Curriculum, subjects, number of hours

The curriculum system of vocational education and training consists of the National Qualification Requirements, education provider’s qualification or training programme specific assessment plan and the students’ personal competence development plan.

The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) decides on the National Qualification requirements for each vocational qualification, determining the composition of studies and objectives, core contents and assessment criteria for study units.

There are up to 160 vocational qualifications: 43 vocational upper secondary qualifications, 65 further vocational qualifications and 56 specialist vocational qualifications.

Three types of vocational qualifications

There are three types of vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. A holder of a vocational upper secondary qualification has broad-based basic vocational skills to work in different tasks in the field as well as more specialised competence and the vocational skills required in work life in at least one section of the field. A holder of a further vocational qualification has vocational skills that meet the needs of work life and that are more advanced or more specialised than required in the vocational upper secondary qualification. A holder of a specialist vocational qualification has vocational skills that meet the needs of work life and that are highly advanced or multidisciplinary.

Broad-based and flexible qualifications

All qualifications are composed of units of learning outcomes. Vocational qualifications consist of vocational units and common units. Further and specialist qualifications comprise only vocational units and the necessity for common units is assessed when preparing the personal competence development plan.

Each National Qualification requirement is drawn up in such a manner that the qualification will provide extensive basic vocational skills for the various assignments in the field and more specialised competence and the vocational skills required by the world of work in one sector of the qualification. The vocational skills are defined as functional areas in the world of work.

The scope of the qualification requirement is 180 competence points. 60 competence points corresponds to one year study. The vocational qualification consists of vocational units (145 competence points) and common units (35 competence points). There must be at least one
compulsory and one optional vocational unit in the qualification.

The function of common units is to make sure that a person with vocational qualification has the basic skills needed in life and working life, common skills needed in all branches and the capacity to further studies and lifelong learning. Common units are:

- Communication and interaction competence
- Mathematical and scientific competence
- Social and labour market competence

**Key competences help students to keep up with the changes in society and working life**

The National Qualification Requirements governing different upper secondary vocational qualifications determine the key competences of lifelong learning, which are included in the vocational skills requirements set for vocational units and core subjects.

The key competences of lifelong learning are:

- Digital and technological competence
- Mathematics and science competence
- Competence development
- Communication and interaction competence
- Competence for sustainable development
- Cultural competence
- Social and citizenship competence
- Entrepreneurial competence

The qualification requirements and the vocational competences form the basis for identifying the types of occupational work processes in which vocational skills for a specific qualification can be demonstrated and assessed.

**Continuous application for training throughout the year**

Prospective students can apply to VET whenever suitable and start their studies flexibly throughout the year. National joint application is organised each spring for those who have completed basic education and who do not have a secondary qualification. The aim is to ensure each young person a student place after basic education.

**Personal competence development plan for each student**

A personal competence development plan is drawn up for each student. The plan is drawn up by a teacher or a guidance counsellor together with the student and, when applicable, representative of working life.

The plan charts 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. Students may have obtained relevant skills from working life, another school, international study, work placement periods, family and leisure activities or through the media. Previous learning is recognised and only the missing skills are acquired.

The plan also includes information on the necessary supportive measures. The support received by a student may involve special teaching and studying arrangements due to learning difficulties, injury or illness, or studies that support study abilities.
The qualification requirements are drawn up in tripartite co-operation

The qualification requirements are drawn up under EDUFI leadership in tripartite co-operation between employers, employees, the educational sector and student unions. Independent self-employed people are also represented in the preparation of qualification requirements in fields where self-employment is prevalent to a significant extent. The qualification requirements determine the units included in the qualification, any possible specialisations made up of different units, the composition of the qualification, the vocational skills required for each qualification unit, the guidelines for assessment (targets and criteria of assessment) and the ways of demonstrating vocational skills.

Finnish VET students study more languages than other European students

According to the results of Eurostat, Finnish VET students have on average studied more languages than other European students. In Finland 84 per cent of VET students had studied at least two languages in addition to mother tongue. There were just two countries, Romania and Luxembourg, where VET students studied more foreign languages. In Sweden almost all VET students studied one foreign language, but in Estonia over half and in Denmark almost 80 per cent had not studied a single foreign language in their VET studies.

Teaching methods and materials

Education providers are responsible for and decide on the contents of education and the manner in which it is provided. Education providers have versatile possibilities to make use of different learning environments and pedagogical solutions (such as traditional contact teaching, simulators and other digital learning environments, and workplaces). The method of instruction is not regulated. Teachers themselves may choose the methods that they apply and the materials they use in order to achieve the objectives defined in the curriculum. The students buy the textbooks and other materials needed in their study.

At present, the emphasis is on student-centred working methods, development of students’ own initiative and entrepreneurship, their sense of responsibility and the importance of learning to learn. Key factors include flexible teaching arrangements, a wide range of working methods and teaching not tied to year classes, integration of theory and practice as well as co-operation and interaction between institutions in the planning and implementation of instruction. In order to integrate instruction into larger units, it is possible to use methods of joint teaching and project work, which bring together the objectives of several study modules. In addition, e-learning is a priority area in development of new teaching methods.

Work-based learning included in all qualifications

Work-based learning (WBL) is provided mainly in real work environments (companies). If this is not possible, it can be also organised in school facilities.

The 2018 reform aimed to increase the share of work-based learning in VET by offering more flexibility in its organisation. All learners take part in WBL and any form of it (training agreement or apprenticeship training) may be taken by learners in any qualification programme. WBL may be provided during the whole programme duration and cover the whole qualification, a module/unit or a smaller part of the programme. The most suitable method for a learner is agreed in the personal competence development plan.

The legislation does not stipulate a maximum or minimum amount on workbased learning but it
strongly recommends VET providers to organise at least part of the learning at workplace. WBL forms may vary during the studies. A learner may flexibly transfer from a training agreement to apprenticeship training, when the prerequisites for concluding an apprenticeship agreement are met. Work-based learning is guided and goal-oriented training at a workplace, allowing learners to acquire parts of the practical vocational skills included in the desired qualification.

**Training agreement**

This type of WBL can be offered in all initial and continuing VET programmes. At the beginning of the training, the personal competence development plan is designed by the teacher/ guidance counsellor, working life representative and the learner. In this plan, the WBL periods are defined.

Learners are not in an employment relationship with the training company. They do not receive salary and employers do not receive any training compensation. But companies gladly recruit people with work experience. Within this system, the learners get some work experience during their studies and the learner and the company get to know each other. It is possible to change from a training agreement to an apprenticeship training contract, if prerequisites for concluding an apprenticeship agreement are met. A training agreement period can also be conducted abroad, as an exchange period, such as within the Erasmus+ programme or through other programmes or individual arrangements.

**Apprenticeship training**

Any qualification can be acquired through apprenticeship training; this is a work-based form of VET with a written fixed-term employment contract (apprenticeship contract) between an employer and an apprentice, who must be at least 15 years old. Working hours are at least 25 hours per week. The education provider assesses the suitability of the workplace to function as a learning environment. This assessment is based on the vocational skills requirements of the qualifications the workplace is intended to support. The workplace must be able to provide the following in relation to the provision of education and demonstration of knowledge and skills:

- sufficient production and service operations
- necessary equipment
- personnel with the necessary professional skills, educational background, and work experience.

The workplace is required to keep track of the development of the student, report to the education provider and take action if the competence is not reached. Apprenticeships have been mainly used in further and specialist vocational education. Since the 2018 reform, there is no indication in the legislation where the theoretical part should be acquired. The word ‘theory’ is no longer used; instead, ‘learning in the working place’ and ‘learning in other environments’ applies. If the company is able to cover all training needs, there is no need for the learner to attend a school venue at all. Learners themselves find workplaces for the training. The employer has no obligation to keep the apprentice employed after the training period is completed.

VET providers are responsible for initiating the contract. Demand and supply in contracts / workplaces are not always in balance. There are regional and field specific differences but usually there are not enough apprenticeship places in companies. Apprenticeship training is based on the requirements for the relevant qualification, according to which the learner’s personal competence development plan is drawn up. It considers the needs and requirements of the workplace and the learner. Approximately 70-80% of the time used for learning takes place in the workplace, where the apprenticeship contract is concluded. Periods of theory and in-company training alternate but there is no common pattern; it is agreed in the personal competence development plan.
The employer pays the apprentice’s wages according to the relevant collective agreement for the period of workplace training. For the period of theoretical studies, learners receive social benefits, such as daily allowance and allowances for accommodation and travel expenses. The education provider pays compensation to cover the costs of training provided in the workplace. The employer and VET institution agree on the amount of compensation before the training takes place; a separate contract is prepared for each learner.

**Students can receive financial support to buy learning material**

Although upper secondary education is free of charge, students are required to buy their own learning materials. The Finnish government’s budget for 2019 includes learning material supplement to some upper secondary learners, including VET. A learning material supplement of EUR 46.80 per month (equals to approximately EUR 1 400 for three semesters) has been granted from August 2019 onwards for VET learners if they are:

(a) from 17 to 19 and living with their parents/guardians;

(b) 17 years old and living on their own;

(c) below 17 and their parents' annual income is less than EUR 41 100.

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