

# Finland

## Full Review

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### Aim and purpose

- What is the stated aim and purpose of this stage of education, e.g. linked to entry to higher education, the world of work; a broad aim of personal and societal enrichment etc.?
- What is the context to the development of the aims and purposes for this stage of education and what vision do they present for the future of this stage of education?
- Are these aims and purposes influenced by an overarching national plan for education or do they reflect the influence of international organisations such as the OECD?

The [Finnish National Agency for Education](#) works with the Ministry of Education to develop educational aims, content and methods for upper secondary education. The specific aims and purposes vary depending on whether students are following a course of general or vocational upper secondary education.

### General upper secondary education

The purpose and objectives of general upper secondary education are set out in the General Upper Secondary Schools Act 629 / 1998 (Government of Finland, 1998a), according to which upper secondary education is intended to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for further study and working life. This phase of education also aims to produce balanced, rounded individuals and members of society who are able to benefit from lifelong learning and self-development in line

with their personal interests and personality.

The Government Decree on the General National Objectives of General Upper Secondary Education and the Distribution of Lesson Hours (Government of Finland, 1998b) elaborates further on the aim and purpose of general upper secondary education, stating that it should support balanced psychological, physical and social growth and promote respect for life, human rights, sustainable

development and the environment, and cultural diversity. It states also that education and all school activities should support equity and equality; guarantee to all young people the fundamental right to education regardless of their place of residence, language and financial standing; and produce students who take a democratic, responsible and active role as part of a local, national, European and global community.

## Vocational upper secondary education

In addition to providing students with the diverse knowledge, skills and competences required for the world of work, vocational education and training aims to prepare students for lifelong learning and self-development. The Vocational Education and Training Act 630 / 1998 (Government of Finland, 1998c) specifies that the aim of Finnish upper secondary vocational

education and training is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain vocational expertise, as well as the capabilities to find employment or to become self-employed. In accordance with the provisions of the Vocational Education and Training Act and Government Decision 213 / 1999, upper secondary vocational education and training also provides students

with extensive general vocational skills in a given field and more specialist skills and competences for the specific sector they have chosen. The aim is to enable young people to find employment, to be able to complete a range of tasks in their field and adapt to developments in the area, and so be capable of developing their vocational skills throughout their lives.

## Strategic Programme 2015-2025

Changes to the Vocational Education and Training Act introduced in October 2014 (under the Vocational Upper Secondary Education and Training Act 787 / 2014) aimed to strengthen the learning outcome approach of vocational qualification requirements and the modular structure of qualifications, with a view to supporting the development of flexible and individual learning paths and to promoting the validation of prior learning.

The aims and purposes of general and vocational upper secondary education are framed within the context of the Government's overarching *Strategic Programme* for the period 2015-2025 (Government of Finland, 2015) which has five main strands:

- employment and competitiveness
- knowledge / skills and education
- well-being and health
- bio-economy and clean solutions
- digitisation, experimentation and regulation.

The aims for education are to:

- modernise learning environments through the use of digital materials and new pedagogical approaches

- reduce the numbers of young people dropping out of education by reforming vocational upper secondary education
- improve the dialogue between educational institutions and the workplace
- improve the quality and effectiveness of research and innovation
- facilitate access to art and culture.

The overarching vision is for a country that encourages people to continuously learn something new, in which skills and education levels have risen, which promotes the renewal of Finnish society and equal opportunities, and which is at the vanguard of education, skills and modern learning techniques.

For upper secondary education, the future vision is that:

- the status of vocational education in society will have improved
- the funding system and structure of upper secondary education will have been revamped but the system will retain a range of flexible and permeable educational paths and continue to ensure eligibility for further studies
- interaction between educational institutions and the workplace will have been enhanced and any unnecessary overlaps eliminated
- barriers between vocational upper secondary education for young people and vocational education for adults will have been removed and vocational education will be provided, steered and funded as part of a coherent, integrated single 'package'
- learning in the workplace will have increased and apprenticeship training will have been reformed (by easing the administrative and financial burden on employees)
- movement within and between different levels of education will have been made as flexible as possible, within a system in which a faster transition to working life is encouraged
- the entrance examination process to higher education will have been reformed and cooperation between upper secondary level and higher education will have increased
- vocational upper secondary education will focus on a competence-based approach. It will be 'customer-oriented' – becoming even more individualised; designed to meet the needs of students and working life; offer more opportunities to learn in the workplace and to apply for training throughout the year; and respond to technological advances and new occupations which are emerging as old ones disappear.

In addition, the Government has introduced a 'Youth Guarantee' for young people in need of support / who are not in education, employment or training. The vision for the future of the Youth Guarantee is one of increased cooperation between the public, private and third sectors to help these young people, supported by improved social welfare and health care services, outreach youth work and mental health services. The Youth Guarantee, which was introduced in 2013, provides all young people under the age of 25, and recent graduates under the age of 30, with either a job, on-the-job-training / skills training, a place in education and training, or access to outreach youth work and workshop activities within three months of becoming unemployed. It was introduced in response to concerns regarding increased youth unemployment, and a significant minority of young people who are at risk of social exclusion through their limited education and who are neither working nor on education or training programmes. The Youth Guarantee youth workshop activities in particular aim to strengthen young people's life, learning

and social skills and to enable them to follow a tailor-made educational / training pathway or to find employment.

At the same time as seeking to reform the system of upper secondary vocational education and training (VET), the Government has significantly decreased the budget for upper secondary VET. It is intended that streamlining the funding systems for upper secondary VET, VET in further education and training / adult education, apprenticeship training, and labour policy education, at the same as streamlining the provision of upper secondary and adult VET and so reducing overlaps, will go some way towards accommodating the budget cuts. Vocational upper secondary reform is currently in the planning stage, with introduction of the changes intended to begin from 2018.

A key element of the reform is renewal of the qualification structures and, in future, there will be fewer, more wide-ranging vocational qualifications. Preparation for the reform began in April 2015, when the Education Ministry appointed a steering group on working life. This group examined changes in working life and

their relationship to the qualification structure for VET, and proposed a new structure composed of broader qualifications that provide individual students with better opportunities to target their competence development in a flexible way and meet the changing demands of working life. Changes to the qualification structure are expected to be introduced from 2019.

The *Strategic Programme 2015-2025* and aims and purposes for upper secondary education in Finland summarised above take account of the OECD's *Education Policy Outlook for Finland* (OECD, 2015) by, for example:

- reducing funding for and streamlining vocational education provision – in response to reducing upper secondary student numbers caused by demographic change
- introducing a more competence-based approach to upper secondary vocational education and training in particular
- introducing the Youth Guarantee.

In addition, in response to performance gaps between native students

and students from an immigrant background highlighted by OECD, the Government has introduced language training classes for young immigrants (see the subheading 'Inclusion' below) and a preparatory programme for immigrant students (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes').

## Structure of the education system

- How is upper secondary provision for students structured, e.g two-year / three-year / varied approach; around subjects or broad areas of learning; broad/comprehensive or specialised / narrow in focus?
- When does compulsory education end?
- What is the age profile of students in this stage of education?
- How well does the structure of the system reflect the stated aim as outlined above

Upper secondary education in Finland is provided within the structure summarised in the table below. It lasts for three years from age 16 to age 19 and is usually provided in general or vocational upper secondary schools.

Year	Age range	School Level
Preschool	Ages 1-6	Early childhood education and care
Compulsory pre-primary education	6-7	
Year 1	7-8	Single structure, basic education
Year 2	8-9	
Year 3	9-10	
Year 4	10-11	
Year 5	11-12	
Year 6	12-13	
Year 7	13-14	
Year 8	14-15	
Year 9	15-16	
Year 10	16-17	Single structure, basic education
Year 11	17-18	Single structure, basic education
Year 12	18-19	Single structure, basic education

Compulsory education runs from Year 1 through to Year 9, ages seven to 16, and is provided in a single-structure system known as basic education. (The final year of early childhood education and care / pre-primary education, for children aged six to seven, is also compulsory.) Although the usual age for full-time, three-year (post-compulsory) upper secondary education is 16-19, students can be older as studies can be extended in to a fourth year (dependent on student need). Some students may also complete upper secondary education in two years.

## Available pathways / programmes

- What pathways / programmes are available to students - academic / vocational / professional / flexible?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?
- At what stage are decisions about the student choice of pathway finalised and who has an input into these decisions?
- Where do these pathways lead - entry to higher education; accreditation for professional life; further training?
- What percentage of the overall cohort of students progress through each pathway?
- How many students progress to higher education / further education / workforce / apprenticeships?

After nine years of compulsory basic education, 16-year-old school-leavers in Finland can either opt for general upper secondary education (*lukio*), or initial vocational education and training (VET) / vocational upper secondary education (*ammattikoulutus*). They can apply for a general upper secondary or upper secondary VET programme anywhere in the country and usually apply via an electronic application system maintained by the

Finnish National Agency for Education.

Students receive educational guidance and counselling from their teachers throughout the basic education phase which, along with ongoing teacher assessment and feedback and self-assessment (see the subheading 'Assessment and reporting') supports them in making decisions on the pathway they wish to follow in upper secondary education / on completion

of the compulsory basic education phase. Educational guidance and counselling is given particular emphasis at key transition points including when students are approaching the end of compulsory basic education. On starting upper secondary education, students work with their teachers to develop an individual learning plan for their upper secondary studies.

## General upper secondary education

To be eligible for entry to most general upper secondary schools, students are expected to have achieved a minimum grade point average in the basic education certificate (the certificate of completion of compulsory education) of 7 (in a 4-10 grading scale, where 4 is failed, 5 – adequate, 6 – moderate, 7 – satisfactory, 8 – good, 9 – very good, and 10 shows excellent knowledge and skills). General upper secondary schools may also use entrance or aptitude tests in addition to select students.

Some general upper secondary schools have a specialist emphasis in addition to offering a mainstream / standard general upper secondary programme. These schools may specialise in music; visual arts; drama; art and media; languages; environmental sciences; natural sciences; mathematics; technology; technical studies; and

sports. A small number of upper secondary schools also offer upper secondary education in accordance with the Steiner pedagogy; instruction in a foreign language (e.g. the International School of Helsinki which provides instruction in English mainly to the children of foreigners living in the city); International Baccalaureate (IB) or European Baccalaureate programmes; or instruction leading to examinations equivalent to the upper secondary matriculation examination (see the subheading 'Assessment and reporting' for further information on the matriculation examination).

(For adult learners, six 'folk high schools' (*kansanopisto*) offer general upper secondary education and the matriculation examination.)

General upper secondary education can also be completed via distance

learning. Such learning complies with the National Core Curriculum (NCC) (see the subheading 'Specified curriculum within pathways'), and students enrol at an educational institution providing general upper secondary distance education and draw up their personal study plans together with the institution's principal, student counsellor and subject counsellors. The majority of studies are completed in the form of distance learning under the supervision of teachers, and using textbooks and other written materials; distance learning programmes on radio and TV; e-mail; web-based materials; and other online learning materials. Distance learning students may also participate in their school's contact and counselling classes, as required. The entire general upper secondary school syllabus can be accomplished virtually via distance learning.

## Upper secondary vocational education and training

Providers of upper secondary vocational education and training for young people include local authorities, municipal training consortia, foundations or registered associations, or state-owned companies. Providers are approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture to offer vocational education in particular fields in their upper secondary schools and educational institutions (and for a total student number). Providers themselves determine the specific vocational qualifications and study programmes they will offer within the relevant fields of education. They tend to operate in multi-field networks of vocational providers and institutions, with a view to ensuring a comprehensive and flexible range of

vocational education and training provision locally, and so enabling learners to individualise their qualifications and ensure that their studies match their learning needs. All upper secondary vocational qualifications provided by institutions can also be obtained through apprenticeship training (*oppisopimus*). Apprentices are employed and their practical training periods in the workplace are complemented by theoretical studies usually in vocational institutions / upper secondary schools, vocational adult education centres or other types of educational institution providing vocational education and training.

To be accepted on to courses of upper secondary vocational education and

training, students are usually required to have successfully completed basic (compulsory) education and to have achieved a good overall grade across all subjects and, in particular, in those subjects which are relevant to their intended field of study. This grade will normally be a minimum of 7 in the 4-10 grading scale described above. Individual upper secondary vocational education institutions may also use entrance and aptitude tests or interviews, or require some work experience, or they may determine that some students who have not achieved the required average grade score can be admitted as they appear to have the capabilities to complete the programme for which they have applied.

## Preparatory education for general upper secondary education / preparatory pre-vocational programmes for upper secondary vocational education

In addition, some students may follow a (usually) one-year preparatory or pre-vocational programme prior to entering general upper secondary education or upper secondary vocational education and training (VET).

In 2014, the, then, Finnish National Board of Education (now the Finnish National Agency for Education) introduced a *National Core Curriculum for Preparatory Education for General Upper Secondary Education* (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). This preparatory programme is intended for immigrants and foreign language speakers. The aim is to provide them with the linguistic and other capabilities required to be able

to transfer to general upper secondary education, and with the foundations for lifelong learning and personal development. In this way, it is intended that preparatory education will promote social equality and improve opportunities for immigrants and foreign-language speakers to complete general upper secondary education.

Pre-vocational programmes are intended to aid transition and provide continuity of learning for those students who may not yet be ready for upper secondary VET studies. They are provided in the same institutions as upper secondary vocational education and training and lead to a certificate of completion but not a qualification. The available courses include:

- VET Start - education preparing for VET. This 20–40 credit\* programme is aimed at those young people who don't have a clear idea of their future career choice, or who don't yet have the capacity / skills to apply for or cope with upper secondary vocational study. Each student studies in accordance with his or her individual study plan.
- Preparatory and rehabilitative instruction and guidance for disabled students. This 20-120 credit programme enables disabled students to develop their competences; acquire the skills required for vocational study, working life and independent living; and to clarify their future plans. The scope of the programme varies for each individual student and is defined in his / her individual education plan.
- Pre-vocational preparatory education for immigrants. This 20-40 credit programme is intended for immigrants and people of immigrant origin who already have basic proficiency in the language of instruction. It aims to provide such young people with the skills and capability to move on to programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications, by improving their proficiency in the language of instruction (Finnish or Swedish), and developing the skills required for vocational studies. A further objective is to increase their knowledge of the learning and work culture in Finland. At the same time, students also learn about different occupations and vocational studies and receive support to retain their own native language and cultural identity. Each student has an individual study plan.
- Home economics course. This 20-credit course provides students with the practical skills and knowledge required to manage their everyday lives / household. It prepares students for further studies and can be adapted to the needs of the individual student and / or to a specific VET field.

\*40 credits is equivalent to one year of full-time study.

Some students who have completed compulsory basic education may also receive a further year of basic education (in a tenth grade). This voluntary individual programme aims to better prepare them for their next steps by reinforcing their basic education, and so ensuring that they won't subsequently drop out of upper secondary general or vocational education. Courses can include the further study of compulsory or optional basic education subjects, vocational orientation studies, and periods of work experience.

## Statistics

In general, 90-95 per cent of those completing basic education continue their studies immediately – either in general upper secondary education, upper secondary VET, voluntary additional basic education, preparatory education or pre-vocational programmes.

In 2015, there were 104,060 students in general upper secondary education; 35,262 of these were new entrants. Almost all students who complete the upper secondary school syllabus take the national matriculation examination at the end of their course (aged around 19) and, in 2015, there were 30,617 matriculation graduates (a further 400 students received the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma) (Statistics Finland, 2016a). The matriculation examination determines whether students have acquired the knowledge

and skills required by the curriculum for the general upper secondary school, and whether they have reached an adequate level of maturity in line with the goals of the upper secondary school. Passing the examination entitles students to continue their studies in universities, universities of applied sciences (polytechnics), or vocational institutions. Every year, around six per cent of students fail the matriculation examination. See the subheading 'Assessment and reporting' for further information on the matriculation examination and entry requirements for higher education.

In the same year, there were 122,200 new students attending education leading to a vocational qualification. Of these 48,400 were new students following an upper secondary vocational

education and training course leading to an initial vocational qualification. (Of the remaining new entrants to VET, 36,300 were following a preparatory initial vocational education course leading to a skills examination, and 37,500 were in higher or adult VET.) In 2015, 37,800 students completed an upper secondary vocational education qualification and 17,400 passed examinations in preparatory initial vocational education (Statistics Finland, 2016b).

In 2015, 68 per cent of upper secondary school leavers did not advance to further studies immediately on completing the upper secondary phase and their matriculation examination - as highlighted in the table below. However, many do continue their studies one year or a couple of years after graduation.

### Direct transition to further studies after completion of the matriculation examination, %, 2005-2015

Year of graduation	Vocational upper secondary studies	Studies in university of applied science (polytechnic)	University studies	No qualification- or degree-oriented further studies
2005	4.3	18.2	19.5	57.9
2010	4.2	17.4	18.1	60.3
2015	4.7	10.8	16.4	68.1

Statistics Finland, 2016c.

That said, 75 per cent of those completing their matriculation examination in 2015 applied for tertiary education - 37 per cent applied for university education; almost 20 per cent applied for a place at a university of applied science (polytechnic); and almost 20 per cent applied for a place at both a university and a university of applied science (Statistics Finland, 2016d).

Although both students who have completed general upper secondary education (the matriculation examination) and those who have completed three-year upper secondary vocational qualifications are eligible for further study at university, the majority of university

entrants come from general upper secondary schools and have completed the matriculation examination. The natural next study track for holders of upper secondary vocational qualifications is the polytechnic / university of applied science and around a third of new entrants have completed upper secondary vocational qualifications. Five years on from starting their upper secondary programme, the employment rate for students who have completed apprenticeship training is approximately 90 per cent, which is significantly higher than for other types of VET qualifications. Over a ten-year monitoring period, eight per cent of

students completing a vocational qualification in apprenticeship training had experienced unemployment, compared with 23 per cent of students completing upper secondary VET.

Of those students completing vocational upper secondary education in 2015, one year after leaving education, 65 per cent of qualified vocational upper secondary leavers were in employment (almost 10 per cent of these were still studying in addition to working). Around 20 per cent were unemployed (Statistics Finland, 2017).

## Specified curriculum within pathways

- How is the curriculum within these pathways organised? Is it broad / comprehensive / specialised / narrow?
- Are there core subjects that are central to the curriculum?
- What degree of choice is afforded to students within each pathway?
- Is the curriculum presented in subject specifications / syllabi / learning outcomes?
- Is there differentiation of learning outcomes in terms of stage and / or ability?
- What degree of autonomy do teachers / schools have in shaping and implementing the curriculum?
- What is the place of wellbeing / social, personal and health education (SPHE) / citizenship education within the curriculum?
- What competences / key skills are promoted in the curriculum?
- To what extent are skills and competences central to the curriculum structure? How do they feature i.e. are they embedded in learning outcomes?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

## General upper secondary education

The Government – in the form of the Finnish National Agency for Education – determines the National Core Curriculum (NCC) for general upper secondary education. This includes the objectives and core content of the curriculum subjects; principles of pupil assessment; and principles of pupil welfare and educational guidance. A revised National Core Curriculum for local adaptation by schools was

developed in 2014/15 and began to be introduced in the 2016/17 school year for new upper secondary students. The NCC is revised / refreshed every ten years to ensure that it remains up-to-date and relevant. The 2014/15 revisions aimed particularly to help ensure that the curriculum reflects changes and advancements in society and the world of work; is future-oriented; ensures student motivation to learn

through being meaningful and relevant; and supports individual approaches to learning. A particular aim was to increase and embed the role of technology and to make more use of environments outside of school in learning.

Individual schools / upper secondary education providers draw up their own local curricula based on the NCC. Local curricula provide students with the

opportunity for individual choice of subjects / study pathways (within the parameters of the NCC, see below), and allow them to receive instruction from other providers, where necessary. As instruction in upper secondary education is organised in modular form, in drawing up their education programme / study plan, individual students can also combine studies from general education and vocational education and training.

Each student's study plan comprises compulsory, specialist and applied courses. Individual students may follow different syllabuses in the same subject and students' study plans become more focused / specialist as their upper secondary studies progress.

- In accordance with the 2014/15 National Core Curriculum, students in upper secondary education must study a minimum of 75 courses, divided in to compulsory, specialist and applied courses / subjects. In the three-year general upper secondary programme:
- Students must follow between 47-51 compulsory courses (depending on their choice between the basic and advanced syllabus in mathematics).
- They must include a minimum of 10 specialist courses in their study plan. These courses are optional advanced courses that relate primarily to compulsory subject courses. Schools must provide them for students and specialist courses can be developed locally or by the National Agency for Education (in such cases they are known as 'national' specialist courses).
- They can also study applied courses. These are entirely optional for students and individual general upper secondary schools decide on the inclusion (or otherwise) of applied courses in the curriculum. Applied courses can be school-specific i.e. local applied courses or they can be national applied courses (developed by the National Agency for Education). They can include methodological courses; vocational courses offered by the school / provider or another school / education provider; integrated courses containing elements of different subjects; or other subjects within the school's / provider's remit.

The following table outlines the distribution of lesson hours in general upper secondary education under the National Core Curriculum. The duration of a lesson must be at least 45 minutes and the average scope of one course is 38 lessons.

Subject	Compulsory courses	Number of national courses offered as specialist courses
Mother tongue and literature	6	3
Foreign language A	6	2
Foreign language B	5	2
Other languages		8 + 8
Mathematics		
Common study unit	1	
Basic	5	2
Advanced	9	3
Environmental and natural sciences		
Biology	2	3
Geography	1	3
Physics	1	6
Chemistry	1	4
Humanities and social sciences		
Philosophy	2	2
Psychology	1	4
History	3	3
Social studies	3	1
Religion / culture*, worldview and ethics	2	4
Health education	1	2
Arts and physical education	5	
Physical education	2	3
Music	1-2	2
Visual arts	1-2	2
Guidance counselling	2	
Thematic studies		3
<b>Total compulsory courses</b>	<b>47-51</b>	
<b>Specialist courses, minimum</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>Total number of courses, minimum</b>	<b>75</b>	

\*Usually the teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran religion but upper secondary schools may teach other religions providing they follow the guidelines set by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Religions such as Islam, Judaism and Catholicism are included.

All students study at least two foreign languages. ICT is not a separate subject but schools may offer optional (applied) courses in ICT and one of the aims of the NCC revision in 2014/15 was to embed the role of technology in upper secondary education.

Key competences as such do not appear to be included as a constituent part of the National Core Curriculum framework for general upper secondary education. This contrasts with compulsory basic education which includes seven transversal competences which contribute to a student's development as a human being and citizen:

- thinking and learning to learn
- cultural competence, interaction and expression
- taking care of oneself and others, managing daily activities, safety
- multi-literacy
- ICT competence
- competence for the world of work, entrepreneurship
- participation and influence, building a sustainable future.

It contrasts also with upper secondary vocational education which includes key lifelong learning skills as part of the national

vocational qualifications requirements (see below).

Individual working groups developed the new NCC for general upper secondary education – working on aspects including structure and objectives, concepts of learning, support for learning and the different subjects taught in general upper secondary education. Each group included education officials, researchers and teachers and the aim was for the revision of the curriculum to be as collaborative and interactive as possible. All education providers had the opportunity to follow the development and give their feedback during the different phases. Pupils and parents were also encouraged to be involved in the reform process.

## Upper secondary vocational education and training

The curriculum for upper secondary vocational education and training consists of national vocational qualification requirements, each education provider's locally approved curricula and students' personal study plans.

The national vocational qualification requirements are a legal requirement for

educational institutions. Their purpose is to reflect the objectives of national education policy for vocational education, to determine nationally consistent / uniform requirements for vocational competence, and to determine the capabilities for learning to learn and functioning as a citizen.

The national qualification

requirements for each vocational qualification are determined by the Finnish National Agency for Education. They specify the modules to be included in the qualification, any module specialisations, the composition of the qualification, the objectives, core content, vocational skills required, and the assessment targets and criteria for each qualification

module. There are also requirements for student assessment and feedback, guidance counselling, on-the-job learning, special education and training, educational arrangements for immigrants, and apprenticeship training. The content of local curricula is also defined in the national qualification requirements. The provisions are common to all vocational qualifications.

In drawing up the national qualification requirements, the Finnish National Agency for Education works with employers, employees, teachers and specific experts in National Education and Training Committees which are established in each occupational field. The draft requirements are also subject to broad consultation with union representatives, VET organisations and providers, and a wider range of employer organisations / employers. Once approved, they are nationally binding.

All 52 available vocational qualifications were reviewed and reformed in October / November 2014. The reforms, which came into effect on 1 August 2015, introduced the 180 competence point vocational qualification

model (see below); revised core subject content; increased individual student choice of qualifications; and emphasised the validation of prior learning and the role / contribution of workplace learning and the assessment of learning outcomes in the workplace. Following the reforms, prior learning acquired in training, working life or other learning environments must now be recognised as part of upper secondary vocational qualifications.

Each education provider's local curriculum must comply with the national qualification requirements and include information on:

- the methods of providing education
- how workplace training and practical experience will be provided
- opportunities for student choice
- how students will be enabled to achieve units of learning outcomes, working with other education providers and in the workplace
- the provision of guidance counselling and the preparation of a student's individual study plan

- the implementation of special needs education
- the general principles of student assessment
- the procedures for the validation and recognition of prior learning.

It must also state, by qualification, the units that will be provided and the order in which they will be completed, and how student learning outcomes will be assessed.

The 52 vocational qualifications available are each worth 180 competence points, where one year is equivalent to 60 competence points. Each comprises:

- vocational studies, 135 competence points
- core subjects, 35 competence points
- free-choice modules, 10 competence points.

At least 35 of these competence points must be acquired during a period of on-the-job learning which usually accounts for around six months of the three-year course. This must be practical training in a genuine working environment.

The core subjects are grouped into four entities:

- competences in communication and interaction
- competences in mathematics and natural sciences
- social and labour market competences
- social and cultural competences.

Following the reforms to upper secondary vocational qualifications introduced in August 2015, information and communication technology and occupational well-being are now compulsory core subjects.

In addition, students can now choose their free-choice subjects / modules from those on offer either at their own institution or in another general or vocational institution. They can also include relevant work experience as part of their free-choice modules. Free-choice modules can also be vocational or they can focus on core subjects. In this way, they may mean that those students who elect to study additional core subjects can complete general upper secondary school and / or the

matriculation examination at the same time as the vocational qualification.

The vocational qualifications available in upper secondary education can also include modules from other vocational qualifications – such as vocational qualifications usually available in adult education, specialist vocational qualifications, or degrees available in universities of applied education (polytechnics). The aim is to increase flexibility for students, enabling them to create their own individual learning paths and to increase their motivation to complete their studies. The reforms also aimed to enable education providers to more effectively meet the demands of regional and local businesses.

The national qualification requirements also determine key lifelong learning skills to be included in the vocational skills requirements for vocational modules and core subjects. These key lifelong learning skills are:

- learning and problem solving
- interaction and co-operation

- professional ethics
- health, safety and ability to function
- initiative and entrepreneurship
- sustainable development
- aesthetics
- communication and media skills
- mathematics and natural sciences
- technology and information technology
- active citizenship and different cultures.

Individual learning plans for students following an apprenticeship programme in post-compulsory upper secondary education are based on national vocational qualification requirements or on the requirements of the relevant competence-based qualification. The student's learning plan defines the qualification to be completed; the National Core Curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification to be observed during instruction; the scope of the qualification; assignments to be completed; the theoretical

instruction to be included in the training programme; the timing for the completion of studies during the training programme; the instructors responsible; and other issues relevant to the organisation of learning. The student's prior learning and work experience must be taken into account in / recognised as part of the learning plan, which is drawn up collaboratively by the student, the employer and the education providers and appended to an individual's apprenticeship contract when this is approved. Approximately 70–80 per cent of an apprentice's learning happens in the workplace. The student works and learns in the working environment under the guidance of an on-the-job instructor(s). Theoretical education is usually provided in a vocational institution or vocational adult education centre.

### Preparatory programme for general upper secondary education and training

The *National Core Curriculum for Preparatory Education for General Upper Secondary Education* (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014), which is intended for immigrants and foreign language speakers (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' above), comprises a minimum of 25 courses. It is intended that these courses are studied over one year (but, exceptionally, they may be studied over two). The programme aims to prepare students for general upper secondary education and includes the study of:

- the Finnish or Swedish language (both are official languages of instruction in Finland)
- another language as necessary (e.g. foreign languages, the second national language (Finnish or Swedish), or possibly the student's native language)
- subjects included in the general upper secondary education syllabus – a mathematics and the natural sciences subject group which includes mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and geography; and a civic education and cultural knowledge subject group which includes history and social studies.

All students also receive guidance counselling; an introduction to the skills and knowledge required to study in the general upper secondary school; and have an individual study plan which guides their learning. Each of the 25 courses takes 38 teaching hours (of 45 minutes) on average.

Subject and subject group	Compulsory courses
Mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish)	10
Other languages	3
Mathematics and natural sciences	2
Civic education and cultural knowledge	2
Guidance counselling	2
Optional studies	6
Total	25

There is no fixed order for completing the courses and optional studies can include subjects from the basic (compulsory) education syllabus or from the general upper secondary education syllabus, as specified in the student's individual study plan.

The National Core Curriculum for preparatory education is produced by the Finnish National Agency for Education and, as with the other curriculum frameworks, local providers then base their local curriculum on this framework, which defines the curriculum in terms of general objectives, specific learning objectives, core content, and principles of assessment.

## Inclusion

- How is inclusion addressed?
- How are the learning needs of all students catered for, including students who have completed a reduced curriculum at lower secondary school, students with challenging behaviour patterns who find it difficult to function in larger classes, international learners for whom the language of instruction is not their first language, students with special educational needs?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

Public authorities in Finland are obliged to guarantee an equal opportunity to everyone to participate in post-compulsory upper secondary education, according to their abilities and to any special needs they may have. They are also required to provide equally for the educational needs of the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking populations (see 'Language of instruction' below).

The Constitution of Finland stipulates that no one individual shall, without an acceptable reason, be treated differently from others on the grounds of gender, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or any other reason that concerns the individual. In education, the basic principle is that all students should be treated as individuals and enabled to maximise their potential.

This includes supporting the learning of gifted students.

The system for students with special educational needs is based on the principle of inclusion, with support provided within mainstream education but also in special classes and schools. The intention is that, where possible, provision for students with special needs should be mainstream provision or that, where it is provided in special classes or schools, the provision corresponds as far as possible to that in mainstream education and / or follows mainstream curricula, although such students may have specific timetables or syllabuses. Local municipalities are responsible for provision.

The matriculation examination taken on completion of upper secondary general

education (see the subheading 'Assessment and reporting') aims to be accessible to students with special educational needs. The Finnish Matriculation Examination Board issues guidelines for examination arrangements for students who, for example, are hard-of-hearing, deaf, dyslexic, handicapped, whose mother tongue is a language other than Finnish, Swedish or *Sami* (see below) or who fall ill.

In 2014, 12 per cent of students in upper secondary vocational education were in some form of special vocational education institution. A further one per cent were in other institutions providing vocational education and over 86 per cent were in mainstream provision - 82 per cent were fully integrated with mainstream students (Statistics Finland, 2016e).

In upper secondary education, all students have an individual learning plan. Where specific support is needed, this will be detailed in their individual learning plan. Individual learning plans in upper secondary vocational education will, for example, include details of the qualification / curriculum to be completed; the scope of the qualification; the individual curriculum drawn up for the student; and any support measures or special educational and welfare support services required by the student.

Young people who have completed compulsory basic education (aged 16)

may receive a further year of basic education – in a tenth grade. Whether or not this additional year is offered to students is left to the discretion of education providers. Instruction for an optional tenth grade is planned individually, but the curriculum may include:

- core subjects common to all pupils as part of the basic education syllabus / curriculum
- elective basic education subjects
- other subjects and subject groups relevant to compulsory basic education

- vocational orientation studies
- periods of work experience.

Around two per cent of those who complete basic education participate in the additional year. The aim is to better prepare them for their next steps by reinforcing their basic education, and so ensure that they won't subsequently drop out of upper secondary general or vocational education.

## Accessibility of upper secondary vocational education

Accessibility is emphasised in student admission criteria and, in general, no aspect relating to the health status or functional capacity of an applicant may constitute a barrier to admission as a student. That said, where an individual wishing to enter upper secondary vocational education would not be

capable of undertaking practical assignments or on-the-job learning – which are a required part of the study programme - due to his or her health or functional capacity, he / she cannot be admitted as a student. Barriers to admission as a student in upper secondary VET can include a mental or

physical illness or disability that prevents participation in practical assignments / on-the-job learning; a visual or hearing impairment that cannot be corrected with assistive equipment, including colour blindness; or substance abuse or dependence.

## Language of instruction

Finnish and Swedish are both official languages in Finland and are languages of instruction at all levels of education. Educational institutions usually have either Finnish or Swedish as their language of instruction, but some upper secondary vocational institutions are bilingual. Although the Swedish-speaking population accounts for only 5.4 per cent of the total population and is mostly concentrated on the coast, Finnish and Swedish are equal languages throughout the country – in terms of being official languages.

The native language of *Sami* (Lappish) is also spoken by 0.04 per cent of the population as their mother tongue. *Sami* is the language of instruction in some upper secondary general and vocational institutions in the *Sami*-speaking areas and can

be taught as the mother tongue or as a foreign language. The *Sami* population has the right to maintain and develop their language and culture.

The aim of the *National Core Curriculum for Preparatory Education for General Upper Secondary Education* (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) (see the subheading 'Specified curriculum within pathways') is to prepare immigrants (and foreign language speakers whose first language is neither Finnish nor Swedish) for integration into the Finnish education system and society; to support their cultural identity; and to support them in achieving a level of bilingualism which enables their participation in education and society. Adult education centres and folk high schools also provide language training classes for young

immigrants who account for a greater number of those who do not apply for, are not admitted to, or drop out of upper secondary education. The aim is to enable them to develop the language skills to be able to participate in upper secondary education / further education and training.

Preparatory or pre-vocational programmes prior to entry to upper secondary general or vocational education are also provided for students who need additional support or who have special educational needs. See the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' for further information.

## Assessment and reporting

- How is the curriculum assessed?
- What variety of assessment modes and methods are in evidence? For example, external assessment / internal assessment / online assessment / portfolios / formative / summative / synoptic etc.?
- How does the system recognise varied learning / skills / competences?
- How does assessment link to certification / qualifications / a qualifications framework / selection for further and higher education?
- How is vocational / technical education assessed and accredited?
- How is achievement reported? What is reported?
- Where reform is taking place, how is the reform being prepared / what is happening now to prepare the ground for this reform?

## Assessment in general upper secondary education

There are two main forms of assessment in general upper secondary education – course assessment and the matriculation examination.

Course assessment is based on the objectives defined in the curriculum and each course is assessed once it has been completed to give students feedback on how they have met the objectives of the course and on their progress in the particular subject. The grade for the overall subject syllabus is the mathematical average of the grade for the individual courses. Assessment is

internal and completed either by the student's teacher or, should there be several teachers, jointly by the teachers concerned. The final assessment is carried out by the principal together with these teachers. The grading scale used for course assessment is a numerical 4-10 scale, where 4 is a fail and:

5 = adequate  
6 = moderate  
7 = satisfactory  
8 = good  
9 = very good  
10 = excellent.

In some instances, numerical grades are

complemented by narrative comment or oral feedback provided in an assessment discussion.

Students can retake courses they fail and there are no regulations limiting the number of times they can retake failed courses. If they are not satisfied with the grade they have received, they can ask the principal, a teacher, or the teacher who completed the assessment for a remark, providing that they do this within 14 days of receiving their results.

At the end of general upper secondary education (or when they have completed the course of study in a particular subject, see below), students also usually take the matriculation examination (*ylioppilastutkinto*). This consists of at least four compulsory tests:

- a compulsory examination for all students - in the candidate's mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish)
- three other compulsory tests selected from: the second national language; a foreign language; mathematics; or a range of general studies tests (science and humanities subjects).

Students may also include one or more optional tests as part of their matriculation examination.

The matriculation examination tests are provided at two different levels of difficulty in mathematics, the second national language and foreign languages. In mathematics and foreign languages they are available as an advanced course or as a basic course; in the second national language, they are available

as an advanced course and an intermediate course. Students can choose the level at which they wish to take each of the above tests, but must take a test based on the advanced course in at least one compulsory test. They can only take one test in the same subject in the examination.

A central body – the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board - is responsible for the development, content and administration of the matriculation examination. The Board also issues guidelines on the arrangements for and the marking of the examinations and ensures that the individual subject tests included follow uniform (standard) criteria. The Ministry of Education nominates the chair of the Board and its members (about 40 in number) at the suggestion of universities and the Finnish National Agency for Education. The members represent the various subjects covered by the examination. Around 330 associate members assist the members in preparing and assessing (moderating) the tests, which are marked in upper secondary schools. The technical arrangements for the tests are the responsibility of the Board's secretariat which has 22 civil

service employees.

Students can take the tests which contribute towards the matriculation examination twice a year – in spring and in autumn. Tests take place in all upper secondary schools at the same time. Candidates take the tests when they have completed the course of study in a particular subject and must complete the tests for the complete examination during not more than three consecutive examination periods. Alternatively, they can take the complete examination in one examination period.

Matriculation examination tests are marked by the upper secondary school subject teacher and then checked and moderated by the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board. They are marked on the following scale:

- *laudatur* (L) (praised, 7)
- *eximia cum laude approbatur* (E) (passed with exceptional praise, 6)
- *magna cum laude approbatur* (M) (passed with much praise, 5)
- *cum laude approbatur* (C) (passed with praise, 4)

- *lubenter approbatur* (B) (satisfactorily passed, 3)
- *approbatur* (A) (passed, 2)
- *improbatur* (I) (failed, 0).

Students who have passed a matriculation examination test may retake it once. There is no time limit for retaking a test that has been passed. If a student retakes a test before a Matriculation Examination Certificate has been awarded, the better grade achieved on the test will be entered on the certificate.

A candidate who has failed a compulsory matriculation examination test may retake the test twice during the three examination periods immediately following the examination period in which the test was failed. A candidate retaking a failed compulsory test can change the level of the test, providing at least one test based on an advanced course is still included in their examination. If a student does not pass the test within the prescribed time limit, he /she has to retake the examination in

its entirety. Where students fail optional tests, they can retake these tests twice without a time limit.

Students who have passed the matriculation examination can supplement it by taking tests that they have not previously taken. They can also supplement the examination by taking a test at a different level in a subject they have already passed. Supplementing the examination is only possible once students have passed the matriculation examination.

Plans are currently in place to revise the matriculation examination so that it will more accurately reflect the revised National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary education (which will be fully introduced in the 2018/19 academic year), and to improve its usability in higher education admissions. The objective is to better measure whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills of the upper secondary curriculum and achieved sufficient

maturity and eligibility for further studies. Preparations are also beginning for the matriculation examination to be an online examination. The developing electronic matriculation examination system is available online at <http://www.abitti.fi/> (Finnish).

Students in general upper secondary education can also take optional upper secondary school diplomas. These allow students to demonstrate particular skills and knowledge in the following areas, and complement their learning for the general upper secondary school leaving certificate and the matriculation examination:

- visual arts
- physical education
- music
- theatre
- media
- crafts
- dance
- home economics.

Students receive the following certificates:

- the general upper secondary school leaving certificate – for those students who have completed the entire general upper secondary school syllabus

- a certificate recording the completion of a syllabus – for all students who have completed the syllabus in one or more upper secondary school subjects
- the ‘certificate of resignation’ – for those students who leave school without completing the general upper secondary school syllabus. This certificate records their completed studies and the marks received
- the Matriculation Examination Certificate – for students who have passed the matriculation examination.

General upper secondary school certificates must include:

- the title of the certificate
- the name of the education provider and institution
- the student’s name and social security number
- details of the studies completed
- the date of the award and the principal’s signature
- information about the educational institution’s licence to award certificates
- information on the grading scale.

The general upper secondary school leaving certificate and the certificate recording completion of a syllabus detail the subjects studied, the number of courses completed within these subjects, and the grade for each subject in words and numbers, such as ‘very good...9’ (in the 4-10 grading scale for course assessment described above). They also include information on any additional courses completed, such as optional general upper secondary diplomas; oral language proficiency tests; studies

completed in other educational institutions as part of the general upper secondary school syllabus; and information on the language in which a student has completed his or her studies (in cases where they have completed more than half the courses in a subject syllabus in a language other than the school’s language of instruction). The general upper secondary school leaving certificate does not contain an overall grade; it indicates the total number of courses completed by the student.

Students receive their Matriculation Examination Certificate following the examination period when they have completed all the compulsory matriculation examination tests. The certificate shows the compulsory and optional tests they have passed, together with their levels and grade (e.g. *laudatur*, L, 7 – the highest grade). Students who have passed the matriculation examination but who retake a test that they have already passed, or who supplement their examination, receive a separate certificate for this.

## Assessment in vocational upper secondary education

Upper secondary vocational qualifications are the primary qualifications required when entering the labour market. They provide the occupational skills and competence required to enter the world of work. All programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications assess students' learning and development – to provide them with verbal and written feedback on the progress of their studies, guidance and encouragement; provide information on the skills and competences they have acquired; and assess their achievement of the learning outcomes defined in the national qualification requirements or the National Core Curriculum.

An upper secondary vocational qualification is awarded once a student has completed all compulsory, optional and free-choice study modules (a total of 180 competence points) included in his / her individual study plan. At the end of each unit of study, the student's skills and knowledge are compared with the objectives and assessment criteria of the education provider's curriculum, which is based on the national qualification

requirements. The objectives and assessment criteria for free-choice studies and those for some optional studies are drawn up locally. Assessment is based on observations, different types of theoretical and work-based /practical examinations, portfolios, students' self-assessment and group assessment.

Competence in vocational qualification units is also assessed through vocational skills demonstrations. These entail work assignments relevant to the vocational skills requirements which must take place in the most authentic settings possible. They can be supplemented by other assessment methods where necessary. Skills demonstrations are designed, implemented and assessed in co-operation with representatives from the world of work within the framework of the national qualifications requirements and, as far as possible, they take place during periods of on-the-job learning either in workplaces or vocational institutions.

Assessment is conducted by teachers and, for on-the-job learning periods and vocational skills demonstrations, it is

the responsibility of the teacher in charge of the on-the-job learning period or the demonstration, together with the on-the-job / workplace instructor appointed by the employer, or the demonstration supervisor.

As in general upper secondary education, all assessment must guide and motivate students and develop their abilities in self-assessment.

Assessment of learning outcomes, which summarises the student's level of competence in line with the learning outcomes, is usually expressed in grades on a three-step assessment scale where:

- Satisfactory = 1
- Good = 2
- Excellent = 3.

Free-choice studies may, with the consent of the student, be given a pass mark without indicating a grade.

Once students have completed all modules included in a qualification to an acceptable standard, they receive a qualification

certificate, which consists of a vocational upper secondary certificate and a certificate of skills demonstrations. The certificate of skills demonstrations includes information on the vocational skills demonstrations taken and the grades awarded for these, while the vocational upper secondary certificate covers the qualification units and their grades.

Note: where students in upper secondary vocational

education study modules from other vocational qualifications, such as vocational qualifications usually available in adult education, specialist vocational qualifications, or modules from qualifications available in the university of applied education (polytechnic), these are assessed as 'pass' or 'fail' rather than on a three-point scale.

As in general upper secondary education, if students are not satisfied

with the grade they have received, they can ask the principal, a teacher, or the teacher who completed the assessment for a remark, providing that they do this within 14 days of receiving their results. Where students are completing an apprenticeship programme, this request is made to the employer with regard to workplace training, and to the principal of the institution providing theoretical training where it concerns this aspect of the apprenticeship programme.

## Preparatory programme for general upper secondary education and training

Assessment for the *National Core Curriculum for Preparatory Education for General Upper Secondary Education* (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014), which is intended for immigrants and foreign language speakers (see the subheading 'Available pathways / programmes' above), aims to provide students with feedback on their progress and results from their learning both during preparatory education for general upper secondary education and on completion of the course. This feedback is intended to encourage students and to guide them towards the completion of

their studies.

Assessment during the course provides students with feedback on how well they are achieving the course objectives and making progress with their studies. Course assessment must be diverse and based not only on written tests but also on oral tests and other methods of demonstrating skills, such as ongoing observation of a student's progress. In addition, students' self-assessment can also be taken into account and is often made use of in course assessment discussions, for instance. Assessment methods and practices are defined in greater detail in the local

curriculum for preparatory education for general upper secondary education. The courses comprising the *National Core Curriculum for Preparatory Education for General Upper Secondary Education* are also assessed on completion, and students either pass or fail. This pass-fail outcome can be complemented by written or verbal assessment provided during course assessment discussions.

Identified linguistic difficulties and other reasons that might complicate the demonstration of competence must be taken account of in

assessment, and special arrangements may be put in place to enable students to demonstrate their competence through methods other than writing.

Where students in preparatory education for general upper secondary education have included subjects from the basic (compulsory) education syllabus as optional studies in this course (see the subheading 'Specified curriculum within pathways'), they can take examinations in these subjects. Their knowledge and skills are assessed against the objectives defined for the subject(s) in the National Core Curriculum for basic education and specified in the local curriculum. The student's level of

competence is determined by applying the descriptions of good performance (in the 4-10 grading scale described above) and the final assessment criteria included in the National Core Curriculum for basic education.

Students are awarded a certificate recording the studies they have completed within preparatory education for general upper secondary education. The certificate includes information on the subjects studied by the student; the number of courses completed; and / or an indication of successful completion of a subject group or subject (passed). For mother tongue and literature (Finnish / Swedish as a second language and literature), the level

of proficiency attained by the student is recorded on a certificate for reading comprehension, writing, listening comprehension and speaking, in accordance with a language proficiency scale. Preparatory education for general upper secondary education uses the language proficiency scale included in the National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary education.

No overall mark is awarded for completion of preparatory education for general upper secondary education, either as an average of the marks for the various subjects or in any other way. The total number of courses completed by the student is though recorded on the certificate.

## University entry

Students who successfully complete a three-year upper secondary vocational qualification are eligible for further study in universities of applied education (polytechnics), and those who successfully complete the matriculation examination in general upper secondary education

are eligible for entry to university. Although upper secondary vocational qualifications or the matriculation examination provide a general entitlement to university, entry is restricted via a *numerus clausus* system, as there are many more applicants than places

available. In 2013/14, for example, there were 182,000 applications for higher education – 90,000 students applied to university, 122,000 to polytechnics (30,000 of these applied to both sectors). Around 35 per cent of applicants were selected for entry.

Universities may select applicants based on:

- their matriculation examination grades and their grades in the general upper secondary school leaving certificate, together with the results of an entrance examination. This is the most common procedure
- the results of an entrance examination only
- their grades in the matriculation examination and in the upper secondary school leaving certificate only.

Some institutions / courses may also look for students to have work experience or practical training in a given field.

Entrance examinations are developed by individual universities (faculties or departments) and polytechnics (universities of applied education) to assess applicants' motivation, suitability and aptitude in the area of study. They are often based on required reading. There may also be interviews and / or practical examinations in which students are required to demonstrate their skills and aptitude.

## Flexibility and transfer options

- What flexibility is inherent in the system for movement between or within pathways?
- What are the student transfer options?
- Can students combine study across schools / institutions?
- Can credits / certification be transferred?

Although upper secondary general and vocational education usually lasts three years, as courses are modular and each student is assessed on completion of courses in his / her own study plan, some students may complete their upper secondary course in two years. Others may take four years to complete their upper secondary studies.

Students may study part of their upper secondary general or vocational course in another institution to their 'home' institution – usually in cases where their institution doesn't offer a specific course they wish to study. In addition, prior learning from courses of study completed in another institution can also be accredited for students' general or vocational upper secondary school courses, provided that the objectives and core content of this prior learning are equivalent to those set out in the general upper secondary school curriculum or the upper secondary vocational

qualification requirements. All upper secondary vocational courses also require 'authentic' workplace learning (usually of around six months during a three-year course) which necessitates study across educational institutions and workplaces. The situation is similar for apprenticeships – where the majority of the learning is in the workplace but some theoretical learning takes place in an educational institution.

The modular structure of upper secondary qualifications aims to allow students the flexibility to compile a study programme that is suited to their needs, abilities and aptitudes and, for example, to combine the study of general academic subjects (in general upper secondary education) with the study of vocational subjects. Where upper secondary study programmes (general and vocational) recognise prior learning, they can be shorter for students.

General upper secondary school leavers can apply for upper secondary vocational education and training and complete vocational qualifications. Since 2013, however, applicants for vocational education and training who already have qualifications (such as the matriculation examination) have been encouraged to follow adult VET courses, such as specialist and competence-based courses, rather than to follow upper secondary vocational courses.

There is also flexibility in the matriculation examination in that students can take their matriculation examination in a particular subject once they have completed the relevant course of study. Not all the matriculation examinations need to be taken in one examination session.

Students also have opportunities to retake failed courses or to retake courses they have passed to improve their grades.

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## Glossary of terms and abbreviations

<i>ammattikoulutus</i>	initial vocational education and training / vocational upper secondary education	Vocational post-compulsory upper secondary education for 16- to 19-year-olds.
<i>approbatur</i>	passed, 2, A	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>cum laude approbatur</i>	passed with praise, 4, C	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>eximia cum laude approbatur</i>	passed with exceptional praise, 6, E	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>improbatur</i>	failed, 0, I	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>kansanopisto</i>	folk high school	Provides general upper secondary education and the matriculation examination for adult learners.
<i>laudatur</i>	praised, 7, L	The highest score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>lubenter approbatur</i>	satisfactorily passed, 3, B	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
<i>lukio</i>	general upper secondary education	General, post-compulsory upper secondary education for 16- to 19-year-olds.
<i>magna cum laude approbatur</i>	passed with much praise, 5, M	A score in the matriculation examination scale (which is a 0-7 scale, 0, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	
<i>oppisopimuskoulutus</i>	apprenticeship training	All upper secondary vocational qualifications available in Finland can be obtained through apprenticeship training. Apprentices are employed and their practical training periods in the workplace are complemented by theoretical studies usually in vocational institutions / upper secondary schools, vocational adult education centres or other types of educational institution providing vocational education and training.
<i>sami</i>	Lappish	The language spoken by the indigenous (Lapp) population of Finland. It is the language of instruction in some upper secondary general and vocational schools in Sami areas.
VET	vocational education and training	
<i>ylioppilastutkinto</i>	matriculation examination	Taken on completion of general upper secondary education. Successful completion grants eligibility for higher education.