
INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY
IN APPRENTICESHIPS: FOCUS
ON LONG-TERM MOBILITY
FINLAND





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CHAPTER 1.

Introduction

In Finland work-based learning (WBL) is widely recognised for its relevance to working life. This is reflected in the competence-based and customer-oriented approach taken to VET. All competences specified in VET qualification requirements can be acquired through work-based learning. Furthermore, to ensure the quality and attractiveness of VET, all training programmes are developed and delivered in cooperation with the labour market.

All forms of formal (institutional) VET include work-based learning. There are two forms of WBL – training agreement and apprenticeship. In apprenticeship learners have the status of a salaried employee on the basis of an apprenticeship contract, whereas in training agreement learners have the status of a student, who does not receive a salary. The amount of workplace learning in each of these forms is specified in each individual learner's personal competence development plan. National regulations specify no minimum nor maximum share for workplace learning. Work-based learning is guided and goal-oriented training in real work environment at a workplace. It can be complemented with learning in other environments, like schools, inter-company training centers etc. (see 1.1 on the 2018 reform), when necessary. Most apprentices are adults, and most training takes place in regular employment in the workplace. Apprenticeship training must comprise a minimum of 25 hours of work a week.

Work-based learning in both forms (training agreement or apprenticeship) is always jointly planned by the student, the employer, and the education provider as part of the student's personal competence development plan. Identification of learning outcomes for the student in relation to the qualification, course, or units they are working towards are the starting point for the personal competence development plan. To identify these learning outcomes, attention is paid to any of the student's previous studies and training that may contribute to and be wholly or partially recognised as part of the targeted qualification.

1.1. Apprenticeship training in Finland

In Finland any VET qualification, (initial at EQF level 4, further at EQF level 4 and specialist vocational qualification at EQF level 5) can be acquired through apprenticeship training. Apprenticeship is that form of WBL that is based on a

written fixed-term employment contract (apprenticeship contract) between an employer and an apprentice, who must be at least 15 years old.

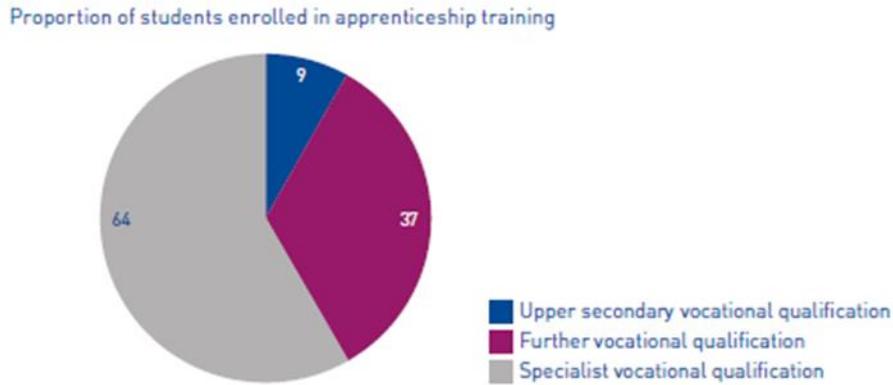
Learners themselves find work places for their training. The employer has no obligation to keep the apprentice employed after the training period is completed. VET providers are responsible for initiating a contract with an employer first, and then the employer signs an apprenticeship contract, which is a work contract, with the student. The demand and supply of contracts / work places are not always in balance. There are regional and sector-specific differences but usually there are not enough apprenticeship places in companies.

The employer pays the apprentice's wages according to the relevant collective agreement for the period of workplace training. For the period of theoretical studies, learners receive social benefits, such as daily allowance and allowances for accommodation and travel expenses. The education provider pays compensation to the employer (funded by the State budget) to cover the costs of training provided in the workplace. The employer and VET institution agree on the amount of compensation before the training takes place; and then a separate contract is prepared for each learner. Compensation varies, but in general represents only a small share of the wage paid to the apprentice.

Typically, in the past, the theoretical part of the studies in apprenticeships has been provided by VET institutions. Since the 2018 reform, however, the legislation does not regulate where the theoretical part should be acquired. In fact, a term 'theory' is no longer in use. Instead, 'learning in the working place' and 'learning in other environments' terminology applies. In case the company is able to cover all the training needs according to the personal competence development plan, there is no need for the learner to attend in courses or modules organised by VET institutions at all. In that case, the VET provider assesses the suitability of the workplace to function as a learning environment.

Apprenticeships have been mainly used in further and specialist vocational education (see Table 1 and Figure 1). In 2017, very few vocational upper secondary qualification students were enrolled in apprenticeship training. The number of apprentices in upper secondary qualifications was 17 970 (of 193 444 in all VET), in further vocational qualifications 17 174 (of 46 430 in all VET) and specialist vocational qualifications 15 395 (of 24 005 in all VET). There were no significant gender differences in this respect. Further vocational qualification students were more often enrolled in apprenticeship training, women somewhat more often than men. The majority of specialist vocational qualifications were taken in apprenticeship training, also more often among women than men.

Figure 1. **Distribution (%) of apprenticeship training by type of qualification programmes in Finland 2017.**



Source: Vipunen- Education Statistics Finland

Table 1. **Number and percentage of students enrolled in apprenticeship training by type of qualification programme in Finland, 2017**

Qualification programme	All VET types	Apprenticeship training			
	number of students	number of students	Share of apprentices in total VET students	Number of female students	Share of female students in total apprentices
Upper secondary vocational qualification	193 444	17 970	9 %	9401	52%
Further vocational qualification	46 430	17 174	37 %	9582	56%
Specialist vocational qualification	24 005	15 395	64 %	9049	59%
Total	263 879	50 539	19,2%	28 032	55%

Source: Vipunen-Education Statistics Finland

1.1.1. Apprenticeship mobility in Finland

In 2018 there were 21 Finnish apprentices doing a mobility period abroad. Almost half of them went to Spain. Other destination countries were France, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Canada and Italy. The mobility periods were not long-term, since their duration was six weeks or less.

The number of incoming apprenticeships was 232 but the actual number is presumably higher, since under incoming mobility there are quite a lot of students whose form of study is not statistically identified. The most common country of origin of incoming apprenticeships was Germany. There were some incoming apprenticeships also from France and Japan. Most of these incoming mobility periods lasted three weeks or less.

CHAPTER 2.

Exogenous factors influencing mobility of apprentices at upper secondary level

2.1. Economic sectors and actors

Finnish employers appreciate apprenticeship training because of its practical working life orientation and excellent employment rate. The employment rate for apprentices one year after completing their studies was approximately 80%, which is significantly higher than other types of VET qualifications where the corresponding figure was 58% (2017). During a ten-year observation period, 8% of students having completed a vocational qualification through apprenticeship training had experienced unemployment, whereas 23% of students having completed school-based upper secondary VET had experienced unemployment ⁽¹⁾.

The Finnish labour market is considered relatively open and there are no elements which restrict international mobility. The openness of labour market can be also attributed, among other things to the fact that there are fairly few regulated professions in Finland.

According to Statistics Finland, in 2017, Finnish enterprises had international business activity in 5 070 affiliates located in 142 countries. It can be argued that companies with affiliates carry out training of their staff abroad more often than companies operating only in Finland.

2.2. Dynamics of skills demand and supply at the medium level occupation level

Based on the employment outlook by occupation ⁽²⁾, the so called "occupational barometer" produced by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, there is

⁽¹⁾ https://www.oph.fi/julkaisut/2015/koulutus_kannattaa

Key figures on apprenticeship training in Finland, Finnish National Board of Education, Publications 2016:7

⁽²⁾ The barometer is the view of the TE offices about the development prospects in key occupations in the near future. The occupational barometer is carried out twice a year. <https://www.ammattibarometri.fi/posteri.asp?vuosi=19i&kieli=en&maakunta=suomi>

shortage of labour force especially in the fields of engineering, manufacturing and construction, services and health and welfare.

Apprenticeship training has proven to be an effective means to increase the vocational competences of adult learners and possibly to improve labour shortages. In many cases this pathway can be more motivating for learners with a migrant background than school-based studies.

As an indication of labour shortages, the share of foreign-language speaking students in Finnish VET in 2015 was 8% of all new students, representing mostly learners of migrant background. The respective percentage in general upper secondary education was 5%. The share of foreign-language speaking students in VET has also increased from 2010 to 2015 by 53% and in general upper secondary education by 34% respectively ⁽³⁾.

2.3. Attitude of employers towards training

Finnish employers in general invest in training and provide and provide upskilling and reskilling opportunities for their employees. Both forms of WBL, i.e. apprenticeship and training agreement are used to this purpose among other options.

The Finnish employers in general do not promote long-term mobility periods very actively. They are worried of how to get extra workers to replace their apprentices who are abroad and organising long-term mobility periods causes trouble and extra costs to the employers. The employers are more interested in receiving apprentices from abroad. The long-term international mobility periods in apprenticeships need to be promoted and marketed to the employers because at the moment the whole set of mobility provisions (options, procedures, benefits, incentives) is not very well known ⁽⁴⁾.

2.4. International qualifications existence (and extent)

In Finland there are no international qualifications available for students. Several vocational qualifications, however, comprise optional units focusing on the development of international competences (5-15 competence points). The

⁽³⁾https://www.oph.fi/julkaisut/2017/vieraskieliset_perusopetuksessa_ja_toisen_asteen_koulutuksessa_2010-luvulla

⁽⁴⁾ Anu Haapasalo, Head of apprenticeship training, The Federation of Education in Central Ostrobothnia, interview

acquired competences enable learners to study and function in international settings.

2.5. Any other relevant factor(s)

In Finland, VET is an attractive choice. Nine out of ten of all Finns think that VET is of high quality and provides skills needed for jobs. Around 42% of compulsory basic education graduates opt for vocational upper secondary education. VET is attractive because of its flexibility and good employment and further study prospects. Internationalisation is often seen as a means to improving both the quality and attractiveness of VET. Vocational education and training strives to provide students with the knowledge, skills and competences required in an increasingly internationalised labour market and multicultural society.

Finnish VET has a strong international orientation, placing much emphasis on mobility and on foreign language learning. According to the results of Eurostat ⁽⁵⁾, Finnish VET students have on average studied more languages than other European students. In Finland 84% of VET students had studied at least two languages in addition to mother tongue. There were just two countries, Romania and Luxembourg, where VET students studied more foreign languages. Knowledge of foreign languages enables individuals to move successfully between education programmes and also to pursue employment in different countries. Some VET institutions also offer vocational content that prepares students to work in another country.

Cedefop opinion survey on VET in Finland ⁽⁶⁾ in 2017 found that only 61% of other European respondents agreed with the statement that “Vocational education at upper secondary education provides opportunities to study or work abroad”, whereas in Finland the share was 78% overall, and 82% among respondents with a VET background 82%. All these features favour outgoing international mobility.

Finnish VET and its modular qualification structure enables flexible and individual study paths for all learners; target groups for VET are wide-ranging: they include not only young people, but also adults and employed people with upskilling or reskilling needs as well as unemployed people. Adult apprentices are more often already employed in a company before starting apprenticeship training (rather than being students). They can be better prepared to have a mobility period abroad, but

⁽⁵⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/da/publications-and-resources/statistics-and-indicators/statistics-and-graphs/19-how-many-foreign>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/cedefop-public-opinion-survey-vocational-education-and-training-europe-finland>

at the same time they may have already significant responsibilities at work, which can often prevent the willingness to participate in international mobility. Also, salaries and other benefits can be lower in a mobility period abroad. Family obligations might also be a reason why it is not so easy for adults to go abroad for a long period. As a result, adults possibly favour short-term periods than long term periods. Adults need more courage and support from their employers in financing their studies abroad. Young apprentice students are more available to periods abroad, because they conceive themselves more as students.

CHAPTER 3.

The link between the apprenticeship scheme design and apprentices' mobility

3.1. Apprenticeship type (e.g. system or mode of delivery)

The purpose of VET is to increase and maintain vocational skills of the Finnish population, develop Finnish commerce and industry and respond to its competence needs. Promoting employment and self-employment are key elements of VET ⁽⁷⁾. Competence-based approach and personalisation are guiding principles in Finnish VET. Apprenticeships in Finland represent an alternative type of VET delivery within the formal VET system, not a separate system per se, and all qualifications can be obtained through apprenticeship. Apprentice's personal competence development plan can foresee learning periods abroad or can be adjusted to include it during the apprenticeship period. The VET system is very flexible, and VET providers can independently decide on the teaching / learning methods, apprenticeship being one of the options. It can be argued that this flexibility favours international mobility, however other factors restrict its use.

Apprenticeship learners are encouraged by VET providers and guidance counsellors to be internationally mobile. The training places no obstacles to going abroad. Salary agreement and the family situation of particularly adult learners, however, can pose obstacles to mobility.

3.2. Apprenticeship governance (at strategic, decision-making level)

Many key VET stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), VET providers etc. promote VET internationalisation and international mobility. Individual employers don't always see the benefits of mobility, long-term outgoing one in particular (see 2.3).

VET institutions enjoy a high level of autonomy. The Finnish VET legislation enables VET providers to independently decide on how they organise the training.

(7) <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2017/20170531>

There are teachers or small units within VET institutions which take care on apprenticeship training issues. This autonomy makes it possible to flexibly design and implement long-term mobility periods in apprenticeship training.

3.3. Duration of apprenticeship and of the company placement in particular

The duration of apprenticeship training is agreed on in the apprenticeship contract and it is based on the learner's personal competence development plan. As in other aspects, there is flexibility in the definition of the duration of the apprenticeship period for each learner. Apprenticeship training may cover the whole qualification or one or several units of the qualification.

The duration of a possible mobility period is also defined in this contract either at the beginning if mobility is foreseen, or during the apprenticeship period with an adjustment of the personal development plan. The fact that mobility periods can be foreseen and explicitly included in the learner's plan can be seen as an enabler of mobility. The flexibility in the total duration increases the autonomy of VET providers and functions more as an enabler than disabler for (long-term) mobility of apprentices.

3.4. Organisation of alternance

Since the 2018 reform, there is no indication in the legislation where the theoretical part should be acquired. In fact, a word 'theory' is no longer in use. Instead, 'learning in the working place' and 'learning in other environments' terminology applies. In case the company is able to cover all the training needs, there is no need for the learner to attend a school venue at all. Periods of theory, if needed, and in-company training alternate, but a common pattern doesn't exist; it is agreed in the personal competence development plan.

This flexibility on how training is organised among learning environments increases the autonomy of VET providers and functions more as an enabler than disabler for (long-term) mobility of apprentices.

3.5. Type of contract and status of apprentices

Apprenticeship training is based on a fixed-term employment contract between a learner aged 15 or older and a private employer or, in a civil service employment relationship or other comparable public-sector employment relationship and a

written fixed-term agreement between a VET provider and an employer (apprenticeship agreement, see agreement template) ⁽⁸⁾. A learner in apprenticeship training shall have working hours of at least 25 hours per week. A learner has a status of an employee.

The contract does not prevent or pose any obstacles to mobility. If all parties (apprentice, employer and VET provider) agree on carrying out a mobility period for the apprentice, then the contract would not stand as an obstacle.

3.6. Remuneration

In accordance with the applicable collective agreement, a student participating in an apprenticeship under an apprenticeship contract must be paid at least the minimum wage. If there is no collective agreement in the field of work in question, the student must be paid a reasonable wage. Students have the same statutory rights as an employee, including the right to annual leave, sick pay, and occupational healthcare.

While abroad, apprentices usually receive the local salary. The employer in Finland cannot influence the level of remuneration in the target country, unless the company abroad is a subsidiary or such of a Finnish company. If the level of apprentice salary is lower in the target country, apprentices may be demotivated to participate (see also 2.5 regarding the age of apprentices).

3.7. Provisions on occupational health, safety and social insurance

The occupational safety of a student undergoing training in a workplace during practical work assignments is the responsibility of the employer as provided for in the Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002). The education provider shall inform the employer or the training agreement job provider of the aforementioned occupational safety responsibility.

During mobility periods the responsibility of the occupational safety and health is that of the target company and follows the local regulations. If the level of safety in work and other similar provisions is lower in the target country than in Finland it might more discourage than encourage apprentices to go abroad.

⁽⁸⁾ <https://minedu.fi/tyoelamassa-oppiminen>

3.8. Curriculum / training standards specification

Apprenticeship training is based on national qualification requirements, according to which the learner's personal competence development plan is formed. It is drawn up so as to allow for the needs and prerequisites of the workplace and the learner. When an education provider has checked that a workplace meets the requirements to function as learning environment and after the personal competence development plan has been jointly planned with the student for the workplace in question, the education provider and the employer make an agreement regarding the organisation of the apprenticeship training. This agreement may not deviate from the contents of the personal competence development plan.

Mobility periods can be foreseen in the agreement, as long as they address the agreed learning outcomes. So, the training done during a mobility period can be included in this development plan. This flexibility increases the autonomy of VET providers, may integrate mobility in the personal development plan and functions more as an enabler than disabler for (long-term) mobility of apprentices.

It is the responsibility of the training provider in Finland to ensure that the training corresponds to the qualification requirements. This can be ensured by concluding agreements, such as:

- (a) Memorandum of understanding, MoU: The sending and receiving partner sign a memorandum of understanding. MoU is the framework for cooperation and established mutual trust between the signing partners;
- (b) Training agreement – learning agreement: The sending VET college, receiving workplace and student sign a training agreement. This agreement states the schedule and objectives of the mobility and the responsibilities of the parties. It can also contain the assessment guidelines and tables.

The sending schools have to choose the workplaces carefully, train the instructors, plan together the content of the training, follow actively the procedure by visits, Internet or by phone, check carefully the accommodation and have a reliable local partner. The employers must understand that they sign a contract and commit to guide the student according it. The student must be active, follow strictly the rules and keep the sending school well informed of the mobility.

3.9. Use of validation in apprenticeships

The apprentice's prior learning and work experience is taken into account and recognised as part of the learner's personal competence development plan. This plan is drawn up in co-operation between the learner, the employer and the

education provider, so that it can be appended to the apprenticeship contract when the contract is approved.

As the mobility period is included into the personal competence development plan, this is automatically validated as part of the qualification. The careful selection of workplaces by sending VET institutions and the conclusion of agreements among sending and hosting parties (see 3.8) contribute to this direction.

CHAPTER 4.

Lessons learnt from existing policies, initiatives, projects (as applicable) of apprentices' mobility

European Pathway - a Gateway to work (EPaG) ⁽⁹⁾ is a pilot project carried out by seven vocational education colleges in Finland and their international partners. The aim is to pilot and develop long term VET learning mobilities (six to twelve months) for apprentices with the ultimate goal to enable young apprentices to develop their skills and enhance their employability prospects, whilst also strengthening their sense of European citizenship.

According to the project results, stays of more than six months provide the highest added value in terms of improvement of professional, personal and social skills. Mobility brings gains for the company as well as for the apprentice. While short term placements (less than six months) help to improve personal and social skills, longer placements considerably improve professional skills and employability as the benefit to both the Finnish employer and the employer abroad.

In addition to what is mentioned above the key results of the project are:

- (a) The project managed to carry out 19 (of 22) over six months mobility periods where the participants gained an average of 55 competence points;
- (b) the project identified the legal and insurance issues and created a Memorandum of understanding and learning agreement for further use; and
- (c) the project resulted in a written guide with do's and don'ts in long-term mobility that can be used by others.

Box 1. Do's and don'ts in long-term mobility

✓ Make sure that the work tasks match with the requirements of the qualification ✓ Make sure that there is a named and motivated work place instructor who knows the procedures of mobilities ✓ Train the apprentice to meet the rules and cultural differences of the receiving country ✓ Usually the best candidates for long term mobilities are those already more advanced in their field and with some experience of working abroad ✓ Emphasize the importance of learning the local language and English ✓ Train the apprentice to realise the differences in the receiving country's work legislation, i.e. working hours and their distribution during the day ✓ Monitor the apprentice's coping with the given working hours and the level motivation ✓ Accommodation (e.g. quality, location and safety) is one of the key elements when the apprentice is adjusting for the mobility period ✓ Make sure that the selection process to choose the suitable apprentices and work placements is thorough

⁽⁹⁾ <https://www.eurooppalainenopintopolku.fi/net-work-presentation/>

It is crucial to have enough resources for instructing the apprentice already in home country and for monitoring visits to the work place ✓ A good local (receiving) partner is of utmost importance ✓ It is important to have close communication between all the participants before and during the mobility periods ✓ React quickly when problems arise ✓ Make sure that the induction in the workplace is thorough by giving instructions beforehand to the company

Source: European Pathway - a Gateway to work (EPaG) project results

As mentioned in the chapter 3.2. of the autonomy of VET providers to organise apprenticeship training the key results of the project can be easily applied into the everyday training offer.

More efforts are needed to improve the cooperation with the VET institutions. Internationalisation coordinators working at VET institutions are responsible for the organisation of international mobility periods and the teachers working in apprenticeship offices are responsible for the organisation of apprenticeship training. The persons responsible for these two duties are specialists in these areas and it is not common for them to be responsible for both. Valuable experiences have been acquired when the professionals responsible for organising international mobility periods and apprenticeships work together to plan the internationalisation mobility periods included in the apprenticeship training.

Once a year, education providers and teachers working with apprenticeship training gather together in a national seminar to discuss current matters. From this year on also the teachers responsible for organising international mobility will join the meeting. This arrangement is meant to bring these two groups of professionals together and to promote the organisation of international mobility in apprenticeships.

Another challenge is that the Finnish VET legislation must be followed when arranging vocational education and training in Finland. On the other hand, the legislation and regulations of the hosting country related on the young workers' working hours etc. must be followed during the mobility period. To combine the regulations of two countries, sometimes conflicting, can be challenging. It would be desirable if regulations which are related to the apprenticeship training would be unified in the EU to some extent.

CHAPTER 5.

Conclusions

Finnish VET students have a positive attitude towards international mobility. The Cedefop opinion survey in 2017⁽¹⁰⁾ found that 82% of Finnish respondents with a VET background agreed with the statement that “Vocational education at upper secondary education provides opportunities to study or work abroad”.

Learning languages prepares Finnish students for international working environments: in 2015, 80% of all Finnish VET students studied two languages in addition to mother tongue.

Educational authorities promote international mobility periods and the VET system enables VET providers flexibly organise apprenticeship training and international mobility periods.

A big challenge is the differences in the regulations and legislation between countries. Long-term mobility periods require a lot of planning and familiarisation with the host country's bureaucracy and regulations, as well as with the responsibilities of the different parties involved and their salary systems.

Active marketing is also required to encourage both learners and employers to consider mobility periods abroad ⁽¹¹⁾. Further challenges are helping students to find a job, the provision of support during the exchange period, and the familiarisation of workplace instructors abroad with the Finnish requirements.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cedefop (2017). *Cedefop European public opinion survey on vocational education and training*. Publications Office, Luxembourg. Cedefop research paper; No 62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/264585>

⁽¹¹⁾ Marja Vartiainen, Expert of education and training, The Federation of Finnish Enterprises, interview

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