

Ministry of Education and Culture

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Improving completion rates in vocational upper secondary education and training

Abstract

As set out in the Government Programme, efforts will be made to reduce the number of young people outside education, training and the labour market and to prevent exclusion through a joint programme of different administrative sectors (the NEET working group, Neither in Education nor in Employment or Training). In keeping with the task assigned to the working group, this report describes **where, how and why education providers have successfully reduced drop-out rates and increased completion rates in vocational upper secondary education and training. Key actions and observations in this report are shown in bold print.**

The purpose of vocational upper secondary education and training is to develop the students' vocational competence and point them to the labour market or further studies. In order to achieve these objectives, dropping out of education and training must be prevented. Education providers' drop-out rates vary from 2.3% to 19.6% according to monitoring data from 2013 - 2014. Those education providers who have taken effective action to improve their completion rates have attained drop-out rates of approximately 5%. **Development resources should be allocated to education providers whose drop-out rates clearly exceed this figure.**

The results of projects aiming to improve completion rates indicate that rather than individual measures, the crucial factor for reducing drop-out rates is including the perspective of completion in the education provider's strategy, objectives and management systems; in other words, **the education provider must focus on systematic leadership related to completion and student welfare (Figure 1).**

<p>COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEVELOPING STUDENT COMPETENCE • DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION PROVIDER'S COMPETENCE 	
<p>1. THE STRATEGY AND ANNUAL PLAN PROVIDE FOR GOAL-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP RELATED TO COMPLETION AND STUDENT WELFARE</p>	<p>2. MEASURES AIMING TO PREVENT DROPPING OUT ARE IMPLEMENTED AT ALL ORGANISATION LEVELS</p>
<p>3. PROVIDING GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS ON INDIVIDUAL, WORK-BASED STUDY PATHS</p>	<p>4. ENSURING THAT THE GUIDANCE PERSONNEL HAVE ADEQUATE COMPETENCE AND THAT GUIDANCE IS PART OF THEIR JOB DESCRIPTIONS</p>
<p>5. THE STUDENT ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM IS USED SYSTEMATICALLY: MANAGEMENT BY INFORMATION AND STUDENT-CENTRED GUIDANCE</p>	<p>6. ELEMENTS OF GUIDANCE: RAPID INTERVENTION, FINDING OF FURTHER PATHS, COOPERATION WITH SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE AND OTHER SIMILAR STAKEHOLDERS</p>
<p>7. GUIDANCE AND COOPERATION AT TRANSITION POINTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRANSITION FROM BASIC EDUCATION TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING • ENGAGEMENT IN VET, GROUP FORMATION 	



• PLACEMENT IN THE LABOUR MARKET OR FURTHER STUDIES

Figure 1: Education provider's actions to reduce dropping out

Cooperation between different levels of education and the labour market promotes successful transitions. **If necessary, the student should be offered guidance and his or her well-being should be ensured in cooperation with the social and health services and other partners.**

As part of the VET reform, the Finnish National Agency for Education can provide consultancy and support, especially for those education providers whose drop-out rates significantly exceed the national average.

1. Development efforts aiming to promote completion funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education

The Government Programme sets the target of reducing the number of young people who are outside education, training and employment (the NEET group, Neither in Education nor in Employment or Training) and preventing exclusion. A joint programme of different administrative sectors is to be launched in order to achieve this target. As a backdrop for the formulation of this programme, the Ministry of Education and Culture requested the Finnish National Agency for Education to prepare a report on practical measures that education providers have successfully used to reduce their drop-out rates in vocational upper secondary education and training.

For years, efforts have been made to develop more effective measures to promote the completion of vocational upper secondary education and training in projects funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The completion of education and training is associated with the perspective of dropping out. Different projects have tested and modelled measures that reduce dropping out and promote completion.

A programme aiming to improve the completion rates of vocational upper secondary education and training was implemented in 2011 - 2014. This was a joint project of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education and education providers. A total of 55 education providers around the country participated in the programme, including almost all major education providers. The development work continues during the current ESF programming period under a package of measures titled "Sustainable growth and jobs 2014 - 2020 Apt competence", in particular in the national projects of the section focusing on smooth transitions, as well as in the regional projects of the smooth transitions network created in a project titled Zoomi. While some of the projects seeking to improve completion rates were local, the majority of their results can be applied in a broader context. In addition to the aforementioned project packages, ESF projects funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education in 1998 - 2013 focused on preventing students from dropping out and increasing the support available during the studies.

This report uses the concept of completion, which was the focus area of the project packages. However, dropping out and completion are related concepts. The completion rate usually improves as the drop-out rate reduces. As the number of challenging students increases, however, the completion of studies may take longer.



On the other hand, the drop-out rate may remain unchanged, while the education provider manages to increase the number of students who complete the qualification within the target period.

The report focuses on national data and the available results of completion projects. Little comparable international research data on completion and dropping out is available, as vocational education and training is implemented in diverse ways in different countries.

2. Drop-out rate

The target of the programme aiming to improve completion rates was to reduce the national drop-out rate from 8.6% to 7%. Statistics from 2014 show that some 30% of the education providers had reached this target. Some education providers consider it possible to achieve the targets partly, while others believe that they cannot realistically be achieved at all. Many justify the results by stating that the student cohort is increasingly heterogeneous, and a large part of the students have many different problems that are also reflected on their studies.

There are major differences between education providers and qualifications in the drop-out statistics. Student numbers in Helsinki Metropolitan Area are large, and dropping out is more common than in other parts of the country. Consequently, wider application of the models that were developed and proven good during the programme aiming to improve completion rates would be particularly important in this area, and the significance of supervised student house activities should be considered. Based on monitoring data examined by the Finnish National Agency for Education, we can conclude that some education providers have also been successful in problem areas, and thus **mainstreaming and putting on a permanent footing the good practices of these actors would be important**. Above all, future measures should be targeted at those education providers that have a higher-than-average drop-out rate.

According to Statistics Finland, the drop-out rate of vocational education and training for young people in 2013/2014 was 7.6%, and 6.9% dropped completely out of education and training leading to a qualification; this amounts to 8,662 students out of the student cohort on which the statistics were based (20 September 2013: 125,541 students). The national drop-out rate is closer to the targets now than it was before the programme aiming to improve completion rates was launched.

Those education providers who have taken effective action to improve their completion rates and prevent dropping out have managed to reduce their drop-out rates to some 5%. As an example can be cited the results achieved by vocational education and training in Turku. Could this also be set as a target for other education providers? The drop-out rate of students receiving special support is almost double compared to other students. Regardless of higher levels of funding, it appears that the support measures offered to this group are not adequate, as the students keep dropping out.

According to Statistics Finland, the employment rate of recent graduates went down in 2015 compared to the year before. Men who graduated from vocational education and training, in particular, found it difficult to get jobs. In 2015, 58% of the men and 71% of the women who had completed vocational education and training were employed. Regional differences in the employment rates are large, and such



issues as structural problems of the labour market cannot be directly influenced. **Development measures should continue to be targeted at both reducing the drop-out rate and guiding newly graduated students to the labour market or further studies.**

3. Basic premises of improving completion rates

Completion is associated with the strategies of individual subregions and cities related to the Youth guarantee and the Educational guarantee. Improving completion rates is part of the basic task of vocational upper secondary education and training, and it is included in the strategies of many education providers. Completion rates have a natural link to quality work and overall development of the activities. The completion rate is an indicator of quality, and a low completion rate thus often is an indication of quality problems, even if the other indicators told a different tale. An improvement in the completion rate is generally reflected as delivering vocational upper secondary education and training of a higher quality - in other words, students' success in their studies.

Monitoring and improving completion rates are also associated with the funding of vocational education and training in the form of performance-based funding. Development and monitoring efforts are thus naturally focused on issues that also have financial impacts. In 2015, a modification was made in student admission criteria that gives priority to applicants coming directly from basic education. In a near future, we will see what impact this will have on the drop-out rates.

When examined at the level of individual education providers, completion rates are affected by regional differences and the scope of the education provider's activities. If a single education provider has a dominant position in a region, its completion rates are higher than average. Naturally, the employment rate of the region and the attraction of the qualification also have a bearing on how well the education provider does in terms of completion rates. The significance of student house activities and the associated support measures as factors for improving completion rates in the projects raise the question of whether more supervised and supported housing solutions that benefit young students should be offered.

Long-term development work both at the national level and in cooperation with the regional labour market will be needed to improve completion rates. A good employment situation usually improves the attraction of a sector. The attraction of vocational upper secondary education and training has been improved by both national and international Skills competitions, which have provided young people with examples of successful students. Regional cooperation between basic education and vocational upper secondary education and training can promote success in career choices. The expansion of Skills 9 competitions to comprehensive schools spreads awareness of vocational upper secondary education and training.

VET quality competitions and audits have improved the quality of vocational education and training. Development projects funded by discretionary government transfers and the associated training events have drawn attention to the significance of leadership in terms of completion rates. The attraction of vocational upper secondary education and training has increased in the 2000s. The drop-out rate has also gone down in the last period of less than ten years. While this rate was over



10% in 2005/2006, Statistics Finland data shows that it had gone down to 7.6% in 2013/2014.

A learning environment that promotes effective completion rates is a complex object of scrutiny. The student's competence, inclusion, experience of being accepted and functional capacity are at its centre. Good learning experiences lead the students towards completing the qualification or a qualification unit. The students' learning experiences are influenced by guidance related to learning a vocation as well as cooperation between the student's home and school, not only before the studies but also during them. The aforementioned aspects have an essential impact on the student's motivation.

4. General factors related to promoting completion

Many factors have an impact on completion and dropping out. Some of them are structural, including factors related to the labour market, and thus difficult to tackle. The principles of the national student admission system contribute to the success of individual students' career choices.

All efforts to improve completion rates started from monitoring dropping out and making improvements on this basis. The educational institution's atmosphere was important and contributed to cooperation with stakeholders within and outside the institution. Using all possible means to re-direct students who had dropped out to education and training and offer them adequate support and guidance measures to encourage them in their studies was essential. Engagement with work during education and training is an important part of preventing exclusion, and attention should thus be paid to guidance in the final stage of studies.

Improving completion rates was approached with a diverse selection of methods, which focused on identified problems in the background of dropping out and completion. In particular, **developing pedagogical solutions and providing for more flexible teaching arrangements to enable and support individual study paths and studying while working** were emphasised. In addition, guidance counselling as well as anticipatory and more individual operating models of student welfare were developed. They were complemented with practices related to the identification and recognition of prior learning as well as developing the competence of teachers and counsellors.

Guidance was developed in an effort to ensure preventive intervention in problems with life management and studying. As a result, various models for caring for the students, more carefully planned and recognised study paths, and individual flexibility mechanisms in studies were created. The new teacher's identity also embraces observing and resolving a student's problems, either by the teachers themselves or by directing the student to other services. This is why the teachers' and counsellors' competence should be developed, but attention should also be paid to how they cope with the mounting requirements of their work.

Guidance counselling associated with basic education and a possibility of becoming acquainted with vocational education and training before making educational choices are essential in order to improve completion rates. It is important to plan how introduction to working life should be implemented and what type of



cooperation basic education and the vocational institution should engage in. Good preparatory training solutions or other flexible solutions for starting at vocational upper secondary education and training can reduce dropping out. Distributing appropriate information as well as active visibility in the social media and regional visibility are important factors for improving recognisability.

Cooperation between the home and the school supports the completion of studies. Encounters with teachers and fellow students and the educational institution's atmosphere support engagement with the studies and enhance the student's motivation. A humane culture that takes individuals into consideration at an educational institution is open and dialogic, and the students have an active role in developing the education and training.

Adequate availability of information and clarity related to both the study path and the vocational content to be studied improve completion rates. If a student loses control over his or her studies or has selected an unsuitable field, the risk of dropping out increases materially. Good guidance practices are underpinned by a broad understanding of transition phases and consideration for the student's surroundings. This requires **comprehensive and anticipatory guidance, in which work aiming to promote completion is carried out in cooperation with the comprehensive school, the home and youth work.** A precondition for successful guidance is the systematic use of student administration systems, so that all up-to-date and essential information related to studying is available for the persons who take part in providing guidance at the institution. For example, analytic systems of a new type helping to identify and anticipate stages that predict dropping out have produced promising results in the monitoring of dropping out.

Moving away from excessive focus on problems and paying more attention to all students and the institution's activities as a whole promote completion at the level of individual institutions. In addition, the students' holistic well-being was emphasised. The educational institutions that had improved their completion rates stressed teachers' encouraging and positive attitudes towards the students and the use of new teaching methods, including social media pedagogy. The studies were planned and organised well, and their level of challenge was suitable. Both the teachers and the students knew what they were supposed to do. Integration of common units in the studies and extended on-the-job learning were good practices. Inspiring, guiding, showing approval and caring for the students were preconditions for improving the completion rate. Desirable student experiences include "I want to do, I know what I am doing, I am good enough, I can cope, I am learning, and I know." The students found that the experience of being accepted as a person and feeling good enough was important.

Good completion rates were associated with the educational institution's tenacity and systematic approach to development, associated with critical examination of their own activities by all actors. Good practices were spread in a goal-oriented manner. Mainstreaming good practices requires an ability to manage complex entities, clear decisions, organisation, coordination and adequate resources.



5. Success with improving completion rates in the light of project experiences

The programme aiming to improve completion rates in vocational upper secondary education and training and the associated survey addressed to education providers indicated that **effective means for improving completion rates were:**

- **early intervention in absences and problems with studies**
- **individual intensified support**
- **ensuring first-year students' engagement with the group and their studies**
- **individual and flexible study paths**
- **group formation throughout the studies.**

Early-stage dropping out can be influenced in many ways. The selection of a field in the joint application round may be a crucial factor related to dropping out. In particular, developing cooperation between basic education and vocational education and training is vital. A regional guidance model where guidance and support measures are targeted at transition points and cooperation between education providers is an effective solution. This model also includes special education schools.

The first days of vocational upper secondary education and training, as students get to know each other, the educational institution and the teachers, are crucial in terms of preventing dropping out. Diverse group formation methods have been widely tested in different projects. The principle of "everyone provides guidance" in the guidance of early-stage students has been found an effective model when the activities are well planned and coordinated. New students can start their studies slightly earlier than others, giving the educational institution's personnel a possibility of paying special attention to guiding the new students.

Group formation can be facilitated by developing tutor activities and clarifying the student's personal goals. Improving the students' life management skills, providing support related to health promotion and using an early intervention guidance model have proven effective.

In terms of the students' learning experiences, motivation and the perspective of the future are highlighted. The manner in which a young person is motivated to embrace his or her future work and working methods is crucial; studying may not be too easy, as this will alienate the students from the studies and potentially lead to dropping out.

Digital learning was considered a good practice, as it enables infinite repetition, rewinding and flexibility. Using digital learning materials is also important for students who find that they do not have enough to do during the school day. The use of social media expands the study environment temporally and geographically. Digital learning and practices related to the social media increase the students' feeling of being in control by giving them a clearer idea of the contents of their studies.

6. Success in improving completion rates - three VET providers as examples

City of Turku Education Division



The City of Turku has engaged in long-term and goal-oriented efforts to reduce dropping out and improve completion rates. According to Hannu Immonen, Service Area Director for vocational education in the City of Turku, vocational education and training in the city is steered by both a strategic and an operative agreement. Both long-term goals and annual targets are set in the agreements. The targets include reducing drop-out rates and promoting completion. The strategic agreement also comprises measures associated with improving completion rates, including intervention in the reasons for dropping out, supporting graduation and developing pedagogy and learning environments. Currently, the negative drop-out rate is 4.9%, while the completion rate is 70%; both figures are some of the best in the country. Maintaining a high standard requires continuous work at all levels of the educational institution.

In the strategic agreement, the focus is on improving the attraction and quality of vocational education and training, as these factors have been found to have a direct impact on both dropping out and completion. As a result of the KOMEa tulevaisuus ("Bright Future") campaign implemented in the machining and metalworking programmes of Turku Vocational Institute, the share of students who started their studies in autumn 2016 and subsequently dropped out was 0%, whereas this figure has been as high as 35% at the same time in previous years.

Management by information is a concrete tool of education development. The educational institutions are using an operations management model in which information is evaluated regularly and openly. In addition to the drop-out and completion rates, other indicators are about to be introduced to provide information on such aspects as the students' progress with their studies. The organisation has a low hierarchy, and the management system enables fast interventions where necessary. In addition to the operations management model, management tools include regular assessment and planning meetings specific to each unit and field of education, consultations with the personnel and students and the associated feedback system. Shared rules clarify the activities when an institution has a number of different units. Attention is focused on developing leadership.

The city has prepared for the VET reform by training teachers, directing teaching resources to guidance in particular, changing the structure of studies, for example by creating modules, implementing individual study paths and increasingly introducing digital solutions as part of teaching and guidance. As a result of the VET reform and changes in the student admission system, young people who require individual paths for different reasons will be selected as students. While the number of students in need of special support grows, so does the number of those who have capabilities for progressing faster than average in their studies. Both of these student groups are at risk of dropping out.

At Turku Vocational Institute, a working life coach guides and supports students who complete a large share of their studies in the workplace or otherwise need support with their studies. In 2014 - 2016, some 360 students participated in working life coaching; the drop-out rate for those who took part in the coaching in 2016 was approximately 0.5%, while this figure at the level of the entire institution is 4.9% (negative drop-out rate). Similarly, the drop-out rate of students in need of special support who participated in the coaching was 0%, whereas this rate at the level of the institution was 14%. Investments in guidance are both a student-friendly and



cost-effective operating method. In the students' experience, the feeling of belonging to the group and inclusion are also the most important aspects that prevent dropping out.

SASKY Municipal Education and Training Consortium

According to Consortium Director Antti Lahti from Sastamala Municipal Education and Training Consortium, the preconditions for reducing the drop-out rate and improving the completion rate are that the leadership is committed and that the student welfare activities are managed by such persons as the principal or the vice-principal. Corporate social responsibility has been integrated in the strategy, and student welfare plans direct the work in the profit areas. The profit area budgets contain targets related to work ability, which are monitored in the annual financial statements. In addition, the attainment of targets that are relevant to the performance funding is monitored.

A student welfare process has been defined in the municipal education and training consortium, in which the activities are described in concrete terms. Providing introductory training related to this operating model for teachers plays a key role for reaching the targets. The starting point is that a student's personal support measures are planned in cooperation by the teachers, possibly the guardians, the student's support team and other experts. Preconditions for regular monitoring of progress with studies and corrective actions are the availability of sufficient guidance personnel and, for example, transition to preparatory or other similar training if the student lacks motivation to study the field he or she selected.

As students increasingly drop out because of health reasons, attention should be paid to the student's fitness for studying. Fitness for studying can be influenced by adequate health care support measures. Preparatory training for vocational education and training can be tailored to students who are not fit enough for studying.

The young person's motivation to pursue studies in a field is another important aspect related to dropping out. The objective of the Youth guarantee is to offer a study place for all those who complete basic education. In this case, the risk is that some young people may end up selecting a field that is unsuitable for them, which will be manifested as a lack of motivation. For this reason, the benefits of selecting preparatory training should be justified positively while the students are still in basic education.

Successful transition point cooperation between comprehensive schools, general upper secondary schools, universities of applied sciences and the labour market enable flexible transitions and the implementation of individual study paths. Different learning environments and pedagogical models are built together with the labour market. Experiments are encouraged, and effective solutions include various implementations that the students find inspiring; an example of these is a "Bachelor of Rock 'n' Roll programme", or business studies where some of the teachers are professional musicians.

The question is, what impact will the funding act amendment associated with the VET reform have on student admissions? How can the education provider's willingness to admit challenging students who need a lot of support and may not



complete their qualification be supported through funding? Successful group formation is another challenge, as for secondary level students, the group and team spirit are important factors that support their studies. In the delivery of student welfare services, it is important that the employees are physically present at the educational institutions and that the services are available close to the students. The effects of the social and health care reform on the organisation of student welfare services give rise to concern.

The following models are presented as examples of good practices. **In all operating models, cooperation between teachers and guidance personnel plays a key role, and it is important to always hold on to the quality of education:**

- the tutor teacher model: promoting cooperation, inclusion and study skills, group formation
- group formation: students are involved in the planning, teachers receive training related to developing implementation methods
- well-being groups: young people come together in different thematic groups (sleep, nutrition, interpersonal relationships, exercise, hobbies, creativity, values); the groups' targets support the content areas of work ability cards, employer participation
- home-school cooperation: guardians' evenings and different events, short meetings with the parents
- encouraging the young person to be active and take responsibility: guidance lessons (student, group supervisor, guidance counsellor, special needs teacher), teacher's material for shared use, social media use, extended on-the-job learning

Education providers have for an extended period monitored dropping out and the reasons leading to it. As the so-called positive dropping out is due to natural causes, only negative dropping out should be monitored, and the development measures should be targeted accordingly.

Oulu Region Joint Authority for Education

According Jarmo Paloniemi, Managing Director and Principal of Oulu Region Joint Authority for Education, says that when the goal is to influence the drop-out and completion rates, the first step is to create a comprehensive guidance system. This requires strong commitment from the leaders, but also sharing competence within the organisation. The rate of negative dropping out is some 2-3%, while the total drop-out rate is some 5-8%.

In order to achieve the targets, it is important to focus on both teachers' continuing training and the use of counsellors to support the students' studies. While the personnel's competence and attitudes are crucial, offering adequate resources for the provision of special support is also important. A good standard of activities can be maintained by providing continuing training for teachers and investing in successful recruitments.

According to the education provider, too little attention has been paid to dropping out and completion of studies in the VET reform. The drastic funding cuts do not support efforts to reduce the drop-out rate. The cuts reduce the accessibility of education, with an increased risk of exclusion.



7. Focus on completion: the entire institution's activities

When improving the completion rate is approached as a whole, four different perspectives emerge whose detailed contents were clarified in the course of the project work. In order to succeed, the educational institution has to make strategic choices and decisions and implement measures. **The best way of improving completion rates and reducing drop-out rates is highlighting completion and dropping out as content of leadership and an element of everyone's job description, and ensuring sufficient competence related to guidance and teaching.**

1. Leadership

- completion is part of the overall strategy
- the needs and objectives related to completion have been defined
- efforts to improve the completion rate are coordinated
- completion is supported by networks and teams
- resources are used efficiently
- anticipation and monitoring data is available to support the efforts to improve completion rates
- personnel competence is adequate and it is developed in a goal-oriented manner
- the significance of values and attitudes for supporting completion is recognised
- cooperation between educational units and institutions is effective
- completion is supported through labour market cooperation
- interaction between leaders and the personnel is effective.

2. Guidance

- influencing career choices in basic education: vocational institutions increase their cooperation with the upper basic education grades to promote more successful career choices
- those who did not obtain a place in education and training or a job are also taken into consideration in the transition point guidance and support services; this includes imparting study skills and capabilities for life management as well as providing psychosocial services
- special attention is paid to the early stage, recognising the importance of the first days of the studies and group formation
- early intervention when a student is giving cause for concern; identifying these students in time and making efforts to help them and guide them towards "a new beginning"
- the group supervisor participates in the guidance process, monitoring the students and working together with student welfare services and the guidance counsellor
- more guidance counselling is provided
- guidance and support services are available for students who drop out; the target group is identified, reached fast enough and directed to meaningful paths forward
- guidance and support services are provided in the final stage of the studies; special support is also targeted at the final stage, and career and recruitment services are offered at all stages of the studies



- monitoring the students' progress with their studies, with an effective personal study plan process and information systems that support the activities; all those participating in guidance know about the student's situation, which increases clarity and improves study management
- informing the students before and during their studies; the joint application round and the early stage of studies are critical moments, but providing information during the studies is also important
- supporting and developing the student's self-regulation

3. Teaching

- prior learning is identified, and it affects the acquisition of the required competence
- alternative learning environments are used in the teaching
- social media pedagogy and other digital learning solutions are used in the teaching
- individual and flexible study paths are accessible for all students
- different on-the-job learning implementations and other workplace learning practices are accessible to all students
- cooperation between the teachers is effective, and all personnel members take part in providing guidance
- integration of common units in vocational qualification units whenever this can be done naturally
- effective interaction between teachers and students
- participatory working methods
- a competence-based approach
- efficient organisation of the students' and teachers' work and time use
- flexible possibilities for completing missing performances.

4. Support for studying

- all actors in the learning environment have a good level of well-being and access to peer support
- attention is paid to student well-being and well-being at work
- student welfare services support the studies
- services for special needs students are available
- cooperation between the home and the school is effective
- students have access to student houses and support for housing
- recreational activities are offered
- multidisciplinary cooperation is part of the educational institutions' activities
- the students participate in and influence the educational institution's activities
- equity and equality are realised.

Systematic statistical monitoring and recognising students who are at risk of dropping out enable fast interventions and up-to-date follow-up of the students' progress with their studies. The reasons for dropping out should be recorded in a consistent manner both in the education provider's organisation and nationally to enable the monitoring of and intervention in the reasons for dropping out. From the student's perspective, the reasons for dropping out may be positive or negative. In certain cases, dropping out may make sense in terms of the student's studies. If the student changes fields of education, moves to another educational institution or



drops out completely, continued guidance should be provided to ensure that the student can progress on his or her pathway as planned.

8. Challenging student groups

Targeting special care and adequate guidance at the following groups helps successful completion of studies:

- students aged over 20
 - group formation and early intervention to prevent the students from having even a single experience that would induce them to drop out
 - sufficient guidance throughout the studies, also covering the student's financial situation and employment
 - multidisciplinary cooperation to support life management
 - motivation can be influenced by individual paths, team work and active use of personal study plans
- special needs students
 - guidance and support, the solutions for which may be found in flexible study paths, workshops for catching up with missing performances and diverse teaching methods
 - timely support and its targeting from the perspective of early intervention
 - developing workshop cooperation
 - teaching personnel's competence related to special needs students.
- foreign-language speakers
 - developing the teaching of Finnish as a second language, workshops, small groups and workshops for catching up with missing performances
 - provision of plain-language teaching and learning materials
 - group formation
 - preparatory training for vocational upper secondary education and training
 - implementation methods of teaching and teachers' competence: work-based teaching methods, workshop activities and team teaching, taking the student's background culture into account
 - general guidance and support.
- students who represent the minority gender in their field of vocational education and training (low student numbers):
 - group formation and peer support
 - consideration and implementation of equality in teaching and guidance.
- students progressing at a faster pace - "idling" experienced by the student related to the organisation of studies and disjointed nature of studying
 - flexible and individual study paths, offering possibilities for distance learning, work-based studies, extended on-the-job learning, active use of personal study plans in the guidance and implementation of studying, supervised online studies



- timetable planning and prevention of “idling”, perspective of flexibility, small groups, making backup plans, parallel groups and study paths suited to an individual’s pace of progress.
- unfit students
 - ensuring during the studies that the student has a sufficient level of fitness and work ability for tasks in his or her field, work ability card.

9. Focal areas in promoting vocational studies

In the VET reform, issues that play a key role for completion will be emphasised. Competence is emerging as an important perspective at the level of both the individual and the community. Experiences of competence and success affect the student’s motivation, functional capacity and willingness to act. New competence should be built on the student’s existing strengths. Caring for and helping others in a spirit of togetherness are operating methods to which everyone has access. Individual study paths should be put together flexibly, and their contents should offer a suitable level of challenge.

In improving completion rates and reducing dropping out, attention is drawn to the following:

- ensuring smooth progress across the transition point between basic education and vocational upper secondary education and training, developing cooperation between schools to ensure that comprehensive schools receive enough information to support the pupils’ choices, cooperation with parents
- early-stage engagement in vocational education and training, in which adequate attention is paid to the early stage of studies and individual study paths but also positive group formation
- providing a good and safe learning environment, eliminating fears of school
- monitoring and fast response to absences, analysing the reasons for absences as part of development efforts
- monitoring competence development, realisation of individual study paths
- more efficient use of digital learning environments
- giving the students opportunities for confidential conversations at the educational institution
- good cooperation between the teaching personnel and student welfare services
- agreement on measures taken as a response to dropping out to make sure that student financial aid is not paid groundlessly, avoiding the need to recover it
- ensuring that all students receive sufficient guidance to support their employment or transition to further studies.

The participation of leaders at different organisation levels in planning and implementing measures that improve completion rates is essential. In order for the efforts to improve the completion rate to be successful, all those working at the educational institution should be aware of and, through their own actions, influence the issues they are committed to.



Currently, statistical data does not provide reliable information on the numbers of students dropping out and their reasons for doing so in different education and training implementations. Statistical analyses of dropping out would be more consistent and different measures could be targeted more accurately if all education providers used the same classification methods for the different reasons for dropping out.

Since 1998, extensive reforms of vocational education and training have been implemented with ESF funding. During the current ESF programming period, the Finnish National Agency for Education has less possibilities for improving the completion rates of vocational upper secondary education and training, as the Agency no longer is a funding authority in ESF projects.

The task of the Finnish National Agency for Education is to develop the impact and quality of vocational education and training together with the labour market and VET providers. **As part of implementing the VET reform, the Finnish National Agency for Education consults and supports especially those education providers whose drop-out rates significantly exceed the national average. The objective of this work is highlighting completion and dropping out as part of the content of the education provider's leadership and an element in the job descriptions of all personnel members, and ensuring that sufficient competence related to guidance and teaching is available.** The Finnish National Agency for Education is prepared to, in cooperation with the other stakeholders, develop an overall model of leadership related to student welfare services and completion and to provide consultancy and support for introduction.

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Director General

Anni Miettunen
Director

APPENDICES

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