Teaching and Learning

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.

The Content of Qualification Requirements

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.

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:
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 technical competence
- Mathematical and natural scientific competence
- Development of competences
- Communication and interaction competence
- Competence of sustainable development
- Cultural competence
- Societal competence and citizenship
- 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.

Individual study plan for all students

Objectives for competence development will be written down in a personal competence development plan for each student. A teacher will draw up the plan together with a student. An employer or another representative of a workplace or other cooperation partner may also participate in the preparation of the personal competence development plan, where needed. The plan will include information on, for example, identification and recognition of prior learning, acquisition of missing skills, competence tests and other demonstration of skills, and the necessary guidance and support.
Prior learning acquired in training, working life or other learning environments has to be recognised as part of the qualification. The student can also include units from general upper secondary curriculum, other vocational qualifications (incl. further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications) or polytechnic degrees in his personal competence development plan.

**The labour market experts are involved in designing the Qualification requirements**

The EDUFI sets up a qualification project for renewing her requirements, inviting experts representing employees, employers and teachers in the field to participate. The multi-stakeholder Skills Anticipation Forum established by the Ministry of Education and Culture with nine industry specific anticipation groups supports the anticipation work in practice. The steering group and nine anticipation groups are multistakeholder constellations with representatives from employers and entrepreneurs, employees, education and training providers (VET and HE), educational authorities, education staff and students, as well as research and evaluation organisations. Each skills anticipation group takes part in qualitative and quantitative anticipation, to ensure that the education system will provide the necessary skills and competences, and make initiatives and recommendations to relevant actors (i.e. the Ministry of Education, EDUFI, and education providers) regarding curricula content and labour market collaboration.

In the course of its work, the expert group must also consult other experts in the world of work. In addition, the expert group has to cooperate with the working life committee concerned. Once the expert group has completed a draft version of the new Qualification Requirements, the document will be sent out for a broad consultation process to representatives of unions, organisations, the world of work and VET providers. Following the consultation process, the EDUFI adopts the qualification requirements as a nationally binding regulation.

**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.

Training at workplaces in connection with the practical work tasks will be arranged as apprenticeship training or training based on a training agreement.
Training agreement

Finnish VET is based on work orientation. Vocational upper secondary education and training always includes work-based learning. Work-based learning means guided and goal-oriented training at a workplace, and its purpose is that students learn part of the practical vocational skills included in the qualification during this period. The scope of on-the-job learning in vocational upper secondary education and training is not defined. The educational objectives of work-based learning are determined in the qualification requirements. Work-based learning is carried out in service or production capacities at the workplace. Training instructions are planned and implemented in cooperation between the educational institutions and employers.

When applying training agreement, students are not in an employment relationship (status: student). Students receive no salary and employers receive no training compensation. Training agreement is made as per module which supports the student’s flexible transitions between the educational institution and workplaces on one hand, and between a training agreement and an apprenticeship contract on the other. A student may flexibly transfer from a training agreement to apprenticeship training, when the prerequisites for concluding an apprenticeship agreement are met. The objectives of work-based learning are to improve the employability of graduates and increase response to the needs of the labour market. Work-based learning should help the student to learn the rules and procedures of working life. It aims at improving young people's immediate job placement, similarly to traditional apprenticeship training. Work-based learning should enable and increase exchanges between teachers and experts as well as strengthen the attractiveness of vocational education and training.

Apprenticeship Training

Apprenticeship training is a work-based form of providing vocational training. It is based on a written fixed-term employment contract (apprenticeship contract) between an employer and an apprentice, who must be at least 15 years old. Civil servants and entrepreneurs may also develop their competence through apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship training accounts for about 20 % of vocational education and training.

Apprenticeship training (Finnish: oppisopimuskoulutus, Swedish: läroavtalsutbildning) is based on National Qualification Requirements or the requirements for the relevant competence-based qualification, according to which the student’s individual learning plan is formed. It is drawn up so as to allow for the needs and prerequisites of the workplace and the student. The plan defines the qualification to be completed, the National Core Curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification to be observed in the instruction, the scope of the qualification, central assignments, theoretical instruction included in the training programme, the timing of completion of studies during the training programme, the instructors responsible for the studies, and other issues relevant to the arrangement of the studies.

The student has to work at workplace on average at least 25 hours during the week. The student’s prior learning and work experience must be taken into account and recognised as part of the learning plan. The learning plan is drawn up in co-operation between the student, the employer and the education providers, so that it can be appended to the apprenticeship contract when the contract is approved.

The organisation of instruction is not regulated in apprenticeship training either. However, the training mainly emphasises work-based learning and integration of practical and theoretical instruction. Approximately 70–80% of the time used for learning takes place in the training workplace. The student works and learns in the working environment, where the student’s training is entrusted to the
responsible work place instructor(s). Theoretical education is mainly provided by a vocational institution or vocational adult education centre (Finnish: ammatillinen aikuiskoulutuskeskus, Swedish: yrkesutbildningscentrum).

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, the student receives social benefits, such as a daily allowance and allowances for accommodation and travel expenses. The employer receives training compensation to cover the costs of training provided at the workplace.

**Apprenticeship training guarantees better employment**

The benefit of apprenticeship is its practical working life orientation and excellent employment rate. The employment rate for students completing apprenticeship training five years after beginning studies is approximately 90 per cent, which is significantly higher than other types of VET qualifications. During a ten-year observation period, 8 per cent of students completing a vocational qualification in apprenticeship training had experienced unemployment, whereas 23 per cent of students completing upper secondary VET had experienced unemployment.

**Assessment**

**Pupil/Students Assessment**

A competence based approach involves transferring from the assessment of single credits to the assessment of extensive competence areas that correspond to the work and operational processes of working life.

The assessment of learning refers to the support and guidance provided to students in achieving vocational skills requirements and the objectives for learning outcomes. The assessment of learning involves monitoring and assessment of the students’ competence development during their studies and providing them with feedback on their development.

The assessment of learning outcomes evaluates whether the student meets the vocational skills requirements and the objectives for learning outcomes set forth in the national qualification requirements. The assessment of learning outcomes evaluates the level of competence, mainly expressed in grades obtained from an assessment scale.

The purpose of student assessment is to provide students with guidance and encouragement, develop their self-assessment capabilities, provide information on their competencies and ensure the achievement of vocational skills requirements and the objectives for learning outcomes defined in the national qualification requirements or the national core curriculum.

On programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications, students’ learning and its development as well as the competence acquired as a result of learning are assessed throughout the period of study. Assessment always involves students’ individual self-assessment.

Students’ learning and competence are always assessed in terms of the vocational skills requirements and assessment criteria determined within the relevant National Qualification Requirement.

Vocational skills are primarily demonstrated in practical work situations at workplaces in competence tests. Competences are assessed as per unit of a qualification. In a competence test, the student’s competence is assessed by a teacher and a representative of working life together. Working and business life is given a strong role in assuring the quality of skills: a representative of working life is
one of the two assessors, and working life committees ensure the quality of vocational skills at national level.

Students' learning is assessed by giving verbal or written feedback on the progress of their studies. Assessment of competence forms the basis for awarding grades for all qualification modules on students’ certificates, using the following five-step grading scale:

- Satisfactory 1-2,
- Good 3-4, and
- Excellent 5

Common units are given a pass mark without indicating a grade.

**Rectification of assessment**

Students have the right to know the assessment criteria applied to them. A student not satisfied with the assessment may request rectification from the assessors within 14 days since he /she was informed of the assessment. If a student is not satisfied with the aforementioned decision, he / she has to make a request for rectification from the working life committee within 14 days of having had the possibility of receiving the decision. The committee may make a request for reassessment in cases where the decision seems to be incorrect.

**Progression of Pupils/Students**

In school-based vocational education and training, studies have traditionally been organised in year classes. However, the aim is to discard this tradition and the tendency is towards providing students with advancement opportunities that are as individual as possible.

There are various ways of promoting students’ opportunities for organising their studies individually. Recognition of prior learning aims to shorten the duration of education and to avoid overlaps in education. The modularity of the qualifications, in turn, increases options; the qualifications consist of large units, which the students may partially choose themselves and complete in the manner best suited to them. The modular qualification structure increases flexibility and options and makes it easier to get credit for earlier studies and competence. The modular structure also makes it easier to supplement the qualifications.

Teachers work together with their students to draw up personal competence development plans, on the basis of which the students themselves can partially decide when, how and in which order they study. As the aim is to study without division into year classes, the institutions provide students with opportunities to progress according to their individual abilities and according to their personal competence development plans in different groups. Instruction may also be organised flexibly in the evenings or during the weekends as well as during the summer holidays.

Instruction not tied to year classes requires effective guidance counselling, as students do not necessarily have their own class or group and drawing up personal competence development plans may be demanding and complicated. Holders of upper secondary vocational qualifications or further and specialist qualifications are eligible for further studies at polytechnics and universities. Natural study tracks for further studies for holders of upper secondary vocational qualifications include polytechnics, where just below a third of new entrants have completed such qualifications. At present, university entrants mainly come from general upper secondary schools but the vocational track is another possibility.
Certificate

The certification and the content of the qualification are regulated by the Vocational Education and Training Act 531/2017 and Decree 673/2017 as well as the National Qualification Requirements and other regulations of the Finnish National Board of Education. Since January 2018, acceptable performances are graded on the scale of excellent (5), good (4-3) and satisfactory (2-1), according to Decree 673/2017. Qualification certificates are awarded by the education provider/vocational institution.

A qualification certificate for the vocational qualification is awarded upon completion of all compulsory and optional study units (a total of 180 competence points) included in the student’s personal competence development plan. The assessment is carried out by the teachers and the representatives of working life.

Once students have completed all units included in a qualification to an acceptable standard, they receive a qualification certificate.

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