Recommendations to strengthen cooperation between VET and higher education

The Ministry of education and culture will establish an expert group for the development of cooperation between VET providers and higher education institutions in 2019. The group makes proposals for making cooperation more effective and goal-oriented.

The groups task is based on the new government programme’s aim of increasing co-operation between the upper secondary level and higher education. In addition, the legislation on VET emphasises that education providers should co-operate with the local employers and businesses, other providers of vocational education and training, higher education institutions and general upper secondary education providers.

The 2017–2020 performance agreement for higher education institutions state that higher education institutions should deepen their cooperation with upper secondary education providers in order to accelerate the transition to higher education. The share of higher education graduates in the age group 25–34 should increase to 50 per cent by 2030.

For more information in Finnish: [1]

Funding is granted to improve attractiveness and communications

The Finnish National Agency for Education allocates state funds for VET projects that improve and upskill the communication skills of teachers, trainers and other VET staff. Funding also aims to improve the attractiveness of VET. Projects which use innovative channels and new communication methods are prioritised.

The goal of these projects is to develop models where students and the world of work can be involved in the communication processes. With new innovative communication, new target groups should be reached.

For more information in Finnish: [2]
International mobility is picking up in vocational education and training

The number of international mobility periods among Finnish vocational (VET) students has started to increase in 2018. The annual fluctuation of the number of students is typical in vocational education and training. The budget cuts in the last few years in VET in Finland are reflected in the numbers. The number of foreign students coming to study in Finland grew by 6.5 % in 2018 compared to the year before.

Mobility periods of Finnish students typically last for 6 weeks. The most popular target countries in mobility periods of more than two weeks are Spain and Britain, for short-term periods Sweden and Estonia. Most foreign students come to Finland from the Netherlands and Russia.


10 million euros for VET to improve the availability of skilful workforce

The ministry of education and culture has distributed 10 million euros to the short-term vocational education and training. This extra funding is allocated especially fields which are suffering from lack of skilful workforce such as health and welfare and field of industry.

The objective is to respond the recruiting needs fast and ease the access to employment. Support can include individual measures to alleviate the access to the world of work and it is especially appointed to those unemployed applicants who are in their best working age.

Special subsidy against grooming

The Finnish National Agency for Education grants 500 000 euros special subsidy for in-service-training for educational staff (ISCED 1-3) against grooming that is aimed at children and adolescents.

The subsidy is meant for schools’ and educational institutes’ intensified actions so that pupils and students would better recognise the grooming phenomenon and they could act safety in social media and in situations where they might encounter something frightening or disturbing. Children and adolescents are supported in defending their personal integrity and in protecting themselves from harmful and damaging phenomena.

In addition, the special subsidy is aimed for preparing support material for protecting young people from violence, teasing and disturbance as well as strengthening media and protection skills of children and adolescents. The emphasis is on safe use of social media.

The first results of the anticipation work for the year 2035

The report by the National Forum for Skills Anticipation highlights changes in competences and the most important skills needed in 2035. Important skills needed in the future are customer-oriented development of services and knowledge of sustainable development. Working life requires skills in digitalisation, information evaluation skills and problem-solving skills.

Experts from the education and training sector and from the world of work examined the most important skills and education needs by 2035 and reflected on the proposals for the development of education and training. Anticipation work was made based on the listings drawn up by 30 sector groups. This anticipation process was implemented during June 2017 and February 2019.
In the scenario, digitalisation and technological development plays a vital role. Digitalisation will become an essential condition for companies’ operation and competitiveness. It will change the operating practices of companies as well as customer behaviour. In 2035 new jobs will emerge especially in high-tech industry and in the marketing and processing of highly processed products. In addition, the forecast predicts that the development of cost-efficiency and ecological sustainability will in the future take place at the same pace.

Knowledge of sustainable development will be an important basic skill in the future, especially in industrial sectors. The importance of skills in sustainable development will become more important if societal development continues in a more ecological direction. The ability to learn was found important, but the development and management of personal competence was also highlighted from the employers’ point of view. Problem solving skills and information evaluation skills, on the other hand, are essential metaskills needed in the future.

The importance of skills in customer-oriented development of services is emphasised in the service sector. In the future, new types of solutions will be needed in interactive customer service where the role of service design and automation is emphasised. Challenges facing continuous learning are also themes emphasised in the future. According to the anticipation scenario, a reform of continuous learning is required in the 2020s. This means that qualification-based learning should be only one part of competence and skills development and developing competences and skills is especially needed in transformation of technology. Furthermore, the funding of the continuous learning provided by society should follow the individual so that everyone would be able to flexibly choose what, where and when to study.

The National Forum for Skills Anticipation serves as a joint expert body in educational anticipation for the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI). The system consists of a steering group, anticipation groups and a network of experts. The task is to promote the interaction of education and training with working life in co-operation with the Ministry and EDUFI. Anticipation groups are involved in both qualitative and quantitative anticipation work.

For more information in Finnish:
https://www.oph.fi/ajankohtaista/tiedotteet/101/0/asiantuntijoiden_nakemys_tulevaisuuden_osaamista
rpeista_tyoelamassa_tarvitaan_kestavan_kehityksen_osaamista_digitaitoja_ja_jatkuvaa_oppimista [4]

Work to improve attractiveness of vocational education and training is supported by a state subsidy

The Finnish National Agency for Education will allocate 500 000 euros to the state subsidies for supporting communication work and to improve the attractiveness of VET. Subsidies can be applied during April 2019.

VET in Finland creates versatile opportunities for future and it is strongly connected to the needs of working life. Studying in VET supports lifelong learning. Main aim of the state subsidies is to enhance the attractiveness and appreciation of VET.

VET Skills week, organised in October 2019 is one of the main events of the EU presidency in Finland. Goal of the event is to raise awareness of the importance of the skills needed in the changing world. State subsidy is mainly granted for the communication work related to the Skills week.

State subsidy is granted for vocational education and training providers and other stakeholders such as student unions and working life organisations.
2018

**Student feedback will be considered as a basis for funding**

The funding of VET has been reformed in 2018, and will be divided into core funding, performance funding and effectiveness funding, and strategy funding. Student feedback is one part of effectiveness funding and will be taken into account when calculating the funding in 2020. Collecting student feedback has started in July of 2018. The legislation covering VET funding has been amended and the new funding system will be gradually introduced and is fully operational in 2022.

**Government proposes a teaching material supplement**

The Finnish government’s new budget proposal for 2019 introduces plans to grant a teaching material supplement for upper secondary students in the lowest economic situation, which will also change the Act on Financial Aid for Students. The proposed supplement for teaching material would be granted from August 2019 onwards and it would be 46,80 euros per month.

**The VET reform is in force**

The VET reform entered into force at the beginning of 2018. Its main goals are to update the funding system, remove overlaps and barriers from education, ensure regionally comprehensive education network, and strengthen links between education and the labour market. Key aspects of the reform are competence-based approach, customer-oriented VET, and labour market relevance. Reinforcing workplace learning, apprenticeship, and alleviating the administrative and financial burden of employers is also part of the reform.

**Vocational qualifications are restructured**

As part of the 2018 VET reform the number of vocational qualifications will decrease from 351 to 164 (43 vocational qualifications, 65 further vocational qualifications and 56 specialist vocational qualifications). The new qualification structure, which is composed of broader qualifications, is expected to allow individual learners better organise their competence development, in a more flexible way and in line with the changing demands in working life.

2017

**Psychology and Curatorial Services for 50,000 New Students**

The right to the Psychology and Curriculum Services under the Student and Student Care Act is extended to all initial vocational qualification students, as well as to students attending preparatory education for vocational training. A total of EUR 5.6 million will be spent on extending services. With this change, approximately 50,000 new students can access the services.

The expansion focuses on student wellbeing and preventive work in educational institutions. The support and guidance is meant to help to complete the studies and the employment process. The law amendment is intended to enter into force on 1 January 2018.

**Reform of vocational upper secondary education**

The new legislation on vocational education and training will reinforce professional skills in Finland. The most important task will be to produce individual skills that meet the needs of students and
working life. The Finnish Government proposed on 10 August that the President of the Republic adopt the new Act on Vocational Education and Training.

Reform in VET updates the entire vocational education and training (VET) by 2018. In the future, work life requires a new kind of competence, while there are fewer financial resources available for education. VET has to respond more swiftly to the changes in work life and operating environment and to adapt to individual competence needs.

The reform will enter into force on 1 January 2018.

**VET Reform in a nutshell**

- Individual skills needs will be met flexibly through vocational qualifications and their parts and through preparatory education and training not leading to qualification. It will be possible to study in educational institutions, at workplaces and in digital learning environments.

- A new learning agreement model will facilitate studies at workplaces. Attractiveness of the existing apprenticeship training will also be improved. Skills acquired with the learning and apprenticeship agreements will be demonstrated in practical work situations.

- Students’ performance will be assessed together by teachers and experts in working life. It will be possible to apply for and start training flexibly according to needs. Increasing the opportunities for working life-oriented studies aims to respond to the changes in working life.

- A new funding model will be introduced to improve the effectiveness and quality of education and training. The funding model will encourage education providers to adopt measures to reduce discontinuation of studies and recognise previously acquired skills more efficiently. Education providers will get more freedom to organise education and training with the introduction of the new organisation licences. The funding reform aims to ensure the implementation of the educational guarantee and encourage education providers to adopt measures to reduce discontinuation of studies.
20 million euros for vocational education for immigrants

The Ministry of Education and Culture will subsidise vocational education and training for immigrants by 20 million euros. The financial resources are designed to promote a swift labour market integration of asylum seekers and other persons with immigrant background and to strengthen their education. The goal is to combine language studies with vocational studies. The funds are part of the Vocational skills for immigrants programme.

Minister of Education and Culture believes that education and work are the best ways to integrate immigrants into their new home country. The reform of vocational education and training aims to make educational tracks more flexible and thus make combining studies and work easier than before. The aim is to use the granted financial assistance so that 2,000 new persons could begin studies in 2017.

The programme Vocational skills for immigrants provides immigrants for example with a possibility to complete parts of vocational qualifications with support in professional Finnish and with other necessary support so that the persons could either enter the labour market straight away or complete the other parts of the qualification as competence-based qualifications. Competences and qualifications acquired earlier are identified and recognised, whenever possible.

The programme makes use of operational models developed and experiences gained within the Young Adults’ Skills Programme: it invests in the support in the early stages of studies and in discovering students’ strengths.
Anticipating forum of skills and competences

The national education and training committees were replaced by the anticipating forum organised by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The forum also has a steering group which supports the anticipating process. The secretariat of anticipating groups consists of the experts of the Finnish National Agency for Education. Instead of the approximately 30 groups of the previous model, there are nine anticipating groups representing different vocational fields. In the groups the employers, employees and entrepreneurs, and providers of VET are represented. Also higher education institutions, teaching staff, researchers as well as educational administration are represented in the groups. The anticipating groups have been appointed to the time 1.1.2017 - 31.12.2020.

The tasks of the anticipating groups are

1. to participate in a qualitative and quantitative anticipating and in possible separate anticipating projects which are connected to the task of the anticipating group

2. based on the anticipating data, to analyse changing and new competence and skills needs of the working life and their effects for education at different levels of education.

3. to make initiatives or recommendations about new development needs to the national administration, and to the providers of education on how to strengthen the cooperation between the world of work and education.

4. develop and strengthen the cooperation between upper secondary vocational education and training and higher education

5. to introduce the perceived issues in to the discussion and to conduct research and development proposals connected to them.

2016

Proposal for the introduction of a training agreement in vocational education and training

Finnish Government’s strategic priorities are materialised in the form of key projects. As part of the implementation of Knowledge and education -key project there is a reform of upper secondary vocational education and training. In January 2016 the Minister of Education and Culture appointed rapporteurs to prepare a proposal for a training agreement model and its introduction in vocational education and training. The objective of the training agreement model is to promote workplace learning and practical ways of completing qualifications by creating flexible paths for the students on workplaces.

The proposal was submitted to the Minister in April. The new Training Contract model would simplify and reform existing work-based learning models as well as allow more flexible learning paths. The new Training Contract would replace the current on-the-job learning periods and form a largely integrated approach with an apprenticeship.

The rapporteurs propose that the training agreement model and, in a broader sense, the new model of training provided on the workplace, will be introduced by 1 January 2018 as part of the vocational education and training reform.
VET Reform and budget cuts

VET is facing financial challenges as the budget will be cut 190 million euros from the beginning of the year 2017. Reduction of the unit price decreases funding from the vocational upper secondary education and training by 59 million euros during the year 2016 and also 19 million euros from the apprenticeship training.

VET reform is seen as an answer for the budget cuts as the reform unifies financing system and legislation. Financing systems of vocational upper secondary education and training, vocational further education and training, apprenticeship training and labor policy education will be organised into a single entity. Dividers between current legislation will also be unified into joint legislation concerning adults and young students in VET. With these measures financial resources are used more effectively.

Main goal of the VET reform is to improve the status of VET in the Finnish society. The funding system and structure will be renewed while keeping the various educational paths open. Preserving the eligibility for further studies and ensuring regionally comprehensive education network is an important aspect when planning VET reform. One of the targets is to strengthen the interaction between educational institutions and working life. Reform also aims to remove barriers between young and adult students and eliminate unnecessary overlaps in education. Key aspect of the reform lies in the competence-based approach.

Reform is strongly based on the idea of customer-oriented VET, meaning that VET is designed to meet the needs of students and working life. The aim is, for example, to increase learning in workplaces and enable students to apply for training throughout the year. Apprenticeship training will also be reformed by easing the administrative and financial burden of employees.

Reform also unifies financing system and legislation. Financing systems of vocational upper secondary education and training, vocational further education and training, apprenticeship training and labor policy education will be organised into a single entity. Dividers between current legislation will also be unified into joint legislation concerning adults and young students in VET.

Reform is prepared and carried out in close cooperation with experts and different stakeholders of VET in Finland. Reform takes effect from the beginning of the year 2018.