higher education. VET has a learning-outcome and individual-oriented approach.

The attraction of VET has been increasing throughout the 21st century

Provision of upper secondary programmes is quantified so as to give all young people an opportunity to continue their studies after compulsory education.

Approximately 95 per cent of young people completing compulsory education will immediately continue their studies in general upper secondary education, VET or voluntary additional basic education. The share of those continuing to VET is over 40 per cent.

The Vocational Education and Training Act [1] specifies that the aim of VET is to:

- maintain the population’s vocational competences
- provide opportunity to demonstrate competence regardless of the way it has been acquired
- develop working life and industry and meet their skills needs’
- improve employment
- provide entrepreneurship capabilities
- provide skills to maintain one’s working capacity
- support lifelong learning and professional development
- support the growth of students into good, balanced and educated individuals and members of society
- provide students with skills and knowledge needed to ensure capabilities to continue studies, professional development, hobbies and personality development.

Reform removed barriers between young people and adults in VET

The provision of education, funding and steering of VET of young people and adults were merged in the beginning of 2018. The separate acts were unified into the new Vocational Education and Training Act [1].

The central starting point of the new legislation is a learning-outcome and individual-oriented approach.
Legislation governing VET provision

The following legislation governs vocational qualifications, the education and training required to acquire vocational competence and demonstration of vocational competence.

Vocational Education and Training Act [1]

Vocational Education and Training Decree [2]

The following legislation governs state subsidy granted to a municipality, joint municipal authority, registered association, foundation or state enterprise.

Act on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture [3] and the amendments to the act

Organisation

Types of Institutions

The Ministry of education and culture [4] grants licences for providing education. Qualifications and programmes, special task for labour policy education, language of instruction and qualification, area of operation, minimum number of student years, other rights and obligations are defined in the licence.

Different types of education providers organise VET: municipalities, joint municipal authorities, the state and the private sector.

There are over 160 VET providers in total. Five special education institutions, the Maritime Safety Training Centre and the Sámi Education Institute are government-run. Swedish-language training is provided in Swedish-language and bilingual institutions.

VET is provided mostly in vocational institutes

VET is provided in educational institutions and as apprenticeship training. Vocational institutes are the main type of institution providing initial vocational education and training. Vocational adult education centres are a significant provider of further VET, but marginal providers of IVET. Other providers account for less than ten per cent of students in IVET altogether.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Number of ed. institutions</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Share of students of all enrolled students (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational institutes</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>194,500</td>
<td>84,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs vocational institutes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>2,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk high schools</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,159</td>
<td>1,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports institutes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2,436</td>
<td>1,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music schools and colleges</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>0,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational adult education centres</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19,700</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialised vocational institutes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19,700</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other educational institutions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand total</strong></td>
<td>174</td>
<td><strong>230,108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All VET qualifications available at institutions may also be obtained through apprenticeship training. Around 90 per cent of IVET students receive their training in a school-based setting and 10 per cent in apprenticeships.

As apprenticeship training is based on employment contracts, practical training periods take place at the workplace in connection with ordinary work assignments. This is complemented by learning in other environments, if needed.

It is possible to study the whole qualification or part of a qualification according to one’s needs.

**Personal competence development plan**

Students only need to learn the skills they do not yet have. A personal competence development plan is prepared for each student. It identifies and recognises the skills previously acquired by the student and outlines what kind of competences the student needs and how they will be acquired in different learning environments.

The teacher or guidance counsellor together with the student and, when applicable, a representative from the world of work draw up the plan. The personal competence development plan was introduced as part of the VET reform of 2018.

**Geographical Accessibility**

The school network is comprehensive at all levels of education. Vocational qualifications can also be completed in Swedish in Swedish language educational institutions throughout the country and in the Sámi language in the North of Finland.

In the future, demographic changes will cause significant challenges regarding accessibility. The age groups in basic education have been markedly diminishing and the age groups in upper secondary education will begin to diminish during the current decade.

National evaluation of accessibility [5](2015) of vocational upper secondary education concluded the following:

- There are significant regional differences in the accessibility of VET. The trend has been growing in the recent years.
- In Southern Finland, 88 per cent can find VET after basic education within 10 kilometres from home, while only 62 per cent can find VET in Eastern Finland.
- VET provision has been concentrated to bigger cities, while institutions in smaller towns have been closed down and scope of education narrowed.

Considerable changes in age groups require the network of educational institutions to adapt and develop. The future challenge will be to organise teaching and educational services so that the high standard of teaching and versatile service selection can be secured for everyone as required by
legislation. The utilisation of ICT, distance and e-learning and co-operation between education providers may be a central means to reach the objective.

**Admission Requirements and Choice of School**

Students apply to VET in

- the joint application organised nationally twice a year, in the spring and autumn;
- the continuous application system throughout the year, where the application periods and methods vary depending on the educational institution and programme; or
- in case of apprenticeship training by directly contacting the VET provider

1. **The joint application system**

The joint application system is the main pathway to VET for those who have just completed compulsory education and those who have no upper secondary qualification. Extra points are given to those who have just completed basic education or additional basic education.

Education provided in a foreign language (other than Finnish or Swedish) is, however, not included in the joint application system, and students apply directly to these institutions.

The joint application system is a national procedure used by general upper secondary schools, vocational institutions and some folk high schools and to higher education to select new students. It is maintained by the [Finnish National Agency for Education][6].

The [Ministry of Education and Culture][4] decides on student admissions criteria which are:

- the applicant’s previous study record (average grade of all subjects and grades emphasised in the relevant field)
- work experience; and
- the ranking of the programme on the applicant’s list.

VET providers decide on student admissions and may use entrance and aptitude tests or interviews, for example, to support their selection.

**Announcement of results and admittance**

The results of admission to programmes starting in autumn are usually announced in the summer. Vocational institutions usually send a letter to every student admitted with instructions for accepting the student place. One must accept the study place once admission results have come through by a specified date.

Complaints regarding admissions will be directed to [the Regional State Administrative Agencies][7].

2. **The continuous admission system**

One can also apply at any time during the year. Education providers are obliged to inform about study possibilities that they offer. The education providers decide on

- the timing of the period of application
- procedures related to application
- criteria for admission
The education provider is obliged to provide the applicant with guidance in the form of mapping out which qualification or programme best meets their need.

3. Admissions to apprenticeship training

Those interested in apprenticeship training should contact directly the vocational education and training provider organising apprenticeship training in the region. If an applicant for apprenticeship training already has work, the readiness and suitability of the workplace for apprenticeship training should be first examined. Those applicants without work can find a workplace suitable for apprenticeship training either by themselves or in cooperation with the education provider organising apprenticeship training.

Admission criteria

VET applicants include young people and adults from different educational and working backgrounds, whose prior competencies must be recognised as part of vocational qualifications.

It is also possible for general upper secondary school graduates to apply for vocational education and training and complete vocational qualifications.

Upper secondary VET students are required to have completed the basic education syllabus or an equivalent previous syllabus. In addition, VET providers may ignore the order of scores in student admission for individual student-related reasons: applicants deemed by the provider to have sufficient capabilities to complete education and training may also be admitted as students. Admission as a student requires a good state of health, such that it does not form an obstacle to participation in the education concerned.

Barriers to admission are considered

Accessibility is emphasised in student admission criteria. No aspect relating to the health status or functional capacity of an applicant may constitute a barrier to admission as a student. Notwithstanding, an individual incapable of practical assignments or work-based learning as part of the studies due to health or functional capacity cannot be admitted as a student, where the studies or working in the relevant occupations involve requirements for the safety of minors, patients, customers or traffic. Barriers to admission as a student may include a mental or physical illness or disability that prevents participation in practical assignments or work-based learning, a visual or hearing impairment that cannot be corrected with assistive equipment as well as colour blindness, or substance abuse or dependence.

Qualification Requirements specify qualification-specific health requirements, on which the Finnish National Agency for Education has issued regulations[8] governing upper secondary, further and specialist vocational qualifications in the fields of Humanities and Education; Technology, Communications and Transport; Natural Resources and the Environment; and Social Services, Health and Sports. Provisions on the qualifications have been laid down in Government Decree[9] Finnish National Agency for Education has drawn up the descriptions of health requirements in co-operation with experts from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.
Age levels and grouping of students

Students in upper secondary VET are mainly aged between 16 and 25. There may be students of different ages in the same class. There are no official recommendations regarding the maximum and/or minimum number of pupils/students in a class or group.

On average it takes three years of full-time studies at a vocational institution to complete a qualification. Compulsory units are primarily organised in year classes. The time it takes to complete studies varies depending on the student’s personal competence development plan and the amount of recognition of prior learning.

In the apprenticeship system, training is not based on age groups. The minimum age is 15 and there is no maximum age.

On upper secondary education targeted at adults, please see CH 8 [10].

Organisation of the School Day, Week and Year

There are no specific provisions on the number of working days, the school year and holidays in legislation for VET. The education provider establishes the start and end dates of schoolwork and holidays. However, instruction must be organised in such a way that students are able to complete all the studies included in the upper secondary VET syllabus within three years.

The school year consists of two terms: the autumn term and the spring term. The autumn term ends and the spring term begins at the turn of the calendar year. The school year and instruction usually start in August. Instruction ends at the end of May or at the beginning of June. As a rule, the school year ends at the end of July.

Timetables are determined according to students' choices

Students choose study modules or units from the study options offered by the institution and their daily and weekly timetables are determined according to these choices.

Apprenticeship training is based on a contract of employment. The weekly working hours should be at least 25 hours on average.

The need for premises varies according to the number of students and the field of study

The way facilities are used depends on the type of instruction and extent of activities. Facilities are dimensioned based on the number of lessons per week, the subject and the size of student groups.

The capacity of each space varies typically from 27 to 32 weekly lessons depending on the type of institution. The proportion of workplace learning also affects the need for facilities.