



# Finnish VET in a Nutshell

EDUCATION IN FINLAND



**PREPARATORY EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING FOR WORK  
AND INDIPENDENT LIVING**

is available for those  
who need support for  
complex needs due to  
illness or injury

**LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION**

Adult education centres  
Folk high schools  
Summer universities  
Centres of learning  
/Study centres  
Sports institutes

**BASIC EDUCATION  
IN THE ARTS**

Schools of architecture,  
circus,  
crafts,  
dance,  
media,  
music,  
literary art,  
theatre and visual arts

Vocational  
education  
and training  
provides skills  
for both life  
and work.

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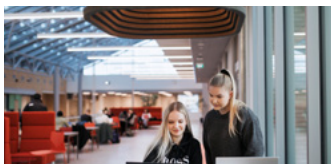
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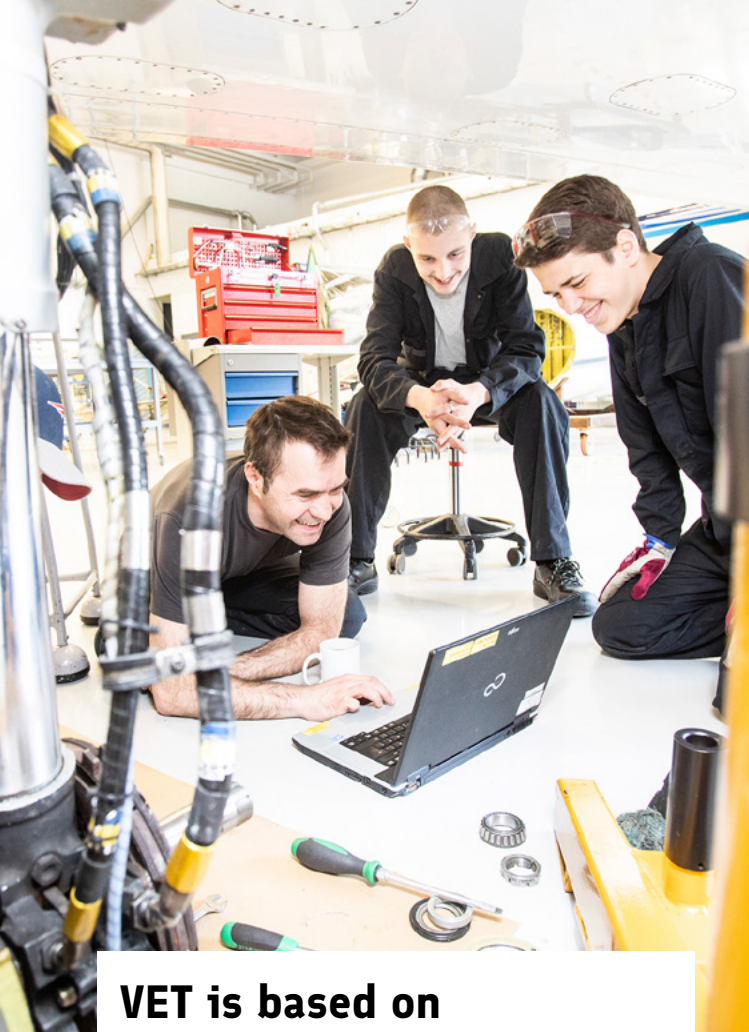
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## **VET is based on** **continuous learning**

The purpose of Finland's vocational education and training (VET) is to maintain people's vocational skills and competence, and to ensure that everyone completes at least an upper secondary qualification. VET supports lifelong learning and students' development as human beings and members of society. It provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary

for further studies and promotes employment. Moreover, VET develops commerce and industry and responds to their competence needs.

## **Students and the world of work as clients**

Finland's educational policy objective is to guarantee equal educational opportunities for each person. Everyone should complete at least an upper secondary qualification. VET also responds to the adult population's needs for additional and continuing education.

VET provides students with strong vocational competence. However, continuous changes in the world of work and the transformation of the content of work

require constantly updated competences and applied specialist skills. Therefore, the other key principle in VET is continuous competence development. In fact, more than half of VET students are aged between 20 and 60.

The Finnish vocational education and training is competence-based and client-oriented. Students' prior learning is identified and recognised. Students therefore only need to acquire the missing competences during their studies. The system allows students to flexibly use qualification units and sets that are smaller than a qualification unit to meet their competence needs. ●

**Finnish  
vocational  
education and  
training is  
competence-  
based and  
client-oriented.**



## **VET is** **an attractive choice**

Compulsory education continues until the young person obtains a vocational qualification, passes the matriculation examination or turns 18. Students who have completed lower secondary education choose their upper secondary pathway – general or VET – based on their interests, skills and success in previous studies. Both pathways are equal in value and provide access to further studies. The same options are also open to adults wanting to reskill or upskill.

Vocational education and training is not limited to the technical sector but covers all sectors in the world of work. The three biggest fields of VET are engineering, manufacturing and construction; business and administration, and health and welfare.

### **High regard for VET**

Nearly 50 per cent of the Finnish youth apply for vocational upper secondary studies immediately after completing lower secondary education. There are several reasons why VET is highly regarded in Finland.



Qualified and competent teachers, flexible qualifications, strong employment prospects and eligibility for further studies are some of the reasons making VET an attractive choice. The Finnish qualifications allow for employer-specific, regional and personal adaptations.

All competences can be acquired in education and training provided in the workplace directly linked to the qualification requirements. Developing and delivering vocational education and training together with business and industry guarantees the quality and appeal of the education offered.

### **Open pathways to further and higher education**

Vocational education and training has been developed as an integral part of the education system. It provides pathways to employment and to further studies either in the form of further vocational qualifications or in tertiary education.

For decades, Finland's educational policy has sought open pathways that can lead students from lower secondary education to further and tertiary education with no dead ends. Today, collaboration between secondary-level VET and tertiary education is increasingly commonplace.

### **Strong employment prospects**

The Finnish vocational education and training system provides the skills sought after by both employers and society at large. Entrepreneurship skills are also high on the agenda.

### **Publicly funded and free of charge**

Central and local government in Finland are responsible for financing VET from the national

budget. Education and training provided in the workplace are also publicly funded.

Students are not charged for completing initial vocational qualifications. Within the scope of compulsory education, students receive learning materials and meals free of charge and can apply for financial support towards the cost of long school journeys and accommodation. For further and specialist qualifications, students may be charged a reasonable fee. Full-time students can apply for student financial aid and loans.

### **International cooperation and skills competitions**

International cooperation and mobility are encouraged as part of the qualifications and through international mobility, which is quite popular in Finland. Of the young people studying for vocational qualifications, 10% to 13% spend some time abroad as part of their studies.

International mobility and cooperation enhance the competitiveness and quality of Finnish work, education and training. International mobility develops students' personal skills and outlook from a global perspective. Strong networks of international cooperation also help the Finnish VET to provide students with the competences required in an increasingly international labour market and in multicultural societies.

Skills competitions encourage both young people and adults to consider VET as a viable and attractive option. International competitions are also an important tool for developing and benchmarking VET. Finland participates in WorldSkills, EuroSkills and Abilympics, and organises an annual national skills competition known as Taitaja. ●



## **Competence and flexibility are key principles in VET**

For decades, the Finnish VET reforms have aimed to strengthen an approach based on learning outcomes and work-based learning. Students create their study paths individually, and education and training quickly responds to any changing competence needs in the world of work.

Vocational qualifications are developed together with the world of work to ensure that

they support a flexible and efficient transition into the labour market, and to allow for occupational development and career changes. In addition to the needs of working life, the development of VET and qualifications take into account the consolidation of lifelong learning skills, and individual needs and opportunities for completing qualifications flexibly.

A modular qualification structure is the key to maintaining study motivation and reducing dropout rates. Students can complete vocational qualification units without needing to complete the entire qualification. In Finland, qualification units are micro-credentials.

It is important for students to have their competence validated, irrespective of how and where they have acquired it. It is equally important that students can accumulate their demonstrated competence and assessed qualification units towards a full qualification. Students can then return later to continue their studies in order to complete their qualification or to update their skills.

### **Broad-based and flexible qualifications**

There are three types of qualifications: initial, further, and specialist vocational qualifications. All qualifications are composed of units. Initial vocational qualifications consist of vocational units and common units. Further and specialist qualifications only have vocational units. The need for common units is assessed when preparing the students' personal competence development plan. Students attending additional or continuing education who require key skills competences can complete common units from initial vocational qualifications.

Vocational units are either compulsory or optional. Students can complete full qualifica-

tions, units of qualifications or sets smaller than units, or combine parts of different qualifications based on their needs.

Competence requirements are the same in all learning environments, including in workplaces. Qualifications are the same for young people and adults.

Vocational qualifications are independent of the way in which the vocational skills have been acquired. As long as the individual's competences meet the national qualification requirements, they can be acquired in different learning environments, by various means and at different times. Students demonstrate their knowledge and skills in competence demonstrations at practical work.

In addition to vocational qualifications, students can complete training preparing them for VET. Preparatory education for accessing upper secondary education is aimed at those who need the skills or guidance for transitioning to vocational education and training or to general upper secondary education. For example, students can improve the language skills they will need for studying, their learning skills or their life management skills. Students can also raise their lower secondary education grades if this is necessary for admission to the programme they wish to complete. In addition, students may complete a combination of units of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training.

Preparatory education and training for work and independent living is available for those who need support for complex needs due to illness or injury. It provides students instruction and guidance according to their personal goals and capabilities.

VET also allows students to advance or supplement their vocational skills without having to aim at completing a full qualification or a unit of qualification. The aims and contents of such VET are tailored to the needs of workplaces and individuals.

### **Individual learning pathways**

Prospective students can apply to VET whenever suitable and start their studies flexibly throughout the year. A national joint application procedure takes place each spring for those who have completed lower secondary education and do not yet have an upper secondary qualification. The procedure aims to ensure that each young person has a student place after completing their lower secondary education.

A personal competence development plan is drawn up for each student by a teacher or guidance and career counsellors together with the student and, when applicable, an employer's representative.

The plan identifies and recognises the student's prior learning, and outlines what kind of competences the student needs and how they can be acquired in different learning environments. Students may have obtained relevant skills from employment, another school, international study, work placement, family and leisure activities or through the media. Since prior learning is recognised, students only need to acquire the missing competences.

The plan also includes information on any supportive measures the student may need. The support may involve teaching and studying arrangements due to learning difficulties, injury or illness, or studies that support learning skills. ●



## **Learning at work** **strengthens competence**

Guided and goal-oriented studying at the workplace takes place in versatile learning environments both at home and abroad and is based on practical work tasks. Educational institutions, workplaces, workshops, worksites of educational institutions and virtual learning environments reinforce each other. While the education provider is responsible for the education and training, the employer appoints the student's workplace instructor who must have the required competences for the task.

Education and training provided in the workplace are based on apprenticeship or a training agreement. Both can be flexibly combined. Workplace education and training can be used to acquire competences for all vocational qualifications and for advancing or supplementing vocational skills.

With apprenticeships, students acquire most of their competences at the workplace through

practical work tasks. The competences can be reinforced in other learning environments if needed. The student, the education provider and the employer agree on the apprenticeship arrangements together. The apprenticeship is based on a fixed-term contract between the student and the employer. The student is a full-time worker and receives pay.

With training agreements, students do not have a contract of employment and do not receive pay or other compensation. The education provider and the employer draw up the agreement together. The workplace needs to keep track of the student's progress, report to the education provider and take action if the student does not reach the required competences.

No minimum or maximum amounts have been set for competences acquired through practical work tasks. Instead, education and training provided in the workplace are designed as part of the student's personal competence development plan, which is based on competence needs. Workplace education and training can cover a full qualification, a qualification unit or a set smaller than a unit. The plan is attached to the agreement and the training is designed by several parties in cooperation. Students can find an employer by themselves or ask the education provider for help with finding a suitable workplace. ●

Education and training in the workplace can cover a full qualification, a qualification unit or a set smaller than a unit.





## **VET is built on trust and shared responsibility**

The Finnish system is based on trust and shared responsibility. The network of vocational education and training providers plays a key role in implementing VET and ensuring the quality of training and qualifications.

Parliament decides on the legislation and the annual budget allocations to VET.

The Government decides on the development of VET in the Government Programme. The Government also makes decisions on the structure of vocational qualifications.

The Ministry of Education and Culture draws up legislation related to VET and guides, regulates, finances and monitors the sector.

The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) draws up the national qualification requirements for vocational qualifications and preparatory education and training for VET. The

Agency also funds projects to develop education and training, works to increase the productivity of education, and supports the international dimension of the Finnish society.

The Ministry of Education and Culture grants authorisations to provide vocational education and training. The authorisation determines the educational task of the education provider and ensures that the provider meets the conditions for providing high-quality qualifications and education. The authorisation covers VET provided to both young people and adults. The authorisation entitles the organisation to provide education required for completing vocational qualifications, to organise competence demonstrations and to issue qualifications.

Within the limits of their authorisations, education providers independently decide on the allocation of the education they offer, and how and in which educational institutions and learning environments they provide the education. Education providers also decide how they are profiled based on different fields or client groups and what kind of staff they employ.

### **Funding based on outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness**

The VET funding system rewards education providers for their outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness of their activities. The focus of funding is on completed units and qualifications, on employment or placement in further studies after graduation, and on the feedback collected from students, employers and workplace instructors. The amount of time spent on education is not relevant from the perspective of the funding structure.

VET is jointly financed by central and local government. The funding is based on an appropriation in the national budget. The

funding is provided and paid directly to the VET providers, who decide on its use and allocation.

The funding comprises strategic funding, core funding, performance-based funding and effectiveness-based funding. The share of strategic funding is up to 4% of the appropriation for VET. For the remaining part of the appropriation, core funding accounts for 70%, performance-based funding accounts for 20% and effectiveness-based funding accounts for 10%.

## FUNDING SYSTEM FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### STRATEGY FUNDING

(A maximum of 4% of the total funding)

**IMPUTED FUNDING**  
(a minimum of 96% of the total funding)

# 70%

### CORE FUNDING

student-years

#### Creates

- preconditions for the future provision of education in all fields and for all students
- a foreseeable foundation for the provision of education and qualifications

# 20%

### PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING

- qualifications and modules

#### Guides and encourages to

- target education and qualifications in accordance with competence needs
- intensify study processes
- complete qualifications and modules in accordance with the set objectives

# 10%

### EFFECTIVENESS-BASED FUNDING

- access to employment
- further studies
- feedback

#### Encourages to

- redirect education to fields where labour force is needed
- ensure that education corresponds to the needs of the working life and is of high quality
- provide readiness for further studies

## **Quality assurance on many levels**

The quality of vocational qualifications and VET is ensured in many ways. Ultimately, the quality of education plays a crucial role in the success of those with vocational qualifications in finding work, how attractive VET is, and how much VET is valued in society and the world of work.

In VET, quality assurance consists of the quality management systems of education providers, national guidance and regulation, and external evaluation. The legislation regulating VET requires education providers to evaluate the qualifications, education and other activities they provide as well as their quality and effectiveness. Education providers must also regularly participate in external evaluation of their activities and quality management systems.

External evaluation involves the evaluation of learning outcomes, auditing of the education provider's activities, or evaluation of the education provider's quality management system. Finland's National Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for the external evaluation of education. Finland does not have an inspector system or a ranking system for education providers.

Close cooperation with business and industry at national, regional and education provider level is a significant part of the quality assurance of VET. Representatives from the world of work participate in the anticipation of learning and education needs, the development of vocational qualifications, and the preparation of plans for implementing education providers' competence assessments. They also take part in drawing up students' personal competence development plans, implementing workplace education and training, and assessing competence demonstrations. Moreover, feedback

from workplace instructors and employers is integrated into the VET funding system, providing information for developing quality.

Business and industry committees play a key role in the quality assurance of VET. They contribute to ensuring the quality of the implementation of competence demonstrations and competence assessment, and to developing the VET qualifications structure and qualification requirements. They also process requests for administrative reviews concerning the assessment of students' competence. ●



## **VET teachers and instructors are respected professionals**

Teachers in Finland are generally highly regarded and respected. This also applies to VET teachers and is reflected in the intake of tertiary-level institutions for occupational teacher training; less than half of the applicants are admitted.

VET teacher training requirements are fairly demanding. Firstly, vocational teachers must have a Master's or Bachelor's degree in their own vocational sector. If the degree does not

exist, the competence can be supplemented by the highest possible other qualification in the sector. Secondly, their studies include 60 ECTS credits of pedagogical teacher education. Thirdly, they need enough relevant work experience in their own field.

### **Close links with the world of work**

The work of VET teachers combines theory and practice. VET teachers convey to students how to ‘do the job’ in practice as well as the professional ethos.

VET teachers engage with both the VET institution and the world of work. Education and training in the workplace and competence demonstrations require teachers to have wide networks with local enterprises, businesses and public institutions. Teachers and the representatives of enterprises and institutions negotiate and agree on what students should learn during workplace education and training, and how competences should be assessed.

### **Workplace instructors play a key role**

During workplace education and training, workplace instructors are central to students’ progress. They mentor and guide students both in everyday work tasks and in understanding the principles, approaches and ethics of the specific vocational field.

Education providers are responsible for acquainting the workplace instructors with their tasks and training them. Those interested in instructing students at the workplace may acquire the required knowledge and skills for example by completing the optional qualification unit for workplace instructors, which is available as an optional unit for all initial vocational qualifications.

VET teacher  
training  
requirements  
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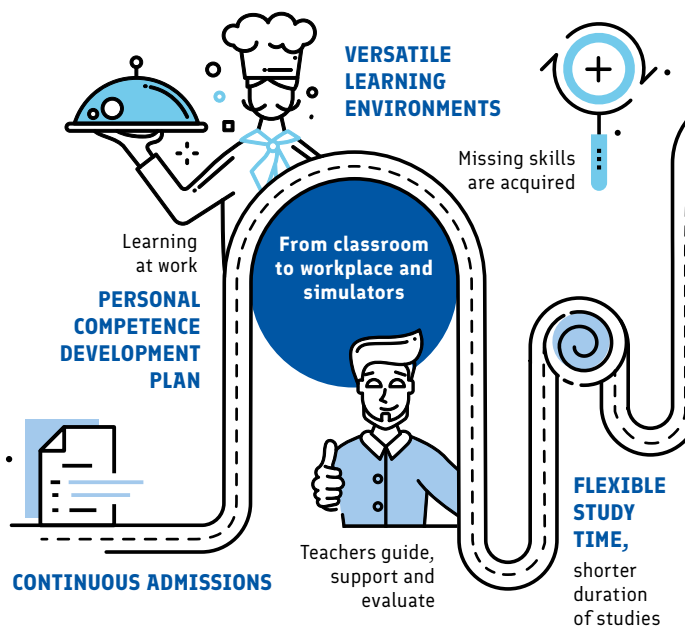
### **Continuing education to maintain up-to-date competence**

Teachers have access to continuing education. The responsibility for funding continuing education rests with the teachers' employers. Continuing education for teachers is also provided with central government funding, focusing on the priorities of the current education policy.

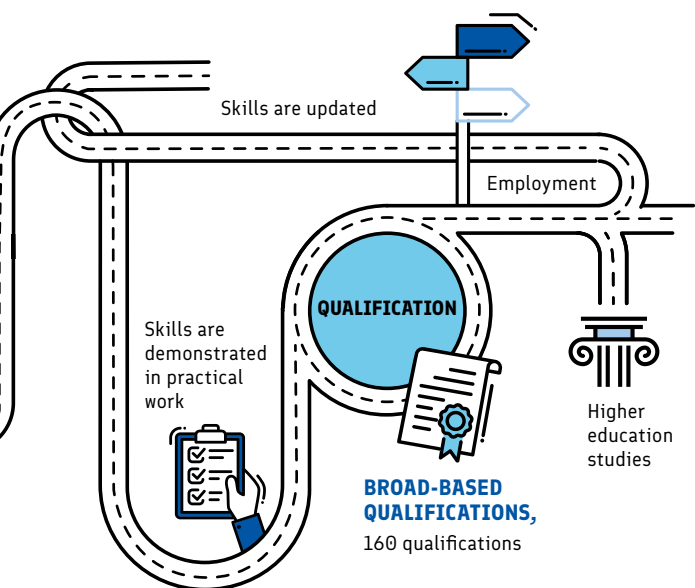
Teachers can also acquire professional competence and update it by working for businesses and other employers. During such on-the-job training, they are expected to forge closer links between the enterprise and the VET institution, and to develop workplace education and training opportunities for students together with the enterprise. ●

# Vocational education and training in Finland

Working life is undergoing changes. New occupations keep on emerging and old ones disappear. Technology advances. Revenue models are renewed. Students' needs are becoming more and more individualistic. Skills need to be updated throughout careers.







## **LEARN MORE ABOUT FINNISH VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING ONLINE**

[www.okm.fi](http://www.okm.fi) – Ministry of Education and Culture

[www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi) – Finnish National Agency for  
Education

[www.opintopolku.fi](http://www.opintopolku.fi) – Support for study planning  
and for screening application opportunities

[www.ohjaan.fi](http://www.ohjaan.fi) – Support for workplace  
instructors





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