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Making visible the levels of education and training outside the education system

Translation of selected parts of the final report of the working
group on identification of skills (Government publications
2025:4)

This English translation document covers selected parts of the final report of the working group on identification of skills. The final report was published in the Government publications series (2025:4) and is available at <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-849-9>.

The translation includes the description sheet, table of contents and following sections of the final report in English:

- Section 1 introduction and subsection 1.1: These sections describe the activities and objectives of the working group on identification of skills.
- Section 2: This section focuses on making visible the levels of education and training outside the education system. Based on a proposal presented by the working group on identification of skills, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture launched two projects in January 2024 aimed at examining how competence modules without a legal basis could be placed within the national qualifications framework or other alternative means in lieu of expanding the framework. The ultimate aim was to make visible the levels of competence modules and micro-credentials that are not part of the formal education system.
- Subsection 2.1: This subsection presents the main findings of a study carried out by the Research Foundation for Studies and Education Otus. The study examined non-regulated education and training outside the education system
- in Finland and ways of making their levels visible.
- Subsection 2.2: This subsection presents the main findings of a study carried out by Owl Group Oy, which examined the practices used in different countries to make visible education and training outside education systems and their skill levels. The study also assessed the suitability of the practices of different countries for the Finnish operating environment.
- Subsection 2.3: This subsection presents the key conclusions of the working group on identification of skills on making visible the levels of education and training outside the education system.
- Appendix 1. This appendix describes the terminology used in the final report of the working group on identification of skills.

Working Group on Identification of Skills Final report

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Abstract

On 24 June 2021, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group on identification of skills as part of the implementation of the Sustainable Growth Programme for Finland. The term of the working group ended on 31 December 2024. The work of the working group on identification of skills was part of the measures of the reform of continuous learning funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).

In the final report, the working group finalises its proposal for national principles for identifying skills. The report also presents other proposals for developing the identification of skills in accordance with the mandate of the working group. The proposals are based on experiments, pilots and further studies as well as national and international data.

This final report presents the working group's proposals for making education outside the education system visible, for developing skills badges and for national principles for identifying skills. In addition, the report addresses good practices for identifying skills as well as development of career guidance skills and a digital tool for identifying skills. The results and conclusions of the experiments carried out by small and medium-sized enterprises and immigrants outside the labour force are part of the report.

A key finding of the working group is that a more extensive identification of skills would be possible, but this requires cultural change, wide-ranging discussion on skills and consideration of identification of skills as a civic skill. Good practices and models from both Finland and abroad should be utilised.

Keywords skills, learning, identification, development projects

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1 Objectives and activities of the working group on identification of skills

On 24 June 2021, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group on identification of skills as part of the implementation of the Sustainable Growth Programme for Finland. The working group's term was 1 July 2021–31 December 2024.¹ The work of the working group on identification of skills was part of the measures of the reform of continuous learning funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).²

The work of the working group has supported the measures for promoting continuous learning included in both Prime Minister Sanna Marin's and Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government programmes, which are aimed at responding to the lifelong need to develop and renew the skills of individuals.

The working group on identification of skills worked in close cooperation with other RRF-funded projects of the reform of continuous learning. These include the development of the digital service package for continuous learning, the development of lifelong guidance and the development of the anticipation of labour and skills needs. In 2024, the digital service package for continuous learning (JOD) was named Osaamispolku. The work of the working group also had connections to several other ongoing development projects, such as the preparation of a continuous learning strategy for higher education institutions, the work of the working group on development of vocational qualifications (TUTKE 4), the development of upper secondary education and training and the reform of employment and business services.

Because of these various interfaces, the working group had to pay particular attention to the solutions of other preparatory processes concerning the identification of skills, micro-credentials, skills badges and the development of digital tools, as these solutions affected the work of the working group and the implementation of pilots and studies. Agreements on cooperation and the division of labour with other projects or working groups were prepared as needed.

Upon the end of its term, the working group presents in this final report its final proposals concerning national principles for identifying skills. In addition to them, the working group presents new development proposals concerning the identification of skills in accordance with the mandate of the working group. These proposals are based on experience gained in experiments, pilots and further studies and data obtained from other national and international development work.

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- 1 [Basic information on the project in the Government's Project Window service \(in Finnish\)](#)
 - 2 [Link to Finland's Recovery and Resilience Plan](#)

1.1 Objectives of the working group

The objective of the working group on identification of skills was to promote and guide the creation of tools and practices for the identification of skills acquired at workplaces and otherwise throughout life outside the formal education system. The work of the working group was aimed at impacting both individuals and society as a whole through e.g. improved employment, functioning of the labour market and well-being.

In accordance with its appointment decision, the working group was tasked with promoting and guiding the creation of tools and practices for the identification of skills in the following ways:

- by supporting the identification of skills acquired at workplaces and elsewhere outside the formal education system³ through the expansion of the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules or the development of skills badges and other skills descriptions
- by proposing national principles for identifying skills acquired in work and elsewhere outside the education system, particularly from the perspective of working life and employment
- by making proposals for pilots to be launched
- by supporting the implementation and dissemination of the national principles
- by supporting the development of tools developed under the digital service package for continuous learning (Osaamispolku).

³ The concepts of formal and non-formal education and informal learning are described in Appendix 1: Terminology of the final report of the working group on identification of skills

The working group's work took into account links to the identification and recognition of skills carried out in the context of the formal education system⁴, the development of skills classification, micro-credentials ⁵, accreditation of work experience, national and international development focusing on the above⁶ and the distinctive characteristics of the identification and recognition of the skills of immigrants.

4 The concepts of identification and recognition of skills are described in Appendix 1: Terminology of the final report of the working group on identification of skills.

5 The concept of micro-credentials is described in Appendix 1: Terminology of the final report of the working group on identification of skills.

6 The European Union's skills initiatives are described in Appendix 2.

2 Making visible the levels of education and training outside the education system

The working group on identification of skills sought ways to identify skills acquired through education and training that are not part of the education system. The working group also examined whether it would be possible to facilitate the identification of such skills if education and training provided outside the education system were to be more extensively placed within the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules, or if the levels of such education and training were to be made visible in other ways.

In its interim report (2022), the working group proposed commissioning a study on the placement of competence modules without a legal basis and micro-credentials in the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications. The working group also proposed expanding the framework for qualifications and other competence modules to allow for the placement of competence modules that have a legal basis, but whose learning outcomes are not laid down in legislation or in other statutes or regulations based on legislation.

On the basis of the working group's proposal, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture launched two projects aimed at exploring the possibilities of placing competence modules without a legal basis in the Finnish National Framework for Qualifications or other potential alternatives in lieu of the expansions of the framework for making visible the levels of education and training provided outside of the education system⁷ and micro-credentials.

7 The Finnish education system consists of early childhood education and care, pre-primary education, primary and lower secondary education (basic education), upper secondary education and training, higher education as well as preparatory education for an upper secondary qualification, preparatory education and training for work and independent living, liberal adult education and basic education in the arts. Other goal-oriented and systematic education and training are not part of the education system.

The projects launched collected data on:

- needs related to expanding the framework in Finland (item 1),
- ways used abroad to make visible the levels of education training that are not part of education systems (item 2).

In January 2024, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched a public procurement procedure, on the basis of which Research Foundation for Studies and Education Otus (item 1) and Owl Group Oy (item 2) were selected to carry out the projects.

2.1 Education and training outside the education system in Finland and making their levels visible

The study carried out by Research Foundation for Studies and Education Otus on education and training outside the education system and making their levels visible involved collecting data on the types of education and training outside the education system that should be taken into consideration in the potential expansion of the framework for qualifications. In particular, the study sought data on education and training that are important for the labour market, established and widely participated in. At the same time, the study examined discussions carried out in different sectors on making visible the levels of education and training outside the education system. The aim was also to collect data on the providers of the education and training being examined, the quality assurance of the education and training and the verification of their learning outcomes.

The two surveys carried out in the study provided data on 220 education and training modules. In addition to the surveys, the study included 22 interviews with representatives of various organisations providing education and training and employers. The collected data was analysed using qualitative content analysis and, to a lesser extent, quantitative analysis.

8 [Link to the study carried out by Otus \(in Finnish\)](#)
The study was published in Finnish in September 2024.

Based on the collected data, the examined education and training were grouped into three categories:

1. Formal education and training with defined and assessed learning outcomes and implementation methods.
2. Sector-specific education and training providing vocational skills organised in response to specific skills needs of the labour market. Some of these types of education and training have defined learning outcomes, content and implementation methods, while others are implemented without documented learning outcomes or assessment criteria.
3. Education and training that develop general working life skills, which are suitable for different sectors and can be short in duration. These include many types of education and training aimed at strengthening management and managerial skills.

Based on the collected data, the study concludes that discussions on education and training and their levels took place primarily within sectors. Based on these discussions, the general sentiment is that there is little need to place the examined education and training in the general framework for qualifications and other competence modules. Some of the respondents estimated, however, that increasing the comparability of the levels of the education and training might have the added effect of increasing their quality and the consistency thereof. Defining the levels of the education and training would increase the information available to individuals on which to base their choices of education and training and facilitate the work of those involved in the identification and recognition of skills. The respondents who were providers of education and training exhibited a willingness to develop the quality management of their education and training, the assessment of skills and the extent to which education and training are based on skills, along with a willingness to describe the implementation methods of their education and training in greater detail. On the other hand, the providers' willingness to open up their own activities or education and training to external evaluations was not as high.

In many respects, education and training outside the education system are time-dependent and unestablished, and it would not be worthwhile to implement their comparability in a way that incurs a large administrative burden. The summary of the study states that there is reason to consider alternatives to be used in parallel with the framework for qualifications and competence modules in order to improve the comparability of education and training outside the education system. However, instead of a new system, respondents called for the development of existing schemes, such as skills badges and their uses.

2.2 Approaches adopted in different countries to make visible education, training and skills outside education systems

The study by Owl Group Oy⁹ sought data on approaches adopted in different countries to make visible education, training and skills outside education systems. The aim of the study was to seek alternative ways of increasing the level and comparability of education and training outside the education system and facilitating the recognition of the skills acquired through them. To this end, the study examined the possibility of expanding the existing framework for qualifications and other potential methods. Approaches were sought in the Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, Canada, Sweden, Singapore and New Zealand. In the study, the various methods and practices used in these countries were examined in relation to the Finnish operating environment and the needs of Finnish society. This analysis served as the basis for proposals on how the levels of education and training outside the education system could be made visible, their skill levels could be defined and the quality of their implementation could be assured.

In addition to a literature review, data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews with experts from the aforementioned countries. In addition to these, a separate group interview was conducted with Finnish experts familiar with the national framework.

Based on the data collected, it is apparent that comparing the education systems of different countries and education and training outside the education systems is challenging. For example, interpretations of formal and non-formal education vary, as do views on whether the levels of qualifications and other education and training modules need to be compared. The classification of levels based on a framework is typical in countries that have their own national frameworks linked to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

In the seven countries included in the study, education and training outside the education systems were made visible in the following ways:

1. Utilising national frameworks for qualifications and competence modules. Education and training outside the education systems can be assessed through a defined process and compared to the levels of the framework at which formal education and training are classified.

9 [Link to the study carried out by Owl Group \(in Finnish\)](#)
The study was published in Finnish in September 2024.

2. Through validation carried out in accordance with defined processes, guidelines or classifications.
3. In some other way that provides information on the level of the skills acquired in the education and training. These models or methods are usually sector-specific and linked to the country's official education classifications.

In particular, items 1 and 3 are linked to the comparison of the levels of education and training or competence modules. Validation (item 2) is related to the identification and recognition of the skills of an individual, which are key means of making previously acquired skills visible. However, validation as a method is not suitable for comparing the levels of education and training.

In country-specific systems where informal education and training was compared to the levels of a national framework, there was some variation in the methods of implementation and processes. That being said, the following statements can be said to apply to such systems in general:

- Recognition of informal education and training is sought by the organisations providing the education and training. They also cover the costs of having the level of the education or training assessed and defined by an external party. The classification issued for the education or training is valid for a limited period of time, after which the level classification can be sought again.
- Responsibility for receiving and processing applications, assessing the levels of education and training and maintaining a register of them is assigned to a national organisation. This organisation is also responsible for marketing the system, related communication and providing guidance to applicants.
The assigned organisation is not necessarily a public authority, and it should finance its activities primarily with fees charged to the parties applying for recognition.
- Education authorities are not responsible for the quality of education training provided outside the formal education system. Classification does not change the status of education and training in the education or funding system.
- The central government has e.g. laid down the principles by which the levels of education and training are compared, authorised the organisation that carries out the comparisons in practice and, in some cases, financed the start-up phase of the service.
- Recognition is given to education and training that meet predetermined criteria. Criteria that education and training need to meet in order to be recognised can include having their content defined and their assessments carried out in a skills-based manner, having a sufficient duration, being established, having an impact on employment in the sector in question and having their

implementation guided through quality management methods.

Other conceptual models seem to be of only minor relevance in terms of education policy. These other models are related to international sector-specific frameworks (e.g. banking or process development), making visible volunteer activities (e.g. guides and scouts, Alppinuoret), or different youth and social frameworks. These other models are usually used in operating environments where career development or advancement opportunities are tied to the completion of specific education and training that are highly valued in the sector in question.

The study did not strongly highlight a need for more extensive comparison of the levels of education and training.

2.3 Conclusions of the working group on identification of skills

The results of the study carried out by Research Foundation for Studies and Education Otus did not highlight any education and training outside the education system or education and training without a legal basis for which the framework for qualification and other competence modules should currently be opened. This result is consistent with the report published by the working group for framework expansion in 2019.¹⁰ **Based on the study, the working group on identification of skills notes that there does not currently seem to be any particular pressure or need to expand the framework.**

Owal Group Oy's study involved collecting data about making the levels of non-formal education and training visible through country-specific surveys. The study showed that the practices of different countries are strongly linked not only to their different education systems, but also factors such as regulation cultures or sector-specific ways of acquiring and verifying skills in the labour market. Some countries had adopted operating models that make it possible to compare the levels of non-formal education and training with the national framework. The view of the working group on identification of skills has been that the expansion of the framework to education and training outside the formal education system and non-formal education and training must not reduce the flexibility of these types of education and training to respond to skills needs. Furthermore, the model to be adopted should be administratively light for both the parties hoping to add their education and training to the framework and the organisation maintaining the system. **The working group states that the international comparison did not reveal any model based on the expansion of the framework or other operating methods that would provide clear added value in return for the resources required for providers of education and training, those participating in said education and training or workplaces.**

10 Osaaminen ratkaisee: Viitekehyksen laajentamistyöryhmän loppuraportti ("Competence and skills matter. Final report of the working group for framework expansion"). [Publications by the Ministry of Education and Culture 2019:3](#).

Making the level of education and training visible is just one way to facilitate the identification of previously acquired skills. The international comparison showed that there are also countries that focus on ways of making skills visible instead of defining the levels of education and training. **The working group thus proposes that efforts to seek alternative ways of describing the levels of education and training and making the skills provided by education and training visible in lieu of the expansion of the framework should continue in Finland.** Suitable alternative ways could also include the wider utilisation of existing operating models, such as the skills badges mentioned in the studies.

The working group also urges organisations providing education and training to develop the quality assurance and focus on skills of their education and training and to tailor their education and training to meet the skills needs of the labour market. Alongside in-house development, organisations should also develop their education and training in cooperation with their sectors' employers, those participating in their education and training and other providers of education and training in their sectors. This kind of development work will improve the smoother identification of skills acquired through education and training in the labour market while also increasing understanding of education and training and their levels.

Appendix 1. Terminology of the final report of the working group on identification of skills

Identification and recognition of skills

Identification of skills is an individual's career planning skill that involves the individual perceiving, describing in words and making visible to themselves, their working community and surrounding society the skills that they have acquired in various ways. Identification of skills is particularly important in transition situations and career changes. It is a skill that can be developed throughout life.

Employers monitor the development and the changing skills needs of their sectors, assessing and deciding in various contexts, such as recruitment and changing work tasks, how a person's skills and education correspond to the skills required for a given work task. This is called the identification and recognition of skills.

However, in certain regulated professions¹¹, especially those in the health care and social services sector, a qualified person also needs to be granted the right to practice their profession by a competent authority.

In Finland, a person who has completed the qualifications required for a regulated profession or position abroad also needs a recognition decision or a decision on their right to practice their profession from a competent authority. This is called professional recognition of qualifications.

In the Finnish education system, the identification and recognition of skills, or prior learning, as they are often called in this context (so-called academic recognition), is regulated by education sector statutes. Skills acquired as part of, prior to or during completed studies are identified and recognised in different ways depending on the type of education and/or training. The Act on General Upper Secondary Education (714/2018) and Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017) assign responsibility for the identification and recognition of prior learning to the education provider. In the context of vocational qualifications, prior learning is recognised based on national qualification requirements and statutes on the recognition of skills.

According to higher education legislation (Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014) and Universities Act (558/2009)), decisions regarding the recognition of prior learning are made by the higher education institution. Finnish higher education institutions do not have harmonised principles for the recognition of prior learning. Instead, the content and structures of study programmes and the procedures for identifying and recognising prior learning may vary significantly even under the same qualification or degree as well as at the individual level.

11 [Link to the list of regulated professions maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education.](#)

Formal and non-formal education and informal learning

Formal education is education and training regulated by legislation or statutes and regulations that are based on legislation. Non-formal education is unregulated. Informal learning is learning that takes place at the workplace, during leisure time, in the context of hobbies or other everyday life, sometimes even unconsciously.

Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are modules shorter than traditional qualifications and degrees that can offer opportunities to acquire, update and improve knowledge and skills and thus respond flexibly to the changing skills needs of the labour market. There is no common European definition or standards for micro-credentials, which is a challenge that the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on micro-credentials issued in June 2022¹² was aimed at addressing in its part.

In the recommendation, micro-credential means the (digital) record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning, such as a course or training period, in either a formal or non-formal setting. The purpose of the Council Recommendation is to promote the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credentials in educational institutions, education and training organisations, companies and different sectors both nationally and across borders.

The Council Recommendation includes, among other things, European principles for the planning and issuance of micro-credentials.

The implementation of the Council Recommendation on micro-credentials is currently underway in the Member States. As of yet, Finland does not have comprehensive definitions of micro-credentials for use in education. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with higher education institutions has prepared a draft framework for the micro-credentials of higher education institutions on the basis of the Council Recommendation. The framework is currently being piloted with micro-credentials implemented through a procurement process carried out by the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (SECLE)¹³. In vocational education and training, qualification units are micro-credentials.

12 [Link to the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability 2022/C 243/02](#)

13 [Link to the page on SECLE's website on the piloting of micro-credentials \(in Finnish\)](#).