Government Proposal to the Parliament for an Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules

MAIN CONTENT OF THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL

The Proposal concerns an act on a National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. In this framework, qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules of the Finnish national education and qualifications system would be classified into eight levels on the basis of their learning outcomes. It is proposed that a Government Decree be enacted on the placement of qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules on the various levels of the framework on the basis of their learning outcomes.

The framework will facilitate overall scrutiny of the Finnish education and qualifications system and other learning by describing the learning outcomes required by qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules as knowledge, skills and competence in a uniform, comprehensible and comparable manner, and by defining their interrelations. The framework will improve the clarity and effectiveness of the Finnish qualifications system, increase the national and international transparency and comparability of qualifications, support the recognition of qualifications, and promote national and international mobility and the preconditions for educational co-operation and education export.

The Act is intended to enter into force on 1 January 2017.
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GENERAL JUSTIFICATIONS

1 Introduction

Qualifications frameworks emerged as part of the education policy debate within the European Union in the late 1990s. This was motivated by the need to increase the openness and transparency of education systems and qualifications, promote recognition of prior learning in the spirit of lifelong learning and highlight the significance of learning outcomes to provision of education and training.

The European Union has made an effort to promote the deepening of co-operation in the education sector by setting common strategic objectives. In the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) work programme, Member States agree upon four common strategic objectives for this decade. As stated in the objectives: lifelong learning and mobility need to become a reality; the quality and efficiency of education and training need to be improved; equity, social cohesion and active citizenship need to be promoted; and creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, should be encouraged at all levels of education and training. The Education and Training 2020 strategic objectives were revised in 2015. In the new Education and Training 2020 priorities, emphasis is given to implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and national qualifications frameworks in order to promote the transparency and recognition of qualifications.

The Bologna process aims to create a common European Higher Education Area. This goal is being pursued by means such as harmonising degree structures and improving quality assurance. Issues relating to the comparability and recognition of qualifications have been high on the agenda as part of the Bologna process. Frameworks for higher education qualifications have been considered to constitute one of the factors promoting such transparency and comparability.

The Copenhagen process aims to improve the performance, quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) and to promote mobility among vocational students and qualification-holders through European co-operation. In broader terms, the Copenhagen process aims to promote development of the European labour market and to complement the European Higher Education Area. These goals are being pursued by means such as developing national qualifications systems and frameworks based on learning outcomes, in keeping with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF); implementing the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF); promoting the recognition of non-formal and informal learning; and facilitating transition and progress between vocational education and training, general education and higher education.

According to the Government Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Cabinet, the Finnish education system will be a leading country in education, knowledge and modern learning in the year 2025. The objectives for the Government term are that education and research have become more international and obstacles to education exports have been removed. The qualification and competence framework raises the profile of qualifications and other competence compliant with the Finnish education system, thus improving the conditions for mobility and promoting the above-mentioned Government Programme objectives.
## Current status

### 2.1 Legislation and practice

**The Finnish qualifications system**

The Finnish education system can be classified into three educational levels: general basic education, upper secondary education covering general upper secondary education and vocational education and training, and higher education provided by universities of applied sciences and universities. The completion of lower level studies is a requirement for studies at a higher level. Legislation covering each particular form of education and training lays down provisions on the objectives and qualifications.

**Basic education**

Nine-year basic education and compulsory schooling are governed by the Basic Education Act (628/1998; *perusopetuslaki*) and the Basic Education Decree (852/1998; *perusopetusasetus*). According to section 25 of the Basic Education Act, every child permanently residing in Finland is subject to compulsory schooling. Children can either complete this compulsory schooling by participating in basic education or by acquiring equivalent knowledge in some other way. Education given in grades 1–6 and 7–9 is primarily class teaching and subject teaching, respectively. Pre-primary education is provided in the year preceding the start of compulsory schooling.

The purpose of education referred to in section 2 of the Basic Education Act is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life. Education shall promote civilisation and equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives. The purpose of pre-primary education is to improve children's skills for learning. More specific provisions on the general national objectives of education and allocation of lesson hours between different subjects, subject groups and guidance counselling have been issued in the Decree on national objectives and distribution of teaching hours in basic education (422/2012). According to section 14(2) of the Basic Education Act, the Finnish National Agency for Education decides on the objectives and core contents of the different subjects and cross-curricular themes, guidance counselling and any other instruction (the national core curriculum).

Basic education does not lead to any specific qualification, but a pupil who has completed the entire syllabus is awarded a basic education certificate.

According to the Basic Education Act, voluntary additional basic education shall also be provided. The Finnish National Agency for Education shall decide on the core curriculum for voluntary additional basic education. Voluntary additional basic education shall be one year in duration and may be taken by a pupil who has been awarded a basic education certificate in the same year or the year before. A special purpose of voluntary additional basic education is to develop the pupil's skills in choosing a career, improve the conditions for further studies and promote life management skills. Pupils who have successfully completed all studies are issued a certificate for completion of voluntary additional basic education.
General upper secondary education and the matriculation examination


According to section 3 of the Government Decree on the General National Objectives of General Upper Secondary Education and the Distribution of Lesson Hours (942/2014), the objective of general upper secondary education is to broadly develop the student's capabilities in adopting, combining and using his or her knowledge and skills as well in the diverse application of his or her knowledge also across subject boundaries.

Education shall guide, inspire, and create preconditions for lifelong learning as well as improve the student's skills in controlling his or her future and making choices and his or her capabilities for career and life planning.

According to section 7 of the General Upper Secondary Schools Act, the extent of the upper secondary school syllabus is three years. A student who has completed the entire general upper secondary school syllabus shall be awarded a general upper secondary school certificate. According to section 10(2) of the General Upper Secondary Schools Act, the Finnish National Agency for Education shall decide on the objectives and core content of different subjects, subject groups and cross-curricular themes in general upper secondary education (the national core curriculum).

At the end of general upper secondary education, students take the national matriculation examination, which is used to assess whether they have acquired the knowledge and skills according to the upper secondary school curriculum and achieved a sufficient level of maturity. Matriculation examinations are governed by the National Matriculation Examination Act (672/2005; laki ylioppilastutkinnon järjestämisestä). The Matriculation Examination Board awards a matriculation examination certificate to candidates who have completed the matriculation examination in accordance with the applicable Act and to whom a general upper secondary certificate or vocational upper secondary certificate is issued as well as to persons who have previously completed a general upper secondary school syllabus or vocational upper secondary qualification and has completed the matriculation examination in accordance with the applicable Act.

Completion of general upper secondary education does not provide the student with professional qualifications. Nevertheless, the education provides students with readiness to go on to university or university of applied sciences studies and to vocational education and training building on the general upper secondary school syllabus.

Vocational upper secondary education and training

Vocational upper secondary education and training as well as vocational upper secondary qualifications are regulated by the Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998; laki ammatillisesta koulutuksesta). According to section 5 of this Act, the objective of vocational education and training is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for completion of a vocational upper secondary qualification and capabilities for self-employment. The education and training also aims to support the students' development into good and balanced persons and members of the society as well as to provide them with knowledge and skills necessary for further studies, vocational development, personal interests and versatile development of their personalities. According to section 6 of the Act, the needs of working life must be specifically taken into account in education and training leading to vocational upper secondary qualifications. When organising education and training, education providers are required to co-operate with businesses and other sectors of working life.

Section 4 of the Act specifies that persons having completed a vocational upper secondary....
qualification shall possess extensive basic vocational skills for the various assignments in the field and more specialised competence and vocational skills required in working life in at least one sector of the qualification. A vocational upper secondary qualification may be completed as vocational upper secondary education and training or as a competence-based qualification.

According to section 4(2) of the Act, a Ministry of Education and Culture decree regulates vocational upper secondary qualifications and the competence areas included in them (qualification structure).

According to section 12b of the Act, a vocational upper secondary qualification completed as vocational upper secondary education includes units, common units and free-choice units. More detailed provisions on the composition of qualifications involving the above-mentioned units as well as the extent of common units and the areas in them are laid down in a Government Decree.

According to section 12(2) of the Act, the extent of a vocational upper secondary qualification is 180 competence points. A Ministry of Education and Culture decree may increase the extent of the qualification to include more than 180 competence points if regulations pertaining to the vocational field in question so require. According to section 12(3) of the Act, the average competence achieved within a year of vocational upper secondary education is equivalent to 60 competence points.

According to section 13 of the Act, the Finnish National Agency for Education specifies the Qualification Requirements for each qualification within a qualification structure. The Qualification Requirements specify the qualification titles, the qualification composition of obligatory and optional vocational units, the extent of unit and common unit areas in competence points as well as unit vocational skill requirements or learning outcomes and competence assessment. The Qualification Requirements also define key lifelong learning skills, which refer to areas such as learning and problem-solving skills, interaction and cooperation skills and occupational ethics and aesthetic skills.

According to section 25 e of the Act, the education provider shall award a qualification certificate to students completing their vocational upper secondary education and training once the students have successfully completed the units required in the composition of the qualification. If a student drops out of his or her studies before completing a qualification, the education provider shall issue him or her a certificate for any completed vocational units. A certificate of completed vocational units may be issued at the request of the student also during studies.

Vocational qualifications completed as competence-based qualifications

According to the Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998; laki ammatillisesta aikuiskoulutuksesta), upper secondary vocational qualifications, further qualifications and specialist qualifications as well as preparatory training for these may be completed as competence-based qualifications.

According to section 2 of the Vocational Adult Education Act, the objectives of vocational adult education are to update and upgrade vocational competencies among the adult population, provide students with abilities for self-employment, develop working life and meet the needs it has for skilled labour, promote employment, and support lifelong learning. In addition, the purpose of the Act is also to provide an opportunity to demonstrate vocational skills regardless of the manner in which they were acquired as well as to promote completion of qualifications or their individual units. According to section 3 of the Vocational Adult Education Act, the needs of the working life must be specifically taken into account in vocational education and training and qualifications. Competence-based qualifications must be designed and organised in co-operation with the business sector and other areas of working life.
According to section 12a of the Vocational Adult Education Act, extensive basic vocational skills for the various assignments in the field as well as more specialised competence and the vocational skills required in working life in at least one sector of the qualification shall be demonstrated in vocational upper secondary qualifications completed as competence-based qualifications. Further and specialist vocational qualifications can only be completed as competence-based qualifications. In further qualifications, students demonstrate skills focused on specific working life needs that are more in-depth in nature than those required for a vocational upper secondary qualification and geared towards more specific work assignments. In specialist qualifications, students demonstrate vocational skills needed in working life that show an in-depth command of the profession or diversified competence. Candidates completing further or specialist vocational qualifications without preparatory training must have competence acquired in working life or elsewhere.

According to section 12b of the Act, a Ministry of Education and Culture decree regulates vocational upper secondary qualifications and the competence areas included in them as well as further and specialist vocational qualifications (qualification structure). According to section 12c of the Act, competence-based qualifications are comprised of vocational units.

The extent of competence-based qualifications is not specified in regulations. Furthermore, the regulations do not specify the duration of qualification completion or preparatory training, as competence-based qualifications are completed irrespective of the manner in which vocational skills have been obtained.

According to section 13 of the Adult Education Act, the Qualification Requirements for each qualification structure are decided on by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The Qualification Requirements specify the competence areas of further and specialist vocational qualifications, the qualification titles, the qualification composition of obligatory and optional units as well as the vocational skills requirements for units (learning outcomes) and the assessment of competence.

According to section 7 of the Vocational Adult Education Act, qualification committees formed by and working in connection with the Finnish National Agency for Education are responsible for organising competence-based qualifications, supervising the quality of the competence-based qualifications system and developing competence-based qualifications and the system. According to section 7a of the Act, a qualification committee shall issue the candidate a qualification certificate when he or she has successfully completed the units required for the qualification. Furthermore, the qualification committee shall provide a certificate for completed units upon request.

**University of Applied Sciences degrees**

According to section 11(1) of the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences (932/2014; ammattikorkeakoululaki), universities of applied sciences confer bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees. In the system of higher education degrees, the bachelor’s degrees are first cycle higher education degrees and master’s degrees second cycle higher education degrees. Provisions on the degrees conferred by a university of applied sciences, the objectives of the degrees and the structure of studies and other study requirements shall be issued by government decree.

According to section 1(1) of the Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences (1129/2014), the bachelor’s degrees are basic degrees conferred by the universities of applied sciences. According to section 2(1) of the Government Decree, studies leading to a bachelor’s degree comprise core and professional studies, elective studies, work placement to promote professional skills and a final project. According to section 3 of the Decree and its annex, the extent of studies leading to a bachelor’s degree are 180, 210, 240 or 270 credits, depending on the degree. The average input of 1,600 working hours needed for studies of one academic year
shall correspond to 60 credits. The work placement to promote professional skills included in studies leading to a bachelor’s degree accounts for at least 30 credits.

According to section 4 of the Decree, the objective of studies leading to a bachelor’s degree is to ensure that the candidate possesses: 1) extensive and practical basic knowledge and skills as well as theoretical knowledge with a view to functioning in demanding expert positions within the relevant field; 2) capabilities in following and promoting developments within the relevant field; 3) capabilities for lifelong learning and continuous development of their own professional skills; and 4) proficient communication and language skills required for assignment in the relevant field as well as in international activities and co-operation.

According to section 2(2) of the Government Decree on the Universities of Applied Sciences, studies leading to a master’s degree comprise advanced professional studies, elective studies and a final project. According to section 3 of the Decree and its annex, the extent of studies leading to a master’s degree are 60 or 90 credits, depending on the degree.

According to section 5 of the Decree, the objective of studies leading to a master’s degree is for the candidate to: possess extensive and in-depth knowledge in the relevant field, as required for development of working life, and the necessary theoretical knowledge with a view to functioning in demanding expert and managerial positions within the relevant field; deep insight into the relevant field, its status in working life and its societal significance and the capability to follow and analyse developments in research information and professional practice within the relevant field; capabilities for lifelong learning and continuous development of their own vocational skills; good communication and language skills as required in working life as well as for international interaction and professional practice.

According to section 10 of the Decree, a university of applied sciences shall issue a degree certificate to the student for the degree completed. The university of applied sciences shall issue a Diploma Supplement, especially intended for international use, to students who have completed a degree or studies at a university of applied sciences. The Diploma Supplement shall contain sufficient information on the university of applied sciences and the studies completed as referred to in the degree certificate or certificate, including information on their level and status in the education system. Upon request, the university of applied sciences shall issue the student a certificate of the studies he or she has completed also during studies.

University degrees

According to section 7(1) of the Universities Act (558/2009; yliopistolaki), universities confer bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees and academic, artistic and professional postgraduate degrees. Master degrees are taken after completion of a bachelor’s degree or a corresponding education programme. Education leading to a master’s degree may be provided in fields regulated by a Government Decree, also in cases where the education does not include a bachelor’s degree, provided that it is appropriate in terms of the professional requirements relevant to the educational field in question. Academic, artistic and professional postgraduate degrees are taken after completion of a master’s degree or a corresponding education. More detailed provisions on university degrees, the objectives of the degrees, the structure of studies and other study requirements are enacted by a Government decree.

Degrees completed in universities that fall within the purview of the Ministry of Education and Culture, are regulated by the Government Decree on University Degrees and Specialist Education (794/2004).

According to section 7 of the Decree, studies leading to a bachelor’s degree shall provide the student with: 1) knowledge of the fundamentals of the major and minor subjects or corresponding study modules or studies included in the degree programme and the prerequisites for following developments in the field; (2) knowledge and skills needed for scientific thinking and the use of scientific methods or knowledge and skills needed for artistic work; (3) knowledge and skills needed for studies leading to a higher university
degree and for lifelong learning; (4) a capacity for applying the acquired knowledge and skills in one's own field in working life and international co-operation; and (5) adequate language and communication skills for international activities and co-operation. The education shall be based on research or artistic activity and professional practices.

According to section 8 of the Decree, the extent of studies required for a bachelor’s university degree shall be 180 credits, with the exception of the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, whose extent is 210 credits. According to section 5 of the Decree, the average input of 1,600 working hours needed for studies of one academic year shall correspond to 60 credits.

Studies leading to a bachelor’s degree may include basic and intermediate studies, language and communication studies, interdisciplinary programmes, other studies and work practice for professional development. The degree of Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy shall include a compulsory internship. The degree shall include a thesis of at least six and at most ten credits.

According to section 12 of the Decree, the education shall provide the student with: (1) good overall knowledge of the major subject or a corresponding entity and conversance with the fundamentals of the minor subject or good knowledge of the advanced studies included in the degree programme; (2) knowledge and skills needed to apply scientific knowledge and scientific methods or knowledge and skills needed for independent and demanding artistic work; (3) knowledge and skills needed for independently operating as an expert and developer of the field; (4) knowledge and skills needed for scientific or artistic postgraduate education and lifelong learning; and (5) good language and communication skills for relevant assignments in the field and international activities and co-operation. The education shall be based on scientific research or artistic activity and professional practices in the field.

According to section 13 of the Decree, the extent of studies leading to a master’s degree is 120 credits. The extent of studies required for the degree of Master of Science in Psychology, Master of Art in Music and Licentiate of Dentistry shall be 150 credits. The extent of studies required for the degree of Licentiate of Veterinary Medicine and the degree of Licentiate of Medicine shall be 180 credits. According to section 14 of the Decree, in the fields of medicine and dentistry the university may arrange the education leading to the higher university degree without including a lower university degree in the education. In this case, the extent of studies required for the degree of Licentiate of Medicine shall be 360 and the extent of studies required for the Licentiate of Dentistry shall be 330 credits.

The studies leading to a master’s degree may include: basic and intermediate studies and advanced studies; language and communication studies; interdisciplinary study programmes; other studies; and internship improving expertise. Studies for the degrees of Licentiate of Medicine, Licentiate of Dentistry and Licentiate of Veterinary Medicine, education in social work belonging to the field of social sciences and the degree of Master of Science in Pharmacy and Master of Science in Psychology include compulsory internships. A master’s degree shall include a thesis of at least 20 and at most 40 credits. According to section 21 of the Decree, the aim of scientific and artistic postgraduate education is to ensure that the student: (1) becomes well-versed in his/her own field of research and its social significance (2) gains knowledge and skills needed to apply scientific research methods independently and critically and to produce new scientific knowledge within his/her field of research (3) becomes conversant with the development, basic problems and research methods of his/her own field of research; (4) gains such knowledge of the general theory of science and of other disciplines relating to his/her own field of research as enables him/her to follow developments in them; and (5) achieved adequate proficiency in communication, language and other skills for functioning in demanding expert and managerial positions in working life and international co-operation.

In the field of art and design, the aim of postgraduate education leading to the degree of doctor may be, in addition to the aims listed above, that the student gains knowledge and skills for independently conceiving methods of artistic creation or creating products, objects
or works which fulfil high artistic demands.

In the fields of fine arts, music, and theatre and dance, the aim of postgraduate education may, in addition to or instead of the aims referred to above in subsection 1, be that the student gains knowledge and skills for independently conceiving methods of artistic creation or products or transactions which fulfil high artistic demands.

The licentiate and doctor are academic and artistic postgraduate degrees awarded at universities. According to section 22 of the Decree, in order to be awarded the degree of doctor, the student admitted to postgraduate studies must complete the required postgraduate studies; demonstrate independent and critical thinking in the field of his/her research, and write a doctoral dissertation and defend it in public or demonstrate in public the knowledge and skills required by the university.

A student admitted to postgraduate studies may be awarded a licentiate’s degree after he or she has completed the part of the postgraduate studies and the specialisation studies possibly included in the degree, as determined by the university. The licentiate’s degree shall include a licentiate’s thesis, in which the student demonstrates good conversance with the field of his/her research and the capability of independently and critically applying scientific research methods. In the field of music and in the field of theatre and dance, the licentiate’s degree may include public demonstrations of knowledge and skills, instead of a licentiate’s thesis.

According to the Government Decree regarding specialist degrees in veterinary medicine and the right to practice as a specialised veterinary surgeon (275/2000), a person legally entitled to practice veterinary medicine may complete a specialist degree in veterinary medicine. According to section 3 of the Decree, the aim of the education leading to specialist degrees in veterinary medicine is to acquaint the veterinary surgeons with scientific knowledge in their field of specialisation and provide them with the skills for working as specialised veterinary surgeons, maintaining their professional skills and developing their field of specialisation, and serving as a veterinary specialist surgeon in administering veterinary care and other assignments in the field requiring specialist competence. According to section 4 of the Decree, the duration of studies is four years. The extent of studies is not specified in credits.

As opposed to the Specialist Degree in Veterinary Medicine, the specialisation studies (specialist training) in Medicine and Dentistry do not lead to a degree, but rather they are professional further education that may be completed after a Licentiate of Medicine and Licentiate of Dentistry. The education is regulated by section 4a of the Act on Health Care Professionals (559/1994) 4 a (amended by 1355/2014) and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Decree on the Training of Specialist Physicians and Dentists (56/2015).

According to section 26 of the Government Decree on University Degrees and Specialist Education, the university shall issue to the student a degree certificate upon completion of a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree as well as a doctoral degree. The university shall issue a Diploma Supplement, especially intended for international use, to students who have completed a degree or studies at the university. The Diploma Supplement shall contain sufficient information on the university, the studies referred to in the degree certificate or certificate, including information on their level and status in the education system. Upon request, the university shall issue the student a certificate on the studies he or she has completed also during studies.

**Defence administration and Border Guard qualifications**

According to section 6 of the National Defence University Act (1121/2008; laki Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulusta), the qualifications in military sciences are Bachelor and Master of Military Sciences, and the General Staff Officer’s Degree and Doctor of Military Sciences, which are postgraduate degrees. The Decree on the Higher Education Degree System (464/1998; asetus korkeakoulututkintojen järjestelmästä) specifies that Bachelor and
Master of Military Sciences degrees are lower and higher university degrees and, as such, comparable with bachelor and master degrees taken at universities. The Government Decree on the National Defence University (1124/2008; valtioneuvoston asetus Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulusta) lays down provisions on the objectives and extents of military qualifications as well as on the structure and other requirements of the studies.

In the defence administration sector, there is also a great deal of education falling outside the qualifications system. The Defence Forces’ education system comprises education systems of salaried personnel and conscripts. As the Defence Forces and Border Guard do not have the right to award vocational qualifications, the vocational studies are classified as continuing education. The National Defence University provides university-level, sector-specific continuing education including the High Command Course, Senior Staff Officer Course, Senior Command Course and National Defence study modules 1 and 2.

The service branch schools are in charge of the vocational training of non-commissioned officers. Professional military studies are comprised of four study modules: basic study module; National defence study modules 1 and 2; and master level study module.

At the basic level, students are expected to work in accordance with the requirements of the Defence Forces working environment and norms of the working community as well as in the manner required under the guidelines, when making choices pertaining to attainment of goals in accordance with their own skills and the objectives jointly set with the employer. An understanding of an individual's function as part of the National Defence Forces, along with their obligations, responsibilities and rights, is gained at the basic level.

At general levels 1 and 2, students use their knowledge gained from experience independently and comprehensively and utilise expert information in their work and when training and guiding others. In addition, they carry out their daily duties in accordance with the objectives specified in performance reviews, and these activities are assessed and documented in accordance with the principles of continuous assessment. At the general level, students perform general level NCO tasks and/or master-level NCO tasks, building their competence in self-development, applying their competence and developing the activities of their own work community. At general level 2, students function in general level supervisory and/or expert assignments and develop themselves in work assignments. At general level 2, the principles of development as an expert, supervisor and trainer of different personnel groups are implemented. In addition, competence is applied in diverse operating environments and units.

At the master level, students are able to control their management and training methods in order to produce the desired effect and to set objectives that are in line with the performance capabilities of the group as well as to actively steer the group towards attaining the goals by acting in an exemplary manner in master level NCO tasks of service, branch or functional area. In addition, they plan and assess the performance of the work community and apply supervisory and trainer skills in master level assignments, while analysing and planning activities in their own area of specialisation and proposing developmental measures related to it. At the master level, students are responsible for steering, co-ordinating and managing people, issues and resources.

According to section 25(1) of the Border Guard Administration Act (577/2005; laki rajavartiolaitoksen hallinnosta), the Border and Coast Guard Academy may provide education specified by law as a professional qualifications requirement for a post in the Border Guard, as well as continuing and specialist training for Border Guard personnel and other individuals. As stated in paragraph 3 of the same section, training necessary for the aviation of the Border Guard may be organised in the Air Patrol Squadron in co-operation with the Border and Coast Guard Academy and other educational institutions.

The Border and Coast Guard Academy organises basic, advanced and master courses as well as continuous education required by the Border Guard. The objectives for learning in the basic, advanced and master courses are specified in section 42(2) of the Government Decree on the Border Guard (651/2005; valtioneuvoston asetus rajavartiolaitoksesta). Vocational
studies at the Border Guard are classified as vocational continuing education because the Border Guard is not authorised to issue vocational qualifications.

The objective of the basic course is to train border guards who are competent, respectful of civil rights, possess strong basic knowledge and skills and are committed to the values of the Finnish Border Guard. The basic course provides the student with tools in accordance with the line of study for field-level assignments requiring professional skill at a border control station, border guard station, border control department or equivalent, at a coast guard station, on a coast guard vessel or in aircraft maintenance.

The objective of the advanced course is to provide border guards with the skills to serve as a guard station shift supervisor, work on small group assignments and conduct investigations. It also provides the foundation for managing field operations as well as on-call duties in control rooms and command centres.

The goal of the border guard master course is to provide the student with the tools necessary for serving in a supervisory capacity. Upon completion of training, the student will have gained knowledge, skills and attitudes related to work unit management and lifelong learning as well as to education and training in a work unit.

The Border Guard relies on the National Defence University for its officer training.

According to section 25(2) of the Act on the Administration of the Border Guard, the Border and Coast Guard Academy may organise instruction related to the degree programme of an officer, postgraduate studies or continuing education referred to in the Act on the National Defence University (1121/2008) in the field of activity of the Border Guard as separately agreed with the National Defence University. The Border and Coast Guard Academy provides border security studies as part of the Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Military Sciences and the General Staff Officer Degree studies.

The curricula for education and training provided by the Border and Coast Guard Academy are described in terms of learning outcomes. The modules taught are built on working life-based competence modules rather than the division of subjects. The competence modules are divided into units of study, and their learning outcomes are described in accordance with the EQF requirements and philosophy into three categories: knowledge, skills and competence. Officer training curricula are drafted in accordance with National Defence University guidelines.

Prison and probation service qualifications

Section 6(1) of the Act on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services (1316/2006; laki Rikosseuraamusalan koulutuskeskuksesta) determines that the Training Institute provides education and training leading to a vocational qualification in the field of correctional services.

According to section 6 of the Government Decree on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services (1448/2006; valtioneuvoston asetus Rikosseuraamusalan koulutuskeskuksesta), the vocational qualification conferred by the Training Institute is the Basic Examination in Prison Services. The qualification provides vocational training for supervisory and control duties within the prison services (prison officer posts). The aim of the Basic Examination in Prison Services is to provide students with practical basic knowledge and skills for carrying out goal-oriented, safe and effective supervisory and control duties within the prison services in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of each individual. The extent of the examination is 90 credits.

Admissions requirements for vocational education and training leading to a qualification in prison and probation services are specified in section 9 of the Act on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services. One of the requirements for student admission is that the
student has completed at least an upper secondary level vocational qualification (vocational upper secondary qualification, further vocational qualification or specialist vocational qualification), the general upper secondary school syllabus, matriculation examination specified in the Act on the Organisation of the Matriculation Examination (672/2005) or an equivalent prior qualification, or foreign studies equivalent to the qualifications mentioned above.

According to section 28(1) of the Act on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services, higher education in prison and probation services leading to a bachelor’s degree is provided by Laurea University of Applied Sciences in co-operation with the Training Institute. This education is subject to the applicable provisions laid down in and by virtue of the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences.

**Police qualifications**

According to section 14 of the Act on the Police University College (1164/2013), the degrees in the field of internal security are a bachelor's degree and a master's degree completed at the Police University College. The higher education degree system status of degrees completed at the Police University College is enacted by Government Decree.

Section 1 of the Government Decree on the Police University College (282/2014) defines the institution's educational task and degrees awarded. Degrees in the field of internal security are completed at the Police University College and they are assigned degree titles which indicate the field of study: Bachelor of Police Services (poliisi AMK) and Master of Police Services (poliisi (ylempi AMK)).

The police administration organises plenty of training primarily for the employees of the police administration which falls outside the qualification system. As the Police University College does not have the right to award vocational qualifications, the vocational studies are classified as continuing education.

The degrees in police studies were reformed by the Act on the Police University College (1164/2013), which entered into effect on 1 January 2014. According to the transitional provision of the Act, previous degrees may be completed so that, when the Act enters into force, students studying for a basic degree in policing will be able to continue their studies and complete the basic degree in policing in accordance with the provisions and regulations in effect when this Act enters into force on 31 December 2016 and, correspondingly, students completing a degree in Police Command may continue their studies and complete the degree in Police Command in accordance with the provisions and regulations in effect when this Act enters into force on 31 December 2017.

Following the degree reform on 1 January 2014, education and training preparing candidates for police sergeant assignments shall be provided as specialist studies with an extent of 45 credits.

**Qualifications in fire and rescue services and emergency response centre operations**

Provisions on the qualifications in fire and rescue services and emergency response centre operations have been laid down in the Act on the Emergency Services College (607/2006; laki Pelastusopistosta) and the Government Decree on the Emergency Services College (658/2006; valtioneuvoston asetus Pelastusopistosta). The tasks of the Emergency Services College are to provide vocational upper secondary education and training in fire and rescue services and emergency response centre operations, education leading to a bachelor’s degree for fire officers and continuing and further education for staff in fire and rescue services and emergency response centres.

The qualifications in fire and rescue services and emergency response centre operations are
Fire Fighter (90 credits), Sub-Officer (60 credits) and Emergency Response Centre Operator (90 credits), which are conferred by the Emergency Services College. The degree programme for Fire Officers, Bachelor of Engineering (240 credits) is provided by the Savonia University of Applied Sciences in co-operation with the Emergency Services College. Education in the degree programme for Fire Officers is subject to the applicable provisions laid down in and by virtue of the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences. The qualifications in fire and rescue services form a continuum which ensures that the experts in different positions have the competence required in the various tasks.

According to section 16(1) of the Act on the Emergency Services College, the Emergency Services College adopts a curriculum for training leading to the vocational qualifications, which determines the maximum duration and the extent of studies in terms of credits, the objectives and core contents of education, general teaching and study arrangements as well as guidelines for student assessment. Section 14(2) of the Act on the Emergency Services College provides that training leading to a vocational qualification consists of vocational studies and practical training to support these as well as core subjects necessary for acquiring vocational competence and complementing vocational skills. The Savonia University of Applied Sciences approves the curriculum for studies and training leading to a bachelor’s degree, proposed by the Emergency Services College. As stipulated by the Government Decree on Universities of Applied Sciences, the bachelor’s degree comprises basic and professional studies, elective studies, practical training to enhance professional skills and a final project.

The aim of the Emergency Response Centre Operator qualification is to provide the student with the knowledge, skills and competencies for the duties of an emergency response centre operator. Handling emergency calls and dealing with people in crisis situations is the core duty of an emergency response centre operator that emphasizes both broad theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Those who have completed the qualification are familiar with the statutes governing and guiding the activities of the emergency response centre, rescue services, police and social and health care authorities, the characteristics of the duties and related risks assessments and are able to act responsibly and make judgements accordingly. A person who has completed this qualification understands the ethical background of his/her profession and through careful interaction he/she can instruct the caller in a way that is appropriate to the situation and takes into consideration also the caller’s ability to follow these instructions safely. A person who has completed this qualification has the ability to develop his/her profession and personal professional competence in a changing and developing environment.

The aim of the Fire Fighter qualification is that individuals who have completed the qualification have the knowledge, skills and competence for the duties required in the duties of a fire fighter which emphasize both broad theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Those who have completed this qualification have internalised the values of fire and rescue services and health care, have the competence to work in fire and rescue services and are willing to develop their work and professional competence in a changing and developing operational environment. They are able to operate as members of a rescue unit in accident situations, command the basics of first aid and are familiar with the principles of managing a rescue unit. They understand preventive work in the rescue services, self-directed preparedness, general civil defence as well as volunteer fire and rescue services, and are prepared for co-operation with volunteers, part-time staff and other interest groups.

The sub-officer qualification is a so called immediate supervisor qualification. It focuses on personnel management, supervision of fire and rescue operations and accident prevention. The competence is based on advanced professional knowledge, good management skills and ability to train others. Those who have completed the qualification know how to plan and supervise the rescue unit and rescue team activities in accident situations. They understand the importance of preventive work in the rescue services to the society and know and command the various methods of accident prevention required of sub-officers. Furthermore, they must be capable of working in responsible positions within the fire and rescue services and in
special duties involving fire and rescue services, risk management and emergency preparedness. They have the ability to develop their profession and personal professional competence in a changing and developing environment.

The fire officer’s degree, Bachelor of Engineering, prepares for supervisor and manager positions in the field. It also provides skills for expert positions that require strong professional knowledge and the ability to apply such knowledge in national or international settings. The degree provides skills for good administration and personnel management. A person who has completed this qualification can identify and assess various risks related to operations and can choose the right methods of risk management and function as a coordinating official. He/she can plan and manage rescue operations and has a good command of the norms and principles of good administration related to the administrative tasks of the fire and rescue officials. He/she can communicate in a target-oriented manner and is an active member in cooperation with the interest groups. He/she has good abilities for lifelong learning.

On 22 September 2016, the Government gave the Parliament a proposal which proposes that the responsibility for providing education leading to fire officer’s degree be transferred from Savonia University of Applied Sciences to the Police University College as of 2017 (GP 157/2016 Is). According to the proposal, studies leading to a bachelor’s degree in the field of fire and rescue services would transfer to the administrative sector of the Ministry of Interior, and this change would provide for the development, planning and finance management of education as a whole within this administrative sector, in a more efficient and comprehensive way.

**Competence modules supplementing the qualifications system**

The qualification system is supplemented by numerous competence modules, which are separately regulated. Education and training based on separate regulation are usually extensive competence modules preceding completion of a qualification, supporting the completion of a qualification or aimed at those who have already completed a qualification.

The adult population in working life supplement their competence and improve their professional skills also by means of other competence modules, which are not separately regulated. Some of these are related to eligibility and qualifications requirements for a profession. Some may be established on the labour market, even though the training or the qualifications conferred is not regulated.

**Preparatory education and training preceding the completion of a qualification**

The Basic Education Act regulates instruction preparing immigrants for basic education. According to section 5 of the Act, a municipality may provide instruction preparing for basic education. The Finnish National Agency for Education decides on the national core curriculum for preparatory instruction. The extent of instruction preparing immigrants for basic education is equivalent to a one year of studies. The aim of the instruction is to provide pupils with the necessary skills in Finnish or Swedish and other skills necessary for making the transition into pre-primary education or basic education as well as to promote the balanced development of pupils and their integration into the Finnish society. Another aim of the instruction is to support and promote the pupils' command of their own mother tongue and knowledge of their own culture. Upon completion of the preparatory instruction, the pupils receive a certificate for their participation in preparatory instruction for basic education.

The General Upper Secondary Education Act and Decree regulate the provision of education that prepares immigrants and speakers of a foreign language for general upper secondary education. An immigrant or foreign-language speaker who does not have adequate language proficiency to complete general upper secondary education in Finnish or Swedish and who has completed the basic education syllabus or possesses equivalent knowledge and skills may
be admitted for preparatory education for general upper secondary education. According to section 2 of the General Upper Secondary Education Act, the aim of instruction preparing immigrants and foreign-language speakers for general upper secondary education is to provide the students with the necessary language and other skills for entering general upper secondary education. The objectives of the instruction also include providing the student with skills for participating in the Finnish society as an active citizen. Another objective is to support and promote the student’s skills in his or her own mother tongue as far as possible. A certificate for completion of studies in preparatory education for general upper secondary education is issued to the students. The certificate specifies the subjects studied by the student, the number of courses in these subjects or a statement indicating the successful completion of a subject group or subject.

According to section 3 of the Act on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training, preparatory education for vocational upper secondary education and training and preparatory education for work and independent living may be provided as preparatory education not leading to a qualification. According to section 5 of the Act, the aim of preparatory education for vocational upper secondary education and training is to provide the student with skills in applying for enrolment in vocational upper secondary education and training as well as to strengthen his or her ability to complete a vocational upper secondary qualification. The preparatory education for work and independent living aims to provide instruction and guidance to students who due to an illness or disability have special needs in accordance with their personal goals and skills. Preparatory education also aims to support the students' development into good and balanced persons and members of the society and provide them with readiness for further study, vocational development, hobbies and versatile development of their personalities.

According to section 12 c of the Act on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training, preparatory education includes parts of vocational education and training. More detailed provisions on parts of vocational education and training for preparatory education may be laid down in a Government Decree.

According to section 12(2) of the Act on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training, the extent of preparatory education for vocational upper secondary education and training as well as for work and independent living is 60 competence points.

Under section 13 b of the Act, the Finnish National Agency for Education sets the educational requirements for preparatory education and training. The educational requirements specify which parts are obligatory and which optional, their extent in competence points as well as the learning outcomes and their assessment.

According to section 25 e of the Act on Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training, the education provider issues the student a certificate for completion of preparatory education when the student has completed the preparatory education for vocational upper secondary education and training or the preparatory education for work and independent living. If the student terminates his or her studies before completing the preparatory education, the education provider shall issue the student a certificate of the studies completed. A certificate of the studies the student has completed may also be issued during the studies, upon request by the student.

According to section 10(3) of the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences, a university of applied sciences may provide education for immigrants free of charge with a view to providing the student with language proficiency and other skills needed for studies at a university of applied sciences.

Studies supporting completion of qualifications and improving study skills

According to section 8a of the Vocational Adult Education Act, as part of the preparatory training for competence-based qualification studies with the purpose of facilitating completion
of a competence-based qualification, completion of a unit, and participation in preparatory training for a competence-based qualification can be provided in cases when the student’s skills for studies are not adequate. Studies improving study skills may be taken full time for no more than six months in duration. The education provider decides on the organisation and content of studies improving study skills.

Competence modules aimed at holders of a degree

Competence modules that are completed after obtaining a degree are often linked to gaining some eligibility in the field in question and they are regulated in different administrative sectors. Competence modules aimed at holders of a degree include among others specialist training in medicine and dentistry in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and specialisation studies offered in the higher education institutions in the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

*Specialist training in medicine and dentistry* is vocational post-graduate training following the Licentiate of Medicine and Licentiate of Dentistry that is regulated by the Health Care Professionals Act (559/1994) within the purview of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health as well as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Decree on the Training of Specialist Physicians and Dentists (56/2015). Until the end of 2014, the trainings lead to a Specialist Degree in Medicine and Specialist Degree in Dentistry, which were professional postgraduate degrees conferred by universities.

According to section 4a of the Health Care Professionals Act, the aim of specialist training in medicine and dentistry is to further advance the competence of physicians and dentists in a specific area of specialisation as well as secure competence in the area of specialisation within the social welfare and health care system.

As stated in the Universities Act, a university may admit a person to specialist training in medicine, if he or she has been granted the right to practice medicine in Finland as a licensed professional and to specialist training in dentistry if he or she has been granted the right to practice dentistry in Finland as a licensed professional and has performed the clinical duties of a dentist full-time for at least two years.

Specialist training in medicine is provided as a programme, whose minimum duration of full-time, supervised study is five years. Specialist training in dentistry is provided as a programme, whose minimum duration of full-time, supervised study is three years.

According to section 2 of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Decree on the Training of Specialist Physicians and Dentists and Specialist education in General Medicine (56/2015), the aim of specialist training in medicine and dentistry is to acquaint the physician or dentist with scientific knowledge and information acquisition in his or her specialist field as well as provide him or her with the skills to serve as a specialist in medicine or dentistry, maintain professional skills and develop his or her area of specialisation as well as serve as a specialist in medicine or dentistry within the social welfare and health care service system. The training shall provide specialists in medicine or dentistry with a command of demanding diagnostic methods as well as the ability to plan and implement the prevention and treatment of demanding illnesses at the individual and population level. Another aim of the training is to acquaint the physician or dentist with health care management, administration, planning and multi-professional co-operation.

According to sections 6 and 7 of the Decree, a university issues a certificate of the completed specialist training in medicine or dentistry.

According to section 4 of the Health Care Professionals Act, Valvira the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health grants, upon application, a person who has completed in Finland the specialist degree in medicine or dentistry specified in section 4a of the
Government decree the right to practise as a licensed medical or dental specialist.

Specialist training at higher education institutions is regulated in the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences and the Universities Act. Specialist training at universities and universities of applied sciences comprises training programmes for promoting professional development that are aimed at people already in working life. Universities and universities of applied sciences organise training for holders of higher education degrees and those who the higher education institution deem to possess adequate knowledge and skills for the studies.

The minimum extent and the common objectives of specialist training are enacted by Government Decree. The objective of specialist training at universities is that the student, based on his or her educational background and work experience will be able to function in demanding expert assignments in a working life sector specified in an agreement procedure in accordance with section 7 a(3) of the Universities Act; has a command of specialised scientific-professional expertise and its links with the operating environment required for serving in an expert capacity; is able to use scientific data or artistic production methods, analyse, assess and develop professional practices in his or her area of specialisation as well as serve as an expert in groups and networks within his or her own area of specialisation.

The objective of specialised training at universities of applied sciences is that the student, based on his or her educational background and work experience will be able to function in demanding expert assignments in a working life sector specified in an agreement procedure in accordance with section 11 a(3) of the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences; will gain the in-depth specialised expertise or have a command of multidisciplinary knowledge required for expert tasks; is able to, using scientific data or artistic production methods, analyse, assess and develop professional practices in his or her area of specialisation as well as serve as an expert in groups and networks within his or her own area of specialisation.

The minimum extent for a specialist training is no less than 30. The university shall issue the student a certificate on the specialist training that he or she has completed. The certificate shall indicate the specialist training and its core content.

Other competence modules

The objectives, content and extent of certain competence and study modules are not separately regulated, even though they may be eligibility or qualification requirements for serving in certain professions or positions. Such modules include various qualifications in social welfare and health care sector. The extent of competence modules varies according to the skills need.

In addition, some competence modules intended for the development of competence and improvement of professional skills are offered in the labour market which are not eligibility and qualification requirements for certain positions, but they are established and well-known. Prior learning is supplemented, updated or broadened by means of such modules. Various continuing education programmes serve as an example of these modules.

National Certificates of Language Proficiency are language proficiency certificates aimed primarily at adults. Regulated in the Act on National Certificates of Language Proficiency (964/2004), these are examinations taken to measure functional language proficiency regardless of the manner in which the language proficiency was acquired. Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency examinations are taken at Basic, Intermediate and Advanced levels.

Folk high schools organise long-term courses, which are geared towards improving students’ working life skills and vocational competence. Folk high schools draw up their own objectives and contents for liberal adult education programmes and classify the education they provide as self-motivated adult education with focus on vocational learning. Some of the folk high schools have directed their education towards students with severe disabilities.
During military service, conscripts complete a combatant’s qualification. In addition, it is possible to complete a non-commissioned officer course, reserve officer course and leadership and instructor training during national service. There are also various courses through which some conscripts gain qualifications, for example, as a defence forces driver, shot-firer or diver.

2.2 International developments and legislation abroad and in the EU

International classifications of qualifications

The purpose of international classifications of qualifications is, among others, to cater for compilation of statistics, to serve educational authorities and employment services and to facilitate occupational and academic mobility and recognition of qualifications. The classification systems may be structured by the level of education, field of study, occupation or for instance, the qualification level.

ISCED

Developed by UNESCO, the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is primarily intended to facilitate the comparison of international education statistics and indicators. UNESCO rendered a decision regarding the currently valid classification of education levels in 2011. ISCED classifies education geared to completion of a qualification according to both level of education and field of education.

ISCED level 0 describes early childhood and pre-primary education. ISCED level 1 is reserved for primary education or the first stage of basic education, which covers grades 1 to 6 of basic education in Finland. ISCED level 2 refers to lower secondary or the second stage of basic education, which covers grades 7 to 9 of basic education. ISCED level 3 describes upper secondary education, which comprises general upper secondary education and matriculation examinations, upper secondary vocational qualifications and further vocational qualifications. Specialist vocational qualifications are placed at level 4. Tertiary education is divided into four levels in the ISCED classification: level 5 includes the lowest level of tertiary education (covers former Finnish post-secondary vocational qualifications, which have been removed from the qualifications structure); level 6 includes bachelor’s degrees (issued by universities and universities of applied sciences); ISCED level 7 describes master level degrees (master’s degrees issued by universities, specialist degrees in medicine, and master’s degrees issued by universities of applied sciences); and level 8 includes research degrees (Licentiate degrees and Doctor degrees).

ISCED classification is based on the content of the curricula. The classification of education using only their contents is difficult because there are no existing standards for the international comparison. As a result, other criteria related to the level of difficulty are used to define the classification level of education instead of curricular content. These criteria include the nominal duration of education, requirements of prior studies and eligibility for further studies.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01), known as the EQF recommendation, was adopted on 23 April 2008.

The European Qualifications Framework can be used to link the national qualifications systems and frameworks of various European Member States together and to facilitate comparison and understanding of qualifications gained in different European countries. The framework has two principal aims: to promote citizens’ mobility between countries and to facilitate lifelong learning. The European Qualifications Framework is used to improve the transparency and comparability of qualifications. The framework also contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners.

The EQF has eight reference levels, which span the full scale of qualifications. The EQF encompasses all levels of qualifications acquired in general education, vocational education and training as well as academic education. Each level should, in principle, be attainable through a variety of educational and career paths.

The EQF reference levels are based on learning outcomes that are described as knowledge, skills and competence. Each of the eight levels is defined by describing the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications. The EQF focuses on what a person with a qualification knows, understands and is able to do on completion of the learning process.

The EQF is compatible with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area developed in conjunction with the Bologna Process. The descriptions of the EQF levels 5 to 8 refer to the descriptions of higher education levels agreed upon as part of the Bologna process. However, the EQF level descriptors differ in wording from the Bologna level descriptors. This is due to the fact that, as a framework for lifelong learning, the EQF also covers vocational education and training and working environments up to the highest level.

The European Qualifications Framework does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications. Nor does it describe specific qualifications or an individual’s competence. Particular qualifications should be referenced to the appropriate EQF level by way of the relevant national qualifications systems or frameworks.

The European Qualifications Framework is non-binding but it is recommended that Member States relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by 2010, either by referencing their qualification levels to EQF levels or, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice. Additionally, the Member States should ensure that all new qualification certificates, diplomas and ‘Europass’ documents contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level by 2012.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the Member States use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In order to enhance confidence related to qualifications and education, it is recommended that the Member States promote and apply the principles of quality assurance specified in the recommendation annex in qualification descriptions compliant with the EQF. In addition, Member States are recommended to set up a national co-ordination point to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between the national qualifications system and the European Qualifications Framework.

At the EU level, procedures and criteria agreed upon within the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group are used to allow other Member States to comment on the intelligibility of the placement of qualifications. Once the placement of qualifications in the national framework and EQF has been agreed upon at a national level, the Member States draw up a report on the placement for international use. Ten questions are answered in the report, and it is discussed by the group in question. Finally, the report is published on the
European Commission website. International experts may be used in drafting the report. The purpose of this procedure is to enhance the transparency and intelligibility of the placement of qualifications in other countries.

The European Commission included an initiative on new skills in its Work Programme 2016, presented on 10 June 2016 (New Skills Agenda for Europe COM (2016)381). The initiative includes proposals for developing competence-related co-operation in the European Union, enhancing education and employment policy co-operation, and improving the level of skills among the labour force, for example, by developing systems for the recognition and identification of prior learning. The initiative also includes a proposal for revision of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendation. Later, a proposal will also be made for revision of the proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competence (Europass). The Commission explained that need for change is based on a need for flexibility in the recognition and identification of prior learning as well as, for example, the need for the recognition and identification of digitally acquired knowledge.

Member States begun deliberations on the Commission recommendation in the autumn of 2016. The earliest possible entry into force of the Commission proposals is 2017, after which the Member States will assess the national needs for implementation.

National qualifications frameworks in other countries

All EU and EEA Member States and EU candidate countries have decided to draw up or further develop their national qualifications frameworks, whose levels can be confirmed as being compatible with EQF levels. The Member States work in close co-operation. A total of 26 Member States have already prepared a national framework for qualifications and stated the equivalence of national and EQF levels. Their basic solutions seem similar: they are preparing a single framework to cover the entire qualifications system. Some countries have drawn up education level-specific frameworks, with the intention of later consolidating them into a single framework. A majority of the Member States are using an eight-level framework.

All the Nordic countries have prepared national qualifications frameworks. In Denmark, the national qualifications framework approved in June 2009 comprises eight levels, and learning outcomes have been described for each of these through three dimensions (knowledge, skills/capabilities and competence). While the Danish higher education qualifications are placed at levels 5 to 8, placement of qualifications is otherwise indicative: general education certificates are placed at levels 1 to 4 and vocational programmes at levels 2 to 5. The principle of ‘full fit’ is used to place qualifications at levels 6 to 8, i.e. the learning outcomes must be fully consistent with the description of the relevant level, whereas the principle of ‘best fit’ is used with the other levels, which means that the qualification will be placed at the level at which it is most suitable overall. At present, the Danish framework does not include informal and non-formal learning. Preparation of the framework continues in these respects.

In Iceland, the Ministry of Education, together with educational institutions, teachers and representatives of working life, prepared a framework that is part of the reform of the education system and legislation. The national framework for qualifications comprises seven levels. Level 1 is equivalent to EQF level 1-2. From this point on, the national framework level corresponds to EQF level 3, etc. Rather than being regulated by separate legislation, the framework will be included in legislation concerning different levels of education.

In Norway, the framework for higher education qualifications was adopted in March 2009 and descriptions of learning outcomes were implemented for all qualifications by the end of 2012. A coherent framework covering the entire qualifications system was adopted in 2011. The framework comprises seven levels. The levels are numbered 2-8 so that they are clearly aligned with the EQF levels. Level 1 has been left open and contains no description. The three highest levels of the Norwegian qualifications framework are based on the European
Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (EHEA) and European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and the remaining levels are based on the EQF. Expansion of the framework to include informal and non-formal learning is being investigated.

In Sweden, the Swedish government decided on a national framework for qualifications in August 2015 and the framework entered into force in October 2015. The national qualifications framework is linked to the EQF. It has eight levels, and learning is divided into knowledge, skills and competence. The best fit principle is used in placement of qualifications to different levels of the framework. The placement of qualifications that belong to the official qualification system is determined by a decree, and a separate application system has been created for the purpose of linking modules which are not part of the official qualifications system to the framework. It was launched in March 2016.

In the United Kingdom and Ireland, the qualifications frameworks have been in use for years, which is why their basic premises differ from those of the EQF-based frameworks in the Nordic countries and many other countries.

England has three qualifications frameworks in place: the Qualifications and Credit Framework (specifically for vocational qualifications), the National Qualifications Framework (general education and vocational education and training) and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (specifically for higher education). The frameworks are primarily intended for the purpose of comparing different programmes and their learning outcomes, but they are also largely used to regulate the award of qualifications. In Scotland, the qualifications framework, which spans the entire education system, comprises 12 reference levels. Wales' eight-level Credit and Qualifications Framework also covers the entire education system.

Ireland's national qualifications framework, introduced in 2003, has ten levels. Each level is based on nationally agreed standards on knowledge, skills and competence. In 2012, the framework was made statutory. Ireland's framework is also open to qualifications that are not part of the national system of qualifications.

National frameworks are also widely developed in countries outside Europe. A report by the European Training Foundation (ETF) indicates that about 120 countries are either in the process of developing or have already developed a national qualifications framework.

2.3 Review of the current status

The Finnish education system mostly consists of qualifications and syllabi (hereinafter referred to as qualifications) falling within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as a few qualifications within other administrative sectors. Provisions on the qualifications included in the education system and on the respective objectives and learning outcomes provided/required by them are laid down separately in legislation on each form of education. As a result of these separate statutes, the Finnish education and qualifications system and the learning outcomes required by different qualifications fail to form a clearly integrated whole. This hinders the international transparency and intelligibility of our qualifications system, but it also causes complications in national terms, in particular for alignment of qualifications within other administrative sectors with those within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The qualifications included in the Finnish education system and their objectives and the learning outcomes provided/required by them are described in statutes and regulations and the curricula based on these in very different ways within different forms and levels of education. Regulation stems from the needs of each particular form of education, rather than the education system as a whole. Regulation applies to areas such as the objectives and contents of education, the duration of programmes, modes of provision, the structure of studies and possibly also subjects, as well as learning objectives and outcomes in some respects. There is no consistent method of describing qualifications and syllabi across the education system,
which complicates comparison of qualifications and syllabi and the learning these provide as well as validation and recognition of prior learning in conjunction with transitions from one form of education to another. The relationships between qualifications included in the Finnish education system have mostly been defined by laying down provisions on the types of studies for which a completed qualification or syllabus provides eligibility.

The absence of a consistent and effective method of describing qualifications is also a challenge with regard to international co-operation and individual mobility. The common European objective is to describe qualifications through learning outcomes. The existing international systems for classification of qualifications (such as ISCED) are not suitable for this purpose, because they were created from a different perspective and for a different, specific purpose.

The learning outcomes-based approach to describing qualifications aims to promote lifelong learning, enhance employment opportunities, increase mobility and reduce the gap between education and training and the world of work. Consistent descriptions highlighting learning objectives and outcomes improve the transparency and intelligibility of the education system and facilitate comparison of education systems and their respective qualifications. They also promote recognition of prior learning, in particular validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In addition, descriptions based on learning outcomes force the focus of attention onto the outcomes of education, thus improving its quality.

The European Qualifications Framework and competence-based approach have, however, been used in, for example, preparations for qualification requirements and core curricula. The framework has already been used in curriculum development at different levels of education. However, Finland is the last European Member State which has not described the correspondence between its own national qualifications system and the EQF. As a result, qualification certificates cannot contain any reference to a national qualifications framework, nor can they be referenced against a certain EQF level. Implementation of a national qualifications framework would therefore be crucial to promoting both mobility and education export. The European Qualifications Framework is internationally recognised and qualifications’ linkage with it is also considered an assurance of quality.

There are currently several extensive competence modules falling outside the existing qualifications system, which are widely studied and have learning objectives set down in legislation. The learning outcomes provided by such modules may not necessarily be validated or recognised as part of existing qualifications. These kinds of competence modules should be made more visible and proportionate to the competence provided by qualifications.

3 Objectives and key proposals of the Government Proposal

3.1 Objectives

The Proposal aims to increase the national and international transparency and comparability of qualifications by laying down provisions on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. The aim is to improve the effectiveness and clarity of the qualifications system by describing Finnish qualifications and other competence modules in a coherent, understandable and comparable manner, while simultaneously harmonising the terminology used. A further objective of the Proposal is to raise awareness of the Finnish qualifications system, thus facilitate international mobility from Finland to other countries and vice versa and support education export.

The objective of the Proposal is to facilitate mobility within the education system by defining the relationships between qualifications and other competence modules. A further objective is to promote transition to further and supplementary education and to enhance validation and recognition of prior learning when moving within the qualifications system, thus supporting lifelong learning.
A key objective of the Proposal is to focus more attention on the learning outcomes required by qualifications and assist educational institutions and higher education institutions to focus more on learning objectives and learning outcomes when developing their curricula and programmes. Clear and understandable descriptions of qualifications and other competence modules will improve the quality of Finnish education. The objectives set for qualifications and other competence modules and attainment of them will also serve as a key premise for quality assessment.

3.2 Alternative implementation methods

It would be possible to implement the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules in three alternative ways: creating a national framework that is separate from the European Qualifications Framework; adopting the EQF as such as the basis for the national framework; or establishing a national qualifications framework on the basis of the EQF and utilizing the EQF to some extent.

Creation of a completely new national framework independent of the European Qualifications Framework cannot be envisioned to achieve the objectives set for the EQF. A separate national framework would make it significantly more difficult to place Finnish qualifications within the EQF. Moreover, it would complicate description of the learning outcomes relevant to different qualifications and comparison of qualifications.

One alternative is to apply the European Qualifications Framework as such as the basis of the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. Qualifications completed in the Finnish system and other competence acquired within the system can be placed on the eight levels of the European Qualifications Framework. However, the descriptions of learning outcomes pose a problem with this alternative. The descriptions drafted at the EU level are very general in nature and do not provide an adequate description of the competence provided by Finnish qualifications. Furthermore, their direct implementation is not appropriate when the development of the education system and the competence required for qualifications is considered.

The best alternative would be establishing a national qualifications framework on the basis of the EQF and utilizing the EQF to some extent.

The eight levels of the EQF can be directly implemented, as described above. The classification of qualifications and other competence modules into eight levels in the national qualifications framework facilitates the placement of qualifications and other learning within the EQF. This also facilitates the comparison of qualifications from different countries. An eight-level classification also consolidates the international transparency of the national qualifications framework. An eight-level classification also involves the description of all qualifications belonging to the national education system or competence within a single framework. The description of each level can be drafted so that it is possible to place qualifications for basic and higher education as well as for vocational education and training on the same level.

However, the EQF level descriptors can only be partially utilised. The level descriptors in the national qualifications framework should be based on the EQF to for the purpose of comparability of framework levels. However, these should and can be further defined on a national basis.

The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules and objectives pertaining to its implementation are so important that the framework should be ensured a strong foundation and good visibility. Legal regulation by an act or decree would highlight the framework’s significance and comprehensiveness of the national system, strengthen its international visibility and credibility and demonstrate commitment. The legislation in force does not authorise the laying down of provisions on the national qualifications framework, which means that laying down provisions on the framework requires a legal instrument.
equivalent to an Act of Parliament. This could either be accomplished by inserting enabling provisions into acts governing qualifications and education both within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture and within other sectors, or by enacting a separate act on the framework. Enacting a separate act must be considered to be a better alternative than inserting enabling provisions into existing legislation, because this would make it possible to comprehensively review the Finnish education and qualifications system and the relevant learning outcomes as a whole. In addition, the fact that no legislation contains comprehensive provisions on the qualifications within different administrative sectors also supports the idea of a separate act.

3.3 Key proposals

The Proposal proposes that an act on a National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules be enacted into law. The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules is an integrated whole, which enables a comprehensive review of the education and qualifications system and other extensive competence modules both within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture and in other administrative sectors. The framework makes it possible to analyse how education within other administrative sectors compares with education within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Laying down provisions on the framework will also consolidate the international transparency of the Finnish qualifications and education system.

It is proposed that the Act provide that, in order to facilitate international and national comparability of qualifications and other learning, relationships between qualifications, basic education and general upper secondary syllabi as well as other extensive competence modules included in the Finnish national education and qualifications system be defined by classifying them into eight reference levels based on their respective learning outcomes. It is further proposed that provisions on the descriptors of the levels and placement of qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules be laid down by Government Decree.

In the first phase, the Government Decree to be issued by virtue of the proposed Act is only intended to place qualifications and syllabi specified in the legislation which belong to the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture and other administrative sectors within the framework. In addition, the aim is to include in the framework specialist training in medicine and dentistry which, until 2014, were professional postgraduate degrees conferred by universities and whose learning outcomes did not change as these degrees were removed from the qualifications system. Specialist training in medicine and dentistry would be placed in the framework as an entity together with specialist degrees in veterinary medicine.

Qualifications or syllabi that have been removed from the qualifications system will not be placed in the framework, because their learning objectives are mainly based on duration of studies and subjects instead of learning outcomes. The framework will also not cover qualifications included in a foreign qualifications system or organised by international organisations, even though such qualifications could be completed at Finnish educational institutions.

In the first phase, the framework is not intended to encompass any competence modules extending or consolidating qualifications that fall outside the qualifications system, in addition to specialist training in medicine and dentistry degree holders, such as different preparatory and training programmes, studies that support study skills, competence modules related to eligibility and qualifications requirements, or competence modules aiming at development of competence and professional skills. However, the intention is that the framework will later be extended to a wider framework for learning (knowledge, skills and competence) by virtue of the proposed Act. The Ministry of Education and Culture will initiate further development work once the Act enters into force, taking into consideration developments in the Finnish education system and co-operation with the European Union.
The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules would describe the learning outcomes required by Finnish qualifications and competence modules by means of criteria agreed through European co-operation, in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, with a view to focusing more attention on the learning outcomes required by the qualifications. While qualifications and competence modules may cover elements from various reference levels, they should be placed in the framework at the most suitable level overall (the principle of ‘best fit’), based on their learning outcomes. Qualifications or competence modules placed at the same level may focus on different dimensions of learning, and qualifications of the same level may differ from each other regarding their language proficiency requirements, for example. In order to ensure the clarity of the education and qualifications system, all qualifications of a certain type would primarily be placed at the same level in the framework. However, an individual qualification would not necessarily have to meet all elements of the level descriptors as such, and the level of individual elements could be higher or lower, if this is justified by workplace needs in the field in question. Instead of placing parts of qualifications separately in the framework, these would be placed at the same level as the entire qualification.

The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules and its levels do not describe the competence or qualifications of an individual person, nor the content or quality of an individual qualification or competence module; instead, it describes the level linked to its learning objectives.

The framework does not require a quality assurance system of its own. The intention is to consider the principles of quality assurance presented in the EQF recommendation as part of quality assurance procedures and their development in each educational sector.

The Ministry of Education and Culture would be responsible for development of the framework and preparation of related legislative amendments, as well as consultation with other ministries and stakeholders during the legislative preparation phase. The mapping of the development and updating needs of the framework in co-operation with stakeholders is to be integrated into the existing forms of stakeholder co-operation and preparation of the qualifications structure proposals.

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Culture designated the Finnish National Agency for Education as Finland’s National Co-ordination Point to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between the national qualifications system and the European Qualifications Framework. The tasks of the Finnish National Agency for Education are to: participate in development of the National Qualifications Framework and implementation of the European Qualifications Framework; inform stakeholders and citizens of the National Qualifications Framework and placement of qualifications within the framework; and provide different stakeholders with guidance and advice on how to apply the framework.

4 Effects of the Government Proposal

4.1 Economic Effects

The Proposal does not have any significant economic effects. The principal parties involved are the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education, and they will agree on the measures and appropriations related to implementation of the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules when necessary. The point of departure is that the proposals put forward in the Proposal will be implemented within the limits of the existing appropriations and that funding available for application from the Commission to support implementation of the European Qualifications Framework will be used for dissemination of information, for example. When functioning as intended, the framework may reduce, for example, personnel management and assessment costs at the level of the entire national economy.
4.2 Effects on the activities of national authorities and education providers

The national framework will not significantly affect the administrative workloads of the Ministry of Education and Culture or other ministries. The national framework will increase administrative work for the Finnish National Agency for Education, which has been appointed as the National Co-ordination Point for Finland. The task of the co-ordination point is to handle official communications, guidance and advice relating to the framework as well as international co-operation and related communications.

The national framework will not significantly affect the administrative workloads of education providers and higher education institutions. It is likely that there will be a slight increase in administrative work as, in addition to the current information, every new qualification certificate, diploma and Europass document (Diploma and Certificate Supplement) must include a reference to the EQF level of the qualification or other competence modules completed.

The implementation of the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules will require the dissemination of information. In particular, it is imperative to provide training for members of the Competence Anticipation Forum that will start operating in early 2017. The anticipation groups of the forum will continue the work of the National Education and Training Committees and, based on anticipation information on competence needs, map the needs to update and develop the qualifications system and, consequently, also the framework at all levels of education and in all competence areas and fields. Moreover, it is important to ensure that the personnel in municipalities, vocational upper secondary education and training providers, further education providers, higher education institutions and educational institutions providing education for other administrative sectors, which provide education leading to or preparing for qualifications and other competence modules included in the qualifications framework, are familiar with the qualifications framework and able to utilise it in their work. The Finnish National Agency for Education bears primary responsibility for the dissemination of information.

For a long time now, there has been a prevailing trend in Finland, where learning objectives and outcomes have been adopted as one of the starting points for provision and development of education and training. The National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules with its level descriptors based on competence will reinforce this trend. The Qualification Requirements for upper secondary vocational qualifications have been built on the vocational skills requirements of working life since the 1990s, and the Qualification Requirements and education providers’ local curricula have been continuously developed to place more focus on learning outcomes. Higher education degrees and qualifications falling within other administrative sectors have also been developed towards emphasising learning objectives during the 21st century.

4.3 Societal effects

The framework will improve the effectiveness, clarity and intelligibility of the qualifications system and facilitate mobility within the education system by defining the relationships between the qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules within different administrative sectors included in the Finnish qualifications system.

The framework will also support development of the educational system. The framework makes it possible to identify and further develop the strengths of the education system while also correcting shortcomings in the system. The framework forms a foundation which can in applicable parts be utilised when planning qualifications and preparing National Core Curricula, Qualification Requirements and local curricula. The descriptors of the framework levels will help clarify the differing learning objectives and requirements for various qualifications and education providing certain eligibilities by describing them in a more consistent manner. The framework will focus attention on competence and learning outcomes both in terms of planning education and student assessment. The emphasis on learning
objectives will help develop education and training so as to improve learning outcomes. More consistent descriptions of learning outcomes at different qualifications levels will facilitate education providers in developing the identification and recognition of prior leaning within the qualifications system. The framework can also be used in support of determining the level of competence modules not included in the framework, which will facilitate recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

Laying down provisions on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules will not change the contents of existing qualifications, nor will it lead to harmonisation of the contents of qualifications placed at the same level (such as bachelor’s degrees obtained at universities of applied sciences and bachelor’s degrees obtained at universities). Furthermore, the framework will not change the eligibility for further studies provided by different qualifications or the eligibility for public posts specified by statutes.

The clearly-defined alignment of qualifications and other learning will also have a major impact on working life, for example, when comparing the qualifications of job applicants. Implementation of the framework levels will therefore reduce personnel administration costs. The framework will promote the development of lifelong learning as part of careers.

The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules will increase the transparency and comparability of qualifications nationally and internationally. This will facilitate international mobility from Finland to other countries and vice versa, either during studies or in working life. Every new qualification certificate, diploma and Europass document (Diploma and Certificate Supplement) must include, in addition to the current information, a reference to the EQF level of the qualification or other competence module. These certificate entries will make the level of competence provided by the qualification visible. The framework and certificate information will also make it easier for workers to describe the level of their competence to employers in other countries and for employers to interpret the qualifications of job applicants. In addition, the framework will support recognition of studies completed abroad as part of Finnish qualifications and the recognition of studies completed in Finland in foreign education and training. The National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules will improve education export opportunities for education providers and higher education institutions as use of the framework facilitates description of the educational offering. The European Qualifications Framework is internationally recognised and qualifications’ linkage with it is also considered an assurance of quality.

The European Commission has issued a New Skills Agenda for Europe COM (2016)381 (final). This initiative includes proposals for developing competence-related co-operation in the European Union, enhancing education and employment policy co-operation, and improving competence levels, for example, by developing systems for the recognition and identification of prior learning. The initiative also includes a proposal for revision of the EQF Recommendation. Member States have begun deliberations on the Commission recommendation in the autumn of 2016. In order to improve Finland's standing in international negotiations, it is vital that Finland implements the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules.

5 Preparatory work

5.1 Preparatory phases and material

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a committee to prepare a proposal on the national qualifications framework and to define its levels in terms of learning outcomes as well as to determine the criteria according to which qualifications should be placed at different levels of the national and European Qualifications Frameworks, and to propose at which levels Finnish qualifications should be placed within the frameworks. In addition, the committee was expected to propose how the national qualifications framework ought to be maintained, updated and developed, and to describe how quality assurance will be organised.
The committee also had to make a proposal on whether the national qualifications framework could be extended to cover all learning in addition to qualifications.

In its report given in June 2009 (National framework for qualifications and other learning, Reports of the Ministry of Education 2009: 24), the committee proposed that the national qualifications framework should have eight levels based on the EQF. The qualifications would be placed in the national qualifications framework according to the learning outcomes required by them and qualifications that comprise elements from several reference levels, are placed on the level that is overall most suitable. The committee further proposed that the framework be provided for in an Act of Parliament compiling the qualifications and syllabi as a whole as laid down in various statutes. The Act would also compile the specialist trainings for higher education degree holders. In addition, the Act would provide for authorisation to describe the reference levels and place qualifications, syllabi and specialist trainings for degree-holders at different reference levels by Government Decree. Finnish qualifications would be referenced to the EQF by placing them at the levels of the national qualifications framework which correspond to the levels in the EQF. The committee report included a proposal for placement of qualifications within the framework.

The Ministry of Education of Education and Culture invited feedback on the committee report from key employer and employee organisations, other ministries, the National Education and Training Committees, organisations and other bodies representing different educational sectors, the Education Evaluation Councils and higher education institutions. A total of 86 opinions were submitted. In their opinions, the submitting parties considered the committee’s initial proposal as being a good point of departure for describing qualifications and other learning and developing education to focus more on learning outcomes. They regarded the preparation of a National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules as justified and the framework itself as necessary. Placement of qualifications was mostly viewed as being apt, but some problems were also perceived in terms of certain types of qualifications. Some stakeholders considered it important to verify the necessity and appropriateness of new legislation as part of further preparations, stating that it would not be necessary to provide for the framework through an act. All stakeholders considered it important to extend the framework to cover all learning, but some pointed out that caution should be exercised when proceeding with extension plans.

This Proposal was drawn up by officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture on the basis of the committee report and opinions submitted on the report. The preparation work also involved the Committee for Preparation of the National Qualifications Framework. The Proposal content corresponds primarily with proposals made by the Government to the Parliament in 2010 and 2012 (GP 165/2010 ls and GP 38/2012 ls), which have lapsed.

5.2 Opinions and their consideration

Feedback on the Draft Proposal was requested from the other ministries, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Centre for International Mobility CIMO, the Matriculation Examination Board, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, student organisations, key employers’ and employees’ organisations, National Education and Training Committees, organisations and other parties representing actors in different sectors of education and training, and higher education institutions. A total of 77 statements were issued.

The statements were in favour of the proposal across the board, and the framework was considered to clarify the Finnish qualifications system, increase the international comparability of national education and training, and promote international mobility. All those who issued statements also supported the selected legislative technique and the alternative based on establishing a national qualifications framework on the basis of the EQF and utilizing the EQF to some extent.

Further development efforts aiming to extend the framework to cover other learning were
found important in the statements. Many statements also proposed the inclusion in the framework of certain qualifications that no longer are part of the qualifications system (including former post-secondary vocational qualifications) and various competence modules (including vocational teacher education, training conferring limited prescription rights and training for providing critical pre-hospital emergency care, qualifications of the church). In response to these proposals, more detail has been added to parts of Section 3.3 General justifications, and Chapter 2 Detailed justifications, of the Government Proposal. The views expressed in the statements concerning the placement of certain competence modules in the framework will be taken into consideration in the further development of the framework.

Some statements contained various opinions on the Draft Decree on the placement of qualifications, syllabi and competence modules in the framework, especially regarding the placement of certain specialist vocational qualifications, the respective placement of vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications, as well as the placement of specialisation studies organised by higher education institutions in the framework. The viewpoints expressed in the statements will be taken into consideration in the further drafting of the Decree. Chapter 2 Detailed justifications of the Government Proposal has also been made more specific in this respect as regards the principles applied to the placement of qualifications. Due to conflicting feedback received on the placement of specialisation studies organised by higher education institutions, in the interest of the consistency of the framework it is not proposed that the specialisation studies be placed in the framework in its initial phase. The placement of specialisation studies and other extensive competence modules in the framework will be considered as a whole in the course of further development of the framework.

Several statements also contained proposals concerning the wordings of the framework's level descriptors relating to such areas as the descriptions of language, communication and interaction skills, references to entrepreneurship, the terminology used, and coherence of the level descriptors. These proposals will also be taken into account in the further preparation of the Government Decree.

DETAILED JUSTIFICATIONS

1 Justifications for the legislative proposals

1 §. Scope of application. According to subsection 1, the proposed Act would apply to the qualifications and syllabi laid down in legislation of both the Ministry of Education and Culture and other administrative sectors.

The qualifications and syllabi according to the statutes listed in the section are the basic education syllabus as referred to in the Basic Education Act; the general upper secondary school syllabus and the matriculation examination as referred to in the General Upper Secondary Schools Act; the vocational upper secondary qualifications as referred to in the Vocational Education and Training Act and the Vocational Adult Education Act; the further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications according to the Vocational Adult Education Act; the bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees as referred to in the Act on Universities of Applied Sciences; the bachelor’s and master’s degrees as well as the scientific, artistic and professional postgraduate degrees as referred to in the Universities Act; the Bachelor of Military Sciences, Master of Military Sciences and Doctor of Military Sciences degrees and the General Staff Officer’s Degree as referred to in the National Defence University Act; the Basic Examination in Prison Services as referred to in the Act on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services; the Bachelor of Police Services and the Master of Police Services degrees as referred to in Government Decree on the Police University College; and the vocational qualifications for fire and rescue services and emergency response centre operations as referred to in the Act on the Emergency Services College.
According to subsection 2 of this section, the Act would also apply to modules comparable with qualifications or other extensive competence modules, the learning outcomes of which have been laid down in or by virtue of an act, and which have been specified as eligibility or qualifications requirements for working in a profession or position, or which are otherwise related to development of competence and professional skills. The proposed Act would apply to study modules specified as qualifications requirements for so-called regulated professions. The Act would also apply to the established and well-known competence modules which are used for supplementing, updating or broadening a previously completed qualification or other competence, or which prepare for education leading to a qualification or for working life. Such competence modules include specialist training in medicine and dentistry.

2 §. Division into reference levels. It is proposed that the section provide that the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules be based on the European Qualifications Framework, such that the Finnish qualifications framework would also comprise eight levels. The solution aims at transparent European comparability. Furthermore, it is proposed that the section provide that the qualifications and other competence modules specified in the Act be placed at the framework levels according to their learning outcomes. The framework would describe the requirements of Finnish qualifications and competence modules in terms of knowledge, skills and competence, however, without distinguishing between these different dimensions of learning. The level descriptors would take into account the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008/C 111/01) and its level descriptors.

According to subsection 2 of this section, further provisions on the placement of qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules referred to in section 2 at different reference levels would be issued by Government Decree.

3 §. Entry into force. The Act is intended to enter into force on 1 January 2017. Subsection 2 of this section sets out the customary provision on the right to undertake measures necessary for the implementation of this Act before the Act enters into force.

2 Further provisions and regulations

According to section 2(2) of the Government Bill, further provisions on placement of qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules referred to in section 1 at different reference levels would be issued by Government Decree. The Government Decree is intended to be issued immediately upon passage of the Bill according to this Proposal and it would enter into force at the same time as the proposed Act.

The descriptors of the reference level included in the Government Decree are intended to be based on the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework, but they would be further specified from a national perspective using the learning outcomes and vocational skills requirements of existing qualifications. The level descriptors would specify what a person completing a qualification should know, understand and be able to do upon completion of the learning process. The level descriptors are intended to be quite general in order to ensure that their linkage to EQF levels is clear and so that they would be applicable to qualifications at different levels of education and for different administrative sectors. As a rule, competence would increase when moving from a lower level to a higher level. In some dimensions of learning, the competence could, however, remain the same after a certain level.

In the first phase, the Government Decree is intended to provide for placement of qualifications and syllabi falling within the scope of the Act and also for placement of specialist training in medicine and dentistry at different reference levels of the framework. However, the aim is to extend the framework to cover also other learning by incorporating other extensive competence modules. At a later date, such extensive competence modules with learning outcomes laid down in an act or decree may be placed in the framework, if they
are an eligibility or qualification requirement for serving in a profession or position or are otherwise related to the development of competence and improvement of professional skills. The Ministry of Education and Culture plans to initiate further development work once the Act enters into force, taking into consideration development of the Finnish education system and co-operation with the European Union. In this development work, it will be possible to also revise the level descriptors of the framework. The development of the competence modules to be placed in the framework will be monitored continuously, and the placement of competence modules at a certain level in the framework can be reviewed as necessary.

In the Government Decree to be issued by virtue of section 2(2) of the Government Bill, the aim is to place qualifications and syllabi referred to in the Act according to their learning outcomes in such a way that although a qualification may include elements from several reference levels of the framework, it is placed at the most suitable level overall ("best fit principle"). As a general rule, qualifications and syllabi are to be placed within the framework so that the qualifications included in the same qualification type are placed at the same level within the national qualifications framework. Individual qualifications could for a specific reason be placed at a level that is higher or lower than the level of the relevant qualification type. Because the intention is to base the proposed framework on European Qualifications Framework levels, it is possible that there will be levels onto which qualifications, syllabi or other extensive competence modules cannot be placed at this stage. The intention is not to place qualifications and syllabi removed from the qualification structure into the framework.

The intention is to place university and university of applied sciences degrees within the framework according to the cycle approach established as part of the Bologna process, such that the first cycle includes bachelor’s degrees awarded by universities and universities of applied sciences, including bachelor’s degree in police services (level 6), the second cycle includes master’s degrees awarded by universities and universities of applied sciences, including master’s degree in police services (level 7), and the third cycle includes scientific, artistic and professional postgraduate qualifications (level 8).

Vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications would be placed at level 4 and specialist vocational qualifications at level 5. Under the statutes applicable to vocational education and training, the difference between competence demonstrated in upper secondary vocational qualifications and competence demonstrated in further vocational qualifications is that the latter is, as a rule, more demanding and advanced than the former. However, the differences in the competence are not significant enough to place the further vocational qualifications to a higher level than the upper secondary vocational qualifications in the proposed eight-level National Framework for Qualifications and other Competence Modules.

Of the vocational upper secondary qualifications currently included in the qualification structure for vocational education and training, the Vocational Upper Secondary Qualification in Air Traffic Control is placed at level 5, one level higher than the basic level of this qualification type. A prerequisite for taking the Vocational Upper Secondary Qualification in Air Traffic Control is an upper secondary qualification. Furthermore, due to international regulations the vocational skill requirements are more stringent than those in other vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications, and correspond to level 5 descriptors in accordance with the best fit principle. The vocational education and training qualification structure and qualifications are currently being developed. A steering group on working life appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture is overseeing and monitoring this development. The agreed changes to the vocational education and training qualification structure and qualification requirements should enter into force by no later than 1 January 2019. The steering group on working life has discussed the possibility of removing the Vocational Upper Secondary Qualification in Air Traffic Control from the purview of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In the future, it would be a qualification separate from the general qualification system under the Ministry of Education and Culture similarly as the qualification of an aircraft pilot. After this, all vocational upper secondary qualifications would be placed at a level according to the qualification type.
The current qualification structure contains a few specialist vocational qualifications whose vocational skills requirements are, according to evaluations produced in connection with previous government proposals, more demanding than those of other specialist vocational qualifications, and in keeping with the best fit principle, correspond to level 6 in the Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. These qualifications include the Specialist Qualification in Management and the Specialist Qualification for Construction Site Managers. The Ministry of Education and Culture together with the Finnish National Agency for Education will examine any specialist vocational qualifications whose vocational skills requirements differ from the basic level of the qualification type in connection with the drafting of the Government Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules.

The objective is that the framework and the level descriptors contained in it could, where applicable, guide the preparation of the Qualification Requirements for vocational qualifications in the future. When existing vocational qualifications are updated, they would be placed at the level indicated by the qualification type. This would also apply to new vocational qualifications.

The matriculation examination and the general upper secondary school syllabus would be placed at the same level as vocational upper secondary qualifications (level 4). Qualifications falling within other administrative sectors that correspond to vocational upper secondary qualifications or further vocational qualifications in terms of learning outcomes would also be placed at level 4, and those corresponding to specialist vocational qualifications would be placed at level 5. The basic education syllabus would be placed at level 2.

3 Entry into force

The Act is intended to enter into force on 1 January 2017.

In view of the above, the following bill is hereby submitted to the Parliament for approval
Act
on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules

In accordance with the decision of the Parliament, the following is enacted:

Section 1

Scope

This Act shall apply to the qualifications and basic education and general upper secondary education syllabi governed by the following acts and by decrees issued by virtue thereof:
1) Basic Education Act (628/1998);
2) General Upper Secondary Schools Act (629/1998);
3) Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998);
4) Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998);
5) Act on Universities of Applied Sciences (932/2014);
6) Universities Act (558/2009);
7) National Defence University Act (1121/2008);
8) Act on the Training Institute for Prison and Probation Services (1316/2006);
9) Act on Police University College (1164/2013);

This Act shall also apply to extensive competence modules comparable with qualifications or other extensive competence modules, the learning outcomes of which are laid down in or by virtue of an act, and which have been specified as professional eligibility or qualifications requirements for working in a profession or position, or which are otherwise related to development of competence and professional skills.

Section 2

Division into reference levels

The qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules referred to herein shall be divided into eight reference levels on the basis of their learning outcomes (National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules).
Further provisions on placement of qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules referred to in section 1 at different reference levels shall be given by Government Decree.

Section 3

Entry into force

This Act enters into force on x Month 20xx.

Helsinki, 20 October 2016

Minister for Foreign Affairs as deputy for the Prime Minister

Timo Soini

Minister of Education and Culture
Sanni Grahn-Laaksonen
Government Decree
on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules

By decision of the Government, the following is decreed by virtue of section 2 of the Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (x/x):

Section 1

The reference levels of the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules referred to in the Act on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (x/x) shall be described and the qualifications and syllabi referred to in the Act shall be placed at the different levels of the framework in accordance with the Annexe to this Decree.

Section 2

This Decree enters into force on x Month 20xx.

Helsinki, 20xx
Reference levels of the National Qualifications Framework and placement of qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules at different levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National reference level/European Qualifications Framework level</th>
<th>Qualifications, syllabi and other competence modules</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a good command of the general knowledge and basic skills required for study and for carrying out simple tasks in a structured context under direct supervision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility for his/her learning under supervision. Communicates verbally and responds to simple written communication in his/her mother tongue.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has a good command of diverse general knowledge in his/her field and the basic cognitive and practical skills that are required for making use of such knowledge when carrying out tasks and solving problems. Follows rules and uses diverse equipment and tools in a supervised operating environment demanding autonomy.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility and shows initiative.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility for his/her learning. Has the ability for lifelong learning. Communicates in a diverse and interactive way in different situations and produces texts in his/her mother tongue. Knows how to perform in a familiar learning and work community.</td>
<td>Basic education syllabus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Annex*
## Level 3

Has a good command of the knowledge base, principles, processes and general concepts in his/her field of work or study as well as certain cognitive and practical skills required for carrying out tasks and solving problems. Chooses and applies basic methods, tools, materials and information.

Adapts his/her actions to the circumstances and the operating environment when solving problems.

Takes responsibility for completion of his/her tasks and works safely within a working or learning community. Has the ability to perform his/her tasks in a responsible manner showing initiative. Understands the significance of working life and entrepreneurship to individuals and society. Evaluates his/her own competence and actions, skills and choices pertaining to work or study.

Has the ability for lifelong learning. Communicates diversely and interactively in various situations and produces varied texts in his/her mother tongue. Knows how to perform in a familiar learning and work community. Has the ability to communicate at an international level and interact in a second national language and at least one foreign language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Level 4</strong></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Has a good command of the knowledge base in his/her field in broad contexts, has certain cognitive and practical skills as well as the ability to express him/herself, and makes use of such knowledge and skills when solving problems specific to his/her field and carrying out tasks in the field. Works independently in operating environments that are usually predictable, but are subject to change. Takes responsibility for completion of his/her tasks and works in a safe and responsible manner within a work community. Works in an economical, productive and systematic manner, taking other actors into consideration. Is able to supervise routine tasks performed by others. Has the ability to work in an entrepreneurial manner in someone else’s service or as an independent entrepreneur. Evaluates his/her competence and scope of duties and improves actions relating to work or studies. Develops himself/herself and his/her work. Has the ability for lifelong learning. Communicates diversely and interactively in various situations and produces varied and also field-specific texts in his/her mother tongue. Acts according to the ethical principles when in interaction with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Can communicate at an international level and interact in a second national language and at least one foreign language. | General upper secondary school syllabus and matriculation examination  
Upper secondary vocational qualifications  
Further vocational qualifications  
Basic Examination in Prison Services  
Fire Fighter Qualification  
Emergency Response Centre Operator Qualification |
### Level 5

Has a good command of the comprehensive and/or specialised knowledge base in his/her field and cognitive as well as practical skills and the ability to express him/herself, and makes use of such knowledge and skills when solving abstract problems in a creative manner and performing tasks in the field. Understands the links between scopes of professional duties, his/her field and other fields, and how these connect with the big picture.

Functions as a specialist in his/her field and develops operations, products and/or services. Manages and supervises operating environments and operations that change unpredictably. Guides and supervises tasks performed by others. Is well-prepared for working as an independent entrepreneur in the field. Evaluates and develops his/her own as well as others’ performance and work.

Has ability for lifelong learning. Communicates in his/her mother tongue verbally and in writing both to audiences in the field and outside it. Acts according to the ethical principles in interaction with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Communicates and interacts at an international level in his/her field in a second national language and at least one foreign language.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Specialist vocational qualifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Officer Qualification (Fire and Rescue Services)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational Qualification in Air Traffic Control</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Level 6**

Has a good command of comprehensive and advanced knowledge in his/her field, involving a critical understanding and appraisal of theories, key concepts, methods and principles. Understands the extent and boundaries of professional functions and/or disciplines. Has advanced cognitive and practical skills which demonstrate mastery of the issues, the ability to apply knowledge and find creative solutions and applications, which are required in a specialised professional, scientific or artistic field to solve complex or unpredictable problems.

Manages complex professional activities or projects or works independently as an expert in the field as well as in international cooperation. Can make decisions in unpredictable operating environments. Takes responsibility for the development of other individuals and groups, as well as for evaluation and development of his/her own competence.

Has the ability for lifelong learning. Considers communal and ethical aspects when dealing with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Communicates to a good standard verbally and in writing in his/her mother tongue both to audiences in the field and outside it. Communicates and interacts independently at an international level in a second national language and at least one foreign language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bachelor’s degrees (universities of applied sciences)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degrees (universities)</td>
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</table>
**Level 7**

Understands comprehensive and highly specialised concepts, methods and knowledge corresponding to the specialised competence in his/her field, which are used as the basis for independent thinking and/or research. Understands issues that link his/her field with different fields and evaluates them and new knowledge critically. Solves demanding problems, also creatively, in research and/or innovation, which develop new knowledge and procedures and applies and combines knowledge from various fields.

Is capable of working independently in demanding expert duties in the field and in international co-operation. Manages and develops complex, unpredictable and new strategic approaches. Manages things and/or people. Evaluates the performance of individuals and groups.

Accumulates knowledge and practices in his/her field and/or takes responsibility for the development of others.

Has the ability for lifelong. Considers communal and ethical aspects when dealing with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks.

Communicates to a good standard verbally and in writing in his/her mother tongue both to audiences in the field and outside it. Can communicate and interact at an advanced level in international context in a second national language and at least one foreign language.

<p>| Master’s degrees (universities of applied sciences) |
| Master’s degrees (universities) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 8</th>
<th>Universities’ and National Defence University scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees (licentiate and doctor degrees)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Staff Officer’s Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialist Degree in Veterinary Medicine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Specialist training in medicine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Specialist training in dentistry</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Has a good command of extensive knowledge areas and contexts. Masters the most advanced and/or specialised and most profound knowledge, skills and/or theories, which are placed at the most advanced and/or specialised level of the field and at the interface between different fields. Applies knowledge in a creative way. Creates new knowledge in compliance with good scientific practice. Conducts independent and reliable scientific or artistic and professional research. Develops professional functions and/or his/her scientific or artistic field. Develops and applies new ideas, theories, approaches or processes in the most advanced contexts.

Works independently in the most demanding expert positions in the field and international co-operation. Manages things and/or people. Synthesises and prepares critical evaluations required to solve complex problems in research and/or innovation. Extends and redefines knowledge or professional practices.

Accumulates knowledge in his/her field and/or takes responsibility for the development of others.

Has the ability for lifelong learning. Communicates in his/her mother tongue to a good standard verbally and in writing with both the scientific community and the general public on issues pertaining to his/her own research area and the entire discipline and/or professional field. Considers communal and ethical aspects when dealing with different people in learning and working communities and other groups and networks. Can communicate and interact at an advanced level in international context in a second national language and at least one foreign language.