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Apprenticeships Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training (ADULT)

Apprenticeships for adults and older workers in Finland

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Foreword

New technologies, demographic shifts, climate change, globalization and more recently the crisis such as global health pandemic are causing major disruptions to the world of work. Against this backdrop, it becomes ever more important to build an agile workforce capable of navigating the fast-changing labour market through appropriate and timely skilling, reskilling and upskilling. The use of apprenticeship models or dual training systems can be an effective solution in the context of the future of work, as it bridges the gap between education and training system and the world of work.

Although apprenticeship is a centuries-old system which enable young persons to acquire skills related to specific occupations, questions are increasingly being raised about its relevance for skilling, reskilling and upskilling in the context of the future of work and lifelong learning.

The ILO has therefore launched a research project – *Apprenticeship Development for Universal Lifelong Learning and Training (ADULT)*– which aims to generate new ideas and policy options to modernise apprenticeship systems. The project is funded by the Government of Flanders. The research aims to explore how apprenticeship systems are being modernised and transformed to promote and enable lifelong learning and decent work for youth, adults, and older workers (both employed and unemployed) and provide recommendations for modernizing the apprenticeships in the country. The research also covers other forms of work-based learning options for students in VET institutes.

The "*Apprenticeships for adults and older workers in Finland*" country-level report has been produced by the ILO as part of the ADULT project. It provides an overview of the VET system and alignment with the general education system in Finland and highlights elements relating to the development of adult apprenticeships. The report also highlights the policies, guidelines and strategy undertaken by the country for promotion of adult apprenticeships so as to make them attractive for adults, employers and TVET institutes alike.

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Executive Summary

This country-level report on Finland discusses how apprenticeships are utilized as a parallel and optional route to obtain vocational qualifications as part of the Finnish state-led and publicly funded vocational education and training (VET) system. In Finland, apprenticeships have been used to provide further training for adults who already have work experience and may have previous qualifications. An apprenticeship is always based on an employment contract and the apprentice is entitled to a wage, in compliance with the applicable collective agreement, that often matches the wage of a skilled worker. The recent reform of the VET system has highlighted an approach which is learner-centred, competence-based and individualized. All VET, including apprenticeships, is not time-bound – the duration and pace of study are linked to the needs of the individual. The funding system has been recently renewed to emphasize outcomes and effectiveness, instead of study time. Although adult apprenticeships have not been high on the policy agenda, nor have they been highly incentivized, they act as a significant supplement to the existing VET system.

1 Overview of the VET system and apprenticeships

Overview of the VET system and apprenticeships

The Finnish education system locates vocational education and training (VET) at the upper secondary level. The objectives of VET and its qualifications are defined in law in the Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017. On this basis, VET in Finland aims to increase and maintain vocational competence, promote employment, develop working life and businesses and support lifelong learning and professional growth. In addition, VET aims to support the development of learners as "decent, well-rounded and educated human beings and members of society" who have the knowledge and skills needed to advance in their professional development and to pursue further education. These aims emphasize the importance of VET as a means of promoting economic growth, but also as a means of promoting social inclusion (Nilsson 2010).

In addition to the legal requirements, the Finnish VET system is based on national qualification criteria that are determined by the Finnish National Agency for Education. These criteria include the composition of the qualification, the scope of the studies in competence points and the competence requirements.[1] The national qualification criteria are prepared in collaboration with key stakeholders, including social partners and VET providers. In addition, the Finnish National Agency for Education appoints field- and in some cases qualification-specific working life committees, which are composed of representatives of employers' associations, trade unions and VET providers (for example, three persons from each category). These working life committees (39 in total) are involved in the development of qualifications, as well as the quality assurance of competence demonstrations and assessments.

The Finnish VET system is state-led and jointly financed by central and local government. The VET providers (private providers, municipalities, joint municipal authorities) are an important element of the publicly funded VET system. The Ministry of Education and Culture grants licenses to provide education and thereby ensures that education providers offer high-quality qualifications and education. Within the limits of this licensing process (including authorized qualifications, areas of operation and quantity of education on offer), VET providers can tailor their training to meet local and regional needs.

1.1 Basics of the VET system and vocational qualifications

The Finnish VET system was recently reformed to ensure that VET can better respond to current and future changes, particularly the changes needed in the world of work. The new law on VET, adopted in January 2018, further emphasized a competence-based approach, flexibility, and individual study pathways in the organization of VET. In the reform, adult and youth education were brought together, and the competence-based approach and qualification system developed in adult education since 1994 was adopted throughout the entire VET system (Ropponen et al. 2015). With this approach, the aim is to increase the individuality and flexibility of studies and to bring VET closer to working life (Korpi et al. 2018b, 1).

[1] For more information, see Act on the Vocational Education and Training 531/2017, Section 15.

The competence-based approach includes the competences defined in the national qualification criteria, which can be acquired in different ways and in any learning environment. The VET provider is responsible for planning the acquisition of vocational skills or competences for each student or apprentice who enters VET.

In practice, the flexibility and individualization of the study path is supported by a personal competence development plan (PCDP). A teacher or a guidance counsellor creates the PCDP document together with the student, and the PCDP records the details of identification of prior learning, recognition of prior learning, acquisition of competence, competence development, demonstration of competence and details of guidance and support measures. The PCDP aims to ensure that vocational studies focus on the acquisition of skills that a student does not have. Based on this plan, the duration of studies may be individual and often shortened especially for adults, depending on their previous experience and knowledge.

The qualification structure of the upper secondary VET system consists of three levels of qualifications.[2] These qualifications are the same for young people and adults. Initial vocational qualification should take between one to three years to complete, whereas further and special vocational qualifications often take one to one-and-a-half years to complete.

- **Initial vocational qualifications** (European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 4, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 3) demonstrate broad, basic vocational competence in various tasks in the selected field and more specialized skills and vocational competence as required for the world of work in at least one area in the context of a functional entity of working life (for example, the vocational qualification in business)

- **Further vocational qualifications** (EQF level 4, ISCED 3) demonstrate vocational competence decided according to the needs of the world of work in more depth than in an initial vocational qualification and with a focus on a narrower set of tasks (for example, the further vocational qualification in tourism services)

- **Specialist vocational qualifications** (EQF level 5, ISCED 4) demonstrate vocational competence decided according to the needs of the world of work in more depth than in a further vocational qualification and with the requirements of the relevant occupation or multi-discipline skills (for example, the specialist vocational qualification in product development)

[2]For more information, see the Act on Vocational Education and Training 531/2017, Section 5.

In the recent VET reform, the number of qualifications was reduced from 351 to 164, which highlighted the specialization within each qualification and the possibility of more optional studies. The qualifications include both vocational units and common units (see table 1).

- **Vocational units** are intended to promote specific knowledge, and they include compulsory as well as optional units. The optional units support specialization and enable individual study pathways, and they may, for example, promote various combinations of competence (with units from another vocational upper secondary qualifications or general upper secondary school) or prepare the student for higher education (higher education studies).
- **Common units** are intended to enhance more generic or transversal skills and abilities for further studies and lifelong learning. All initial vocational qualifications contain the following common units: communication and interaction competence; mathematical and science competence; and citizenship and working life competence. Further and specialist vocational qualifications comprise only vocational units, and the need for optional common units highlighting more generic skills is assessed and discussed when preparing the PCDP.

Regarding assessment, there are no final examinations. Instead, competence is assessed by means of practical work carrying out practical work tasks and assignments ('competence demonstration'). The competence is assessed by a working life representative and a teacher. In initial vocational qualifications, competence is assessed on a scale of 1 to 5 (from satisfactory to excellent) and in further and specialist vocational qualifications on a scale of pass or fail.

Table 1. Example of the composition of an initial vocational qualification: Vocational qualification in business (180 competence points)

Vocational units (145 competence points)		
Compulsory units (55 competence points)	Customer service	20
	Profitable operation	20
	Acting in a work community	15
Optional units I (55–90 competence points), e.g.	Customer relationship management	30
	Finance services	30
	Personnel support services	15
	Bookkeeping	30
	Library information and guidance services	30

Vocational units (145 competence points)		
Optional units II (0–35 competence points), e.g.	Workplace instructor training	5
	Working as a top expert	15
	A unit from another vocational upper secondary qualification, further qualification or specialist qualification	5–15
	Higher education studies	5–15
	Parts of common units, general upper secondary school studies or other studies supporting capacities for further studies	1–25
	A unit based on local competence requirements (the education provider names the unit and determines its scope and requirements to meet the needs of the local labour market and the needs of more than one workplace)	5–15

Common units (35 competence points)		
	Communication and interaction competence	At least 11
	Skills in mathematics and natural sciences	At least 6
	Citizenship and working life competence	At least 9
	Optional targeted learning outcomes of common units (selected by the student to support the learning outcomes of a common unit, may include prior learning)	9

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education (2018a). Qualification requirements: Vocational Qualification in Business.

1.2 VET within the education system

Overall, the image of VET is quite positive in Finland. A survey[3], carried out by European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) showed that 84 per cent of the Finnish respondents considered vocational education for those aged 16–18 to have a positive image, whereas the overall EU-28 percentage was 67 per cent (see also Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018b).

However, when VET is compared to general education in Finland, recent image surveys show that general education is more highly rated (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021a). In the same vein, the Cedefop opinion survey shows that VET has a positive image, but the majority of the respondents thought that general education has a better image than VET. According to the survey carried out in Finland (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021a), general education is considered to offer an excellent basis for higher education and strong general knowledge, whereas VET is considered to provide concrete skills and abilities to gain employment and requires students or apprentices to have a clear vision of the field or profession that they find attractive. Overall, based on the survey, studying in VET is considered more flexible, relaxed and less pressurized than being in general education, and it is considered a good option for practice-oriented students who prefer learning by doing.

While it is widely recognized that VET may offer a smooth entry into the labour market, general education may provide labour market benefits at a later stage, as general skills may enable workers to adapt better to various changes in the labour market (Forster et al. 2016; Hanushek et al. 2017). Nevertheless, comparing VET to general education does not provide a full picture of the significance of VET, which has its own role in the education system, and in addition to promoting initial education, it is also expected to promote

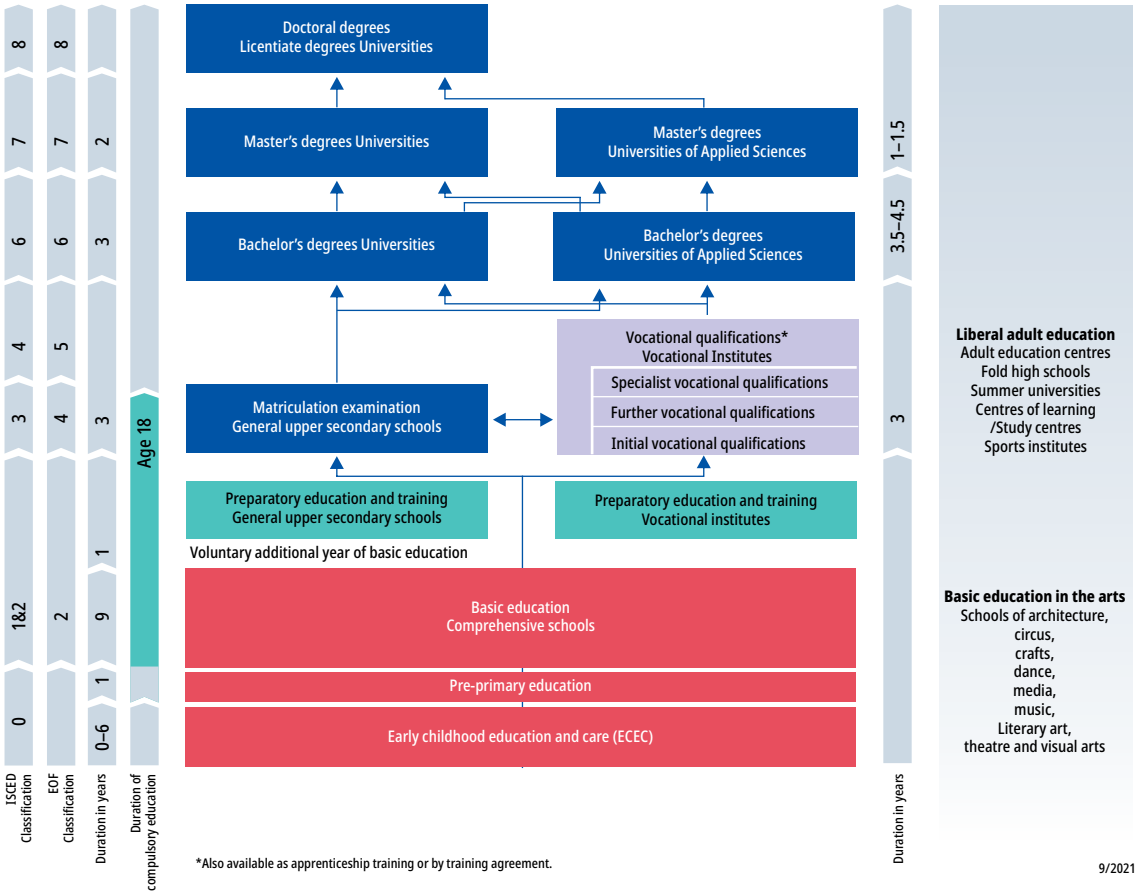
[3] https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/opinion-survey-on-vet5.

lifelong learning and professional growth. Currently, around 60 per cent of new VET students are 25 years or older (Statistics Finland 2020).

In the Finnish education system (figure 1), equality, equal opportunities and access have long been central ideas (Meriläinen 2011). The extension of compulsory education to the age of 18, or until a young person completes an upper secondary qualification, was introduced in August 2021. Upper secondary level qualifications may be gained either from a general education (matriculation examination, a national examination based on the syllabus of the Finnish upper secondary school) or a vocational qualification from upper secondary VET.

The reform to extend compulsory education was considered necessary to raise the level of education and competence and to reduce learning gaps, as around 16 per cent of compulsory school-leavers do not complete upper secondary level education (Finnish Government 2019, 172). The reform ensures that upper secondary education, which now also includes textbooks, travel to school, tools and work clothes etc., is free of charge for students participating in compulsory education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2020). Overall, the aim is to ensure that all have the skills and the minimum level of education needed in the changing world of work and society.

Figure 1. Education system in Finland



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (2021)

Although VET and general education lead to different qualifications, the intention to ensure equal opportunities and access has been visible in the promotion of individual needs and flexibility in recent decades, in part by reducing the boundaries between VET and general education (Meriläinen 2011). Ideally, students may choose and combine subjects in a flexible way across vocational and general education in their qualifications or obtain a double qualification, including both a vocational qualification and a matriculation examination from general education (Stenström and Virolainen 2016, 41).

Since 1998, all vocational qualifications have had general eligibility for further studies at research universities and at vocational/professional universities of applied sciences (UAS). Therefore, although double qualifications combining vocational and general education are available, general education and the matriculation examination are not necessarily needed to enter higher education (HE). The Government programme (2019, 180) has recently stated that there is a need to investigate how the actual opportunities to complete studies in both vocational education and general education are realized especially in sparsely populated areas. Based on data from Education Statistics Finland (2019), 1,594 students undertook both a vocational qualification and a matriculation examination in 2019. The number of these double qualifications seems to be decreasing since the number of double qualifications was over 2,000 per year during the period from 2010 to 2015 (Education Statistics Finland 2019). This may be due budget cuts affecting organizing education, but it is also linked to developing VET and general upper secondary education into opposite directions: VET has highlighted work-based learning, whereas reforms in general upper secondary education have emphasised its role as a preparation for higher education (Lietzén 2022). In the past years, the matriculation exams in general upper secondary education have been made more challenging by adding the number of obligatory exams, which may have eventually turned double qualifications too burdensome for students, especially with respect to the standard study time of three years (Lietzén 2022).

The Finnish HE system covers academic research universities and also vocational/professional UAS that were established in the 1990s to create a more vocational option to HE (Haltia et al. 2021; Stenström and Virolainen 2016). In practice, applications to HE are organized via a joint application system at the level of the state, and access to HE is dependent on competition between applicants of various educational backgrounds. Depending upon the degree programme, student selection is based on grades, an entrance exam or both.

The UAS use entrance examinations as admission criteria in the selection of students for bachelor's level education. When the pathways from vocational education to UAS were investigated, 47 per cent of the new students had a vocational qualification in 2017. However, of these students, only 30 per cent had only a vocational qualification without the matriculation examination from general education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019a, 25).

In addition, universities set their own admission requirements. Students may be admitted to universities based on their educational backgrounds and final school grades, final exam grades or grades in the matriculation examination, but often students who want to enrol in a research university must first pass a competitive entrance examination in their chosen discipline. There is often a limited number of places *(numerus clausus)* in each disciplinary degree programme, and only a small number of qualified applicants (often less than 10 per cent) gain admission (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2018). The number of students with a VET background wishing to enter research universities has been extremely limited (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019).

All in all, comparing the numbers between UAS and research universities shows that around 30 per cent of new students in UAS and around 3 per cent of new students in research universities have only a vocational qualification included in their previous educational background (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019a, 28). This could be partly explained by the division between academic general education and vocational education, which seems to be a predominant feature both at upper secondary level (general education and vocational education) and in higher education (research universities and UAS) (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015).

In practice, it seems that students without general education and a matriculation examination often need to take a longer study pathway to HE. For graduates from VET, the more vocationally oriented institutions, such as UAS, often seem to be the first step towards HE (Haltia et al. 2021). To gain access to a research university, a route from VET seems more likely when the applicant has first studied in an UAS and has the ability to utilize the entry routes designed for mature students and to benefit from open and flexible routes to HE. (Haltia et al. 2021). In addition, a recent survey speculated that among students with a vocation qualification, the reasons for not continuing to HE, especially to research universities, may be related to various factors, such as the admission system favouring general education, a lack of awareness of the criteria for general eligibility as well as inadequate and biased guidance toward employment or UAS (Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi - OSKU ry 2018, 68).

An evaluation study in VET conducted by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), found that guidance and counselling for UAS studies was available via multiple channels, including student counselling, coaching provided by education providers, enabling combined degree qualifications, as well as local cooperation between VET providers and UAS which allows students to open UAS study pathways (Hintsanen et al. 2016). With special regard to apprenticeships, the study found that there was little guidance relating to access to HE (Hintsanen et al. 2016, 61).

▶ 1.3 Apprenticeships

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the Finnish VET system has been largely school-based. Stenström and Virolainen (2018, 38) discussed how traditional guilds were abolished in 1868, and though their duties of supervising apprenticeships and training novices were given to societies for merchants and handicrafts, these societies failed to flourish. In addition, all citizens were given the freedom to conduct business in 1879, and industrialization changed traditional occupations and lowered their status. This led apprentices to become unskilled factory workers, who were paid wages like other employees. However, apprenticeships were mainly used by employers as a means to arrange an employment with underaged workers, and often apprentices focused on limited tasks and lacked future career opportunities (Kivinen & Peltomäki 1999, 76). In the first phase of industrialization, employers did not consider more theoretical training necessary, and 'dual training' did not take root in Finland.

In 1923, the first Apprenticeship Act was passed, but eventually failed as employers considered it bureaucratic and felt that the obligations for the employers were too constraining (Kivinen & Peltomäki, 1999, 77). At this time, employers also felt that the wages for apprentices were too high, and they began to claim compensation from the government for training apprentices in the workplace (Kivinen and Peltomäki, 1999, 77). In the 1940s and onwards, the vocational school system and state-owned vocational schools were established (Kivinen & Peltomäki, 1999, 78; Stenström and Virolainen, 2018, 38).

`Kivinen and Peltomäki (1999) summarized that during the twentieth century, the problems of apprenticeships were related to employment in general (workforce needs and financial resources), but also to constraining employer obligations (for example, high apprentice wages, difficulties in terminating apprenticeship contracts), lack of tradition and motivation for training at work, as well problems in aligning theoretical and practical instruction and demands.

Over the past 20 years, the emphasis on work-based learning has increased in the Finnish VET system. This focus is especially noticeable in the latest VET reform. Currently, apprenticeships are tightly integrated into the VET system and into the activities of VET providers as they form an alternative mode of providing VET and work-based learning.

Apprenticeships in Finland

According to the Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017), "apprenticeship training mainly comprises workplace education and training through practical job tasks". Moreover, apprenticeship training is defined as follows:

- It is based on a fixed-term employment contract (or if the apprentice is a public-service employment relationship, the written contract is known apprenticeship agreement) between an apprentice aged 15 years or older and an employer.
- it includes an average of at least 25 hours of working hours at work per week.

Although apprenticeships are mainly carried out in the workplace organized, the VET provider is the key actor responsible for registering the apprenticeship contract between the employer and the apprentice and for ensuring that the workplace has sufficient production and service operations, the necessary tools and equipment, as well as personnel who are qualified in terms of vocational skills, training and work experience (Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017), Section 72). VET providers are also active in offering voluntary training for workplace instructors; each apprentice is mentored by a workplace instructor who is sufficiently qualified. VET providers may also promote apprenticeships by paying a training incentive to the employer.

In Finland, apprenticeships used to follow the guideline that at least 80 per cent of the training takes place in the workplace and the remaining 20 per cent is the responsibility of a VET provider, often taking place in a vocational institution or a vocational adult education centre that brings together all learners in VET. Since the VET reform in 2018, however, the organization of apprenticeships is highly flexible and the training at work is ' "complemented as necessary with the acquisition of competence in other learning environments".

In practice, apprenticeships may be undertaken completely in the workplace, although up to four days per month of more theoretical studies are often included. The need for studies offered by the VET provider, for example, in a vocational institution or in online and virtual environments is the subject of discussion when drafting a PCDP. When vocational education is provided as part of an apprenticeship, the employer, or another workplace representative, participates in preparing and, if required, updating the PCDP. The duration of apprenticeship is flexible as it may cover an entire qualification, a qualification unit or smaller units of the studies based on the needs of the apprentice and the employer.

Apprenticeships in Finland are also open for entrepreneurs and self-employed persons (Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017), Section 70). Entrepreneurs may participate in apprenticeships if they and the VET provider are able to agree on the provisions of the training. An experienced and competent entrepreneur from another company may act as a mentor (or a 'workplace instructor') who voluntarily commits to supporting the entrepreneur participating in the apprenticeship. This kind of apprenticeship training for entrepreneurs may support entrepreneurial skills or competence development in areas related to the business, thereby enhancing professional competence and the development of business operations.

Source: Act on Vocational Education and Training (531/2017)

Apprenticeships are based on an employment contract, which is regulated by the Employment Contracts Act (55/2001) and its provisions relate to working hours, annual holidays, occupational safety and other protections for employees. The Employment Contracts Act does not, however, contain provisions relating to wages, as they are fixed within the context of collective agreements. As an employee, the apprentice is entitled to a wage based on a collective agreement in force in his/her sector. In Finland, apprentice wages are already relatively high at the beginning of the apprenticeship, often around 80 to 90 per cent of the minimum wage for a skilled worker based on the collective agreement. So far, Finland has been characterized by high level of union density and by the high coverage (93 per cent in 2014) of an extensive collective bargaining system and collective agreements (Jonker-Hoffrén 2019, 205). If there is no collective agreement, it is expected that the apprentice will be paid a reasonable remuneration for his/her work. The VET provider is responsible for supervising compliance with the relevant legislation, including remuneration provisions.

The apprentice wage makes apprenticeship training attractive also for adults wishing to obtain an official qualification which may be needed for permanent positions (such as in public sector organizations); to upskill and progress in their current role; or to reskill and change profession by engaging in practical tasks and workplace learning (Leino 2011; Rintala 2020). In comparison with other options, such as student grants or adult education allowances,[4] apprenticeships offer an attractive means of financing studies. In fact, from the perspective of adults, however, obtaining an adult education allowance (for a minimum of 2 months and a maximum of 18 months) may not be possible, as, to be accepted, the employee must have at least eight years work experience, an ongoing employment relationship and the right to take unpaid leave (see Employment Fund 2021).

▶ 1.4 Apprenticeships in comparison with other forms of VET

VET providers such as vocational institutions and vocational education centres are key players in the VET system and their strong role ensures that the institution- or school-based track is always offered to any student. VET providers are also increasingly being encouraged to promote work-based learning in authentic workplaces and currently, no minimum or maximum time has been set for work-based learning.

The work-based learning may be organized in two different kinds of agreements with the employers. Firstly, work-based learning may be offered as 'apprenticeship training' that includes a signed employment contract and a wage for the apprentice. Secondly, work-based learning may be offered as 'training based on a training agreement'. Prior to the VET reform in 2018, the latter type of training was offered in the form of 'on-the-job learning' periods, which covered a minimum of six months during the three-year study time in the initial vocational education programmes (Virolainen and Stenström 2015; Virtanen and Tynjälä, 2008). Training based on a training agreement (on-the-job learning) similarly promotes work-based learning in authentic work environments, but it differs from the former in that it does not include an employment contract, nor does it offer the status of an employee, and consequently no wage or other compensation for the learner. This distinction makes apprenticeships an attractive option for any student in VET. Table 2 summarizes the main characteristics of apprenticeship training and training based on a training agreement.

[4] Adult education allowances are granted by the Employment Fund which is administered jointly by employers' organizations and trade unions. The allowance is intended to enable full-time studies at the secondary or tertiary level, and an employee can only receive the allowance once. The adult education allowance includes a monthly allowance, which was €597.92 per month in 2020, and an earnings-related component (45 per cent or, after a threshold, 20 per cent of the differences between monthly earnings and the monthly allowance) (Kauhanen 2018). Currently, the amount for an adult education allowance is €950.71 for a person with a previous monthly gross wage of €2,000 or €1503.18 for a person with a wage of €3,000 (Employment Fund 2021).

Table 2. Characteristics of training based on a training agreement and apprenticeship training as part of VET

	Apprenticeship training	Training based on a training agreement
Status of the student	Employee	Student
Contract	Fixed-term employment contract	Training agreement
Planning period and duration	Entire qualification, qualification unit, smaller parts of the studies	Qualification unit, smaller parts of the studies
Amount of work-based learning per week	On average, a minimum of 25 working hours a week at the workplace	Individually planned number of hours covering 1 to 5 days a week
Remuneration	The employer pays a wage in compliance with the applicable collective agreement, which may vary based on the sector. If the employer does not pay a wage during the training offered by the vocational institution, the apprentice may receive social benefits for students (for example, a daily allowance of €15/day, a family allowance €17/day, and a travel and accommodation allowance.	The employer does not pay a wage or any other compensation. The student may be eligible for financial aid and receive social benefits for students.
Incentives for employer	The VET provider may pay the employer an incentive (VET providers have varying practices; it is estimated that most often around €100–200 per month per apprentice is paid in initial vocational qualifications.) As apprenticeships may form part of labour market policy, the employer may be entitled, in addition to an incentive, to a pay subsidy from public employment and business services (TE services the employment and economic development services) if s/he recruits an unemployed person via an apprenticeship. The longer a person has been unemployed, the higher the subsidy (during apprenticeship training, it is around 30–50% of payroll costs for a period not exceeding 12 months, and for the rest of apprenticeship training, it is a maximum of 30% of payroll costs; in 2021, the maximum pay subsidy was €1,800 per month in apprenticeship training).	No incentive is paid to the employer.

Source: Author's analysis

These modes of work-based learning are integrated into the VET system and into the activities of VET providers, which offers the possibility of changing from one mode of work-based learning to the other or to study in the vocational institution. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the flexibility of the system made it possible to convert apprenticeship agreements to institution- or school-based VET, which has allowed the learning process to continue despite the situation in workplaces (UNESCO and Omnia Education Partnerships 2021).

VET providers are also encouraged to promote study pathways that combine these different modes of work-based learning in a flexible way. For example, this may mean that training via a training agreement is used as a pre-apprenticeship that may prepare students to enter apprenticeship and to show for the employer that the apprentice is worth recruiting and worth the wage. This change from a training agreement to an apprenticeship is especially encouraged towards the end of a student's studies to

facilitate the transfer from education to work. In addition, it has been emphasized that the transfer from training via a training agreement to an apprenticeship should be utilized more in recruiting people in fields that face a shortage of skilled and qualified workers (the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020, 8).

Due to this recently added flexibility, it seems that the duration of apprenticeships has shortened. The average length of an apprenticeship was 10.9 months in 2018, whereas the average length was 7.9 months in 2019 and only 3.7 months during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Owal group and Globedu 2021). When comparing different levels of qualifications, initial vocational qualifications most often include short apprenticeships (between 1 to 3 months), whereas apprenticeships included in further and specialist vocational qualifications usually last longer (from 13 to 24 months) (the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020, 17). This reduction in the duration of apprenticeships is also visible in different age groups; for 15–19-year-olds, apprenticeships lasted 4.5 months in 2018 and 3.3 months in 2019, whereas for 35–39-year-olds, apprenticeships lasted 12.4 months in 2018 and 9.8 months in 2019 (Owal group and Globedu 2021).

Overall, the completion rates of apprenticeships vary widely from sector to sector, but it has been estimated that only around 50 per cent of apprentices complete their training within a period of five years (Haapakorpi and Virtanen 2015, 77). Prior to the VET reform in 2018 and during the period of 2012 and 2018, the share of apprentices dropping out during the trial period (often four months) stood at 1.0–1.7 per cent, whereas the proportion of apprentices dropping out later in the apprenticeship stood at 4.1–7.3 per cent (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). It may be that the actual completion of a qualification is always not so important for adults; their main goal is to be in employment.

▶ 1.5 Apprenticeships in numbers

In 2017, 126,884 new learners entered the VET system in Finland, which meant that the entire system had 326,952 learners overall (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). Table 3 shows the number of learners in terms of the level of qualification and the mode of learning.

Based on the data, 18.2 per cent of new and 16.1 per cent of all learners were engaged in apprenticeships. The data also show that in 2017, apprenticeships were mainly used in further and specialist vocational qualifications: the share of apprenticeships was around 30 per cent (28.1 % of new learners and 32.3 % of all learners) in further vocational qualifications and around 60 per cent (59.3 % and 62.3 %) in specialist vocational qualifications (see table 3).

Table 3. The level of qualifications and the percentage of new and overall learners engaged in VET, 2017

	Qualification levels	Number of VET learners not engaged in apprenticeships	Number of VET learners engaged in apprenticeships	Number of VET learners in total	Percentage of apprenticeships
Starts: New learners in VET in 2017	Initial vocational qualifications	79 295	8 750	88 045	9.9
	Further vocational qualifications	20 158	7 887	28 045	28.1
	Specialist vocational qualifications	4 394	6 400	10 794	59.3
	In total	**103 847**	**23 037**	**126 884**	**18.2**
All VET learners in 2017	Initial vocational qualifications	227 684	19 270	246 954	7.8
	Further vocational qualifications	36 952	17 603	54 555	32.3
	Specialist vocational qualifications	9 601	15 842	25 443	62.3
	In total	**274 237**	**52 715**	**326 952**	**16.1**

Source: Official Statistics of Finland (2018)

To highlight the importance of apprenticeships in further vocational education, table 4 shows significance of the educational background of students starting in VET in 2017. The data shows that overall, almost 60 per cent (56.2 %) of the VET learners did not have a post-primary or secondary-level qualification, whereas only a fifth of new apprentices (18.2 %) lacked a post-primary level qualification and almost half of apprentices already had a vocational upper secondary qualification or further or specialist vocational qualification. A bit over 20 per cent of apprentices (21.5 %) had also participated in tertiary education.

Table 4. The level of previous educational background of new apprentices and other new VET students, 2017

Educational background	Number of apprentices	Percentage of apprentices	Number of other VET learners	Percentage of other VET learners
No post-primary education or qualification unknown	4 185	18.2	53 877	56.2
General education/ matriculation examination	1 584	6.9	6 951	7.3
Vocational upper secondary qualification	8 298	36.1	21 180	22.1
Further or specialist vocational qualification	2 340	10.2	4 554	4.8
Post-secondary education qualification	1 656	7.2	2 643	2.8
Lower-level tertiary education degree or vocational qualification	3 111	13.5	4 491	4.7
Higher-degree level tertiary education degree or doctorate	1 845	8.0	2 169	2.3
In total	**23 019**		**95 865**	

Source: Education Statistics Finland (2018)

In 2019, after the reform, the statistics were changed to include the use of training agreements, apprenticeship agreements and their flexible combination. Table 5 shows that 124,615 new learners entered VET in 2019 and around 60 per cent (75, 479) had not by the time of data collection participated in work-based learning either via a training agreement or an apprenticeship.

Table 5. Participation in work-based learning (apprenticeship or training agreement), by qualification levels (starts in 2019)

	Qualification levels	Training agreement or apprenticeship training periods not included in the study pathway	Training agreement periods included in the study pathway	Apprenticeship training periods included in the study pathway	Both training agreement and apprenticeship training periods included in the study pathway	VET learners in total	Percentage of apprenticeships (apprenticeship training periods included in the study pathway)
Starts: New learners in VET in 2019	Initial vocational qualifications	58 731	18 704	8 471	743	81 649	11.28
	Further vocational qualifications	13 593	3 028	10 435	166	27 222	38.94
	Specialist vocational qualifications	3 155	185	7 396	8	10 744	68.91
	In total	**75 479**	**21 917**	**26 302**	**917**	**124 615**	**21.84**

Source: Students and qualifications, Statistics Finland (2020)

As suggested by the emphasis placed on further vocational education, apprenticeships are mainly destined for adults in Finland. Table 6 shows the participation of various age groups in apprenticeships. The data show that almost 90 per cent of new apprentices are over the age of 25. When investigating the different levels of qualifications further, the data shows that almost 80 per cent of new apprentices aiming towards initial vocational qualifications are older than 25 years of age, whereas apprentices in specialist vocational qualifications are almost entirely adults. When looking at the various age groups, the most represented age group is 35–39, closely followed by the age groups 30–34, 25–29 and 40–44.

Table 6. Participation in apprenticeships, by age groups and qualification levels (starts in 2019)

	Age groups	Number of apprentices in initial vocational qualifications	Number of apprentices in further vocational qualifications	Number of apprentices in specialist vocational qualifications	Starts in total	Percentage of the age group in apprenticeships
Starts: New apprentices in 2019	15–19	592	55	2	649	2.5
	20–24	1 429	1 094	170	2 693	10.2
	25–29	1 470	1 727	650	3 847	14.6
	30–34	1 237	1649	1 026	3 912	14.9
	35–39	993	1 690	1 363	4 046	15.4
	40–44	911	1 477	1 388	3 776	14.4
	45–49	743	1 087	1 148	2 978	11.3
	50–54	594	936	922	2 452	9.3
	55–59	420	610	613	1 643	6.2
	60–	82	110	114	306	1.2
	In total	**8 471**	**10 435**	**7 396**	**26 302**	
	Percentage of apprentices who are at least 25 years of age	**76.1**	**89.0**	**97.7**	**87.3**	

Source: Students and qualifications, Statistics Finland (2020)

Table 7 shows the participation in apprenticeships by sector and qualification levels. Eighty per cent of apprenticeships in Finland are found primarily in four different fields or economic sectors: business, administration and law; engineering, manufacturing and construction; services; and health and welfare. It should be noted that over a third (34.6 %) of apprenticeships are in business sector. In a business environment, apprenticeships are mainly found at the further vocational education level (for example, the specialist vocational qualification in business is highly popular, it offers skills required in demanding expert and managerial positions in the field of business, such as in human resources management, trade, estate agency services or international business depending on the choice of the competence area). In comparison, in health and welfare, apprenticeships are prevalent at the initial vocational qualification level (for example, the vocational qualification in social and health care, including various competence areas, such as care and rehabilitation for the elderly, children's and young people's education and care, mental health and substance abuse work).

Table 7. Participation in apprenticeships, by sector and qualification levels (starts in 2019)

	Fields	Initial vocational qualifications	Further vocational qualifications	Specialist vocational qualifications	In total	Percentage of all apprenticeships
Starts: New apprentices in 2019	Business, administration and law	1 237	4 711	3 149	9 097	34.6
	Engineering, manufacturing and construction	1 654	2 036	2 203	5 893	22.4
	Services	2 130	2 358	789	5 277	20.0
	Health and welfare	2 831	626	1 046	4 503	17.1
	Agriculture and forestry	332	315	119	766	2.9
	Arts and humanities	134	214	43	380	1,4
	Information and communication technologies	126	142	32	300	1,1
	Natural sciences	27	7	-	34	0.13
	Social sciences	-	26	-	26	0.10
	Education	-	-	15	15	0.06
	In total	**8 471**	**10 435**	**7 396**	**26 302**	

Source: Students and qualifications, Statistics Finland (2020)

When the four most prevalent sectors are further investigated (see table 8) from the perspective of adult apprenticeships (over 25-year-olds), only initial vocational qualifications in the field of engineering, manufacturing and construction are popular with younger apprentices, whereas the other sectors and especially further and specialist vocational qualifications are almost exclusively dominated by the adult apprentices.

Table 8. Participation in apprenticeships, by fields and qualification levels (starts in 2019)

	Fields	Number and percentage of over 25-year-olds in initial vocational qualifications (%)	Number and percentage of over 25-year-olds in further vocational qualifications (%)	Number and percentage of over 25-year-olds in specialist vocational qualifications (%)
Starts: New apprentices in 2019	Business, administration and law	876 (71.0)	4 389 (93.2)	3 106 (98.6)
	Engineering, manufacturing and construction	1 031 (62.3)	1 632 (80.0)	2 178 (98.9)
	Services	1 584 (74.4)	2 076 (88.0)	735 (93.2)
	Health and welfare	2 474 (87.4)	577 (92.2)	1 005 (96.0)

Source: Students and qualifications, Statistics Finland (2020)

Summary

- Around 90 per cent of apprentices are 25 years or older in Finland. This may be partly explained by the nature of apprenticeship, which is associated with high levels of remuneration (80–90 per cent of the wage of a skilled worker). High wages make apprenticeship an attractive study pathway for adults who often already have educational and work experience.
- The prevalence of apprenticeships is particularly noticeable in further vocational education. This may be explained by the conditions associated with apprenticeships (including remuneration) and the nature of further (EQF level 4 ISCED 3) and specialist (EQF level 5ISCED 4) vocational qualifications. These qualifications are for those who already have competences and work experience in the sector. Previous work experience may encourage employers to recruit apprentices and pay them a relatively high wage. The employer may also use the fixed-term employment contract as a means to engage employees and to reduce employee turnover. In addition, existing employees may be converted into apprentices to provide them with upskilling opportunities.
- Overall, it may be easier for employers and especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to provide training for further and specialist vocational qualifications as they are focused on a narrower set of skills than initial vocational qualifications.
- Apprenticeships especially provide further vocational education for adults in the business sector, but they are also used as a means of training in engineering, services and health and welfare sectors.

Source: author's own summary

2 Policies and strategies for promoting apprenticeships: Success factors and lessons learned

Policies and strategies for promoting apprenticeships: Success factors and lessons learned

Finland currently aims to strengthen adults' opportunities to upskill and reskill. The ongoing comprehensive reform of continuing learning, which will be finalized in March 2023, covers multiple policy areas and, for example, renews the provision and financing of education, highlights the identification of prior learning and aims at facilitating guidance services (Finnish Government 2019, 2022).

The need for the reform has been widely recognized. A recent OECD report (2020) on continuing learning in working life found that Finland lacks a clear and comprehensive vision for the continuing learning system, and it also has some shortcomings regarding learning and training provision and the labour market relevance of education. The OECD report concluded that Finland should support the participation of adults with low skills, promote upskilling opportunities for adults, as well as make training opportunities more labour market-relevant by highlighting skills anticipation by involving employers to develop training programmes and by adding incentives.

Apprenticeships could be an important means to support continuing learning in working life, however, it seems that realizing the full potential of adult apprenticeships is not without challenges. In Finland, the policy focus has been more on promoting apprenticeships for young people and integrating them into the labour market (Jauhola 2015; Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999; Mazenod 2016). Only recently has the government suggested that apprenticeships offer a means to secure a first job, but also "a channel for retraining and adult education" (Finnish Government, 2019, 148).

This section discusses four strategies and policy developments that are related to the wider VET system, but which are also highly relevant for apprenticeships. What limits this discussion from the perspective of adults is that youth and adult education are not officially separated in the VET system. In addition, it is often the case that apprenticeships are not explicitly mentioned in reports and studies on VET, as in the case of Finland, it has long been a marginal learning pathway inside the VET system.

2.1 Promoting competence-based and 'customer-oriented' approaches

In Finland, youth and adult education are integrated, and both these learner groups may study alongside each other at the same vocational institutions. In order to respond to the specific needs of these groups and individuals, the VET system and its recent reform in 2018 have focused on promoting a learner-centred approach that highlights not only competence-based flexibility but also 'customer-orientation' (Korpi et al. 2018b). The meanings and expectations attached to the 'customer-oriented' approach have not been explicitly communicated, but Karusaari (2020, 152–161) suggested that 'customer-orientation' can be linked to the renewal of VET providers' strategies and practices (for example, VET responding to the needs of learners and the labour market, availability of VET in different regions), cooperation with the world of work (for example, the organization of work-based learning, partnership contracts between VET providers and enterprises) as well as the use of personal competence development plans (such as, the joint planning of learning, guidance and support).

As previously discussed in this report, the duration of vocational studies is individual and it seems that the duration of apprenticeships has shortened (Owal group and Globedu 2021), although statistically, the number of apprenticeship periods as part of the individual study pathways has increased. This approach seems to be favoured now, and a working group dedicated to the development of apprenticeships suggested that a transfer to apprenticeship training during vocational studies should be encouraged further, for example, in order to improve the integration of learners in vulnerable groups into the labour market (the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020).

In sum, the aim has been to make apprenticeships more flexible, so that they can swiftly respond to not only the needs of learners but also of the labour market. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2021b, 11) has emphasized the role of further and specialist vocational qualifications in providing adults with opportunities to upskill and reskill. However, catering to the needs of both learners and employers has emphasized need for further flexibility, which is now also visible in the promotion of partial qualifications, vocational units, or even smaller parts of qualifications instead of whole qualifications. VET organized under the label 'apprenticeship' does not necessarily lead to a formal qualification nor does it provide a

standard length of training. It should, in addition, be noted that adult apprenticeships leading to further, and specialist vocational qualifications do not necessarily include common units emphasizing generic skills.

The overall aim in the qualification system has been to emerge specific and narrow qualifications into broader ones that should better ensure correspondence with the knowledge and competence required in the labour market (Korpi et al. 2018b, 1). Instead of promoting established qualifications, both the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021b, 13) and the National Audit Office (2021) have underlined the need for the education system to support the offer of smaller parts of the studies. This could help in building unique combinations of different skills or meet the often-specialized needs of companies better. Recently, stakeholders have suggested that especially the specialist vocational qualifications, that have traditionally been rather vocation-specific, should become broader and more flexible so that they would allow wider combinations of various parts of the qualifications and that they could include studies from other educational institutions and levels (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021b, 13). However, Norontaus (2016, 136) has found that reaching a qualification in apprenticeship was considered important and concrete but also a motivating factor both for employers and apprentices.

Although the competence-based approach has been long developed, it requires further development. The evaluation carried out by the FINEEC concluded that after almost 20 years of developing the competence-based approach, especially in adult education, there is still room for improvement (Korpi et al. 2018b, 4). Based on this evaluation, VET providers considered the individualization of vocational studies and the organization of work-based learning as their main strengths. This was especially true of apprenticeships and seemed to be attainable, since VET providers had a long tradition of adult education. The evaluation also highlighted the need to develop monitoring and quality management and assurance, as learning pathways are becoming more flexible and diverse, for example, due to the added emphasis on promoting work-based learning.

▶ 2.2 Increasing work-based learning and collaboration between education and work

In Finland, apprenticeships have long been a part of adult education, and they have been offered as a supplement to other VET and an alternative that highlights work-based learning (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999). However, bringing the whole VET system closer to working life in order to make VET more labour market-relevant has been an important aim in Finland. The increased emphasis on work-based learning and individual study pathways, as well as their successful implementation, has called for increased and enhanced cooperation between education and the world of work. Due to the 2018 reform , the collaboration between educational institutions and workplaces has been considerably developed recently (Korpi et al. 2018b, 5).

Developing work-based learning and collaboration in the VET system has not remained without challenges. Based on the views of VET providers and apprenticeship stakeholders, apprenticeships in general may have been partly underutilized by VET providers due to the high status of institutional, school-based education and prejudices towards work-based learning (Rintala and Nokelainen 2020b). However, the reform of VET has widely promoted the features that have been previously highlighted in adult apprenticeships,

including a work-based approach and flexibility to accommodate the needs of learners and workplaces (Rintala and Nokelainen 2020b).

Nevertheless, a VET providers' ability to offer further education via apprenticeships has been also limited, as the number of apprenticeships has been regulated by setting a quota for further and specialist vocational qualifications as defined in the state budget. Recently, the autonomy of VET providers was promoted by allowing them to collaborate more freely with employers (for example, by removing VET providers' training quotas for further education especially via apprenticeships), although the provider's license sets some limits for the quantity of education on offer.

For employers, apprenticeships may have been attractive because in the largely supply-led VET system, apprenticeships have acknowledged workplaces and employers' needs and interests, and they have even considered these as a starting point for training (Leino 2011; Viinisalo 2010). Some workplaces have long recognized the opportunities of apprenticeships in offering reskilling and upskilling opportunities (such as, due to changes in the work), whereas some workplaces have focused on recruiting the workforce from outside with the help of apprenticeships (Norontaus 2016, 135–136).

In addition, interviews of employers have shown that they are interested in training adults, who already have experiences from life, work and studying and who could engage simultaneously in work and study as they are considered able to carry out the expected work fast (Norontaus 2016, 135–136). Although flexible and demand-led apprenticeships could serve the needs of small enterprises, these businesses often remain outside the existing system since they lack the financial and human resources and opportunities to provide appropriate guidance (Kivinen and Peltomäki 1999, 84). In addition, the lack of a strong training culture and information related to training are considered persistent barriers to the development of apprenticeships in the workplace (Norontaus 2016; Suomalainen 2009).

Even though apprenticeships have mainly been considered part of adult education, pedagogical considerations and issues related to teaching and learning have also come to the fore. VET providers and teachers have found it difficult to align work-based learning and other learning in a meaningful way as teachers have a limited amount of time and resources to promote collaboration, interaction and communication between education and work (Haapakorpi 2017, 234). It is also widely acknowledged that some workplaces have only been able to offer limited learning opportunities and guidance (Haapakorpi 2017; Leino 2011). This lack of guidance and resources may also have downplayed the educational aspect of apprenticeships and promoted apprenticeships as a learning pathway for self-directed adult learners (Pylväs et al. 2017), but it has simultaneously limited the opportunities for young people to enter apprenticeships.

The lessons learned from the reform process of 2018 suggested that the cultural changes in organizing VET were difficult to implement in a short period of time, and the reform was additionally handicapped by the introduction of budget cuts in the VET system (National Audit Office 2021). In the audit of the reform process, it was found that some VET providers expected more steering and direction from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education during the implementation of the reform (National Audit Office 2021, 2).

Although the autonomy of VET providers has been considered important, their varying, and possibly even unequal, practices in relation to learners and the labour market have highlighted the need for harmonization and enhanced collaboration between education providers (Korpi et al. 2018b, 5). As the current aim is to involve more workplaces in training, it has been emphasized that VET providers are still expected to carry the main responsibility for delivering training. It has also been recognized that apprenticeships could benefit from stakeholders' generic support and guidance measures at the national level (Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020). In addition, the competence development of teachers (for example, via learning and collaboration activities among colleagues) and workplace instructors (for example, via the offer of training) has been considered important by both VET providers and teachers themselves (Korpi et al. 2018a, 70).

It seems that in adult education, the focus on work-based learning is not critically discussed. Instead, the ongoing reform related to continuing learning has aimed at emphasizing everyday learning at workplaces and the role of workplaces as learning environments (Finnish Government 2022, 36–40). However, it has been suggested that depending on the learning opportunities at work apprenticeships may generate a narrow and reduced form of skills development if the focus is on fast transition into productive work and routine tasks in a narrow job role (Rintala and Nokelainen 2020a, 120–122, see also Fuller and Unwin, 2003). In a wider perspective, it has been estimated that the emphasis on work-based learning may detract from the development of the generic skills needed for further studies or career progression (Economic Policy Council 2018, 125) or may widen the gap between vocational and academic programmes, especially in relation to content and pedagogical practices (Nylund et al. 2018, 103).

2.3 Reforming funding mechanisms

The funding mechanism and the steering system were renewed as part of the VET reform. In the previous funding system, the funding granted and paid directly to VET providers was distributed on the basis of the number of students and the unit prices determined by the government (the unit prices varying across different fields of study – on average, it was €10, 278.43 per student in 2017). However, the funding was significantly lower for the VET provider for apprenticeships and the unit price was reduced when more responsibility for training was transferred to the workplace (funding for the VET provider was 63.13 per cent of the average unit price in initial vocational qualifications) (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017). Therefore, the funding did not encourage VET providers to promote apprenticeships as it included a reduced amount of funding for the VET provider in comparison with funding allocated for school-based VET.

Instead of focusing on the overall number of students or apprentices, the reform shifted the focus towards performance- and effectiveness-based funding to encourage VET providers to target and redirect their training provisions to the sectors with labour shortages and to ensure that education corresponded to local and regional needs (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019b). To encourage VET providers to offer apprenticeships, the lower unit price for apprenticeships was removed.

Since 2022, core funding accounts for only 50 per cent of training costs and is based on the VET provider's targeted number of student years[5]. Overall, core funding aims to ensure that VET is available in all sectors and to all students. In addition, performance-based funding, on the basis of completed qualifications and the competence points of qualification units, covers a further 35 per cent of the overall costs. The remaining 15 per cent is effectiveness-based funding that focuses on access to employment and further studies. As apprenticeships often lead to employment, this form of funding may also support the active promotion of apprenticeships. In addition, the funding system aims to promote high-quality collaboration with employers, and 2.5 per cent of effectiveness-based funding is allocated on the basis of feedback received from students as well as from employers (both from workplace instructors and employer representatives).

The new funding system has been criticized, as it has been suggested that it may create inappropriate types of incentives for VET providers: there may be a risk that VET providers change student selection criteria to choose students who are able to progress quickly through their studies. Moreover, VET providers may be encouraged to lower quality requirements to maximize the number of completed qualifications and thus the speed at which students pass through the system (Korpi et al. 2018b; National Audit Office 2021; Ollikainen 2017). Overall, the funding system is currently considered overly complex as it is designed to respond to various objectives and incentives (National Audit Office 2021, 3).

When it comes to adult education and apprenticeships, a need to further reform the funding mechanisms has been recognized. Core funding favours initial vocational qualifications, and further and specialist vocational qualifications, especially those employed in adult apprenticeships, are accorded less weight[6] (). The aim has been to match funding to the costs of organizing education (and the costs of organizing continuing VET seem to be less than organizing initial VET), but this has raised some concerns about VET providers' willingness to promote further education and adult education and instead direct students or apprentices to obtain an initial vocational qualification (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021b, 12).

It has already been suggested that the funding for extended compulsory education and the funding for continuing VET emphasized in adult apprenticeships could be separated to promote both the successful implementation of these different aims (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021b, 13–14). The recent policy developments have promoted agile ways to update skills and added flexibility (Finnish Government 2022, 39). However, it has been noted that from the perspective of VET providers, the funding system

[5] A student year includes 365 days and may include the enrolment of multiple students, the number of student years is specified in the VET provider's license to provide education.
[6] Decree of the criteria for calculating funding for vocational education and training 1244/2020

is still focused on qualifications and qualification units, which hinders promoting smaller parts of the qualifications, targeted training modules and unique combinations of different skills that could better match the often-specialized needs of companies (Ministry of Education and Culture 2021b; National Audit Office 2021, 3).

▶ 2.4 Adding incentives

As one central aim of VET is to increase the amount of work-based learning, the availability of workplaces is a critical challenge (Korpi et al. 2018b). The participation of workplaces and the use of apprenticeships has been promoted by incentives. However, instead of promoting adult apprenticeships and continuing VET, incentives have mainly been used to support apprenticeships for young people who do not have a vocational qualification or an upper secondary-level qualification.

Training compensation is mainly paid to apprenticeships leading to initial vocational qualifications. Recently, the Government of Finland allocated further funding (€5 million per year) to a trial initiative related to the reform of apprenticeship training compensation in apprenticeships for young people. In comparison, further and specialist vocational qualifications, which make up a significant part of adult apprenticeships, do not always include training compensation. Although this is understandable when, for example, an existing employee is converted into an apprentice and participates in upskilling activities in his/her current workplace, it should be remembered that this may hinder the recruitment of apprentices. In practice, VET providers should review the extent of the training input expected from employers and the compensation which is then agreed between the VET provider and the employer. However, it seems employers often feel that the training compensation is given and unnegotiable (Norontaus 2016, 139–140). In addition, the varying practices of VET providers hinder nation-wide information measures and sources, which has raised concerns (the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020).

Norontaus (2016, 139) concluded that employers especially valued pay subsidies (for unemployed persons entering apprenticeships) when recruiting for their workforce. However, it also seemed that higher incentives do not necessarily persuade employers to participate in apprenticeships training, if it requires substantial economic and human resources, despite the positive attitudes towards apprenticeships in general. Moreover, it has been noted that training compensation and pay subsidies may increase the complexity of administrative procedures (the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020). Therefore, there is a need to shift the policy focus to simplifying and revising training compensation and reducing the administrative burden (Finnish Government 2019, p. 148).

So far, no further incentives have been introduced to promote apprenticeships, but some suggestions have been made to promote apprenticeships as initial VET. For example, the Confederation of Finnish Industries has suggested that VET providers' varying practices concerning training compensation should be harmonized and the amount of training compensation should be highest for the youngest apprentices: employers should receive €500 per month for training under 18-year-olds participating in extended compulsory education, and €150–200 a month when training under 30-year-olds without an upper secondary qualification (Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020).

In addition, the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Finland Chamber of Commerce have recently suggested that a new 'learning support' should be developed to bridge employers' expenses and profits; employers who train under 30-year-olds without an initial vocational qualification should receive compensation that gradually decreases as the latter's competences increase (see Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020).

3 Recommendations

Recommendations

All apprenticeships are related to similar types of success factors, such as partnerships and collaboration between education and the world of work and the availability of high-quality learning opportunities. In the Finnish context, adult apprenticeships are not a separate form of VET; instead, all apprenticeships are integrated into the wider VET system where they add to the flexibility of the system. Nevertheless, apprenticeships are an important part of VET for adults. Apprenticeships for adults have not been deliberately promoted, but they have organically found their supplementary role as part of the wider VET system and Finnish labour policy.

Although adult apprenticeships are not a separate form of VET, it should be noted that the difference between apprenticeships for adults and young people is not insignificant as apprenticeships are especially incentivized and promoted for young people, or more specifically, for those who do not have an initial vocational qualification or an upper secondary-level qualification. The differences in the characteristics of young people and adults may also influence the actions and proposals for the promotion of apprenticeships (Cedefop 2019).

The participation of adults in apprenticeships is conditioned by their employment status and the need for an adequate wage. In many other cases, adults' financial responsibilities may often hinder participation in formal education. An adequate wage during the apprenticeship is defined in collective agreements concluded by employers' organizations or an employer and by trade unions. The publicly funded VET system itself may also encourage the participation of adults as education is free of charge, and VET providers may only charge a small, very reasonable, fee for further and specialist vocational qualifications.

Adult apprenticeships benefit from flexibility. The competence-based approach employed in the Finnish VET system has long been developed in adult education. Instead of strictly defining study times and learning input, the focus is shifted to learning outcomes. Overall, emphasis is placed on the recognition of prior learning and tailoring targeted, individualized learning pathways. Especially for adults with previous learning and working experiences, this kind of approach may bring meaningful and relevant learning experiences (Cedefop 2019). In practice, this requires flexibility in the qualification system and considerable resources, such as investments in the competence development of the teaching staff or in added collaboration between education institutions and workplaces.

VET providers are important players in advancing adult apprenticeships. In Finland, VET is supported by the national administration, but VET providers have considerable autonomy in organizing and targeting their training. Increasing work-based learning and apprenticeships has required VET providers to intensify their collaboration with employers. In order to ensure that VET providers promote apprenticeships and adult education, these initiatives need to be supported by sufficient funding and appropriate funding mechanisms.

Adult apprenticeships may be an important means of offering practical and labour market-relevant reskilling and upskilling opportunities. As apprenticeships are used as part of human resource strategies in workplaces, apprentices that already have work experience, previous qualifications or are employed may personally benefit from apprenticeships, for example, by gaining a qualification. However, at least in the publicly funded VET system, this may also raise a question on how public funding and resources should be allocated.

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