FINNISH VET in a nutshell
VET provides skills for both life and work.
**Education system in Finland**

*Doctoral degrees*

*Licentiate degrees*

*Universities*

*Master’s degrees*

*Universities*

*Bachelor’s degrees*

*Universities*

*Matriculation examination*

*General upper secondary schools*

*Voluntary additional year of basic education*

*Pre-primary education: 6-year-olds*

*Early childhood education and care*

*Basic education*

*7–16-year-olds*

*Comprehensive schools*

*Polytechnic master’s degrees*

*Polytechnics*

*Work experience 3 years*

*Polytechnic bachelor’s degrees*

*Polytechnics*

*Specialist vocational qualifications* *

*Further vocational qualifications* *

*Vocational qualifications* *

*Vocational institutions* *

*Also available as apprenticeship training*

**ISCED-classification 2011**

0  Early childhood education

1  Primary education

2  Lower secondary education

3  Upper secondary education

4  Post-secondary non-tertiary education

5  Short cycle tertiary education

6  Bachelor or equivalent

7  Master or equivalent

8  Doctor or equivalent
## Vocational competences for a changing world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills for both life and work</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is publicly funded and free of charge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An education system based on trust and shared responsibility</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## VET is an attractive choice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High regard for VET</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible provision – close cooperation with working life</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open pathways from VET to higher and further education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET provides strong employment prospects</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International cooperation and mobility are encouraged</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills competitions develop the quality of VET</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Competence and flexibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on the learning outcomes-based approach and work orientation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learning pathways add flexibility</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility supports completing the studies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EQUITY, SUPPORT AND MAXIMISING POTENTIAL  

EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY – MAIN RESPONSIBILITY LIES WITH EDUCATION PROVIDERS  

VOCATIONAL TEACHERS ARE RESPECTED PROFESSIONALS  

Close connection to working life  
In-service training maintains up-to-date competence
Vocational competences are vital for Finland’s economic competitiveness and prosperity. Future labour markets demand diverse vocational skills, strong competences, and the continued renewal of these skills. The mission of vocational education and training (VET) is to foster the skills required in working life, promote employment and self-employment, develop the world of work and support individuals’ lifelong learning.

Initial VET provides students with the necessary vocational skills they need at entry level jobs. In addition, in particular at upper secondary level, VET supports students’ growth into good and balanced individuals and members of society, and provides them with the knowledge and skills needed in further studies and in the development of their personalities. Continuing VET again, provides in-depth knowledge and competence in the respective fields, mainly for professionals. As a result, VET provides skills for both life and work.

VET is developed, delivered and assessed in close cooperation with the world of work and other stakeholders such as education providers, teachers and students.
At the national level, representatives of working life and other key stakeholders are involved in making decisions on educational policy. They also participate in a number of national partnership committees that contribute to the development of the VET qualification system and the individual qualifications, the anticipation of education and competence needs, and the planning of the national qualification requirements. At the local level, representatives of working life play a part in curriculum planning, planning and implementation of on-the-job learning, and students’ competence assessment.

At large, the supply and development of VET are based on long-term national anticipation, involving the quantitative anticipation of labour force and training needs, and the qualitative anticipation of competence needs. The purpose of anticipation is to achieve the qualitative and quantitative match of demand and supply in training and education.

**Education is publicly funded and free of charge**

Receiving VET or completing a qualification in Finland is mainly cost free. Students are only charged for their books and other learning materials. They can have one free meal per day, and school transport subsidies are available. In adult education, students are expected to pay a reasonable fee. In order to ensure equal educational opportunities, full-time students can apply for student financial aid and loans.

On the whole, VET is funded through the Ministry of Education and Culture’s budget. The central and local government provide parts of the funding for vocational upper secondary qualifications, while further and specialist
vocational qualifications are fully funded by the central government.

Funding for VET is based on nationally determined unit prices per number of students. The unit price will change depending on the year and the field of education. Education providers can use the annually received funds at their own discretion to plan and deliver education.

In addition to the unit-priced funding, education providers also receive performance-based funding. The purpose of performance-based funding is to offer education providers incentives to continuously improve their performance and quality.

An education system based on trust and shared responsibility

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the regulation, guidance and funding of VET, and for making decisions on vocational qualifications and their scope. The ministry also grants the education providers' permits to provide VET.

The Finnish National Board of Education, an advisory and development agency, is entrusted with making decisions on the national qualification requirements defining the vocational skills requirements for the qualifications and the methods of demonstrating learning outcomes. It also forecasts education and skills needs and coordinates national education and training development projects.

Education providers play a key role in delivering education. Within the scope of their remit, they make independent decisions on the provision of VET on their specific field, including the types of education provided, education delivery,
Education providers play a key role in delivering education. and the type of educational institutions maintained. In addition, education providers determine local curricula, and decide on the level and type of staffing. In planning their educational offering, providers take into account the educational needs of the local population and the employers.

Appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Education and Training Committees are tripartite advisory bodies, which ensure that a good dialogue is maintained between the world of work and education at national level. The National Education and Training Committees contribute to the anticipation of competence needs, and the development of the qualification system and the individual qualifications.

In adult education, a key role is played by the Qualification Committees appointed by the Finnish National Board of Education for the purpose of implementing competence-based qualifications. The Qualification Committees are responsible for the organisation and supervision of competence-based qualifications. They monitor the performance of the competence-based qualification system in their fields and, where necessary, suggest system improvements.

Quality assurance in education and training is central and based on guidance, self-assessment and external assessment, not on strict controls by any central authority. Finland does not either have in place a system of inspecting education or training provisions.
VET IS AN ATTRACTIVE CHOICE

In Finland students who have successfully completed compulsory education choose their own upper secondary pathway – general or VET – based on their interests, skills and success in previous studies.

High regard for VET

Today closer to 50 per cent of the relevant age group applies for vocational upper secondary studies immediately after basic education. The same figure ten years ago was as much as 10 per centage lower. So, one can say that vocational education and training is well regarded in Finland by the young.

The general public’s perception of VET is also very favourable. According to e.g. Eurobarometer surveys nine out ten Finns say the image of VET is very positive. There is also a direct link between the image of vocational education and training and the perceived quality of training: nine out of ten also think vocational education and training offers high quality working life oriented learning.
Flexible provision – close cooperation with working life

Vocational qualifications can be completed in school-based VET, apprenticeship training or as competence based qualifications. The majority of young learners complete their upper secondary vocational qualifications at vocational institutions. The biggest VET sectors are technology, communications and transport, social services and health and sports.

The training at vocational institutions is developed and delivered in close cooperation with the labour market. This is also a guarantee for quality and attractiveness. Working life is closely involved in e.g. forecasting skills needs, designing qualification and national requirements, organising and evaluating on-the-job learning, assessment of the learning outcomes in skills demonstrations and general development of the system through tripartite cooperation. The qualifications also allow for employer-specific, regional as well as personal adaptations.

All school-based VET includes at least six months of on-the-job learning directly linked to the curricula, often more. On-the-job learning is a focused, supervised and assessed study period, which is carried out at the workplace in accordance with the normal study plan and national requirements.

Open pathways from VET to higher and further education

Vocational education and training has been developed as an integral part of the education system to lead to both employment on the labour market and/or further studies in either tertiary education or further vocational qualifications.
For over 20 years Finnish educational policy has already sought educational pathways that are open from basic education to higher education with no dead-ends at any level or in any part of the formal system. Especially the development of the polytechnics, also known as universities of applied science, in the 1990s pushed this goal further and today the cooperation between secondary and tertiary VET is increasingly commonplace.

**VET provides strong employment prospects**

Finnish vocational education and training provides the skills sought after by both employers and society at large. The placement rate directly after VET-studies is 77%, which is fairly high in comparison with most EU-countries. For approximately 68% of the Finnish VET students, the programmes are an immediate entry ticket to the labour market. For another 9%, they provide a basis for further studies in higher education. As graduating students are still young – around 18-19 years of age – some students also continue with another VET qualification, and for some it also takes slightly longer to find a suitable job or a further study place.

**International cooperation and mobility are encouraged**

Vocational education and training strives to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competences required in an increasingly internationalised labour market and multicultural society. The aim is to enhance the competitiveness of the Finnish world of work and education and training, but also to develop the personal skills and outlooks of the students from a global perspective. Furthermore, internationalisation
is often seen as a means to improving both the quality and attractiveness of VET.

Every year, some 6,300 people or in fact 13% of new Finnish vocational students have an opportunity to go abroad for an on-the-job learning period. This is a large number in comparison to the estimated average of 2–3% in the EU at large. Finland also receives approximately 2,500 international vocational students each year. Teachers’ professional development placements are also carried out abroad in order to develop their pedagogical and vocational expertise.

EU, Nordic and national programmes have played a major role in establishing these networks and procedures as a part of VET providers’ normal activities. So far, international co-operation in VET has taken place mainly within the EU, but increasingly institutions from countries like Russia, China and India have started partnering with Finnish institutions, which is in line with the future needs of Finnish businesses.

Skills competitions develop the quality of VET

Skills competitions are an important tool for developing and benchmarking VET. The competitions help to raise awareness of the importance of professional excellence. They are a way to develop and create new teaching models as well as to increase the attractiveness of VET. They support career guidance, encouraging young people and their parents to consider VET as a viable option.

Finland’s participation in WorldSkills, EuroSkills and Abilympics, as well as the national skills competition Taitaja, are all arranged around the Excellence in skills training system, developed and maintained by Skills Finland. It is designed
and carried out in cooperation with education providers and employers, in order to develop excellence of skills, further competence development and improving the VET system at large.

**COMPETENCE AND FLEXIBILITY**

**Emphasis on the learning outcomes-based approach and work orientation**

For the past twenty years, Finnish VET has been based on work orientation and a learning outcomes-based approach. When the national core curriculum of vocational qualifications was reformed in the mid-1990s, the former syllabuses, study units and subjects were replaced by vocational modules, competence-based objectives, and assessment criteria that are based on the operational entities of working life. At the same time, a competence-based qualification system was introduced also in adult education.

The vocational qualifications and qualification requirements are developed in co-operation with the world of work and other key stakeholders in order to ensure that the qualifications support
Finnish VET is based on work orientation and a learning outcomes-based approach.

Vocational upper secondary qualifications consist of vocational units, core units and free-choice units. On upper secondary VET programmes, the learner studies for at least six months in real working life. Competence-based qualifications comprise only vocational units. Competence-based qualifications are independent of the way the vocational skills have been acquired. The learner demonstrates his/her acquired competences by skills demonstrations or competence tests at work.

Individual learning pathways add flexibility
Students and qualification candidates can make their individual study plans and benefit from individualisation of their studies. In addition to
Previously acquired competences are recognised and validated.

the individual study plans, education providers must take into account each student’s individual needs. This applies equally in the case of talented students and those with learning difficulties. The use of individual learning pathways is on the increase. In making individual learning plans, previously acquired competences are recognised and validated. Students may have obtained relevant skills from working life, another school, international study, work placement periods, family and leisure activities, or through the media.

Flexibility supports completing the studies
Flexible study pathways and free-choice units also promote equality in education and reduce the unnecessary overlapping of studies. In addition, a modular qualification structure is the key to maintaining study motivation and reducing drop-out rates. Importantly, drop-out students can continue their studies at another time and complete their qualification at a later stage.
The educational policy objective is to guarantee equal educational opportunities for each individual. The purpose of the planning of upper secondary vocational education and training, along with the general education provision, is to offer all students a place in upper secondary education at the end of their basic education. Finland has a regional VET provision with good national coverage. The majority of young people can access VET in, or close to, their home town. Students apply for upper secondary education through the joint national application system. The idea is to make it easier to find and apply for their secondary studies in a web-based environment. More than 95 per cent of those leaving basic education apply for a place in further education, and nearly all of them continue their studies directly after finishing comprehensive school. Nearly 50 per cent of...
school leavers begin their studies in VET. Priority is given to young people without prior vocational education.

The main task of comprehensive school guidance counsellors is to provide young people with individual guidance in areas such as career and school choices. Partnerships between schools and businesses ensure that all young people benefit from a work placement period during primary education. VET also includes individual guidance counselling.

A number of young people are offered preparatory training for VET. Such training is available for e.g. those in need of special support, immigrants, and any young persons who have not made decisions on their career choices. Preparatory training provides young people with the opportunities to try out different fields of VET and strengthen their learning skills before entering a real programme.
Effectiveness and quality – main responsibility lies with education providers

Education providers are the key players in quality assurance in VET. The quality is seen as a key factor in the efficiency of education and training as well as the equality of individuals. Quality also improves the attractiveness of VET.

Quality assurance comprises the quality management of education providers, the national steering of VET and external evaluations. The legislation obliges the providers to evaluate their own performance and effectiveness, participate in external evaluations as well as publicise their results.

The funding of VET includes a quality assurance perspective.

The education providers can freely choose the quality assurance methods they use.

External evaluation comprises the evaluations of learning outcomes and thematic evaluations on a national level. External evaluations are
used so as to provide evidence for development, not to rank institutions. Also, the funding of VET includes a quality assurance perspective.

A vital part of quality assurance is the cooperation between the education providers and world of work. The representatives of the world of work participate in the national steering as well as the assessment of the skills of learners at the workplace. In all VET qualifications, skills demonstrations ensure and develop the quality of vocational training and improve the quality of student assessment. Skills demonstrations are assessed by teachers and the representatives of companies together.
Vocational teachers are respected professionals

Teachers in Finland are generally highly valued and respected. This also applies to VET teachers, and is reflected in the intake to VET teacher training: only one third of the applicants are admitted.

The training requirements for VET teachers are fairly broad. Firstly, teachers of vocational subjects must have an appropriate Master’s or Bachelor’s degree in their own vocational sector. If such a degree does not exist, it can also be supplemented by the highest possible other qualification in the sector. Secondly, they have a pedagogical teacher training, with the scope of 60 ECTS credit points, and thirdly they need relevant work experience in their own field.

Close connection to working life
The work of VET teachers exhibits a close connection of theory and practice and there is a strong presence of the world of work in VET. The VET teacher must convey to the students both the underlying theories and principles on how to “do the job” in practice as well as a professional ethos, such as the principles, approaches and ethics of the specific vocational field.
The work context of VET teachers encompasses both the VET institution and the working life. The students’ on-the-job learning periods as well as the skills demonstrations have meant that teachers have wide networks with local enterprises, businesses and public institutions. The teachers and the representatives of the enterprises and institutions negotiate and agree on what the students must learn during these periods, and how it should be assessed. Teachers also cooperate closely with working life in forecasting future training needs and in drawing up school curricula in which the regional and local needs of the world of work must be taken into account.

**In-service training maintains up-to-date competence**

Participation in in-service training is compulsory in most fields of VET. The training is intended to keep the teacher’s skills and competences up to date. The responsibility for funding in-service training rests with the teachers’ employers. Training focuses on the priorities of education policy.

VET teachers are also encouraged to update their expertise by professional development placements in enterprises and other work places. During such on-the-job-training they are expected to enhance the cooperation between the enterprise and the VET institution and together with the enterprise to develop the curriculum and on-the-job learning opportunities for the students.●●●