

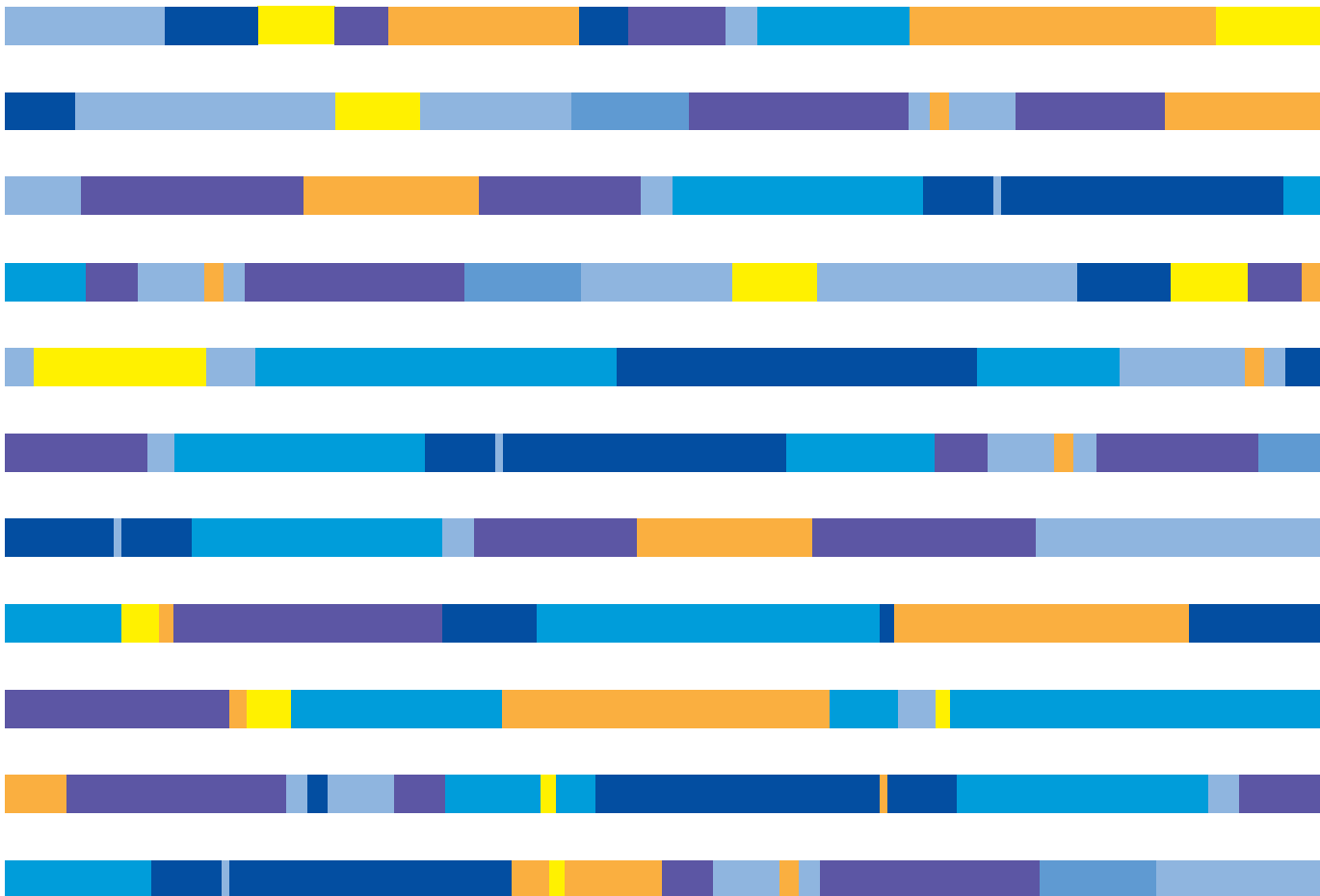


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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

## COUNTRY REPORT: **FINLAND**

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# 1 Abstract

Finland's formal education and training system has a statutory and well-established basis for validation of non-formal and informal competence, although the related practices vary locally and by degree level. Working life, employment services, the temporary job market (e.g., workshops), liberal adult education, and NGOs, associations and hobby activities have each developed their own different ways, processes, methods, digital tools and projects for identifying and recognizing non-formal and informal skills, including competence certificates and competence badges.

With the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning there has been a stronger focus on identifying and recognizing competence in working life where national strategies and policies have been introduced to improve validation, guidance and the digital infrastructure and services. The annual Reveal Your Skills campaign is inspiring and encouraging adults to identify their skills and make them visible. A new service centre for continuous learning and employment, JOTPA, has been established to help meet urgent skills needs and reach out to groups who participate less in competence development. Legislative changes have enabled validation towards formal education of competences acquired in liberal adult education where 650 000 people are voluntarily improving their skills and competences.

# 2 Introduction

In Finland, validation of non-formal and informal learning is understood as identification and recognition of acquired competence, and often framed as a process leading to a formal qualification or improved employment.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is grounded in the Finnish society, with established legislation and policies in formal education. The overarching principle is that validation is a subjective right for individuals and their competences should be validated regardless of when and where they were acquired.

As noted in the 2018 update, there is no single legislation on validation in formal education, but sector-specific laws are guiding the development. Due to the separation in legislation, there is no single national validation policy or strategy in place, but the legislation steers validation procedures in each sector, supported by sector-specific guidance documents on validation. There are statutory and well-established practices for validation of non-formal and informal competence, although these may vary locally, regionally and by degree level.

Working life, employment services, the temporary job market (e.g., workshops), liberal adult education, and NGOs, associations and hobby activities have each developed their own different ways, processes, methods, digital tools and projects for identifying and recognizing non-formal and informal skills, including competence certificates and competence badges (Oosi et al., 2020).

Key developments since 2018 include the continuing implementation of the vocational reform of 2018; it brought together initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET) under the same legislation, changed the validation practices in the vocational sector and abolished the training of validation practitioners. Thousands of VET teachers and guidance counsellors have taken up validation as part of their tasks, often connected to the development of students' personal development plans. The National Agency for Education has supported the progress in the VET sector by guidance on validation and supporting training and development project.

The new General Upper Secondary Education Act that came to force in 2019 has strengthened the potential role of validation in the sector where also a large number of adults are studying, but in the absence of detailed guidance and monitoring the

progress remains uneven. In higher education, the government has put in place incentives to enhance validation in the form of funding allocation and quality assurance. Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) have developed their approaches to validation both individually and collaboratively. In both sectors, validation is addressed as part of the development of students' personal study plans. National recommendations for recognition of prior learning were launched by universities in 2020, and university-specific policies have been developed. UASs which generally have close contacts with the labour market have been active in developing cross-sectoral collaboration and mechanisms and tools such as studification (*opinnollistaminen*) in order to ensure that competences acquired through work-integrated learning are validated towards a formal degree. Some UAS are owned by municipalities which ensures a close link to the local development objectives and the local VET sector.

Significant progress has been made in the third sector that plays a strong role in the development of skills and competences in Finland: annually a third of the population is involved in voluntary work through NGOs, and 650 000 people are completing courses in nearly 180 liberal adult education institutions, spread across the country. NGOs such as Guides and Scouts have developed their ways to identify competence often in partnership with formal education institutions, notably UAS. Major players such as Sivi Study Centre and Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL are supporting their members in the development tools and approaches for identifying the competence developed in the sector. Furthermore, the legislative changes in 2020 and 2021 have facilitated the validation of competence acquired in liberal adult education towards formal education. The sector has made rapid progress in developing competence-based trainings: by early 2023, half of the liberal adult education institutions were already transferring these trainings to the national e-Perusteet service, making it possible to transfer the respective credits to the national Koski system.

At the same time, the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning, launched in 2020, has strengthened the focus on the skills of working age people, including validation, guidance and the underlying digital systems and infrastructure. This reform, which responds to the education and training needs emerging from changes in the world of work, has been informed by the OECD evaluation of lifelong learning (OECD, 2020) and Sitra's multi-annual work on Competitiveness and Well-being from Lifelong Learning (Sitra, 2019). The reform has had a strong buy-in across the Parliament; its implementation is likely to continue beyond the government term thanks to the EU recovery and resilience funding.

## 3 National perspective

### 3.1 Overarching approach to validation

In Finland, consecutive strategies have focused on improving lifelong learning. During the reporting period, following the extensive work by Sitra (2019) and the OECD evaluation (OECD, 2020), Prime Minister Sanna Marin's coalition government (2019-2023) launched a **Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning: Competence secures the future** with the aim to renew the continuous learning system<sup>1</sup>. The reform has a strong focus on the changing skills needs arising from the world of work and the competences of working age people, and is in practice, delivering Finland's national skills strategy although the term 'skills strategy' has not been used. The reform has shifted the policy focus of validation from qualification-based competences towards validation in working life and elsewhere. There is now a stronger focus on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://okm.fi/jatkuva-oppiminen> (fi)

identifying the skills of employees and strengthening on-the-job learning and their career management skills. Validation is a key element of the reform, along with stronger foresight and guidance, improved digital tools and service structure, and enhanced benefits system as well as training and outreach supporting the structural change. The reform is improving access to guidance and lifelong career management skills, enhancing validation, upskilling and career development, developing a digital service package for continuing education, with shared data on education, the labour market and competence, and improving the training of career guidance practitioners (Finnish Government, 2022)<sup>2</sup>.

The Reform of Continuous Learning is part of a broader sustainable growth programme which is implemented with funding from the EU recovery and resilience instrument, with EUR 76 million allocated in the years 2021–2024<sup>3</sup>. It is linked to the social security reform<sup>4</sup> and the WORK2030 (TYÖ2030<sup>5</sup>) programme as well as youth and migration policies.

Since 2021 a dedicated **Working Group on Identification of competences**, by the Ministry of Employment and Economic Development and the Ministry of Education and Culture, has been working to develop the recommendations, principles and tools for identifying competences of working-age people (Valtioneuvosto, 2022). Experiments will be launched early 2023, and proposals for national principles for recognizing skills acquired in workplaces and in education outside of the formal education system will be given by the end of 2024. These will also cover micro credentials which will be developed as part of the reform, along with a national competence mark system for basic adult skills that will enable identification and recognition of competence acquired in liberal adult education and help the situation of migrants.

The newly established Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment JOTPA has already funded targeted trainings in skills need sectors affected by the Covid-19, based on foresight intelligence. For the green and digital transition, JOTPA will fund training related to the hydrogen economy and the battery industry. The service centre is also developing new ways to reach out to working people who participate less in training. A pilot will be launched in 1 200 companies. JOTPA is also analysing foresight intelligence of competence and workforce needs, developing information, advice and guidance services, and promoting regional and other cooperation networks (Valtioneuvosto, 2023).

While Finland has not implemented individual learning accounts, as part of the Reform of Continuous Learning, study opportunities for the unemployed and workforce training to meet the skills needs have been improved. PES have adopted a new service model which entails enhanced personalised guidance and support at the initial stage of job search. In the assessment of the service need, the job seeker's skills and potential skills gaps are identified, along with the best ways to acquire skills. Job seekers' opportunities to study while maintaining unemployment benefits have been improved and income limits for study support raised. (ibid.)

In the digital service package for continuous learning (JOD), services are built that support individuals' education and career choices, skills development, and the interface between the demand and supply of work and education. JOD collects and produces information also for the needs of employers, trainers, service providers and authorities. In addition to digital services, existing digital services and information reserves in education and labour market are being developed. This work has started with the expansion of the *Opintopolku* (StudyInfo) service, where the goal is to make

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<sup>2</sup> To note, the original Finnish version of this report was launched in 2020. .

<sup>3</sup> <https://vm.fi/kestava-kasvu> (fi)

<sup>4</sup> <https://stm.fi/sosiaaliturvauudistus> (fi)

<sup>5</sup> <https://stm.fi/tyo2030> (fi)

available the widest possible range of educational offerings through one service. The development work will continue until 2024 and 2025, when most of the new services will be in use. (ibid.)

As noted in the 2018 update, regarding the legal basis on validation, there is no single legislation on validation in formal education, but sector-specific laws are guiding the development. Due to the separation in legislation, there is no single national validation policy or strategy either, but the legislation steers validation procedures in each sector, supported by guidance documents on validation for different sectors. In general, formal education has a statutory and well-established policy basis for validation of non-formal and informal competence, although the practices may vary locally, regionally and by degree level. In the labour market, however, validation is required to gain mandatory working life passport certificates that are required in certain fields and positions in accordance with the relevant legislation and the central agency guidelines that also validation. The third sector legislation does not address validation.

There is no need for a specific database of qualifications that can be obtained through validation as in principle all formal qualifications or their parts can be obtained by validation. Curricula is available on public domain in the *Opintopolku* (StudyInfo) system under eRequirements (<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi>) which enable comparison of acquired competence with the intended learning outcomes.

The four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment, certification) are used in the validation initiatives in formal education, notably in CVET which has the longest tradition in validation. In the labour market and the third sector the approaches vary and often focus on making the competence visible by creating learning outcomes to enable validation towards formal qualifications. There are varying practices in the identification and recognition of competence in the education system, working life, public employment services and voluntary work and NGO activities. Practices vary by industry and region.

Skills audits are frequently used in Finland in various guidance services, however there is no dedicated legislation on skills audits and they are part of the collective agreements. Skills audits make use of the tools maintained by the public administration as well as private operators. Regional public authorities are purchasing the services created by private providers that are specialising in digital skills audits (e.g., ForeAmmatti<sup>6</sup>) or full-scale validation with demonstrations (TaitoTalo<sup>7</sup>). In addition to Europass, many tools and methods have been developed in Finland. For example, the Osaan.fi service is used in the transition stages of vocational training, such as workshops. The Ohjaustaverkossa.fi service is used by public employment services and Ohjaamo<sup>8</sup> guidance centres for young people in need of extensive support. Private and third sector operators have also produced various skills audit and guidance services.

Third sector organisations target their skills auditing services to harder-to-reach groups and offer skills audit activities as part of a wider offer of integration services for immigrants. PES and other guidance services are also making use of multilingual skills audits. In the public sector, the competence centres for immigrants in eight cities with the biggest concentration of immigrant background people are offering multi-professional public services including skills audits. The skills audit maps individuals' acquired professional competences, Finnish language skills, learning abilities, communication and interaction skills, digital and mathematical skills, social and working life skills, and work ability. For instance, Vantaa Skills Centre provides guidance and counselling to unemployed immigrants in Vantaa on job searching,

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.foreammatti.fi/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.taitotalo.fi/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ohjaamot.fi/en/>

skills recognition, and skills development<sup>9</sup>: Their services include for example a two-week guidance courses held in plain Finnish, personal counselling, and thematic afternoons on diverse work life related topics. Vantaa Skills Centre co-operates with companies and various organisations that specialise in supporting immigrants. The SIMHE (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education) services at higher education institutions also engage in skills audits to enhance the identification and recognition of prior learning of for immigrants who are interested in beginning or continuing their higher education studies.

Owal Group (2022) shows that studification (*opinnoistaminen*) initiatives have mushroomed across sectors in recent years. In higher education, notably universities of applied sciences, the concept of studification is used to describe a way of learning in which work and study are combined and the knowledge gained at work is utilised directly as part of the studies. In the labour market and employment services, studification aims to make the job seekers' existing competence visible and/or enable them to acquire new competence based on a VET or HE qualification and supporting employment. Through studification of work tasks, the job seeker can obtain a competence or diploma certificate by demonstration, which promotes employment or further study opportunities. Studification connected to employment services has been piloted on local and regional level and in workshop activities, where an NGO called 'Into ry' coordinates eight regional studification networks, supports studification workshops and organises trainings and events.

Finland collects no centralised data on participation in validation although local monitoring exists. In formal education, validated courses or modules are not distinguished from other courses in the data systems. The CVET participant data gives an indication on the participation in validation as all CVET students are involved in competence-based validation. Survey-based user experience is collected from all VET students through the national ARVO impact data service. The results are published by the national Vipunen service on the public domain<sup>10</sup>. The data provides a basis to monitor the user experience of validation, but the low response rates affect the reliability of the data.

There are no specific quality assurance frameworks concerning validation procedures. As validation is embedded in the formal qualification system, the quality assurance mechanisms that apply to assessment in education and training also apply to validation procedures. Non-formal education providers in Finland typically have less established quality assurance systems and less established and systematic validation systems.

## 3.2 Validation in formal education and training

There is no national system for validation and no single law on validation of non-formal and informal learning. Sector-specific regulations define validation in basic education, General Upper Secondary Education, VET, and in universities and universities of applied sciences. Validation arrangements are in place in all formal education sectors and typically consist of the four stages of validation: identification, documentation, assessment and certification.

### 3.2.1 General upper secondary education

**The new General Upper Secondary Education Act (714/2018)** that entered into force in August 2019 has strengthened the potential for validation in the sector, by

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.suomi.fi/services/servicepoint/vantaa-skills-centre-vantaa-city/20a073a7-f129-4a1c-9ba3-eb628f1c887d> (en)

<sup>10</sup> <https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/> (en)

introducing the use of credit points and improved practices for identifying and recognising competence acquired elsewhere before and during general upper secondary studies. In addition to NFIL, all studies completed in other general upper secondary schools are recognised and accredited as such.

Following the new legislation, the Finnish National Agency for Education launched the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education in 2019<sup>11</sup>. The core curriculum prescribes that recognition of competence acquired outside formal education should avoid duplication of studies and shorten the duration of studies. Based on the core curriculum, the upper secondary schools have prepared their local curricula which have been implemented in teaching since August 2021. The local curricula also cover the recognition of competence and the related procedures.

The process of validation or recognition of competence starts at the student's initiative, on the request made before the start of the studies or the respective module. Identification and recognition of prior learning is done in connection with the preparation of the personal study plan (HOKS), based on the report presented by the student. The school should ensure that every student receives support and guidance when preparing their personal study plan, which includes plans for study, matriculation, further education and career. The school can request additional evidence in relation to the goals of general upper secondary education. Where necessary, the competence must be demonstrated in the manner decided by the training organiser. Competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning must be evaluated and recognised where it corresponds to the goals and key contents of the curriculum. The principal ensures that the competence acquired in other ways corresponds to the goals of upper secondary education.

Oosi et al. (2020) show that in general upper secondary schools, competence is typically demonstrated in course exams, however other assessment methods are also becoming more common, including discussions, documentation and tests. Validation may cover liberal adult education studies, a driving license, exchange studies and language skills; some general upper secondary schools also include activities such as civic engagement and cultural activities. Upper secondary education diplomas can be added as an appendix to the upper secondary school leaving certificate. These diplomas offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their special skills and hobbies, e.g., in home economics, visual arts, crafts, physical activity, media, music, dance and theatre. As a rule, they are not taken into account in the student selection in higher education.

The overall progress in implementation of validation in the general upper secondary education has not yet been mapped. However, a recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment points to local variations in the local instructions in terms of their details and what is being recognised as competences (Oosi et al, 2020). Clear guidelines would promote validation of non-formal and informal learning as it helps avoid considering each case separately and enables students to know in advance whether specific extra-curricular activities can be recognised.

### 3.2.2 Vocational education and training

**In the VET sector**, major efforts have been made to implement the Vocational Education and Training Act (531/2017) that came into force on 1 January 2018, bringing together two previously separate laws (Vocational Education and Training Act and Vocational Adult Education Act). VET is based on the national standards (qualification requirements<sup>12</sup>) and validation arrangements defined in laws and

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/lukion\\_opetussuunnitelman\\_perusteet\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/lukion_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2019.pdf) (fi)

<sup>12</sup> <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/selaus/ammattilinen> (fi)

policies. More detailed guidance on identification and recognition of learning in VET is based on the Government Decree (673/2017). Guidance from the National Agency for Education covers the general principles and conversion of grades (OPH-1634-2021)<sup>13</sup> and identification and recognition of competence<sup>14</sup>, both in force since 1 August 2021.

VET is characterised by a competence-based approach, and qualification requirements that are defined in terms of learning outcomes. Validation plays an important role in the new VET system, given the requirement for a personal competence development plan (HOKS) for all learners, covering the identification phase that can lead to the documentation and assessment (and in certain cases, certification) of non-formal and informal learning.

Financial incentives promote validation, as 35% of the VET institution's funding is based on the number of awarded qualifications or their parts (modules), which can be gained through validation or a combination of validation and learning either in a VET institution or working place, depending on the needs of the individual.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore 15% of funding is based on graduate employment and transfer to further studies that can also benefit from validation.

The statistics covering the CVET students (Competence based qualifications), show that more than 50 000 individual learners registered in the system. Each individual who participates in CVET undergoes the validation process as a prerequisite and an inbuilt process in the competence-based qualifications. The VET qualifications are modular and units of qualifications are also awarded based on working life needs, particularly in technical fields, in which candidates only take a module or modules that specialises in a particular specialist area concerning their work.

In VET, validation covers the entire education, as the progress of studies and the completion of a degree are based on recognition of competence through demonstrations, tests or other means. When evaluating vocational skills and competences, the evaluation is connected to authentic work tasks and working life requirements. Where previous competence exists, the validation assesses whether this competence is up to date with the working life requirements. The process starts at the application phase and especially at the beginning of the studies, when a personal competence development plan (HOKS) is drawn up for each student and an individual study path is planned. Every student attends a personal competence development discussion (HOKS discussion) where the student's initial situation, previous studies and competence acquired otherwise are clarified and the qualification requirements of the degree are discussed. The individual plans are documented in the personal competence development plan, which is in digital form in the eHOKS service, and can be updated as the studies progress. Quantitative information about recognised competence in VET is available from the Koski service, but more detailed information from eHOKS is not transferred to the database (Oosi et al., 2020).

A recent evaluation by OWAL Group (2021) commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the implementation of the reform shows a variation across VET organisers in terms of the implementation of validation and the need for more student-centred approaches in validation.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/fi/tilastot-ja-julkaisut/julkaisut/osaamisen-tunnistamisen-ja-tunnustamisen-mitoituksen-periaatteet-ja> (fi)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/fi/tilastot-ja-julkaisut/julkaisut/ammattillinen-koulutus-osaamisen-tunnistamisen-ja-tunnustamisen-ohje> (fi)

<sup>15</sup> [http://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/4297550/OKM\\_AKR\\_what+will+change+for+education+providers.pdf/c2419142-26b2-483c-975b-e1624d81c5ee/OKM\\_AKR\\_what+will+change+for+education+providers.pdf.pdf](http://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/4297550/OKM_AKR_what+will+change+for+education+providers.pdf/c2419142-26b2-483c-975b-e1624d81c5ee/OKM_AKR_what+will+change+for+education+providers.pdf.pdf) (en)

### 3.2.3 Higher education

**Higher education** institutions have autonomy to implement the identification and recognition of competence within the framework of their legislation. According to the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014, Article 37) and the Universities Act (558/2009, Article 441) students can have their prior non-formal or informal learning recognised when studying for a degree or specialisation studies, in line with the decision of the higher education institution.

Incentives to validation in higher education include funding and quality assurance policies. Since 2021 the higher education institutions' funding allocation model has encouraged faster completion of studies, and hence indirectly recognition of competence; this incentive is particularly strong for Universities of Applied Sciences that receive a large part of their core funding based on the number of graduates. The identification and recognition of competence is also included in quality assurance: in order to pass the institutional audit, a higher education institution must have its principles of recognition described (FINEEC, 2019)<sup>16</sup>. Also the national student feedback survey, which is taken into account in the calculation of the financial contribution to HEIs, collects information on whether recognition of prior learning has been undertaken.

Practices for identifying and recognizing competences have been developed and unified in various development projects and through the cooperation of the HEIs' representative organizations ARENE and UNIFI with their members. The national guidelines for universities were launched in spring 2020 when a dedicated working group operating as part of the forum of directors of study affairs at universities published its final report on guidelines regarding the practices of identifying and recognizing students' previously acquired competence (AHOT, according to its Finnish acronym) (OHA-foorumi, 2020).

#### National recommendations for recognition of prior learning in universities

In February 2020, UNIFI, the Rectors' Council of Finnish Universities, adopted the national recommendations for recognition of prior learning (RPL). Key points include:

- (1) All students who have the right to study can take advantage of the RPL procedure.
- (2) A student has the responsibility to initiate the recognition process, and the right to receive guidance for making the application.
- (3) In assessment, the focus is on competence.
- (4) In the recognition, competence acquired by elsewhere or previously is compared to the intended learning outcomes (competence goals) of the degree, study unit or course.
- (5) Competence can be recognised, if it corresponds to the intended learning outcomes.

UNIFI (2020)

According to the national guidelines co-developed by universities, and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, competence acquired in non-formal and informal learning – further education, liberal adult education, work experience, positions of trust, hobbies etc. – is compared with the intended learning outcomes of the respective HE studies. Full or partial recognition can be granted for competence acquired outside of formal education provided that it meets the intended learning

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<sup>16</sup>The Audit Manual (3.1.2) prescribes that: "the university consistently and transparently applies the regulations and provisions concerning student selection, recognition of competence, the progress of studies and the completion of degrees. The procedures related to the implementation of the education support the student's graduation and integration into working life."

outcomes of the related studies. In order to assess competence acquired, the student must demonstrate it with a certificate, exam, portfolio, essay, interview or other suitable method. A use of diverse evaluation methods is recommended, but the procedure should not be more burdensome than the evaluation of a corresponding course credit. In the assessment the focus is on acquired competence, not the number of credits. There is no limit in terms of the number of credits in recognition. (UNIFI, 2020)

In higher education, the identification and recognition of competence starts with the student's initiative, and guidance and support are offered for the process. In identification, the student matches the acquired competence to the intended learning outcome (competence goals). A key tool is the personal study plan HOPS that is developed at the beginning of the studies but also updated during the studies which enables identification and recognition of competence acquired outside of formal education before and during the studies. The demonstration of competence can be based on certificates, exams, portfolio, essays, interviews and other methods and will be determined by the person who grants the recognition. If the acquired competence and the intended learning outcomes correspond to each other, a full or partial recognition can be granted. The universities can view the information on students' competences in the Koski database through VIRTa service, covering degrees and studies completed at the universities, vocational qualifications, and matriculation examination results and grades as well as credits completed in liberal adult education (for details on Virta service, see 10.2.1 ICT in formal education).

Higher education institutions are using diverse methods in identification and recognition of competence acquired before and during the studies. Oosi et al. (2020) have identified different ways to demonstrate and recognise informal competence in HEIs:

#### **Ways to demonstrate and recognise competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning in higher education**

Systematic mechanisms to plan work-integrated learning and its recognition. Skills identification and documentation workshops that enable students to identify and document their own skills and develop a demonstration plan. Competence test days where the teacher, students, and alumni act as working life evaluators. ( See 10.1.1).

SIMHE activities (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland) to streamline the identification and recognition of the prior learning of migrants and facilitate their access to higher education, completion of degrees and employment. ( See 9.2.3.)

Recognising competence acquired in a position of trust in the student union, through a learning assignment and accumulation of credits towards a degree.

An online self-assessment tool for nursing students with an immigrant background to identify their starting level, skills and possible gaps.

Recognition of skills and competence acquired in guides and scouts through interpretation forum that compares non-formal learning outcomes with the curricula goals. (See 10.1.2.)

Collaboration with the Defence Forces in recognizing the competence acquired as conscripts who receive an AI-powered, digital skills profile that can be used in the job search and application to further education.

Oosi et al. (2020)

Defence forces are an important training provider in Finland. In order to ensure that the skills and competences acquired in the military service are better credited for in formal education, Pori brigade together with local educational institutions and Headai engaged in a joint pilot project to utilise the competence acquired in military services for education and career paths (Maavoimat, 2020; Ketamo, Ollila and Paasto, 2022).

The aim was to help conscripts to utilise these skills and competencies in their education, careers and jobs, to strengthen HEIs' ability to recognise military service towards HE qualifications and to unify the educational paths in order to create impact on the national economy. As a concrete result, the conscripts received an AI-powered digital skills profile that consists of military leadership skills transformed into civilian language.

### **Articulation of the competence acquired in the Defence Forces' leadership training**

During the years 2019-2021, the Pori Brigade together with local educational institutions and Headai created a joint pilot project to utilise the acquired military skills for education and career paths. Headai used cognitive text analytics to model the competence acquired in the leadership training of the Defence Forces. These competences were articulated as 'occupational safety' and 'responsible operation'. Through this articulation, the competences acquired in the military service became directly compatible with the terminology used by higher education institutions and the labour market.

The pilot focused on leadership training and identifying those skills with AI in order to simulate them with the higher education curricula. Cognitive technology was used to enable real-time comparisons and simulations between multidisciplinary military service training, educational offerings and the labour market skills demand. The AI-based solution was developed in the pilot to enable identification of competence acquired in the leadership courses and articulating them into civilian language. These were saved to a digital skills profile, which the conscripts can download as part of their service certification.

The project identified the competence acquired in military service in detail. The AI-powered experiment found significant similarities for example in leadership training and business studies. The project showed that the management training in the Defence Forces produces competences equivalent of 10-30 credits in formal education and training, depending on the field and the level. Furthermore, the comparison of the competence acquired during the military service with the labour market competence demand, showed that a considerable part of the competence acquired is necessary for employment.

As a result of this pilot, conscripts received a concrete skills profile document of the competence they acquired to help them identify and verbalise their skills for further education and job-seeking purposes.

Maavoimat (2020); Ketamo, Ollila and Paaso (2022)

As Finnish higher education students typically work during their studies, HEIs, particularly universities of applied sciences, have developed mechanisms to integrate competence acquired through work experience or other learning experience into studies, and to evaluate and recognise the resulting competence. In addition to recognition of prior learning, UAS are increasingly engaged in studification i.e., recognising students' non-formal and informal competence acquired in work and other contexts during their studies<sup>17</sup>. Various projects, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, have developed practical models for combining work and higher education and mechanisms to strengthen students' links to the labour market (see e.g., Kotila, 2020). These methods improve the recognition of learning that takes place in working life, improve the acquisition of working life skills and reduce the time to degree.

### **Studification in and with higher education institutions**

In universities of applied sciences, studification is implemented at least in three different forms:

<sup>17</sup> See for instance the Työpeda project that engaged 10 universities and 6 universities of applied sciences. <https://www.tyopedafi/>

- (1) In student-oriented studification, the skills that are acquired at work during the studies are recognised towards a course or part of it. The initiative typically comes from a student. A plan for the competence development is designed.
- (2) In workplace-oriented studification, industry-related competence acquired at work is identified and recognised towards a degree. The initiative usually comes from the employer who identifies skills need and/or wants to strengthen the employees' commitment to the company. A plan is developed by the UAS in collaboration with the employer and employees.
- (3) In HEI-oriented studification all or part of the course is implemented through an assignment for an external client, e.g., R&D or other project. The initiative usually comes from the HEI.

See also section 10.1.1.3 for more details

### 3.3 Validation in the labour market

As noted in the 2018 update, the labour market plays a key role in the Finnish validation system especially in VET. More specifically the role of the labour market is crucial in:

- Assessing skills demonstrations (upper secondary vocational qualifications): In addition to the teacher, a working life representative and the respective student participate in the assessment of the demonstrations.
- Planning and development of VET: Social partners take part in the Working Life Committees that operate under the auspices of the Finnish National Agency for Education for the planning and development of vocational education (including the qualification structure).
- Quality assurance and supervision: Social partners take part in Working Life Committees (Työelämätoimikunta<sup>18</sup>) which monitor the outcomes and where necessary, recommends corrective measures to the Ministry of Education and Culture.
- Provision of workplace learning opportunities and assessment environments for students.

There are no examples where labour market organisations would independently carry out validation activities in the full meaning of the process. The VET qualifications system is built to serve the labour market and ensure its hands-on participation in the validation processes.

A recent evaluation commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Oosi et al, 2020) shows that there is no uniform strategy or operating method for describing, recognising and accrediting competence in the world of work. The practices of identifying and recognizing competence in working life and acquired at work are varied and scattered, and do not always have a clear link to the formal qualification system. Identification of competence in the labour market is typically connected to activities that relate to job search, recruitment and career change situations, with diverse employer-specific practices. The services and tools for identifying competence acquired are not widely used. In recruitment, the competence of job seekers is identified during the processing of their applications and interviews as well as competence tests or work simulation tasks. Job seekers can get support in articulating their skills from PES and educational institutions. Trade unions also offer training on competence identification to their members. During the work career, competence is identified at workplaces based on the models and processes

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/ammattillinen-koulutus/tyoelamatoimikunnat> (fi)

developed from the organizations' own starting points, using mechanisms such as development discussions or competence measurements. In addition to organization-specific competence identification models, there are models that relate to a specific competence or ability, or field/sector-specific standards and practices.

During the reporting period, the government launched the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning and the Strategy for Lifelong Guidance to address these shortcomings, in order to improve guidance practices and to solve the challenges of identifying and recognizing skills. Development measures have been introduced to strengthen competence-based approaches, to improve recognition of competence acquired at work, and to develop digital systems that they contribute to the identification and recognition of competence.

Current examples of competence identification and recognition systems used in the labour market can be divided into three categories (Oosi et al., 2020):

- (1) Tests, licenses and training provided by suppliers, which are used in connection with certain software or licenses etc.
- (2) Training validated for the needs of working life, such as internationally authorised personnel trainer training.
- (3) Mandatory working life passport certificates, such as Alcohol and Hygiene Passports.<sup>19</sup>

For instance, an alcohol proficiency certificate for serving alcoholic beverages is issued by educational institutions in line with the relevant legislation and the central agency guidelines (Valvira, 2022). The certificate can be issued to a person who has passed an exam testing their knowledge of the Alcohol Act or to a person who has completed education and training covering equivalent information, including VET qualifications, provided that the qualification or degree includes skills on the topics covered in the test. In the same vein, all who handle unpackaged perishable foods must pass a dedicated test to obtain a Hygiene Passport. Food hygiene tests are organised by Hygiene Passport Examiners who are independent operators approved and supervised by the Finnish Food Authority. Examiners, who organise tests around Finland, are entitled to charge the candidates a fee for the costs incurred from organizing the test and issuing a Hygiene Passport which is approved by the Finnish Food Authority. Recently online services have been created to support the acquisition of these passports. These services are underpinned with a training offer through the Trainify.fi service that also enables online practising for the tests on Hygiene Passport, Alcohol Passport, Work Safety and Security Officer Card. Other training topics are under planning.

### Working life passports

The Osaamistehdas LLC company offers nation-wide fee-based training and preparation for testing for mandatory working life passports through its national network of testers and its dedicated websites: Alcoholpassport.fi, Hygienepassport.fi and Trainify.fi.

Hygienepassport.fi offers Hygiene Passport tests and trainings. Instructors certified by Finnish Food Authority offer tests and training nationwide in a different language. Online training is available in English, Arabic and Finnish, supported by self-study material in Finnish, Swedish, English, Arabic, Thai, Spanish, Chinese, Turkish, Russian and Estonian languages. Hygienepassport.fi organises hygiene passport tests nationwide in several different languages. All kinds of learners are taken into consideration and there are special tests for people with dyslexia, sense disorders etc.

Customised training and tests are offered for companies and educational institutions at their own premises. Trainify.fi provides online training website for practicing for Hygieniapassport and other proficiency tests. For instance, for Hygiene Passport, the service contains a

<sup>19</sup> <https://opintopolku.fi/konfo/fi/sivu/tyoelaman-passit-ja-kortit>

database of more than 1 000 statements and their justifications, prepared by professionals in the food industry. Users can practice the seven subfields one by one and take the whole test and can receive real-time feedback on their answers. Training time to Trainify.fi service is available in Finnish and English, but also in Arabic by request. The online training site also offers group licenses for educational institutions or employers who want to offer their students or employees an opportunity to practice for working life tests by ordering unlimited access to the online service for the working life passport of their choice.

Some companies are making use of digital tools in competence identification. A commonly used tool is the OSKAR skills audit tool<sup>20</sup> that can be used for identifying and mapping the skills of job seekers, trainees and employees in order to help them discover knowledge and skills that they don't recognise themselves, articulate competence, or otherwise bring up in a job search situation. The OSKAR tool takes advantage of ready-made, occupation-specific surveys that map both special skills related to a certain occupation and more general working life skills. In addition, the OSKAR tool can also map informal competence as well as factors related to motivation. In principle the results can be used also in the formal education sector but there is no knowledge to what extent this is happening.

Several studification initiatives have been launched to enable identification of competence acquired at work (or NFIL) and comparing this competence with the formal degree requirement in VET or higher education. These initiatives typically have a strong link to the formal education systems as the recognition of competence usually takes place in VET institutions and Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). For instance, Haaga-Helia UAS has developed work-integrated learning models with the recognition of competence acquired at work as part of studies (For the Work & Study model of Haaga-Helia, see 10.1). Employers in the fast-food industry have used studification as a means of building the staff commitment: in these models an employee who has acquired competence at work, but lacks formal qualifications or formal proof of competence, can complete a vocational qualification (or parts of it) at work. Studification can also imply development of a UAS training package to employees (e.g. restaurant managers) through a training package that produces competence equivalent to a UAS degree.

Studification has also been implemented on the regional and local labour market and employment services. Studification offers the job seekers the opportunity to learn new things and identify and recognise their own competence. Several initiatives have been developed in recent years. Below are two examples of studification in different types of regions: in the sparsely populated Kainuu region (Elsa-Hanke, 2021) and Finland's third largest city, Tampere where studification is used in apprenticeships, work trials, rehabilitative work etc.

### Regional and local studification models

In the sparsely populated Kainuu region, PES has implemented studification in diverse environments such as youth workshops, companies, and rehabilitative workplaces, work environments in prisons, various municipal units, and NGOs. Kainuu's studification model has made skills development opportunities more accessible in a sparsely populated region. The model consists of the following four steps which are loosely aligned with the four steps of validation:

- (1) The working environment of the workplace is identified together with the vocational teacher. The functions of the work environment are identified and compared with the core curriculum together with the teacher.

<sup>20</sup> <https://bearit.fi/digitaaliset-tyoelamapalvelut/oskar/> (fi)

- (2) The customer's competence is observed and identified in the work environment, by comparing this competence with the core curriculum, available in the eRequirements service, see <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/>. In addition, the customer's prior competence acquired in studying, working life and hobbies is also identified.
- (3) The customer receives a certificate of his/her recognised competence. The customer can use the competence certificate, when applying for studies or in job search. If the customer applies to study at a VET institution, the competence can be recognised in the personal competence development plan (HOKS).

The City of Tampere, in cooperation with the local VET organiser Tredu, offers studification opportunities in apprenticeships, work trials, rehabilitative work and wage support work. The goal of Studification is to enhance the content and effectiveness of employment services, develop the city's employment activities and promote the availability of skilled labour.

The studification of Tampere covers four stages:

- (1) Identifying skills and learning goals with the coach;
- (2) Demonstration of competence organised by the educational institution;
- (3) Achieving a diploma or competence certificate; and
- (4) Continuing to further education or employment.

The client is supported by a workplace counsellor and a coach. The coach helps to identify client's strengths and development needs, and supports the client and the workplace counsellor throughout the process.

For more details on various studification initiatives, see the review by Owl Group (2022).

Digital tools combining validation and guidance for job search have been developed by companies such as Vastuu Group which has created an industry-specific digital service to match job seekers and employers.

### **Vastuu Group**

A tech company called Vastuu Group has developed a digital service (<https://luotettavatyontekija.vastuugroup.fi/>) to promote employment in the real estate service and construction industry. The service facilitates the identification of skills and the job search as it enables users to easily authorise their own skills profile and own verified information in various employment services. It speeds up the recruitment process, as there is no need to check the verified information provided by the job seeker.

The service utilises personal data capabilities, which allow job seekers to manage their own data in different employment management situations and decide for what purpose they provide their own data. In practice, a job seeker can use their own verified information from various registers and use them to build a skills profile for themselves. They can also authorise different services to use the information of the skills profile to search for and apply for jobs in the real estate and construction industry.

The service was developed with the funding from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. Hundreds of experts from different sectors participated in the concept work.

Oosi, O. et al. (2020)

## **3.4 Validation in the third sector**

In Finland, only formal education providers – mainly VET and higher education institutions – can award formal certificates, diplomas or qualifications through validation. While the third sector organisations are providing their own certificates, they are not part of the formal education system although the acquired competencies

may be the same as in the national qualification requirements and formal education providers have been able to validate them.

As noted in the 2018 update, the third sector actors are playing various roles in validation:

- (1) They develop competence-based courses and learning outcomes independently and in co-operation with formal training and other validation providers.
- (2) They inform their target groups about validation opportunities e.g. third sector associations which provide services for immigrants.
- (3) Their employee and employer members can act as co-assessors in the validation process and provide guidance services for their customers.
- (4) They may provide training environments, where assessment can take place. For example a local VET provider can make a training agreement with a third sector organisation to serve as a learning environment.
- (5) They may provide validation services and develop tools for validation.

During the reporting period, important measures have been taken to ensure that the skills and competences acquired in the third sector can be better identified and recognised in formal education. Notably, the legislation concerning liberal adult education has been adapted in 2020 and 2021 to ensure that the learners can make better use of their competences, which is important particularly for those learners who are developing their study or career paths.

Based on the recommendations of two working groups established by the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö*, 2018 and 2019), the Act on national study and degree registers (14.12.2017/884) and the Act on liberal adult education (21.8.1998/632) were adapted in autumn 2020 and spring 2021. As a result, since August 2021, liberal adult education institutions have been able to transfer the credits of their competence-based courses to the national Koski data base. The changes in the legislation ensure that competence-based learning acquired in liberal adult education can be credited and recognised in formal education and in the labour market. The possibility to record credits of courses in the Koski database increases the value of liberal adult education alongside formal education and increases their importance in demonstrating students' competence. When the student gains credit for the course, the skills acquired and the course performance can be better used, for example when looking for a job or when studying and applying to study.

The preconditions for the transfer of credits to the Koski database are that the education and training is described on the basis of competences, that its scope is described in credits and that the acquired learning has been assessed. The registration of credits into the national Koski database facilitates the use of these credits in the formal education but depends on the decision of the education institution. Consequently competence-based and credit-bearing education and training can be introduced to national eRequirements platform (ePerusteet)<sup>21</sup>. The completed credits of these courses can be fed into the national Koski system only if the individual learner has given their permission for the assessment at the beginning of the course. The information on studies is collected from the study administration systems of the teaching and training providers. Through the Opintopolku.fi<sup>22</sup> service, learners can view and easily share their study history with a formal education institution or an employer.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi>

<sup>22</sup> <https://opintopolku.fi/konfo/fi/>

**The structured process for the identification and recognition of competence in liberal adult education ensures that these competences can be recognised as part of formal education and training or as working life skills.** At the beginning of the course, learners are asked for their permission to assess the competences. Permissions are documented and maintained on a permanent basis. In the identification of competence, student makes his/her competence visible in a way that has been agreed in advance. In the demonstration of the competence, learner shows to what extent s/he has reached the learning outcomes of the training. This can involve one or more outputs or actions. Course assessments are undertaken for those learners who have given their permission to assessment. Competence is assessed according to the agreed method, and may be graded. The documentation/certification covers the transfer of the assessment data to the Koski system (name/title of the training and its scope, the end date of the training and the assessment of competence). The institutes feeds the credits to the Koski system and saves the assessment documents (written assessments by the assessor and student's self-evaluation). The documentation is possible provided that the competence has been assessed according to the criteria of the competence-based description (accepted/pass or a grade). Learners can access the credits through Opintopolku (StudyInfo).

There is no national data or quality assurance mechanisms in place regarding validation in the non-formal sector. However, data on the number of courses included in e-Requirements and the number of competence-based credits in liberal adult education that have been transferred to the Koski database show a positive development. For details, see 11.2 Monitoring and evaluation.

**Incentives for liberal adult education institutions to develop competence-based provision also exist in the form of funding, staff training and guidance to institutions.** Institutions can apply for funding from the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), and from Erasmus+ and Nordplus programmes. Instructions by the Ministry of Education and Culture guide the provision of information to learners when saving credit completion data, and stress the importance of an implementation plan for the identification and recognition of competences. In 2022, two guidebooks were launched: one for the leadership of liberal adult education institutions or their providers (Karttunen, 2022a), and another for teachers to plan competence-based courses and guidance and evaluation of students (Karttunen, 2022b). The validation practices in the liberal adult education institutions are supported by trainings provided among others by the Sivis Study Centre and the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to the recent policies in liberal adult education, a range of mechanism and tools have been created to support the validation of skills, including through projects on studification, to enable the identification, evaluation and documentation of competences acquired in associations, organizations, volunteer work, workshops etc.

**Several validation initiatives are ongoing in the third sector.** A growing number of NGOs and other third sector actors are active in developing Open Badges in order to validate the competences gained in the world of associations, voluntary work, scouting etc. Among the NGOs, Finnish Guides and Scouts have developed tools for making competence visible, through competence certificates and badges that make the competences acquired visible. Other NGOs have joined the development work, and various methods and tools have been developed for competence identification. For instance, the Competence Center Kentauri has developed a badge set for young volunteers comprising seven badges<sup>24</sup>. Their contents cover task areas that young people are typically responsible for in organizations.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://kansalaisopistojenliitto.fi/>

<sup>24</sup> [https://kentauri.fi/julkaisut\\_ja\\_tyokalu/kentaurin-osaamismerkit-nuorille-vapaaehtoisille/](https://kentauri.fi/julkaisut_ja_tyokalu/kentaurin-osaamismerkit-nuorille-vapaaehtoisille/)

A pioneering organisation in developing validation services and tools for the third sector is the Sivis Study Centre (<https://www.ok-sivis.fi/>). Sivis works to ensure that the importance of learning in the third sector is recognised in society as part of continuous and lifelong learning and recognised in educational institutions and working life. It supports and guides NGOs in the different stages of identifying and recognizing competences and supports the identification of competence by organizing trainings and by providing tools, training models and competence badges for the use of organizations. Sivis has also provided guidance on issuing and using of certificates and open badges. For more details, see 8.2.2 Training and support to Third Sector practitioners, and 10.1.2 Methods in the Third Sector.

## 4 Links to credentials and qualifications

Provisions on the National Framework for Qualifications (NQF) and Other Competence Modules are laid down in Act<sup>25</sup> and Government Decree<sup>26</sup> on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules. The framework enables overall scrutiny of the Finnish qualifications system, because it includes general education, vocational education and higher education qualifications. The framework and its competence-based descriptions of qualifications support lifelong learning, improve the clarity and effectiveness of the Finnish system of qualifications, increase qualifications' national and international transparency and comparability and national and international mobility.

The NQF was launched in 2017 and has been expanded twice. The aim is that the NQF strengthens the competence-based approach and describes qualifications of all administrative branches. In 2020, qualifications provided by different administrative branches were included in the NQF. In 2022, education related to the compulsory education provided by liberal adult education institutions was included in the NQF. In December 2022, the Working Group on recognition of learning has proposed lighter regulation to enable better coverage of liberal adult education.

In the FINQF, qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules are classified into eight levels based on the required competences. The competences acquired at each level are defined in the Government Decree, and the level descriptors are in line with the level requirements of the European qualifications framework<sup>27</sup>.

Finnish qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence modules are placed, according to the Government Decree, at the following levels of the FINQF:

- Level 2: Basic education syllabus and Preparatory education for working life and independent living (TELMA);
- Level 3: Preparatory studies for general upper secondary school (LUVA) (until 31 July 2022), Preparatory education for vocational training (VALMA) (until 31 July 2022), an Advanced syllabus for basic education in the arts, Preparatory education for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification (TUVA) (as of 1 August 2022) and education related to the compulsory education provided by liberal adult education institutions (as of 1 August 2022);
- Level 4: General upper secondary school syllabus and the Matriculation Examination, Upper secondary vocational qualifications and further vocational qualifications, Basic Examination in Prison Services, Fire Fighter Qualification,

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<sup>25</sup>Finnish National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules are laid down in Act (93/2017) [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270\\_act\\_93-2017.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182270_act_93-2017.pdf) (en)

<sup>26</sup> Government Decree on the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules (120/2017) [https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107\\_government\\_decree\\_120-2017\\_27.2.2017\\_.pdf](https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/182107_government_decree_120-2017_27.2.2017_.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/qualifications-frameworks>

and Emergency Response Centre Operator Qualification, a Basic course for Border Guards and a Basic study module for non-commissioned officers;

- Level 5: Specialist vocational qualifications, the Sub-Officer Qualification (Fire and Rescue Services), the Vocational Qualification in Air Traffic Control, a General level (1 and 2) study module for non-commissioned officers and a Master level study module for non-commissioned officers;
- Level 6: Bachelor's degrees at universities of applied sciences and Bachelor's degrees at universities, Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a Bachelor's degrees or a UAS Bachelor's degree, and Specialised training and Pastoral qualification provided by the church;
- Level 7: Master's degrees at universities of applied sciences and Master's degrees at universities, Professional specialisation programmes provided by universities and universities of applied sciences intended for holders of a Master's degree or a UAS Master's degree, Advanced pastoral qualification, Senior staff officer course, Further studies in war economy and technology and Specific qualification on prescribing medicines;
- Level 8: Universities' and National Defence University scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees (licentiate and doctor degrees), the General Staff Officer's Degree, the Specialist Degree in Veterinary Medicine, and Specialist training in medicine and Specialist training in dentistry.

### **Outcomes achieved**

The FiNQF enables mobility within the education system by defining the relationships between qualifications and other competence modules and promotes transition to further and supplementary education. It improves validation and recognition of prior learning when moving within the qualifications system, thus supporting lifelong learning.

The FiNQF helps focus more attention on the learning outcomes required by qualifications and assists educational institutions and higher education institutions to focus more on learning objectives and learning outcomes when developing their curricula and programmes.

Clear and understandable descriptions of qualifications and other competence modules improve the quality of Finnish education while objectives set for qualifications and other competence modules and attainment of them also serve as a key premise for quality assessment.

The FiNQF is learning-outcome based, which makes the formal qualification structure more transparent. It benefits also the non-formal sector, as it can describe and reference their courses and course curricula according to the FiNQF levels in order to promote validation between non-formal and formal education providers.

In VET, competence points are used (equal to ECVET) and learning is not time-bound but competence bound. Results of validation are not singled out in certification, but both – validation and school-based learning – bear equal status.

Equally in higher education, credits are used and learning is not time-bound but competence-based. Results of validation are not singled out in certification, as validated learning and HEI--based learning have an equal status.

**Regarding the relationship to partial qualifications and modularisation**, all qualifications are modular and assessment criteria are described for each module, making assessment targeted and reliable. Partial qualifications (*osatutkinnot*) do not exist in Finland within the scope of formal education. The parts of degrees, which in vocational education are called units (*tutkintojen osa*), are not placed separately in

the NQF, but at the level of the respective degree<sup>28</sup>. Educational institutions/higher education institutions decide on the recognition of previously acquired skills as part of the degree.

In principle credentials obtained through validation can be combined to obtain a full qualification on the NQF, however the decision to do so is at the discretion of E&T institutions who establish their own practices. The legislation does not specify the maximum number of modules for a qualification that can be obtained through validation. For example, in vocational training, the identification and recognition of previously acquired competence is the responsibility of the education and training organiser, and focused on acquiring the competence that is missing. In general, the fact that competence points and credits etc. are used makes it easier to recognise competence.

**Regarding micro-credentials** (*pienet osaamiskokonaisuudet*), the Working Group on Identification of Competence will launch a separate review in autumn 2023 that will focus on the possible inclusion of micro-credentials in the FINQF, in order to establish the demand for inclusion by different stakeholders as well as possible benefits, added value and problems. The review will also establish possible alternatives to increase the visibility of micro-credentials in Finland. Currently, micro-credentials have been defined as forming a part or parts of the VET qualifications. (Finnish Government, 2022)

There is variation in the extent to which different opportunities made available through validation are offered by the education and training providers and used by individuals in practice. In vocational education and training, validation applies to all students, and it is the duty of the VET institutions to identify and recognise students' previously acquired competence which corresponds to the competence requirements/goals of the degree or education being pursued. The Finnish National Agency for Education has also issued an instruction to this end<sup>29</sup>. Monitoring is implemented as part of an online student and graduate survey, the results of which are published in Vipunen. In general upper secondary education practical arrangements are guided by the Act and a Government Decree, however no central monitoring has been put in place. In higher education institutions, practical arrangements for the recognition of competence, related information and the number of approved studies vary from one institution to another: good practices have been sought together by institutions, but no national monitoring is in place.

Validation is embedded in formal education where individual study plans are prepared for learners. There is no specific central monitoring of the extent of which validation takes place in practice nor the take-up by individuals, although local monitoring exists.

## 5 Standards

As noted in the 2018 update, the Finnish VET system has national qualification requirements that are described in learning outcomes and include skills requirements, assessment targets, criteria and methods. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for developing the qualification requirements in close co-operation with working life and education providers. Finnish HEIs are autonomous, but also their qualification requirements are based on learning outcomes. The degree of

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<sup>28</sup> This was the starting point for the preparation of the framework, and has also been recorded in the government's proposal for the act on NQF.

[https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Documents/HE\\_204+2016.pdf](https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Documents/HE_204+2016.pdf), p. 25. (fi)

<sup>29</sup>

<https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Ohje%20osaamisen%20tunnustasimasesta%20ja%20tunnustasmasista.pdf>. (fi)

engagement with the working life in developing the qualification requirements, varies according to the field.

The standards and the certification are the same for formal education and validation procedures. For instance, the market value of the Finnish VET qualifications is high, because working life is closely integrated with the qualification system and the qualification requirement development processes as well as with assessment procedures and helping candidates to take up further learning options.

As the qualification requirements are the same for both formal education and validation purposes, the assessment is focused on learning outcomes, rather than the learning process. In the Quality-Based Qualifications (CBQs) this approach was introduced in 1995 and the learning outcomes-based qualification criteria are the corner stone of the quality assurance in the Finnish VET system. There are no separate occupational or educational standards. In higher education there are no national standards, but the institutions are responsible for curriculum development. HEIs' learning-outcome-based curricula enables validation procedures and makes it more transparent.

National education portals such as *Opintopolku* and *ePerusteet* provide information on the core curricula and courses for both validation providers and users.

#### **Information portals: *Opintopolku* and *ePerusteet***

The Finnish Agency for Education has developed a massive e-portal called *Opintopolku/StudyInfo* (<https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/>) to support lifelong learning. (NB! the English site does not cover all of the features of the Finnish or Swedish versions). *Opintopolku* covers upper secondary education, VET and higher education. The entire scope of education and training from language studies to higher education for immigrants as well as information on all relevant services is also available.

*Opintopolku* contains information on degrees, professions and studying at different educational institutions. It enables learners to find education and training options and apply for them. Learners can look for education and training programmes and see the providers of these programmes. They can access contact information for general guidance and counselling services related to education and choosing a profession, as well as links to online services.

*Opintopolku* consists of several types of services regarding education and training in Finland both for individual learners as well as for education and training authorities. Finnish residents can find all formal certificates, diplomas or qualifications awarded in the service (by using Finnish bank identification codes, mobile certificate or certificate card). The portal even registers modules or parts of qualifications of each learner. The educational authorities have access to the database and can better plan individual learning paths and receive information to support recognition of prior learning from the database.

The *ePerusteet* service (eRequirements) (<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi>) has been developed as part of the *Opintopolku* service. It contains the national qualifications' requirements and curricula from early childhood education to the secondary education as well as TUVVA preparatory training for degree education, KOTO integration training for migrants, education financed by the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (JOTPA). The service also includes national qualifications requirements for all VET qualifications. Also non-formal adult education sector is increasingly publishing its competence-based curricula in *ePerusteet*.

*eRequirements* serves both the learners and their guardians as well as guidance professionals. Education and training organisers also publish local curricula and degree implementation plans in the service. The English language version *eRequirements* (<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/>) contains qualification requirements for the vocational qualifications for which an authorisation to provide education in English has been granted.

See also 10.2.1 Use of ICT in formal education validation.

## 6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

There is no central coordination of validation activities in Finland, but sector-specific activities and measures. In the strict sense only formal education and training providers are able to provide validation linked to certification in Finland. Validation is possible at all levels of formal education but in practice more common in VET and universities of applied sciences.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) is responsible for the qualifications structure and the National Qualifications Framework. As for the qualifications governed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, qualifications of a certain type have been placed to the National Qualifications Framework but not individual qualifications. For instance, it determines which qualifications are included in the National Qualifications Framework and which are for instance obsolete or too marginal or need to be removed. MEC is responsible for strategic planning and guidelines in education and research and in charge of the development of legislation regarding validation. For instance, recent changes in the legislation have enabled the validation of credit-bearing, competence-based learning in liberal adult education towards formal qualifications. MEC's role in validation has grown with the ongoing Reform of Continuous Learning; in 2021 with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment it established the Working Group on Identification of Competence, for the implementation of the sustainable growth program, with the task to promote and guide the creation of tools and procedures for the identification of skills and competence acquired at work and outside of formal learning system.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM) is responsible for instance for securing the functioning of the labour market and employability, regional development and integration of immigrants. Its role in the validation is linked to the job seekers', immigrants' and adult population's competence identification and recognition undertaken in employment and other services. Since 2022 Finland has implemented the Nordic workforce service model which implies early-stage strong support and guidance for jobseekers including better identification of competence and service needs. TEM co-chairs the Working Group on Identification of Competence. During 2022-2024 it is leading the work on the nation-wide development of lifelong guidance which plays a strong role in validation; this entails the review of the guidance training and structures and development of national standards.

The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) decides on the national qualifications requirements of VET qualifications that are developed in co-operation with working life and training providers, as well as other qualifications. EDUFI is responsible for providing regulations and guidelines on assessment to institutions and validation practitioners and has a strong role in quality assurance of validation. EDUFI is also responsible for national-level coordination of the co-operation between stakeholders, Working Life Committees and VNFIL providers. It also allocates funding for the development of validation in many respects, e.g. innovative projects that improve validation practices in NGOs, formal education etc., and competence development of validation professionals.

A total of 37 sectoral Working Life Committees<sup>30</sup> have been nominated for the period from 1.1.2021 to 31.12.2023. They have replaced the Qualification Committees and are responsible for the quality assurance of assessment and for conducting skills' demonstrations. The Committees decide on rectifying an assessment in the case of an appeal. One of their main tasks is to take part in the development of the qualifications system, structure and requirements.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/tyoelamatoimikuntien-tehtavat-ja-kokoonpano> (fi)

The new Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment JOTPA, established in 2021, reports to the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment. It promotes the competence development of working-age people and the availability of skilled labour and organises the annual Reveal Your Skills campaign which highlights the importance of competence identification (see 6.1. Outreach and Awareness Raising). JOTPA funds trainings to meet urgent skills needs that cannot be met by formal education providers and has a strong focus on harder-to-reach groups. Some of the projects address validation.

### **Education and training providers**

**General upper secondary education institutions** are in charge of validation of competence of their students. There is limited central data on the progress of validation in this sector which can play a big role given the large number of adult learners in this sector.

In VET, **Vocational Education and Training organisations** provide the bulk of the validation services in Finland. They co-operate closely with local / regional work life e.g. in terms of assessment and on-the-job learning. VET organisations provide information and guidance services and work in close co-operation with the professional employment services (PES). Since the 2018 VET reform, the VET organisations are responsible for certification, which was the role of the Qualification Committees in the old system.

**Higher education institutions (HEIs)** are autonomous and may independently decide on validation procedures. With increased emphasis on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning, validation has become more common in higher education institutions. For more than a decade HEIs have been developing their approaches to recognition of prior learning both collaboratively and individually; all institutions have now dedicated policies in place. VNFIL is usually done at the beginning of studies in conjunction of development of personal study plans (HOPS) but can also take place later. Cooperation on validation procedures with employers or other stakeholders is pursued particularly by Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) which close to the world of work.

### **Private sector actors**

**Private sector actors** including social partners play an important role in collaboration and development activities in CVET and IVET. In contrast to many other European countries, in Finland the involvement of the private sector is significant and practical in the validation of informal and non-formal learning. As noted in the 2018 update, the private sector engagement in the VET system stretches from national to local level and from strategic work to involvement in assessment procedures. (See also chapters 3.3 Validation and labour market).

**Many companies** are making use of the opportunities provided by the competence-based education system by encouraging their employees to have the learning they have acquired at work and in formal, informal or non-formal settings validated. The VET system is particularly appealing for them as it is based on the needs of employers. The basic idea is that adults with previous work (paid or unpaid) and/or study experience should only study those areas of competence that provide them with skills that they do not as yet command. This enables employees to shorten their study time by having their prior experience validated and reduces costs (time and training) for both the company and the employee. Many companies are also collaborating with universities to applied sciences to help meet their further education needs which may involve validation too.

A growing number of **technological firms** are providing IT-related products and services for validation. For instance Open Badge Factory (<https://openbadgefactory.com>) is the most frequently used platform for developing open badges which are increasingly popular among users and the third sector actors to validate competences acquired for instance in volunteering, associations, scouting or non-degree adult education.. Headai is another technology firm that collaborates with educational institutions, industry federations and other clients and develops products that provide Artificial Intelligence powered tools to identify and match competence and the labour market skills needs, as well as guidance services.

**Third sector organisations** inform their target groups about validation opportunities (e.g. third sector associations which provide services for immigrants). Their employee and employer members can also act as co-assessors in the validation process and provide guidance services for their customers. Third sector organisations can also serve as training environments, in which assessment can take place. An example is where a local VET provider can make a training agreement with a third sector organisation to serve as a training/learning environment (so that the environment meets with the qualification requirements in question). Such arrangements are used for instance by workshops that engage youth in need of support and are present in 90% of Finnish municipalities.

Some third sector organisations provide validation services and have been involved in the development of tools for validation. For instance the Sivis Study Centre, which have a duty to collaborate with the liberal adult education institutions, has developed an e-learning platform for members which promotes validation and guides how to validate the competences of their customers. They have developed a methodology and learning outcome-based certification. The outcomes of the validation can be taken advantage of in formal education and training too because of the way that the learning outcomes are made visible.

**Liberal adult education institutions** have increased their role and visibility in non-degree adult education and validation after the changes in legislation in 2020 and 2021 that enable them to transfer their credit-bearing, competence-based adult education to the Koski database, on permission of the learner. An increasing number of liberal adult education institutions have trained their staff, developed competence-based courses and are making visible learning in non-formal education.

## 7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance

### 7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

The Reveal Your Skills campaign (*Osaaminen näkyviin*) is an annual event that raises awareness of the positive value of identification and recognition of competences for individuals, labour market and wider society. The campaign was organised for the first time in 2021, as a two-week event, hosted by Finland's Innovation Fund Sitra in collaboration with the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL and the Sivis Study Centre. Since 2022, the Reveal Your Skills week has been coordinated by the new Centre for Continuous Learning and Development JOTPA. During the 2022 campaign, the goal was to help people identify their skills and competence, make them visible and raise the topic for public discussion. A variety of tools<sup>31</sup> for competence identification were made available and different communities were invited to collaborate.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.jotpa.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/osaaminen-nakyviin/tyokalut/> (fi)

## Reveal Your Skills

The first Reveal Your Skills campaign was organised in 2021 during the two weeks in August-September. The highly visible campaign promoted the lifelong learning objective, articulated by the 30 key stakeholders from government, labour market, education and training and civil society, underscoring the need for individuals and communities to have the ability to make their competence visible and take advantage of their strengths (Sitra, 2019).

The programme was implemented by more than 350 different companies, working life and leisure organisations, educational institutions, civic and labour colleges, occupational pension companies, public administration organizations and projects. At least 7 300 people participated in various events.

In order to ensure that validation activities would reach a broad group of potential users, each of the more than 350 organisations engaged their own target groups – customers, personnel, students and members – to identify their competence. Target groups included: working-age adults, young people, experts, industry changers, job seekers, part-time workers and immigrants, personnel from different companies and fields, and study and hobby groups. The partner organisations adapted the key messages for their specific target audiences used the channels and language that reached them best.

The campaign made validation feasible and attractive to users through a large portfolio of activities and dialogues. It collected a range of open access tools that make it easy for people to identify their own skills and competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning. A total of 15 user-friendly tools and their user instructions were made available on the public domain free of charge although some may require registration. Reveal Your Skills also provided user-friendly, open access tools for individual, pair and group assignments that make it easy to identify and recognise skills.

For the tools for revealing skills, see: <https://www.sitra.fi/hankkeet/osaaminen-nakvyiin/#tyokaluja-oman-osaamisen-tunnistamiseen> (fi)

In the reporting period outreach activities have also been developed to reach out to harder-to-reach groups and individuals. The recently established Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Development JOTPA is funding outreach work that reaches out and motivates harder-to-reach groups such as people without secondary education qualifications, people working in fields subject to structural change, solo entrepreneurs, and immigrants.<sup>32</sup> The outreach may entail for instance open information sessions, organised by a municipality for parents taking care of children at home or for employees in sectors which are subject to rapid structural change. It could also mean individual career guidance to people working in a micro or small business, by an educational institution or company which provides low-threshold studies. The Service Centre finances outreach work either separately or combined with other trainings.

## 7.2 Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

Information, advice and guidance on validation is provided as part of wider career guidance activities including PES, education and training institutions, and multi-professional services targeting job seekers as well as students, young people, immigrant background people. Where needed, PES and the multi-professional guidance services connect the individuals to the validation providers. Services are generally free of charge.

PES is providing information, advice and guidance on job opportunities as well as validation. In order to improve the quality of services, in May 2022, a Nordic workforce service model was introduced in the public employment administration and in the municipal employment experiments, covering both identification of competence and

<sup>32</sup> <https://okm.fi/jatkuvan-oppimisen-ja-tyollisyyden-palvelukeskus> (fi)

service needs. This implies stronger early-stage guidance and support for job seekers who are actively offered services and support. For competence identification, self-assessment and dialogue are used. Where more detailed information is needed, the job seeker is referred to skills and professional competence mapping. (Valtioneuvosto, 2023)

### **Implementation of the Nordic workforce service model in Finland**

Since May 2022, Finland's public employment administration has implemented a new service model for job seekers, where, during the early stages of job search, the job seeker is actively offered services and support. More personalised guidance and competence identification and development are key elements of the service. The assessment is a joint negotiation in which the job seeker's view of his own service needs plays a central role.

In the initial interview, the job seeker's service needs are assessed individually. The guidance expert evaluates the customer's overall situation and skills and competences in relation to the labour market situation. The assessment of the need for services considers the job seeker's competence and how to develop it, personal goals; ability to work and function, job search skills and other factors affecting employment; and the probability of extended unemployment.

The starting point for assessing a job seeker's need for services is the job seeker's knowledge and skills acquired through formal education, work experience and other non-formal and informal learning as well as the job seeker's own goals. The job seeker's competence and gaps in competence and the ways to fill these gaps are identified through self-assessment and guidance discussions with guidance professionals. If more detailed information is needed, the guidance expert can also request a skills and professional competence mapping for the job seeker. The need for skills improvement can also be evaluated in cooperation with training providers. The need for services is assessed regularly in job search discussions and in updating the employment plan.

A comprehensive assessment of the need for service, which includes competence assessment and possibly also an assessment of work and functional ability, improves the service quality and delivery through multi-professional services.

Valtioneuvosto (2023)

Like validation, Information, advice and guidance services are commonly part of the education and training system and free of charge. The regional employment centres provide advice and guidance on education and validation opportunities. They work in close co-operation with the VET and HE providers of their region. It is common that the PES purchase Information, advice and guidance services in the form of short courses, which include mapping of prior experience and learning and introduction to various study and career paths and opportunities for validation.

There are several guidance and counselling service centres for adults, which form a national network and provide information, advice and guidance regarding all adult education, competence-based qualifications and validation free of charge. These include national online platforms for adults and different target groups.

Advice, guidance, mentoring and counselling is available free of charge in multi-professional guidance centres that help individuals discover, clarify, assess, and understand their own experience and explore available alternatives and strategies for validation. These include Competence Centres for Immigrants in eight cities with the largest number of immigrants. The in multi-professional guidance centres typically discuss with the clients their work experience and formal education background but also learning acquired in non-formal and informal contexts as well as their personal goals. Candidates are made aware of the aware of opportunities to have non-formal and informal skills (e.g. skills audit) and, where needed, referred to validation services.

Multi-professional services typically also have arrangements in place to follow up with individuals after guidance interventions to assess if further guidance related to validation is needed and of what type, etc.

There are also about 70 multi-professional low-threshold Ohjaamo guidance centres spread across the country where any young person under the age of 30 can have support and guidance free of charge. Ohjaamo centres are present where young people are and reach out to them in multiple ways including social media. Workshop organisations provide long term support including information and guidance on validation is available for young people in need of support, or at risk of dropout through outreach youth work and workshop activities which enable close links to VET organisations. Workshop organisations are present in 90% of Finland's 330 municipalities, and over 43 000 young people and adults participate in their services every year. Into, the umbrella association for Outreach Youth Work and Workshop Activities, represents over 270 workshops and 600 outreach youth workers, and develops tools and approaches to provide advice and guidance on validation to help young people access education and employment. Into Association is coordinating the eight regional workshop networks which bring together the workshop organisers and VET institutions.

The validation providers are at the core of guidance and counselling. In VET it is the legal obligation of the provider to arrange adequate guidance and counselling services to the enrolled students. Each individual has a personal competence development plan (HOKS), in which the learner's individual study plan and prior learning are documented. The competence development plan is updated according to the needs of the individual. Higher education institutions provide information on validation opportunities on their websites for both prospective and current students. They have produced materials for their students on what validation means and how non-formal and informal learning can be validated. This information is freely available on the HEI websites and materials that are sent out to new students.<sup>33</sup> Validation is typically initiated during the Personal Study Planning Guidance process (HOPS), at the beginning of studies, but HOPS can be updated during the course of studies. It is acknowledged that guidance is part of validation and one of the quality assurance factors in the provision of validation. At the same time HEIs have also developed digital systems to facilitate the validation process. Many HEIs are also running SIMHE guidance services for immigrant-background people who are interested in beginning or continuing their studies in Finland or complementing their qualifications to find employment. These services are based on one-on-one discussions and guidance to identify competence and the goals and opportunities available for the client.

In liberal adult education, a learner's permission is the condition for the transfer of credits of competence-based courses to the Koski database for possible validation towards a formal education degree. In practice, the teachers of competence-based courses have the obligation to explain their students about the validation opportunities at the beginning of the course, and they also provide information, advice and guidance. The progress in liberal adult education is important given the significant size of the sector: during the Covid years in 2020 and 2021, the student numbers ranged from 761 812 to 695 939,<sup>34</sup> whereas much higher participation numbers were registered prior the global pandemic.<sup>35</sup> Information, advice and guidance on validation are also provided by individual institutions and their providers – municipalities,

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/demonstrate-your-competencies> (fi)

<sup>34</sup> [https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/\\_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Vapaa%20sivistystyo%20-%20osallistuneet%20-%20vst%20oppilaitostyyppi%20-%20aikasarja.xls](https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Vapaa%20sivistystyo%20-%20osallistuneet%20-%20vst%20oppilaitostyyppi%20-%20aikasarja.xls)

<sup>35</sup> The Statistic Finland data prior to COVID shows that the gross number of liberal adult education students was annually 1.6 million and the net number reached almost 900 000. In the gross number of students, a learner is counted as a student (participant) for each training he/she took part in whereas in the net number a single student is counted only once. [https://www.stat.fi/til/oiop/2019/oiop\\_2019\\_2020-12-10\\_tie\\_001\\_fi.html](https://www.stat.fi/til/oiop/2019/oiop_2019_2020-12-10_tie_001_fi.html)

municipality groupings or foundations and associations. Given the changes, liberal adult education institutions and their providers need to plan communication on competences and its assessments to ensure that different target groups receive sufficient information on what the competence basis means and requires from them and what are the benefits. In 2022, a large number of institutions have organised training on competence-based education to their staff. Guidance to institutions stresses that feedback about the development of competence is important particularly in longer term education and when the student has a goal to receive an assessment of his/her competence. Digital solutions and programmes enable real time follow-up of competence development.

NGOs and other third sector organisations provide information and guidance to their own members and the wider public. Major players such as the Sivi Study Centre and the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL provide information on the competence-based education and its validation, targeting the staff of their member institutions as well as learners, through diverse means including a U-tube channel<sup>36</sup>. For instance, KoL is organising thematic days on competence-based learning during 2022-2022. Several NGOs have also produced materials and information published on their websites regarding competence badges and certificates. Information and guidance are free-of-charge.

Social partners provide information and guidance to their members on validation opportunities. Industry organisations are increasingly interested in validation-related aspects due to labour shortages. For instance, Technology Industries Finland is maintaining the SkillsPulse website (<https://osaamispulssi.fi/>) that provides the latest information on the skills needs of companies in the technology industry. Competence data is used to develop companies' competences and the education and training provision.

### **Osaamispulssi (SkillsPulse in English)**

Osaamispulssi (<https://osaamispulssi.fi/>) is a website maintained by Technology Industries Finland. It provides the latest information on the skills needs of companies in the technology industry in Finland. It uses artificial intelligence to search for competence data (data on people's competences, companies' competence needs and competence provision of education and training institutions) from different sources: CVs, job advertisements, course catalogues and scientific publications.

In 2021, Technology Industries Finland conducted its skills demand survey for the first time by using data-analytics and artificial intelligence. Interpretation seminars were conducted with companies. Technology Industries Finland also tested the use of competence data to develop companies' competences and the course offer of a university of applied sciences. The results have been published in the Competence Data Playbook (Osaamisdatan playbook). Videos and materials based on the results are available for different target audiences: young people, decision makers and guidance professionals (Future in technology sector!).

Osaamispulssi was rewarded as the 2021 Foresight Action.

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<sup>36</sup> see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSDo4SeWLPg> Ota kansalaisopistojen kursseilla saavutettu osaaminen talteen! (fi)

## 8 Validation practitioners

### 8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

#### 8.1.1 Practitioners in formal education

**In general education**, validation practitioners have not specified profile.

**In the VET system**, it is the responsibility of the provider to ensure the relevance of the practitioners' profiles and the associated competences. Since the 2018 VET reform, the profile of a validation practitioner is a teacher or a guidance counsellor. Teachers and working life representatives carry out the assessment and decide on the outcome. In the new bi-partite system, teachers carry out the assessment of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal) in cooperation with a work life representative from an organisation that represents the field of the qualification in question (bipartite). This is in contrast to the earlier tripartite system where the assessors represented the employee and employer representatives as well as the provider organisation.

**In higher education**, validation practitioners have no specified profile. In practice, study counsellors and academic staff/teachers act as validation practitioners. The profile of study counsellors varies between the universities of applied sciences (UAS) and universities. In UAS they often have the qualification of a study counsellor, while the background in universities the staff working in study and career guidance tasks varies and they do not necessarily have background in guidance training. Also, the teaching staff provides guidance on personal study plans (HOPS), study guidance, and support for competence development and career planning.

#### 8.1.2 Practitioners in the Third Sector

**In the Third Sector**, there is no specified profile for validation practitioners. For instance in the liberal adult education, the profile of a validation practitioner is teacher. In practice, the instructor of a specific course usually acts as the assessor of competences. It is stressed that good assessment activities can be promoted if assessors have sufficient expertise in the field of the training or course in question and are familiar with the competence objectives and evaluation criteria of the training in question.

#### 8.1.3 Practitioners in the labour market

**In public employment services**, the profile of validation practitioners includes guidance professionals and psychologists at TE offices. Experts in TE offices are responsible for various information and advisory services, customer guidance, service guidance, advice on education and training and actual guidance services. In the autumn of 2019, 1 661 people worked in TE offices with the title of expert, and there were a total of 139 permanent TE psychologists. A total of 97 TE administration experts worked in the Ohjaamo centres for young people under 30 years (Mayer et al., 2020).

### 8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

The **Strategy for Lifelong Guidance 2020–2023**, launched in 2020, by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment shows that training places for study counsellors have increased, but there is a lack of common continuing education for all guidance workers. Continuing education is

supply-oriented, uncoordinated and short-term, often defined by short-term funding models and a lack of continuity. Also, the opportunities to participate in the trainings vary regionally and depending on the training organisers. A large number of organisations are offering continuing education in guidance skills.

### 8.2.1 Training and support to practitioners in formal education

As noted in the 2018 update, **in vocational education**, the training needs of practitioners in competence-based evaluations are covered by flexible training modules which are planned and implemented jointly by universities of applied sciences, VET providers and labour market representatives. The formal training of Specialists in Competence Based Qualifications, provided by the Universities of Applied Sciences, to teachers, guidance staff, employee and employer representatives as well as private practitioners is no longer required in the assessment process<sup>37</sup>. Nonetheless more than 10 000 trained specialists continue to work in the assessment process. The competence of teachers, guidance staff and support personnel has been strengthened through the government's support programme, launched in 2017 for the implementation of the VET reform.

The VET organiser has the responsibility of familiarizing and training the teachers and assessors from working life with the competence assessment to guarantee students a fair and professional assessment. In addition to general orientation, training should be provided in context of each competence test, covering degree-specific assessment questions, the student's personal competence development plan, the coverage and reliability of the assessment, methods, documentation etc. It is the responsibility of the training organiser to train a sufficient number of assessors in relation to the number of students and to ensure that the assessors are kept informed about the changes in vocational education and the degrees.

The VET reform in 2018 also abolished the Qualification Committees which provided a support network for practitioners as well as fora for discussion and development of validation procedures and assessment. They have been replaced by 37 national working life committees that are responsible for the quality assurance of assessment, conducting skills' demonstrations and developing of the qualifications system in collaboration with other stakeholders, but play a more limited role in supporting the practitioners.

**In higher education**, the training needs of practitioners are covered by collaborative work within and between HEIs, while each institution is expected to ensure adequate skills of their staff. HEIs are providing further training for validation activities, but there is no formal requirement to participate in such a training.

In recent years, the development of the guidance skills of the personnel of higher education institutions has been supported by the projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and ESR. Examples include the co-development guidelines and recommendations for recognition or prior learning and various projects related to recognition of prior learning. For instance, the development project WorkPeda Working Life Pedagogy in Higher Education<sup>38</sup>, coordinated by the University of Jyväskylä and supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, engaged ten universities and six universities of applied sciences in 2018–2020.

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<sup>37</sup> Annually about 800 specialists were trained since 1995. Further training was also been provided for specialists who needed updating of their competences. There are still over 12 000 trained specialists in Finland.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.tyopeda.fi/> (fi)

## 8.2.2 Training and support for the Third Sector practitioners

**In liberal adult education**, each institution must ensure that practitioners understand what competence basis mean and can identify and assess it. Following the changes in the legislation in 2020 and 2021 that enabled the identification and recognition of competences achieved in liberal adult education, hundreds of practitioners have gone through training on competence-based education and its validation. These efforts have been supported by the Finnish National Agency for Education which has also published a guidance to competence-based evaluation in liberal adult education and covered the topic in e-Requirements<sup>39</sup>.

In the Third Sector, major organisations such as Sivis Study centre and Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL are organising trainings on validation and relevant tools.<sup>40</sup> KoL organises training days on topics such as on competence-based education and webinars on assessment and validation and the use of relevant national e-tools (ePerusteet, Koski and Open Badges). It maintains a national platform<sup>41</sup> for sharing knowledge, experience and good practice, covering teachers' guides and project results. In 2022, KoL published two guidebooks for liberal adult education institutions, targeting their management and teachers, covering guidance for, and assessment of learners in competence-based courses (see Karttunen, 2022a, 2022b). For Sivis Study Centre support, see the box below (For more details on methods, see also 10.1.2).

### Sivis Study Centre provides training and support for validation in NGOs

Sivis Study Centre is a nationwide, non-profit organisation, part-funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture). The Sivis operations are maintained by the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres KoL which acts as an umbrella organisation for its 80 member organisations in various fields (health, education and culture, citizens' advice, the environment etc).

Sivis promotes non-formal adult education, by providing almost 100 000 hours of education and training annually in co-operation with member organisations through courses, lectures, study groups and projects.

Sivis Study Centre provides support and guidance in the processes of competence identification and recognition to its member organisations. The support and guidance related to the identification and recognition of competence offered by the Study Center Sivis covers identification and recognition of competence as well as guidance of planning trainings:

- (1) Guidance on the identification of competence focuses on how competence can be defined and mapped and how organizations and their trustees and volunteers can articulate, document and demonstrate their competence.
- (2) Guidance on the recognition of competence focuses on how organizations can recognise competence, using certificates and digital competence badges etc., and how to create a competence-based identification and recognition process for the respective NGO.
- (3) Guidance on planning the trainings focuses on how to plan and develop trainings so that the trainings and the expertise they produce can be recognised both between organizations and in other sectors.

Sivis Study Centre, the Mannerheim League of Children's Welfare, the Finnish 4H Association, the Finnish Youth Chambers of Commerce, the Finnish Girls and Scouts and the Finnish Red Cross have also developed a digital user-friendly training package #Näytäosaamisesi (#ShowYourSkills) that can be customised to suit the

<sup>39</sup> <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.ok-sivis.fi/tunnista-ja-tunnusta-osaaminen/johdanto.html>

<sup>41</sup> [www.kansalaisopistofoorumi.fi](http://www.kansalaisopistofoorumi.fi) ; <https://peda.net/kol/foorumi>

needs of the Third Sector organisations. For more details see 10.2 Use of ICT in validation.

Another example from the Third Sector is linked to workshops which have and extensive experience in guiding young people in need of support. In the workshop sector, the Into Association is developing capacity building, training and support for workshop organisers and their regional partners through structured regional networks. The network activities have grown rapidly: In June 2022, more than 500 people from over 200 organizations participated in the networks. The networks offer a platform for peer development, networking and information sharing.<sup>42</sup>

### **Into Association and Regional Networks for workshops**

The importance of cooperation between workshops and vocational training organisers has grown after the 2018 VET reform as VET organisers must find suitable learning environments for students in need of special support. Into coordinates the regional networks, and the national expert group of studification.

At the end of 2020, the regional workshop networks were launched on the basis of the cooperation guidelines of workshops and vocational education organisers, covering the whole of Mainland Finland. In June 2021, Into established an expert working group on studification to support regional networks and to outline the steps for the national development of studification for the coming years.

The network activities have grown rapidly: In June 2022, more than 500 people from over 200 organizations have participated in the networks. The networks offer a platform for peer development, networking and information sharing.

## **8.2.3 Training and support for practitioners in the labour market**

**In public employment services** the career guidance services in TE offices play a key role in the transition stages between work and training (Mayer et al., 2020). The development of the guidance skills of TE services personnel is the responsibility of the 49 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY centres) and KEHA centre which is the development and management centre for ELY centres. KEHA organises working life-oriented guidance trainings, the scope of which varies from a few hours to more extensive 30-credit trainings consisting of 5-to-6 credit modules.

In other organisations providing career guidance services for adults, the guidance skills of those working in guidance positions are often dependent on the training provided by the employer and self-funded continuing education.

## **8.3 Qualifications and experience**

### **8.3.1 Qualifications and experience in formal education**

**General upper secondary education** has no formal qualification requirements for the work in the field of validation.

**In VET**, the teachers in fixed-term employment must meet the qualification requirements specified in the Teaching Qualifications Decree (986/1998), including the requirements for work experience. In many cases the VET teachers have a master's degree in the field they are teaching or the highest non-academic

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.intory.fi>

qualification available in the field. Additionally, they often study a formal vocational pedagogical teacher qualification while in employment. The guidance counsellors in VET typically have a master's degree in social studies, study counselling, education theory or equivalent studies. Previously, before the VET reform of 2018, at least one of the assessors had to be a certified CBQ assessor. The assessors underwent a training programme 'Specialist in CBQs' (25 Finnish credits) provided by the universities of applied sciences. The employer-based assessors participated in the same training. In the new VET system, this requirement no longer applies, and the teachers are assessing competences in co-operation with the experts from the world of work.

**Higher education** has no formal qualification requirements for the work in the field of validation. As noted above, the profile and qualifications of guidance counsellors varies between the universities of applied sciences (UAS) and universities. The study counsellors in UAS often have the qualification of a study counsellor, while in universities, the qualifications of the staff working in guidance tasks varies and they do not necessarily have a study counsellor qualification. In addition, teachers and academic staff provide guidance of personal study plans (HOPS) and support for competence development and career planning.

### 8.3.2 Qualifications and experience in the Third Sector and the labour market

In the **non-formal adult education and training sector**, there are no national requirements for practitioners. The legislation on liberal adult education does not provide criteria for the assessors' qualifications. In practice liberal, adult education teachers have completed a suitable university degree and teacher's pedagogical studies or have completed the required studies based on Steiner pedagogy. In practice, the instructor of a specific course usually acts as the assessor of competences. While no formal pedagogical qualification is required, the provider must ensure that the person is designated and trained for the task. Non-formal education and training providers are increasingly developing Open Badges for adult educators in their sector.

In 2022, the Finnish National Agency for Education published a quick guide for teachers in non-formal adult education for the planning of competence-based courses, guidance and assessment of students. In liberal adult education, the responsibility for the assessment process as a whole is with the education provider (municipality, foundation or association). The legislation on liberal adult education does not provide criteria for the assessors' qualifications.

**In public employment services**, according to the eligibility conditions defined in the Decree on ELY Centres (1373/2018), the psychologists must have a master's degree in psychology or a higher university degree, including the highest grade in psychology (or obtained separately). For other guidance professionals the educational background varies, but they typically have a higher education degree.

**In other sectors of adult career guidance**, the educational background and qualifications are heterogeneous, for staff in private career coaching firms, trade unions, rehabilitative organizations, projects and personnel development departments of companies and public sector organizations. They often lack specialised guidance training but have related competence acquired in higher education and at work, as well as supplementary guidance training. The career coaches of trade unions often have a bachelor or master level degree in the field relevant to the respective union.

## 8.4 Plans to promote career planning skills and strengthen guidance competence

In 2022, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment launched a project to promote career planning skills and strengthen guidance competence, based on the goals of the Lifelong Guidance Strategy 2020–2023 and the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning. The work aims strengthen the professionalism of guidance with concrete results by the end of 2024. Funding for this project comes from the Next Generation EU (RRF funding) based on Finland's sustainable growth programme.

### Strategy of Lifelong Guidance and the Development of lifelong guidance for career planning

The Strategy for Lifelong Guidance 2020–2023, jointly published in 2020 by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, is linked to the government's objectives related to education, employment, wellbeing and inclusion. The lifelong guidance is seen as a continuum of the whole lifespan, as a dialogue between individuals and their own career management skills, underpinned with information, advice and guidance that support the acquisition of these skills.

Based on the Lifelong Guidance Strategy and the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning, work has been launched by KEHA Centre to promote career planning skills and strengthen guidance competence during the years 2022–2024. Funding comes from the Next Generation EU (RRF funding) based on Finland's sustainable growth programme.

This work will develop a national reference framework for career planning skills in cooperation with experts from different stakeholders in the field of guidance, with the help of experiments. Measures are planned to develop these skills and to monitor their development in different target groups.

Trainings for career guidance professionals, regardless of their organization, will be offered in the field of digital skills, environmentally sustainable development (green transition) and equity and equality. The training will be organised during the period from autumn 2023 until the end of 2024.

The structures, contents and development needs of guidance training will also be reviewed, to examine the skills requirements of guidance professionals in different contexts, different training paths and structures, and the contents of education. An evaluation of the current state of guidance training is ongoing and will be completed by early 2024.

Descriptions of the core and specialised competences of guidance competence will be developed. Competence descriptions are examined against the current training offer in the field of guidance.

Finnish Government (2022)

<https://peda.net/hankkeet/elotori/elinikaisen-ohjauksen-valtakunnallinen-kehittaminen-2022-2024>

## 9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

### 9.1 Funding and costs

#### 9.1.1 Funding the validation activities

In formal education, validation is typically undertaken as part of the development of personal competence development plans or study plans (HOPS and HOKS) and the costs of the validation are covered by the core funding of institutions. This funding is sustainable, however budgetary constraints may affect the access to related

personalised guidance services and over-reliance of digital services with little or no personal guidance.

As noted in the 2018 update, the VET reform has simplified the funding from the perspective of the provider organisations: instead of different funding mechanisms depending on the type of VET, there is only one uniform funding system for all VET. This enables flexibility for the providers to decide how to organise validation procedures in their organisations. The funding system steers the organisers towards validation, since the funding is no longer based solely on the number of students, but the number of qualifications or parts of qualifications (modules). Altogether 35% of the funding is based on the number of qualifications (or parts of qualifications), 50% is basic funding and 15% of the funding is based on employment after certification or transfer to further studies.

Since 2019, the performance-based funding system of higher education steers the institutions to validation. The funding incentive is particularly strong for the universities of applied sciences sector, where 76% of funding is allocated on the basis of education and training with 56% on the basis of the completed UAS degrees. For universities the incentive is somewhat weaker given the stronger research focus. The university funding model devotes 42% of the core funding to education and training in universities with 30% allocated on the basis of completed bachelor's and master's degrees.<sup>43</sup>

In public employment services, validation is embedded in the guidance services; the job seeker may be guided to a more detailed skills audit provided by formal education institutions or private providers. These services are typically purchased from the providers, but free for clients.

In formal education and training and public employment services the costs of the validation are covered by public budgets. There is no specific allocation of public funding to validation for the validation providers in formal education, but it is part of the core funding. In the same vein, there is no specific funding stream for validation in public employment services, but the funding is embedded in the interventions to support the unemployed. There is no central information on the volume of public funding allocated to validation-related activities in any of the sectors. Validation arrangements are not included in collective labour agreements.

There are no systems or arrangements in place to collect information on the costs of validation-related services that are provided outside of formal education system, and no central information on the costs of validation to organisations and individuals or on the fee-based validation-related services.

In all sectors, the development of specific validation mechanisms and related projects may be financed with the help of external funding from the EU sources and may lead to challenges in maintaining the related services and products when the project comes to an end.

### **9.1.2 Costs of validation to individuals**

In general, validation is free in formal education for students and in the public employment services for job seekers, also when clients are referred to more detailed skills audits.

However, several mandatory working life certificates or passports, e.g. a hygiene passport or a fire work card, are fee-based, for those who are not completing them as part of their studies; in some cases costs may be covered by the public employment

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<sup>43</sup> <https://okm.fi/ohjaus-rahoitus-ja-sopimukset> (fi)

services<sup>44</sup>. The price paid by the customer is influenced by the mandatory payment for the respective national agency as well as the tester's fee, possible space rent and possible training material costs. For instance, the cost for fire work and security cards and hygiene passport is about EUR 100 per each card. The hygiene passport tester can charge a fee for organizing the hygiene passport test and issuing the hygiene passport. The price of the hygiene pass can therefore vary between testers and include EUR 6 per hygiene pass collected by the Food Agency from the tester<sup>45</sup>. Hygiene passport testers are independent operators and the Food Agency cannot influence the pricing of an individual tester<sup>46</sup>. Training and tests for permit cards are organised by, for example, vocational institutions and training companies. Some of these certificates need to be renewed at regular intervals.

Also the Finnish National Agency for Education provides a fee-based service to make decisions on recognition of foreign qualifications. In addition to formal professional qualifications, these decisions may consider the work certificates and certificates of lifelong learning (see the box on the next page).

### **Fees of the Finnish National Agency for Education on recognition of qualification**

All decisions issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education are subject to a fee. The fees are charged in two stages: Before the processing is started, a processing fee is charged. When the decision has been issued, the decision fee is charged.

For instance:

Decision on recognition of professional qualifications: processing fee of EUR 70 and decision fee of EUR 350–594.

Decision on sufficient studies for instruction in a foreign language, teaching based on Steiner pedagogy or pre-primary education based on Montessori pedagogy: processing fee of EUR 70 and decision fee of EUR 350–594.

Final decision on the recognition of professional qualifications: processing fee of EUR 70.

Decision on recognition if the decision is based on the same qualifications as a previous decision on recognition by the Finnish National Agency for Education: processing fee of EUR 70 and decision fee of EUR 80–324.

In addition, applicants must cover the translation costs by an authorised translator in Finland or an official translator in the source country, if the original document is in a language other than Finnish, Swedish, Danish, English, Estonian, Icelandic, French, German, Norwegian or Spanish.

<https://www.oph.fi/en/services/recognition-and-international-comparability-qualifications/recognition-foreign>

There is no central information on the costs of the validation or skills audits provided by private operators. These services may target individuals or employers

There are no Individual Learning Accounts or equivalent arrangements used towards the cost of validation.

For individuals who are clients of public employment services or students in formal education, the cost of the validation is not a barrier. For others, the lack of financial support prevents from entering validation. For instance, a report published by Sitra

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<sup>44</sup> Opintopolku lists 17 most common working life certificates. See <https://opintopolku.fi/konfo/fi/sivu/tyoelaman-passit-ja-kortit>

<sup>45</sup> <https://hygieniapassi.fi/hinnat>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ruokavirasto.fi/elintarvikkeet/hygieniapassi/yleista-hygieniapassista/#paljon-hygieniapassi-maksaa>

shows that unemployed people worry about making ends meet during skills development, as self-directed training can cut benefits (Alasalmi et al. 2020).

Specific barriers are faced by those in working life who need more guidance and opportunities for identifying competence and making it visible. The 2020 Lifelong Guidance Strategy further shows that opportunities for skills development and career planning for entrepreneurs and employees of small companies are limited, and the services available to adults are often project-funded and temporary. A particular challenge is that those who need training the most, participate the least, in both training offered by companies and in adult education, therefore the support should target the less educated and those whose skills are at risk by structural changes (Koramo et al., 2023).

### 9.1.3 Financial support for individuals

There are various ways of gaining funding and support for validation depending on the life situation of the individuals.

**Adult education benefit** is available for adults who take a full- or part time study leave to complete at least 4 credits in formal education institutions in Finland. Annually the number of study leave users is around 28 000. Several conditions apply to the award of this support. See box below.

#### The Employment Fund (*Työllisyysrahasto*) and Adult Education Benefit

The Employment Fund (*Työllisyysrahasto*), run by the labour market partners, is a fund that collects unemployment insurance premium which finances unemployment insurance and promotes the competence development of wage earners with the help of adult education benefits. Its operations were launched in January 2019, when the Unemployment Insurance Fund TVR and the Education Fund merged.

Adult education benefit can be granted to permanent residents of Finland who are employees and entrepreneurs with at least eight years of work/entrepreneurship history (including military service, maternity leave etc.), regardless of their educational background.

In order to be eligible to receive adult education allowance, the employee must take part-time or full-time study leave to complete a full degree or, since August 2020, a shorter training of minimum of four credits.

Adult education allowance cannot be paid to a person employed by a foreign employer.

The adult education allowance can be granted only for studies organised by formal education institutions in Finland: universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational schools.

Studying at a foreign educational institution is also not covered by adult education support. However, support can be obtained if the person is enrolled in a Finnish educational institution and studies abroad are accepted as part of the educational institution's education. Support for scientific postgraduate studies at a foreign educational institution can be granted if the person is enrolled as a postgraduate student at a Finnish university and the studies abroad are related to his postgraduate studies.

Koramo M. et al. (2023).

The different conditions for the award of the study benefit may act as barriers to adult education and indirectly to validation. The recent review (Koramo et al., 2023) show that the requirement of eight-year employment history is in contrast with many other countries where shorter time is required. Shorter trainings have been allowed since August 2020, but this option is underutilised, and most beneficiaries are completing a full degree. The 2021 review of the Employment Fund and the transformation of work from the perspective of continuous learning and maintaining work ability,

commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, suggests that the adult education benefit system has not been able to respond to the structural changes in working life: adult education support is mainly used for training in the public sector, and the system does not focus on sectors subject to structural change or target less educated persons (Huttula and Yli-Suomu, 2021).

During the study leave, beneficiaries may also receive study support from the Social Insurance Institution KELA. If a person has been granted adult education support, s/he can also receive a student loan government guarantee from KELA. The KELA study support can be granted for studies in a formal education institution or other education organised in Finland, if KELA has entitled the education organiser to have this right<sup>47</sup>. There is no statistical data on persons who receive adult education allowance and KELA study support. On average, about half of the recipients of adult education allowance apply also a loan guarantee from KELA. (Koramo et al., 2023)

In the case of unemployment, since 2019, the unemployed have been able to study for less than six months with unemployment benefit, without an assessment from the local employment centre (Ibid.) Otherwise the maximum allowance period for the self-motivated studies while on unemployment benefit is 24 months, on condition that an individual agreement with the local employment centre has been received. If the employment office estimates that an individual cannot study while on unemployment benefit, s/he must either give up the idea of studying or become a full-time student. A full-time student may be entitled to Kela's student financial aid and other student benefits.<sup>48</sup> Work-integrated learning (studification) does not affect the unemployment benefits if individuals study for competence tests only, because only participating in a test/demonstration is not considered studying as referred in the law (Koramo et al., 2023).

Unemployed people on unemployment benefit can also supplement their competence, for example in labour market training or by studying part-time (according to an individual agreement with the local employment centre). Public employment services organise vocational qualifications and qualification modules as well as further and continuing professional education as labour market training. Labour market training is also organised as recruitment training, implemented by one or more employers. Different working life cards and passports cards can also be completed in labour market training, in which case the card is free of charge. Unemployed people can study part-time or short-term, but studies must not be an obstacle to finding a job or accepting a job.<sup>49</sup>

**In apprenticeship training** the students are in paid employment. The employers receive a grant for each student. The apprentices in Finland are mainly adults, unlike in other countries. The qualifications carried out through apprenticeship training are mainly CBQs and individualised. In the VET reform, possibilities for apprenticeships have been strengthened for all learners. Apprentices receive a salary on working days in accordance with the collective agreement. For the days of study they receive a daily allowance and other benefits belonging to students.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The conditions are that the education corresponds to the VET degree or part of the degree, that the training provider has the functional, professional and financial prerequisites for organisation of the training, and that the training provider has organised the training in question for at least one year.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.suomi.fi/guides/unemployment/finding-employment/studying#study-while-on-unemployment-benefit>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.suomi.fi/guides/unemployment/finding-employment/studying#strengthen-your-competence-while-on-unemployment-benefit>

<sup>50</sup> <https://oppisopimus.fi/>

## 9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

### 9.2.1 Validation trends

The data on the take-up of validation and level of participation is limited. In formal education, courses that have been validated are not flagged in the data systems. As in previous updates, data can be presented for CVET students who all go through validation in the competence-based system (CBQ). The data is available from the Statistics Finland and the Vipunen database.

CVET new students, all students and graduates in 2019-2022

Year	New students	All students	Graduates
2019	19 290	43 143	16 422
2020	19 455	42 750	15 696
2021	20 250	44 421	16 824
2022	20 331	44 379	16 098

The Vipunen data over 2019-2022 shows that annually about 44 000 individuals are enrolled in CVET with the aim to get a qualification through CBQs, about 20 000 new students enter the system and about 16 000 graduates. The numbers have remained stable during the last four years, apart from 2020 during the Covid-19.

There is no national data available on validation in the other educational sectors. The interviews and the initiatives taking place in other sectors as well as government priorities suggest an upward trend. The Statistic Finland 2022 data was not available during the writing of the report.

### 9.2.2 Validation users

There is limited information of the users regarding their age, gender, qualification level achieved, target group, citizenship status, etc. Central information on validation users is available only on the VET sector for CVET participants. As in the 2018 update, the data on CVET participants shows that women outnumber men in the CBQ system: about 60% of CVET students are women. The trend is the same in all sectors of post-primary education. The representation of different age groups in the CBQs ranges from 15-19 years old to over 60 years old. Majority of the CVET participants are between 20-50 years old.

Women in the competence-based system CVET studies

Year	Total	Women	%
2019	43 143	25 446	58.98
2020	42 750	25 653	60.01
2021	44 421	26 811	60.38
2022	44 379	26 610	59.96

The CBQ system in CVET in Finland does not focus only on people with low qualifications or special target groups, but the entire working age population. Individuals have diverse needs: employed individuals may wish to update their old qualifications, career changers may wish to have their competences validated and those who lack a qualification may wish to gain one.

### 9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is used to support disadvantaged groups like unemployed people or those at risk of unemployment, low-qualified adults and young people (NEETs), migrants, school and training dropouts and people with disabilities. There is no centralised data on the participation of these groups in various validation activities. Validation arrangements in all sectors include special target groups. During the reporting period many validation initiatives targeting disadvantaged people have been developed

#### **Refugees and other immigrants**

Refugees typically have their initial assessment undertaken in the reception facilities, covering education and training, work experience, general skills, and their future plans as well as volunteering, work and study activities undertaken during the time in the reception centre. The reception centres register the competences and store the work and study certificates in the UMA immigration case management system where the experts in public employment offices (TE offices) or municipalities can view them. However, in spring 2022 the Finnish migration office Migri announced that the reception facilities were not in the position to take care of the validation of new arrivals. Therefore those interested in finding a job were referred to the public employment services (TE offices). After the on-line registration with the TE office as a job seeker, the TE makes contact to undertake the initial assessment of individual's education and training, skills and competences including NFIL, as well as individual's goals and aspirations. After the initial assessment, individuals are referred to various charge-free services which may include a skills audit. The TE offices advise on the job search and offer a language course or other training. They also have information about open vacancies. Job seekers can also look for available jobs in Finland through services such as <https://jobsinfinland.fi/> and Work in Finland.

**Validation of competence of adult immigrants.** The KOTO integration training, which is based on an official core curriculum, is targeting adult migrants and includes identification, and where relevant validation of previously acquired competence, including through NFIL, underpinned with professional planning and career guidance. KOTO helps adult migrants structure their educational path and life plans, and can also provide other training and guidance that promotes access to working life and further education, as well as other skills needed in society. The student can set personal goals, and support and guidance in setting these goals and achieving them. KOTO is organised in so that it enables a personal study path. It covers broad-based competencies, language and communication skills, societal and working life skills and optional studies. A wide range of optional studies are available depending of the client's needs and wishes: working life certificates, continuing education to update skills, additional studies in Finnish/Swedish or other languages, studies in maths, orientation studies to the common parts of VET studies, guided visits and periods in educational institutions, preparation for the general language degree, a multilingual social orientation period and other studies relevant to the student's integration and further studies. The validation process of the KOTO integration training is described in the box below.

#### **The KOTO integration training: Identifying and recognizing competence of adult immigrants**

The identification and recognition of skills is a key part of the personalization of integration training within the process of development of the personal study plan (HOPS process). It continues the mapping of competence begun in the initial assessment and provides a basis for the identification and recognition of skills and guidance after the integration training. KOTO identifies the competence that helps the student to get a job or a qualification or apply for further studies. Skills acquired in different ways are systematically identified and

recognised throughout the integration training, for example as part of guidance. The information accumulated during the training is documented in job search documents, competence certificates or work certificates, portfolio or other appropriate form that will benefit the student in the future. The related information is recorded in the student's follow-up plan, so that it can be supplemented and used in the guidance and career planning later on. With those who are less familiar with describing and identifying their competence, the training starts with identifying informal, everyday competence and guides the learner to evaluate their own competence.

Competence is identified, for example, in guidance discussions, as part of teaching, on-the-job learning periods, skills audits or workshop activities, competence tests and demonstrations and with the help of various certificates, including working life certificates. The student can also participate in entrance exams for other education. In integration training, the identification and recognition of skills during the on-the-job learning periods in cooperation with the employer plays a very central role. During the working life periods, the student gets tasks and opportunities that allow him/her to show professional and other skills in authentic work tasks.

If the individual's employment necessitates a qualification for a regulated profession or a legal profession, or a formal recognition of HE qualification, the student will be directed to the competent authority for the recognition of the degree. During the training, the learner is advised and guided to start this process and possible follow-up actions related to the career planning and guidance.

Multilingual, visual and digital tools can be used to support the identification of skills. The student's mother tongue and other languages can be used to help identify competence. In addition to cooperation with employers, competence identification can also be done in cooperation with VET institutions, HEIs, guidance services and the third sector.

<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/kotoutumiskoulutus/8288272/tekstikappale/8296544>

Targeted support is available for immigrants who wish to begin or continue higher education studies through SIMHE services. These services have been developed as a project-based activity since 2016. The charge-free SIMHE services typically guide people through the application process to higher education institutions and help in the identification and recognition of their competence. In a confidential guidance session, the client and a SIMHE adviser discuss the competences and set the goals. The guidance discussion covers previous education, language skills and job experience, as well as interests and aspirations. The guidance helps identify whether supplementary higher education studies or full degree studies are more useful for the individual.

Charge-free immigrants' skills audits<sup>51</sup> have been developed in response to the recent and ongoing refugee crisis.

### **Charge-free immigrant skills audits**

In spring 2022, the 15 regional ELY Centres for economic development, transport and the environment were tendering their services for Ukrainians.

The Uusimaa ELY Centre requested tenders for the integration training in the capital region and negotiated an offer for validation in English language (including the service descriptions) in four sectors: restaurant and catering, construction and building technology and social and health sector. The validation provides a certificate of competences that can be used when looking for a job. Validation in the social and health sector continue to be organised only in Finnish due to the language requirements.

The Uusimaa TE Centre provides mapping of learning and professional competence for immigrants in four sectors with labour shortages: Health and social sector, Construction

<sup>51</sup> Maahanmuuttajien osaamis- ja ammattitaitokartoitukset <https://toimistot.te-palvelut.fi/osaamis-ja-ammattitaitokartoitus> (fi)

and building technology, Restaurant and catering, Machinery and production technology. The mapping provides a certificate of competence which can be used when looking for a job. Validation can be done in Finnish and English in all sectors apart from the social and health sector which continues to be organised only in Finnish due to the language requirements.

In VET, when identifying the competence of immigrants, methods are used where language skills do not affect the assessment such as work samples in the workshop. Interpretation services are also used to overcome the language barriers. The use of images for competence identification has also been developed, but this works in the initial mapping, not in demonstrating more in-depth knowledge (Oosi et al., 2020). Private VET organisations such as Taitotalo are delivering services to the authorities (municipality or TE centre) including also validation.

### **OSKARI skills and professional competence audit in Taitotalo (SkillsHouse)**

Taitotalo is Finland's leading vocational adult education centre in Helsinki which serves 18 000 adults every year. It has a long experience in training immigrant background people and offers them diverse services including professional guidance, language training, preparatory training for upper secondary education (TUVA), vocational qualifications, apprenticeship training, Finnish National Certificate of Language Proficiency, Finnish courses for the world of work, other certification programmes, integration training for immigrants etc.

For skills audits, Taitotalo is using the OSKARI skills and professional competence audit which involves is a five-day mapping of learning and professional competence, covering discussions, exercises and practical work tasks. It identifies previously acquired competences in order to help people find employment or a new career and to find out if certain jobs fit to them. It covers discussions with a professional trainer and a guidance professional regarding skills and training the individual has in the field he/she is interested in, as well as exercises and practical tasks, and information about different professions and study options.

Audits are undertaken in Taitotalo's teaching facilities or authentic work environments either in Finnish or English. Participants receive a certificate with a vocational trainer's assessment of competence and special skills, an assessment of suitable tasks and a recommendation for supplementary studies. The certificate helps in job search or in accessing education and training.

Audits are organised in social and health care, ICT, cleaning, real estate services, construction, business, mechanical and production technology, restaurant and catering. To gain access to this service, individuals need to reference from their contact person in PES who makes the booking.

<https://www.taitotalo.fi/>

In order to enhance the working life insertion of under-represented groups, notably immigrants, the Finnish National Agency for Education has set out to develop a competence mark system for the basic skills in working life for underrepresented groups, especially migrants. The topic was selected because basic skills are developed in many trainings, but they do not provide a clear proof of the acquisition of these skills as the skills are embedded in courses with different names in the Koski database. At the national level it has also been impossible to get an overview of the development of basic skills among adults. See box below.

### **Developing a national competence mark system for the basic skills in working life for underrepresented groups**

In 2022, based on the 2020 Outline of the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning, the National Agency for Education launched the development of the first national

competence mark system for adults' basic skills in working life. The system will be introduced early 2024 when the required changes in legislation have been adopted.

The aim is to build a coherent, functional set of competence marks that can be used to demonstrate the acquisition of the basic skills in working life, targeting underrepresented groups, particularly immigrants who require reading and writing skills and other integration training in Finnish/Swedish languages.

The National Agency for Education aims to launch the competence mark system for liberal adult education, including the descriptions of the competences for each mark to enable evaluation of competence. Competence will be assessed in liberal adult education institutions.

The competence mark system will be created on the e-Requirements platform (e-Perusteet), so that the national Koski database can link to it whenever a specific competence mark is completed and the educational institution has transferred the completion data to the Koski database. The competence mark can be completed charge-free as part of the training provided in the liberal adult education sector or independently, without participation in training, as a fee-based service. The competence mark system will have no connections to commercial operators.

### **Multi-professional services for immigrants and young people and NEETs**

Finland has also developed multi-professional public services that are providing validation-related services for different target groups. These include the Competence Centres for Immigrants in eight cities with at least 8 000 immigrants, and the Ohjaamo centres for young people under 30 years in about 70 locations. The services are provided charge free to clients. These services are mainly relying on project funding from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as respective municipalities.

Multi-professional collaboration in competence centres for immigrants aims to speed up the learning and employment paths of immigrants and improve their employment opportunities. Supported by Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM), they provide a one-stop service for immigrants and migrant background adults, including the validation of competence and guidance towards learning or employment path in line of individuals' own aspirations and interests.

#### **Competence Centres for immigrants**

Eight Competence Centres for Immigrants (Osaamiskeskus) in the cities with biggest number of migrants are providing multilingual and multi-professional one-stop services to immigrants and immigrant background people. These services cover initial guidance to immigrants, identification and validation of competence, teaching of Finnish or Swedish and basic skills, guidance for education and training, preparatory training, strengthening of digital skills, study skills, employability and professional skills, and promoting work ability and access to jobs.

The validation activities cover the competence identification and recognition which maps individuals' acquired professional competences, Finnish language skills, learning abilities, communication and interaction skills, digital and mathematical skills, social and working life skills, and work ability. Based on the results of the competence mapping, the goals and an individual pathway are planned together with the customer. The customer is guided in line with his/her own goals to the path towards employment, training, or other services, the duration and timing of which are planned together and personal guidance supports the progress towards the goal. Client is also supported in the job search by taking into account his/her special needs. Support may include both personal guidance and customised coaching. Clients whose integration is best supported by, for example, rehabilitation or other activities are referred to these services.

The multi-professional services bring together municipality's administrative branches and experts from the job centre (TE office) and in some cases also business services and the

government agency in charge of social benefits (KELA). Competence centres rely on project funding. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM) is supporting these operations (EUR 3 million of grant funding from July 2022 to end of August 2023) to define the content of the services offered by the competence centre.

There are also about 70 multi-professional low-threshold Ohjaamo guidance centres spread across the country where any young person under the age of 30 can have support and guidance free of charge. In 2021, the capacity of these youth guidance centres was strengthened with a state grant to encourage municipalities to hire more experts to enable young people to get better support for well-being, education and employment from one place.

### **Ohjaamo low threshold guidance centres for young people and NEETs**

The Ohjaamo one-stop guidance centres are providing easy access to multi-professional services for young people under 30 years, in questions related to work, education and wellbeing. Almost 70 centres across Finland are offering rapid information and guidance, need-based charge-free support in diverse matters, ranging from studying and employment to housing etc. Irrespective of place of residence, anyone under 30 years is entitled to information and advice.

Ohjaamo centres are present where young people and NEETs are and reach out to them in multiple ways including social media. In outreach activities the social media and networks are utilised (#Ohjaamo). In guidance services Ohjaamo centres use Ohjaustaverkossa.fi service which is also used by PES.

The evaluation of impact (Valtakari et al., 2020) shows that Ohjaamo centres had brought better results in youth employment than standard employment office (TE office) thanks to the longer guidance process and multi-professional one-stop-shop approach which allows more client-centred, customised services. They cover their expenses with public finance savings generated through employment.

For the period of 1.9.2021–31.12.2024 altogether EUR 13 million has been made available (EUR 3.25 million per year) for these centres from the Next Generation EU. The state support enables the centres to hire two experts at the cost of one. By hiring one new expert, the youth centre can apply for state support to hire the second new expert. Financed by Finland's Sustainable Development Programme, the support is available to municipalities which have Ohjaamo youth centre. The state support can be used only for staff costs in social and health or education and training services.

Targeted mechanisms are also in place through workshops for young people in need of extensive support or at risk of dropout. For details on workshops, please see 10.1.2 Methods in the Third Sector. Furthermore NäytönPaikka<sup>52</sup> -service (My life visible) is a free-of-charge, resource-oriented tool that is used widely across Finland in services related employment, youth, education, housing, substance abuse and mental health to enable users to self-identify their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities.

### **The NäytönPaikka service (My life visible)**

NäytönPaikka service (My life visible) is a free-of-charge, resource-oriented tool that is used widely across Finland in services related employment, youth, education, housing, substance abuse and mental health.

The website provides tools that help users to stop and think about their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. Users can save and edit data whenever they want. They can share the documents (including a CV) and summaries with their own support network.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://naytonpaikka.fi/>

For professionals who are supporting the users, the online service provides an easy access to the user's situation, improving cooperation. It enables customer-oriented and holistic anti-exclusion work and supports inclusion, growth and empowerment.

Different language versions of the CV tool help working with immigrants.

NäytönPaikka was developed through a project Making my Life Visible (Oma Elämä Näkyväksi OEN) funded by Finland's Slot Machine Association (RAY) and administered by a dedicated association. Since 2016 the service has been maintained by the Finnish Federation of Settlement Houses and funded by the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA).

<https://naytonpaikka.fi/>

## 10 Validation methods

### 10.1 Methodologies and methods

Finland has no single method for identification, documentation, assessment and certification for validation purposes.

#### 10.1.1 Methods in formal education

In formal education, typical methods include self-assessment, dialogue, and portfolio of evidence. As formal education is competence-based, the competence acquired in non-formal and informal contexts can be compared with the expected learning outcomes and validated. Key parts of this process include a self-assessment, application for validation covering the documentation (in paper or online depending on the local arrangements) and dialogue with the teacher / guidance professional, and demonstration of competence through various means.

##### 10.1.1.1 VET

In VET self-assessment and dialogue are embedded in the development of the personal development plan (HOKS). Different methods can be used to identify skills, such as work samples, simulators, tests, language proficiency tests, portfolios or the mapping through the [osaan.fi](http://osa.fi) service. Assessment of work and operational ability can be undertaken, for example, in a workshop. Competence tests are organised. In 2021, the National Agency for Education launched the instructions for the identification and recognition of competence in VET<sup>53</sup>. The planning and organisation of competence tests is guided in e-Requirements<sup>54</sup>.

In the application phase (identification) the applicant is interviewed, and the qualification options or possible qualification requirements are discussed depending on the needs of the candidate. Self-assessments are commonly used. A specific e-tool ([www.osaan.fi](http://www.osaan.fi)) comprises all VET qualifications and the assessment criteria. The candidate may make a self-assessment to verify if s/he has the required competences to take the competence tests. The candidate is also asked to provide any evidence of his/her competences related to the learning outcomes of the qualification in question.

Different methods can be used to identify skills, such as work samples, simulators, tests, language proficiency tests, portfolios or the mapping through the [osaan.fi](http://osaan.fi)

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<https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Ohje%20osaamisen%20tunnistamisesta%20ja%20tunnustamisesta.pdf> (fi)

<sup>54</sup> Näyttöjen suunnittelu ja järjestäminen. (Planning and organisation of demonstration). <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/ammattillinen/4343283/tekstikappale/4395828> (fi)

service. Assessment of work and operational ability can be undertaken, for example, in a workshop depending on the needs of the student.

In cases where the candidate has reliable documented evidence of competences (e.g. from non-formal settings) the documentation is delivered to the assessors. They may recognise a qualification unit or units or the entire qualification on the basis of the evidence.

In cases where there is no documented evidence or one cannot verify competences on the basis of the documentation, competence tests will take place<sup>55</sup>. The planning and implementation of the competence tests are guided by the VET regulations and the basics of degree curricula<sup>56</sup>. The competence assessment implementation plan which is part of the training provider's quality management system provides the general principles of the design of the competence tests, including guidelines and procedures for its implementation.

The specifications of the competence test will be included in the student's HOKS individual skills development plan, drafted by the VET provider in cooperation with the candidate. In most cases, the competence tests are carried out in an authentic work environment. For a justified reason, other places can be used, such as VET institution's workplaces, virtual environments or simulators. The professional requirements of the degree may include competence which cannot be demonstrated in connection with normal work tasks, or demonstration in a real work situation could endanger patient or traffic safety etc. In these situations, for a justified reason, the competence test can be organised elsewhere than at the workplace. A justified reason can also be that the student is a minor or that there is no workplace within a reasonable distance from the student's home that would meet the requirements of the competence test. Furthermore, if a professional competence requirement cannot be shown in the test environment, the student may complement the test with an interview or written assignments.

Practical tasks in accordance with professional competence requirements are carried out to the extent that the student's competence can be reliably assessed. It is possible to continue the demonstration in another workplace or work site so that the coverage of the demonstration of competence is ensured and the assessment can be made. Students demonstrate their competence in practical work situations or work processes on the competence tests. In addition, the degree requirements may require producing written documents or completion of separate qualifications.

The bipartite assessment implies that the test situation is monitored and assessed by a working life representative and a representative from education. The assessors decide and record the results accordingly. After the competence test the assessors and the candidate review the test situation and give feedback to the candidate. The training provider awards the qualification and the certificate. If the student's competences cannot be assessed comprehensively on the test, individual supplementation is agreed with the student.

#### **10.1.1.2 General upper secondary education**

In general, upper secondary education, competence is largely demonstrated through exams, although other assessment methods are also used. Local solutions and

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<sup>55</sup> Other methods of demonstrating professional competence in addition to competence test may be used for instance when a competence test would endanger the safety of others.

<sup>56</sup> The planning and organization of the demonstration are governed by the regulations of vocational education. Their design and personalization are regulated in the Act on Vocational Education (531/2017, Chapters 5 and 6) and in the Decree on Vocational Education (673/2017, Section 9). The organization of professional degrees and training requires a license for the organization of degrees and training issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The training organiser has the right to organise demonstrations, assess skills and issue certificates only for degrees in accordance with the organization permit.

practices for demonstrating competence include discussions, documentation, tests and exams. Local approaches vary regarding the process of identifying competence from a broader reflection of competence to a more formal process.

Local approaches to the validation process also vary from less formalised to a more structured way (Oosi et al., 2020).

In general, upper secondary schools, application for validation is made to the school principal at the start of the studies, as part of the personal study plan, or before the respective course or module begins.

There are local variations in what competences are validated in upper secondary education. Validation may cover driving license, liberal adult education, exchange studies and language skills (Oosi et al. 2020). In addition, competence demonstrated through other activities can be recognised in the studies, for instance when student has an active citizenship passport or cultural passport<sup>57</sup>.

Competence is largely demonstrated through exams, although other assessment methods are also used. Local solutions and practices for demonstrating competence may include discussions, documentation, tests and exams. The principal ensures the correspondence. Specific local solutions for the identification and recognition of competence may apply to those who are completing adult curriculum, but so far no mapping or evaluation has been taken on this topic (Oosi et al., 2020).

### 10.1.1.3 Higher education

Finnish research-intensive universities have worked together to develop guidance and recommendations on recognition of previously acquired learning through the so called AHOT projects<sup>58</sup>. Consequently, the national guidance by OHA-forum (2020) and the UNIFI recommendation for recognition of prior learning in universities were introduced in 2020. Most universities have developed their regulations and guidance for academic staff and students as well as rules on the correction procedure regarding the recognition of competence during 2020 and 2021<sup>59</sup>.

In universities, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is part of the personal study plan (HOPS) which is a documented plan structured around the student's desired degree and competence goals. Students can take into account their interests, career goals and employment prospects and previously acquired learning when choosing their studies. HOPS is developed with the help of the designated tutor, typically at the beginning of the studies, but can be modified as the studies progress.

In the HOPS process students evaluate their previously acquired competence in relation to the competence goals set in the competence-based curriculum. They discuss the previously acquired competences and their recognition with their HOPS-tutor. The guidance discussion is a mandatory part of the recognition process and helps the student make the application for the recognition.

For competence-based recognition, students must verify and document their competence and show that they have reached the intended learning outcomes of the respective studies. The process and methods of recognition non-formal and informal learning vary across and within HEIs, however the workload should not surpass the workload of the respective credits and the evaluation method should not be heavier than the evaluation of the respective formal studies. Typically used methods include demonstrating competence with the help of work certificates, learning portfolios, diplomas, publications and other written documents. The student can also be required

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<sup>57</sup> <https://seinajoenlukio.fi/opiskelu/hyv%C3%A4ksilukeminen>

<sup>58</sup> AHOT is the Finnish acronym for recognition of prior learning.

<sup>59</sup> Tampere University's guidelines: [https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2020-06/tau\\_ahot-ohjeet-tau-01082020.pdf](https://content-webapi.tuni.fi/proxy/public/2020-06/tau_ahot-ohjeet-tau-01082020.pdf)

to demonstrate the acquisition of competence through an essay, oral or written examination or interview. Competence tests in the form of simulations is a relatively common practice. For instance IT workshops are arranged where candidates must perform assigned tasks. Many universities recognise the leadership training acquired through military conscription towards their degree education.

Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) have a long experience in validation of non-formal and informal learning, partly thanks to their provision of non-degree adult education. In UAS, recognition of earlier acquired learning (*'ahotointi'*) has been implemented for more than a decade. UAS have collaborated to create their approaches to recognition of non-formal or informal learning before or during the degree studies, and individual UAS institutions<sup>60</sup> have developed their guidance to students for recognition of prior learning or learning acquired outside of degree studies. Several UAS are implementing a full VNFIL process that encompasses orientation, self-assessment, guidance, application, demonstration, assessment, formal recognition, documentation, and follow-up, in line with the Nordic Model on Validation, suggested by the Nordic network on adults' learning (Andersson, 2021).

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is addressed through the personal study planning process (HOPS) where UAS students identify the competences they have acquired and articulate them in respect to the intended learning outcomes of the modules or parts of studies. Online application systems are typically used<sup>61</sup>, and videos guide students in the validation process<sup>62</sup>.

The precondition for validation is that the learning outcomes meet the criteria of the intended learning outcomes of the degree studies in question. In theory, all studies can be completed by demonstration, however most students apply for validation of a study load of less than 20–25 ECTS.

While learning acquired outside of formal studies can be recognised at any time of the studies, students are encouraged to undertake this self-analysis at the entry phase. They benefit from counselling by study advisors, when mapping their competence profile. When the student has assessed his/her present competences in a given field, s/he initiates the process of validation, by submitting a brief application form where prior learning and competences are described. Lecturers in charge of teaching in the respective course(s) design the assignments and activities that need to be undertaken by the student seeking for validation. In the demonstration process, the criteria for assessment is the same for completing the course according to the syllabus, or acquiring validation through demonstration of competences.

Students can describe and demonstrate their competence(s) through self-assessment, fixed response/multiple choice questions, interviews, portfolio of evidence, learning diaries, videos, presentation, simulation and controlled job practice etc. UAS have also adopted competence tests that take place in authentic working environments. Competences are demonstrated and assessed by using a variety of demonstration modes: reports, presentations, portfolios, audio-visual work, written and oral exams, pitching, role play etc. Some UAS are organising collective events or demonstration days for units which have a large student participation (Mäkelä, 2022).

Studies completed via demonstration of competences are not tagged with any specific code or comment in the study register, which marks a difference with credit transfer of formal studies that needs to be indicated therein. Demonstration in the framework of VNFIL is considered as part of the study programme, not only by the institution but

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<sup>60</sup> See Guidelines by DIAK <https://diak.screenstepslive.com/s/755/m/74749/l/838085-ahot-ohje-opiskelijalle> .

<sup>61</sup> See HUMAK University of Applied Sciences instructions for e-AHOT tool: [https://opiskelijanopas.humak.fi/?page\\_id=6472](https://opiskelijanopas.humak.fi/?page_id=6472)

<sup>62</sup> See HAMK University of Applied Sciences video on the application for recognition of prior learning competence: Pakki Student Instructions: RPL for non-academic competence [https://kaltura.hamk.fi/media/Pakki+Student+InstructionsA+RPL+for+non-academic+competence/0\\_vjgvc1iw](https://kaltura.hamk.fi/media/Pakki+Student+InstructionsA+RPL+for+non-academic+competence/0_vjgvc1iw)

also by the social security system ensuring study allocations, whilst transferred credits are not included in the accumulation of ECTS points annually.

UAS have also developed methodologies such as 'Studification' to ensure that competence from work-based learning during studies can be fully validated towards the degree. For instance, Haaga-Helia's standardised Work & Study process includes a kick-off meeting, guidance (covering also guidance on additional theoretical studies), regular check-up meetings, a plan on demonstration (how and when), and demonstration (Ibid.). Such a structured approach to work-integrated learning / work-based learning is useful in Finland, given that that many Finnish students work during their studies.

### **Validation of work-based learning during study: Haaga-Helia's Work & Study model**

Work & Study is an alternative study mode at Haaga-Helia and stands for a full process of planning and conducting studies in authentic work contexts, to obtain a set of intended degree-based learning outcomes. This may refer to a situation where students are working in projects developed by Haaga-Helia, or where a company identifies a need for professional development or new processes that necessitate further training. In this case, a group of employees become part-time students, and the UAS provides them with a customised development and studies for a shorter or longer time up to obtaining a full degree.

The most common scenario is when a student takes the initiative to have learning acquired through ongoing work (paid or voluntary), entrepreneurship etc. validated towards the degree. As in the validation of prior learning, the learning outcomes must be compatible with the intended learning outcomes of the degree. The student designs a structured and scheduled plan on how to achieve the learning outcomes, and starts working systematically towards them, under the guidance of lecturers.

After the initial self-assessment on compatibility of professional tasks and degree studies, the student submits an application including a preliminary work plan, and receives comments from the lecturer in charge of the respective study modules. To ensure that the related theory contents are not neglected, additional reading and analysis can be required, when necessary. Students receive guidance from study advisors as well as 'substance' lecturers. Students also need approval of the workplace to ensure that there are no confidentiality issues. A formal contract with the organisation is encouraged, as their representative is expected to provide feedback.

In demonstration days students present their learning outcomes, receive feedback from their peers and evaluation and assessment by the lecturers. Alumni in the respective field provide additional professional feedback. They are volunteers who have completed a specific training of 5 ECTS to participate in Demonstration Days as external feedback providers.

Assessment must be designed at the planning phase and cover the assignments to be undertaken at work. The intended learning outcomes need to be regularly screened towards the expectations of the work place. While lecturers are responsible for the assessment, the input from professional contexts and co-operation networks is important. Corporate feedback is collected by standardised, simple forms.

See Mäkelä (2022)

<https://www.haaga-helia.fi/en/recognition-learning>

## **10.1.2 Methods in the Third Sector**

Validation in liberal adult education and other third sector organisations have often used declarative methods, for instance when awarding Open Badges and written assignments or other written evidence, e.g. on work samples. During the reporting period efforts in the third sector have focused on creating competence-based, credit-

bearing training in order to facilitate validation in formal education and labour market contexts.

The legislative changes in 2020 and 2021 have paved the way for smoother validation of competence acquired in non-degree education in formal education and the labour market, as related credits can be transferred to the Koski database. The Koski registration requires that the training is competence-based, credit bearing and evaluated, and that learners' give a permission for the transfer. Learners themselves can use these competences through the *Oma Opintopolku* (My StudyInfo) service. Their online applications for validation in formal education or labour market include a link to Koski system and a description of the learning outcomes.

In 2022, the Finnish National Agency for Education introduced a guide<sup>63</sup> for competence-based evaluation in liberal adult education and other third sector organisations covering the key methods for validation. It shows how the competence acquired through learning in associations, hobbies, competitive activities, entrepreneurship or work etc. can be made visible and recognised as part of the education and training in this sector. Learners can make their competence visible through competence certificates, portfolios, self-evaluation or other reports. Tests and interviews can also be used. In the identification stage, student's acquired competence is compared with the competence goals and evaluation criteria of the education and training. Learners must be informed about recognition and it should be documented in line with the practices of the institution. If the course credits completed in liberal education institutions and third sector organisations meet the professional requirements or competence goals of formal education pursued, they can be recognised, included into or credited towards a vocational or higher education qualification.

In 2022, Sivis Study Center was the first liberal adult education institution, whose education management system SivisWeb (Sivisverkko) automatically transferred credit-based education performance data to the Koski database. Sivis has developed diverse methods for competence identification and recognition certification. It supports the identification of competence by organizing trainings and providing models, tools and competence badges for the use of the third sector organizations. Sivis is also active in international collaboration, and has collected 12 good practices of competence badges<sup>64</sup>

### **Sivis Study Centre develops methods and tools for validation for non-formal education**

The Sivis Study Centre's e-learning platform for member organisations promotes the validation of competences and provides guidance on validation. Its nine-step process model to identify and recognise competences acquired in NGOs, as well as a learning outcome-based certification help NGOs as the outcomes can be used in formal training.

The Sivis web (Sivisverkko) offers an electronic tool for managing the trainings in NGOs and liberal adult education institutions. This enables the planning of competence-based and credit-bearing courses. The level of competence is defined based on the EQF framework. Participants receive an electronic certificate of competence and an extract from the study register. Information can be transferred to the national Koski Study Register and accepted as part of the degree. The information can be transferred to the national Koski study register at the permission of the learner.

Sivis provides open badges for NGO competence, training, digital skills, and for evaluation of competences. The open badge sets are shared to NGOs through the Open Badge

<sup>63</sup> Opas osaamisperusteiseen arviointiin vapaassa sivistystyössä.  
<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/opas/7396550/tiedot>. Validation is covered in  
<https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/fi/opas/7396550/tekstikappale/7402316>

<sup>64</sup> <https://issuu.com/creativitas-eu/docs/badges4good> (en)

Factory (<https://openbadgefactory.com>). The copy of the badge set is available in the organization's own Open Badge Factory, and the organization can, modify the competence criteria according to the situation. An online course on validation of non-formal and informal learning provides participants an Open Badge upon successful completion.

Another example of validation methods in the third sector comes from the workshop sector which has a strong experience in guiding young people who are in need of substantial support. The cooperation between workshops and vocational training organisers has grown after the 2018 VET reform as VET organisers are now obliged to find learning environments for students in need of special support or at risk of dropout. In 2019 and 2021, workshops and VET institutions agreed on the principles for collaboration to ensure the interest of young people<sup>65</sup>: Students at risk of dropout and in need of extensive individual support and guidance are offered the opportunity to join the workshop for a pre-agreed period to complete their studies in accordance with the personal competence development plan (HOKS). In workshop activities competence is identified and made visible through competence certification that takes advantage of online tools such as the Osaan.fi service or PAIKKO competence certificate tool<sup>66</sup>.

Furthermore, the Into Association for Outreach Youth Work and Workshop Activities (<https://www.intory.fi/>) has published guidance for the workshop coaches to enable validation of learning outcomes acquired in workshops towards VET qualifications<sup>67</sup>. This studification model entails a process where the workshop organisers show that they can offer an appropriate learning environment and they have the ability to award competence certificates and organise competence demonstrations. The competence certificate does not correspond to the diploma issued by the training provider, but it can be taken into account in the HOKS process after the workshop period. The competence certificate can also be used in the job search. See box below.

### Enabling validation of competence acquired in workshops for young people in need of support

Into – Association for Outreach Youth Work and Workshop Activities (<https://www.intory.fi/>) represents over 270 workshops and 600 outreach youth workers in Finland. More than 43 000 young people and adults participate in the services every year. Outreach youth work targets young people (under 29 years) outside education or working life. Workshop activities in over 90% of Finland's municipalities help young people access education and employment, support their participation and life management through multi-professional support from PES, education, youth, social and healthcare services.

Into has published guidance for the workshop coaches to enable validation of competence acquired in workshops towards a VET degree:

**Step 1.** Prepare the report for the identification of the workshop's learning environment (facilities and equipment, work assignments, on-the-job and individual coaching). The learning environment is always identified by comparing the workshop activities to the respective VET requirements (in e-Perusteet) in cooperation with the training organiser. The goal is to find an alternative that can be fully implemented through the workshop. The primary target groups are the training organisers and potential students, as well as the workshop staff. The report also serves as orientation material for new employees. The report can be prepared using e.g. the PAIKKO tool (<https://www.paikko.fi/>).

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.intory.fi/tyopajatoiminta/opinnollistaminen/tyopajojen-ja-ammattillisen-koulutuksen-jarjestajien-yhteistyon-linjaukset/>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.paikko.fi/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.intory.fi/tyopajatoiminta/opinnollistaminen/inton-opinnollistamisen-malli/>

**Step 2.** Provide training and documentation on the accumulation of competence and issue competence certificates to trainees. This step requires knowledge of the content of the degree in question and competence recognition. The competence certificated can be prepared using e.g. the PAIKKO tool.

**Step 3.** Implement competence tests at the workshop environment. Agree with the VET institution on the organisation of the test. The organiser of the training is always responsible for evaluating the test and training the evaluators, but it is advisable to involve the evaluators from the test environment, i.e. the workshop.

For the trainee this recognition process implies completion of learning tasks in the workshop and accumulation of competence. The competence required for the certificate is discussed and the workshop stage is planned with the trainee. Competences acquired are documented using a portfolio or competence certificate. A demonstration through a competence can also be organised.

<https://www.intory.fi/materialipankki/opinnollistaminen-prosessit/>

The NGO sector and formal education institutions have collaborated in joint initiatives that embed validation in the formal curriculum and allow individuals to undertake learning with a non-formal education provider. For instance Finnish Guides and Scouts and HAMK University of Applied Sciences have organised an interpretation forum to enable competences acquired through scouting to be recognised as part of UAS degree (Nikander, Kuisma and Sinivuori, 2019). Guides and Scouts and HAMK have also been key players in the development of the Digital Competence Disc service (<https://www.osaamiskiekkko.fi/en/>) which shows young people, youth workers, teachers and guidance professionals the equivalence of the competence acquired in NGOs and voluntary activities and formal education and training, by field of study and educational institution. For more details, see section 10.2. Use of ICT in validation.

### Validation of scouting skills in higher education

Finnish Guides and Scouts provide credits for scouting skills that can be included into the degree studies of Häme University of Applied Sciences' (HAMK). HAMK is the first higher education institution in Finland that enables the validation of scouting competence throughout the entire organization.

HAMK's degree studies can include skills acquired in the scouts (after the age of 18), in management, training, guidance, quality and development of operations, and safety. Up to 15 credits can be recognised towards a degree i.e. 7% of credits required for the degree

HAMK also enables validation of skills demonstrated by the scout's forestry competence mark as part of the studies in forestry engineering.

The validation of scouting skills is a result of long-term collaboration between the scouts and HAMK. This collaboration has included a joint forum, where youth work experts of the Guides and Scouts and the HAMK's experts in teaching and study guidance cross-examined the competences that arose in the UAS degrees and in hobby and volunteering activities.

<https://www.partio.fi/partiomedial/partio-sai-oman-osaamiskeskuksen-%e2%88%92-harrastuksissa-saatu-osaaminen-tehdaan-nakylvaksi/>

## 10.1.3 Methods in the labour market

Working life does not have a unified strategy or operating method for describing, identifying and recognizing competence. Validation for mandatory working life certificates and passports follow an established model (for details see 3.3. Validation in the labour market). Other than that, the practices of identifying and recognizing competence in working life and competence acquired at work are varied and scattered, and they do not always have a clear link to the formal qualification system (Oosi et al. 2020).

The Working Group on Identification of Competence, jointly chaired by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Education and Culture is working towards national guidelines and standards, to be delivered in 2023. Its interim report of 2022 notes that the concept of identification and recognizing competence in working life differs from that of the education and training system, as it takes places in transition stages related to job search, recruitment and career development, development discussions and competence mapping (Oosi et al.2020).

**Regarding the validation in public employment services**, as noted above, in May 2022, a new service model for job seekers was introduced, covering the identification of competence and service needs. The new model is based on the Nordic model, where during the early stages of job search, the job seeker is actively offered services and support. For competence identification, self-assessment and dialogue are used. Where more details are needed, the job seeker is referred to a skills audit. With a comprehensive assessment of the need for service, which includes competence assessment and possibly also an assessment of work and functional ability, the aim is to improve the service quality and delivery through multi-professional services. For more details see section 7.2.

## 10.2 Use of ICT in validation

Finland features many ICT-based initiatives to support validation in order to identify, document, assess and certify competences. Digital services for validation are produced in the private, public and the third sector. The development in this domain has been fast and there is limited information to what extent different systems are used, or their advantages and disadvantages. The 2020 report commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment highlighted the dispersed use of ICT in guidance and validation, with services developed from the perspective of the service providers (Oosi et al., 2020): Guidance professionals across sectors are using different digital platforms, which hampers knowledge transfer, interaction and peer learning. Also ESR is funding regional projects and isolated tools for validation which lack links to national solutions. In the public sector, the web-based tools have been built for the use of actors in specific administrative fields; they focus on portals for citizens, covering educational and professional data.

### 10.2.1 ICT in the formal education validation

The key ICT-based services in the education and training system are the Koski system including central data integration and transfer service and the *OpintoPolku* portal (StudyInfo), which enables registering and keeping track of the learning achievements of individuals.

**Koski** is a central data integration and transfer service, maintained by the Finnish National Agency for Education for study rights and credits. It contains information on learners' individual study rights, credits/study performance and completed degrees. With the Koski transfer service national registers containing study and degree information re brought together. Learners, educational institutions and authorities can access the information in one place in a safe way for purposes such as validation. The service has been developed since 2018 and is increasingly covering also non-formal education. From autumn 2021, it has been possible to export the credits completed in competence-base liberal adult education to the Koski database: each liberal adult education provides decides itself which trainings will be credit-based, and the credits are transferred to the system only at the consent of the individual.

#### **Koski data integration and transfer service**

The Koski service is the central integration service for national study rights and learning outcomes which consists of data reserves and registers. Competence-based learning

outcomes verified by the awarding authority (educational institution) are transferred to the Koski database which contains information on each learner's learning outcomes from coursework to degrees. The Koski service also contains information on learners' study rights and descriptions of the key content and competence requirements of the completed degree(s). This information is used not only in validation but also in planning and personalization of studies and competence development activities, job search, as well as monitoring the progress of studies and participation in education and training, calculating the financing of training, compiling statistics on education and training, and evaluation. Information from the database can be shared in a safe way with authorities. The data is collected directly from the teaching and training organisers through their study administration systems via interfaces.

Koski was founded in January 2018, when the law on national study and degree registers (884/2017) entered into force. From August 2018, the credit and degree information of pre-primary education, basic education, upper secondary education and vocational education have been stored in the database. The VIRTAs study information service functions as the KOSKI transfer service for university degrees and credits. Since then the database has been gradually expanded, enhancing lifelong learning and the potential for validation. KOSKI covers now the study rights and performance data of students in the transition phase from basic to secondary education, of learners who are completing their compulsory education in liberal adult education, in literacy training or who are in migrant integration trainings (KOTO) (from 1 August 2021) or preparatory education for the degree studies (1 August 2022).

For validation of non-formal and informal learning a major improvement took place in August 2021 when the liberal adult education institutions got the right to store data on competence-based learning achievements in non-degree education, based on the consent of the learner. Furthermore the study rights and performance data of the non-degree trainings funded by the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment JOTPA have been stored in KOSKI since 1 January 2023. The service is likely to be expanded as the Working Group on identification of Competence has proposed in its interim report that micro-credentials should be included in the Finland's National Qualifications System.

Learners can view their own information in the Koski service by logging into the Oma Opintopolku service (My StudyInfo).

<https://www.oph.fi/fi/palvelut/koski-tietovaranto>

Furthermore, for higher education, the standardised data collection by authorities is enabled by the VIRTAs study information service. It contains the study-related information of 1.3 million students in 38 HEIs in Finland.

### **The Virta Study Information service in higher education**

The VIRTAs study information service of the national data repository of higher education institutions is a service purchased by the Ministry of Education and Culture from CSC, where higher education institutions keep copies of parts of their student registers and the data content of other personal registers. The information in the registers of HEIs is transmitted in a uniform form for use by different actors and purposes, such as for the joint application to higher education.

The VIRTAs study information service contains the information of 38 Finnish HEIs covering a total of 1.3 million degree students. The database includes e.g. information about the student's completed higher education degrees, credits, their grades, their study rights for a higher education degree, and information about accepting a study place and registering for the education leading to these degrees.

Citizens can view their own study information in the KOSKI service.

The CSC-Science Information Technology Center develops and maintains the VIRTAs study information service as authorised by the technical administrator of the database, the Ministry of Education and Culture.

As noted in Chapter 5 on Standards, the Finnish National Agency for Education maintains the **Opintopolku.fi** e-portal (<https://studyinfo.fi/wp2/en/>) that provides centralised data on education provision as well as diverse services which help learners to identify and apply for suitable studies. Finnish residents can also find their certificates, diplomas, qualifications and credits awarded in the Oma Opintopolku service (My StudyInfo), by using Finnish bank identification codes, mobile certificate or certificate card, including modules or parts of qualifications based on validation. The fact that a learning achievement is based on validation is not indicated in the system as there is no legal requirement for this, and the validated outcomes are considered equal with other outcomes. In addition to learners, educational institutions and guidance professionals can access the database which helps in validation and planning of individual learning paths. Since 2022 Opintopolku has been expanded to create a one-stop shop for the largest possible provision of education in Finland (For more details see JOD in Chapter 10.2.3). The ePerusteet (eRequirements), which developed as part of the Opintopolku portal, provides the requirements of national curricula, degrees and trainings from early childhood education to upper secondary education and VET, and increasingly also competence-based liberal adult education and other curricula<sup>68</sup>. Institutions publish their local curricula and degree implementation plans in the service. The third sector actors and commercial operators are also using the eRequirements' competence descriptions to review the content matching.

Educational institutions, notably VET and universities of applied sciences, are increasingly developing digital environments for the demonstration of skills as well as virtual competence badges, gamification etc. (Owal Group, 2021). Open badges enable recognition of competence acquired in trainings and volunteering, in an open learning environment or at work; they are marketed by the organisations that are issuing them: educational institutions, NGOs, businesses, as well as the Open Badge Factory<sup>69</sup> which is the most frequently used platform for developing and issuing open badges in Finland. Its services include the Open Badge Passport which is a free, multilingual badge storage service. Artificial intelligence is regularly used in the identification of competence by tech firms such as HeadAI, as well as experimentations of the Finnish National Agency for Education which have compared the content description of a competence to another competence description to see their match (Opetushallitus, 2019).

Several digital tools have been developed by and for educational institutions. These include commercial tools developed by tech firms in collaboration with specific HEIs (CareerBot). There are also open access tools and services created through time-limited project funding which may pose a challenge to their maintenance and updating beyond the end of the project (Osaan.fi, Osata). There are also tools that help to articulate competence acquired in the Third Sector such as the Digital Competence Disq and #Näytäosaamisesi (see also 10.2.3 ICT in the Third Sector validation).

### Digital validation tools used in education institutions

**The CareerBot platform** gives AI-powered guidance to students to help them find personal learning paths, work and self-development by optimizing their job market fit. It was developed in collaboration with Helsinki Metropolitan Universities of Applied Sciences (3AMK) and HeadAI. It helps articulate skills and competencies into a skills profile; find a

<sup>68</sup> It also covers preparatory training for degree education (TUVA), basics of the curriculum for the integration education of adult immigrants (KOTO), and the education and training funded by the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (JOTPA).

<sup>69</sup> <https://openbadgefactory.com/en/>

dream job with the help of these skills profiles; identify courses to build the skills they are missing; visualise skills profiles in semantic maps. Students can compare their own competencies to the job market needs and identify and understand what kinds of competencies they are lacking and what they should acquire during studies.

<https://headai.com/careerbot-guides-students-towards-optimal-job-market-fit/>

**The Osaan.fi service** (<https://osaan.fi/#/>) is used in the transition stages in vocational education. The service allows users to browse the competence requirements of VET qualifications and make a self-assessment of their own competence compared to these. Users also get information on relevant education and training opportunities. Osaan.fi is maintained by the National Agency for Education, and it 'reads' the information from other services belonging to the Opintopolku service package (Opintopolku, ePerusteet). The service is used anonymously without registration; however assessments are in a cloud service. Users can share the information with guidance professionals.

**Osata – The project Competence pathways to the future** (Osata - Osaamispolkuja tulevaisuuteen) developed tools and coaching for VET guidance professionals and students to build self-directed career paths and competence identity. The project implemented by the Future Research Center of the University of Turku in collaboration with education and training providers, Study and Education Research Foundation, Municipal Corporations) and relevant student unions ended in 2019, but the developed tools are available <https://osaamismatkalla.fi/sampo/>.

## 10.2.2 ICT in the labour market validation

**Työmarkkinatori or JobMarketFinland** (<https://tyomarkkinatori.fi/en>) is a key working life platform provided by the KEHA Center and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (TEM). In addition to jobseekers, it is used by professional employment services, public, private and third-sector employers, education institutions and job platforms. The services are charge free and open to all. Job Market Finland enables jobseekers to create their own digital skills profile with both formal and non-formal competences that can be published for employers to view. The tool utilises artificial intelligence features and is constantly being developed. The profile tool, reformed in November 2020, provides personalised proposals for jobs that suit the jobseeker's competences, work experience and expectations. The national guidance service can be accessed by phone and via chat. Services are available in Finnish, Swedish, Sami, English and Plain Finnish. Job Market Finland also provides services in Ukrainian language. The platform is under continuous development. Other platforms include Kuntarekry.fi service for municipal positions (<https://www.kuntarekry.fi/>), Valtiolle.fi (<https://www.valtiolle.fi/>) for state positions as well as Duunitori.fi (JobsFinland.fi), and Oikotie.fi (<https://tyopaikat.oikotie.fi/>).

In addition to European tools such as Europass, several tools and platforms are available for competence mapping and identification for the labour market insertion. Validation tools include ForeAmmatti platform with a multi-lingual skills audit tool and other guidance services and the OSKAR skill audit tool. These tools have been developed by tech firms and are used by individuals as well as public employment services who purchase the services and make them available charge free for their clients.

### Validation tools used in PES: ForeAmmatti and OSKAR

The **ForeAmmatti** (<https://www.foreammatti.fi/>) digital cloud service, developed by ForeData, supports competence mapping, job search and career planning. Services are intended for individuals, professional employment services, guidance professionals, educational institutions. Services are available in Finnish, Swedish and English, however competence mapping and identification can be undertaken in 30 languages including Ukrainian. Regional and local employment services are increasingly offering the skills mapping and job matching service to their residents free of charge. ForeAmmatti Skills audit

service is provided by employment services or municipal experiments of employment in 12 regions. For individuals the ForeAmmatti skills mapping service provides a tool for identification and documentation of their skills. Users can share the results of skills mapping with an employment expert or employers. They also receive a daily list of open jobs suitable for their skills, labour market information and other services. The open access, free version of ForeAmmatti offers basic labour market information of all 411 professions.

**OSKAR** is a competence mapping and identification tool (<https://bearit.fi/digitaaliset-tyoelamapalvelut/oskar/>), developed by BearIT for both individuals and groups as well as guidance professionals and those who work with training or skills development. The OSKAR tool uses the European ESCO competence and professional classification and covers all professional fields. For individuals, OSKAR helps identify and articulate their competence and distinguish key sector-specific skills. Individual users can view current work, career and education opportunities and plan their own career path, and save and share their competence profile with employers, guidance professionals etc. For employers OSKAR provides a comprehensive view of the competence of the personnel which enables planning for recruitment and competence development. The tool gives information on the current skills of job seekers, both on an individual and a group level to target services and training. For training providers, the tool generates a summary of the skills of the participants to help plan the contents of the trainings. There is no data on the take-up of OSKAR, however, examples of regional implementation are shown regarding Pirkanmaa and Satakunta.

<https://www.foreammatti.fi/osaamiskartoitus/> accessed 13.2.2023

<https://bearit.fi/digitaaliset-tyoelamapalvelut/oskar> accessed 13.2.2023

Tervakari (2020)

There are also digital tools related to validation for labour market insertion that are targeting specific groups or audiences of different ages. For instance the FutureProof mobile application has been developed for members of specific trade unions. There is also Duunikoutsi (job coach) targeting young people from 13 to 25 years. Abilitator® (Kykyviisari®) targets working age people mainly in working communities and has a strong focus on workability.

### Validation tools for labour market insertion by target audiences

**Futureproof** is an AI powered mobile application, launched in autumn 2022 by Technology Industries of Finland, Union of Professional Engineers, Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland TEK, and The Finnish Business School Graduates. The mobile application visualises the user's current skill set, compares it with the skills required in the aspired job and provides recommendations for updating skills. The mobile app uses open labour market data and artificial intelligence to identify and link skills. It is a matching solution in which skills data helps individuals to identify and develop their own competence in relation to job opportunities in the technology sector. <https://headai.com/futureproof-finds-learning-paths-toward-your-dream-job/>

**Duunikoutsi** (job coach) (<https://tat.fi/palvelu/duunikoutsi/>) is a mobile app work-life coach for young people (13 to 25 year olds) to identify and articulate skills and strengths and find a training place, summer job or dream profession, or draft a CV and prepare for a job interview. The application collects job search ideas, tests and inspiring career stories. By progressing in the application, the young person accumulates a competence-based CV, which s/he can manage by him/herself. Duunikoutsi includes Robokoutsi, which utilises Headai's artificial intelligence. It introduces subjects and, based on the user's feedback, personalises recommendations and makes the young person's progress and interest visible. The mobile app is available in Finnish, Swedish and English. In addition there are Somali, Arabic and Russian language versions combined to plain Finnish.

**Abilitator® (Kykyviisari®)** (<https://sivusto.kykyviisari.fi/en/about-the-abilitor/what-is-the-abilitor/>) is a method for self-assessment of work ability developed by the Institute of Occupational Health for working age people. It enables users to identify their own situation, key strengths and development areas, as well as changes in their ability to function. The free-of-charge survey-based assessment can be completed either on paper or online. (Abilitator web-service is only available for organizations based in Finland.) In addition to

Finnish, the paper and online versions are available in Swedish, English, Somali, Arabic, Sorani, Russian and Dutch. Online users receive immediate feedback in these languages. Group reports are available in Finnish and in English.

### 10.2.3 ICT in the Third sector validation

Many third sector organisations are creating digital tools competence badges for validation. These tools are often developed with the help of Sivis Study Centre guidance to ensure that the competences accumulated in the third sector can be validated in formal education. For more details see 10.1.2 Methods in the Third Sector.

Finnish Guides and Scouts have led the way in developing tools such as the open access Digital Competence Disq service which enables users to identify how the knowledge gained in hobby and volunteer activities can be used in various degree studies.<sup>70</sup> In the interpretation forums, education organisers and the Third Sector youth organizations created a new way of recognising competence, by using jointly produced data and learning analytics.

#### Validation of scouting skills & the Digital Competence Disq

The Digital Competence Disc service (<https://www.osaamiskiekkko.fi/en/>) enables users to identify how the knowledge gained in hobby and volunteer activities can be used in various degree studies. The bilingual service provides a digital solution for identification and recognition of competences acquired in the Third Sector, by allowing a comparison between validated trainings, competence marks and digital badges provided by different NGOs and formal education qualifications. It shows the equivalence of the competence acquired in organizational and voluntary activities and degree education, by field of study and educational institution. The search engine enables learners to see how they can use the skills and competences acquired in hobbies and voluntary activities in their degree studies.

The service was developed by the Finnish Guides and Scouts in cooperation with education institutions, youth organisations and young people, as well as the National Agency for Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, the trade union for teachers and partners from the working life.

As a service and solution, the Digital Competence Disq is the first of its kind in Europe. Its technical implementation is financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and its first version was published in 2019.

The main user groups are:

- (1) (Young) people who have developed their skills in hobby and voluntary activities and who are thinking about degree study options.
- (2) Students who want information on the identification and recognition of skills acquired in hobby and voluntary activities. Students can use the tool to search for alternative ways to complete their studies through hobbies and volunteer activities.
- (3) Teachers of educational institutions, study counsellors, and guidance professionals in the field of teaching and guidance, whose tasks include issues related to competence recognition and employability.
- (4) Youth work professionals as well as career coaches and similar public employment service, who support young people in thinking about study options.

In early 2023, nine NGOs, including major actors such as Guides and Scouts, Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, The Martha's, 4H and Sivis Study Centre are participating in the collaboration. Nine educational institutions are featured in the Competence Disq including three UAS (HAMK, HUMAK and Satakunta) as well as upper secondary, VET and adult

<sup>70</sup> [https://kentauri.fi/julkaisut\\_ja\\_tyokalu/osaamiskiekkko/](https://kentauri.fi/julkaisut_ja_tyokalu/osaamiskiekkko/) (fi)

institutions. The tool offers a possibility to request for inclusion of other education institutions and NGOs.

<https://www.partio.fi/?s=HAMK>

<https://www.osaamiskiekkko.fi/en/>

#Näytäosaamisesi (#ShowYourSkills) tool package (<https://www.xn--nytosaamisesi-bfbc.fi/>) is a training tool for Third Sector organisations to make visible the working life competences that are acquired in the Third Sector activities. The service has been produced by Sivis Study Centre in collaboration with the major NGOs in Finland such as Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, 4H Association, Guides and Scouts, Red Cross, and the Youth Chambers of Commerce, as well as Accenture Finland. Tool package covers six topics relevant to the future working life: showing competence, cooperation skills, operational planning, guidance and training, group leadership and entrepreneurship. With digital badges and certificates, the competences acquired in the Third Sector can be validated in formal education or the labour market.

### **Digital tools to show the competence accumulated in non-formal learning #Näytäosaamisesi (#ShowYourSkills)**

Six major NGOs have developed tool to show the knowledge and skills accumulated in non-formal learning such as hobbies and voluntary work. The #Näytäosaamisesi tool (#ShowYourSkills) has six different topics which cover the different areas of competence relevant to future working life, each developed by one of the six NGOs:

- (1) Showing competence - Sivis Study Centre
- (2) Collaborative Skills - Junior Chamber international in Finland
- (3) Operational planning - Mannerheim League for Child Welfare
- (4) Guidance and training - Red Cross
- (5) Group Leadership - Guides and Scouts
- (6) Own entrepreneurship - 4H

Each topic is supported by videos and challenges that help the identification of one's own competence and expressing it in the form of a digital competence badge through the charge-free Open Badge Passport service. Competences can be supported by adding own proofs/testimonials, and recommendations and confirmation.

The competence mark can be shared as a link to a future employer or added to your resume. The competence badge can also be exported to various digital services, such as LinkedIn.

<https://www.xn--nytosaamisesi-bfbc.fi/osaaminen-esiin#h.58e7axfpedu>

## **10.2.4 Ongoing reform to create cross-sectoral ICT services and infrastructure**

As noted above, the 2020 report commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (Oosi et al, 2020) highlighted the dispersed use of IT for guidance and validation with services developed from the perspective of different service providers.

In 2021, as part of the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning the government set out to develop cross-sectoral service solutions to support individuals' education and training needs and career choices, including services for guidance and validation. The Digital service package for continuous learning JOD was launched to create digital services, including competence mapping and identification services, in order to help individuals and working life to respond to rapid changes. At the same time cross-

sectoral service solutions are developed to support individuals' education and training needs and career choices. The implementation will run till 2025.

### **A digital service package for continuous learning JOD**

JOD was launched in 2021 by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment to enable smooth transitions between education and training and working life. JOD partners include the National Agency for Education, KEHA-centre, HEIs and the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment JOTPA. JOD is building services to support education and career choices, updating and development of skills, and matching the demand and supply of work and education and training. For validation, the goal is to ensure that people can easily map their situation, self-identify their competences and get information about education and work opportunities and guidance to support decisions.

JOD consists of interconnected intelligent digital services, such as competence mapping and identification services, tools to support guidance and training search and provision services, as well as information reserves that are related to competence, education provision, job information and labour market information.

In addition to new digital services, the focus is on the integration and development of current systems, such as JobMarket Finland and StudyInfo (Opintopolku.fi), and making guidance and career planning the central focus of service integration and improving foresight information and its usability. In 2022, the implementation started with the expansion of the Opintopolku service, where the goal is to collect the widest possible range of educational offerings to be found through one service. This helps education and training staff, guidance counsellors and individuals seeking information on education and training and for validation purposes. A new service 'Education Database Pulse' (<https://tarjontapulssi.opintopolku.fi/>) is updated every 10 minutes to enable learners to see newly published educational offerings and programmes available for application and the related application procedures. Other new digital services will include a digital final test for immigrants studying Finnish and Swedish as part of training integration training and a comparative database of foreign higher education degrees for recognition of foreign qualifications.

Most of the new services and operating methods will be in use at the end of 2025:

- (1) services that map, identify and describe individuals' existing skills and competences and interests in relation to their overall situation.
- (2) easy access to information relevant to the individual about future skill needs, the labour market and flexible training opportunities.
- (3) foresight intelligence for individuals' career planning, planning by training providers and in strategic skills development at workplaces.
- (4) services to manage and utilise one's own educational and competence information in different life situations.
- (5) information and tools for guidance professionals and experts to support study and career counselling.
- (6) services to search, find and tailor competence development opportunities that meet the needs of individuals and the labour market, by using Artificial intelligence and other latest technologies.

<https://wiki.eduuni.fi/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=249530598>

# 11 Quality assurance

## 11.1 Quality assurance processes

As noted in the 2018 update, Finland has no specific quality assurance framework concerning validation procedures. Given that validation is embedded in the formal qualification system, the quality assurance mechanisms that apply to assessment in education and training also apply to validation procedures.

In higher education, validation is assessed through external audits; there are no specific quality assurance guidelines for validation apart from one question in the national audit manual. The institutional audits are guided by Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's audit manual for higher education institutions (FINEEC, 2019). The current manual for the years 2019-2024 includes a specific question on the assessment and recognition of prior learning: "How is the prior learning assessed and recognised (RPL or AHOT according to its Finnish acronym)?" Individual HEIs have developed their own guidelines on validation for internal quality assurance. So far FINEEC's thematic evaluations in higher education have not focused on validation.

As noted in the 2018 update, the corner stone of the quality assurance in VET qualifications are the national qualification requirements that are developed in cooperation with experts from working life and education. These requirements determine the learning outcomes along with assessment criteria. With the VET reform in 2018, the quality assurance mechanisms for the Competence-Based Qualifications (CBS) in VET were simplified and streamlined: Firstly, the Qualification Committees were abolished and the main responsibility for quality assurance was vested in the provider organisations. Secondly, the VET provider was awarded a uniform licence to organise vocational examinations and provide education (they are no longer obliged to have a contract for the arrangement of competence tests, a detailed plan to arrange competence tests, and approval by the Qualification Committee in charge of the qualification in question). Thirdly, the new Working Life Committees (about 40) were established to play a key role in the quality assurance of assessment and conducting skills' demonstrations and take part in the development of the qualifications system.

The 2018 update raised concerns over quality assurance mechanisms given the abolishment of the Qualification Committees that had the responsibility of overseeing and monitoring the validation process, supporting the provider organisations as well as acting as the certifying body. Since 2018, 37 Working Life Committees have a quality assurance aspect to their work given their role in monitoring the results and feedback etc. However, the role of these committees is less hands-on than that of the Qualification Committees.

In 2021–2022, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre carried out an evaluation of how individual study pathways were realised in vocational education and training (see Kiesi et al. 2022). The evaluation produced information on the functionality of the practices related to personalisation, guidance and identification and recognition of prior learning, and on the implementation of opportunities for choice for students. The evaluation highlighted the identification and recognition of existing competence as a key part of individual study paths. The recognition of prior learning works best when the prior learning has been acquired in line with existing qualification requirements. It works best with formal education, e.g. vocational qualifications, further and specialist vocational qualifications and studies from general upper secondary education, however less well with higher education studies. The evaluation showed that the identification of prior learning acquired at work or in hobbies remain challenging, and there are also difficulties in assessing the comparability and up-to-dateness of competence produced by studies completed in accordance with qualification requirements that have already expired. The

practices in identification and recognition also vary between education providers and within providers, for example, by field of education and training or by location. The concepts, instructions and policies for the identification of prior learning should be clarified, and the identification of non-formal learning should be enhanced.

Non-formal education providers in Finland typically have less established quality assurance systems and less established and systematic validation systems. The situation in the non-formal education sector is however in transition given the recent changes in 2020 and 2021 that allow institutions to register their competence-based learning provision to the national Koski system.

## 11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There are no centralised mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the take up and success of validation practices covering all sectors. No monitoring or evaluation data is available from upper secondary education, higher education or non-formal education and labour market, although individual organisations may have this information. System-level arrangements have been put in place in the VET sector to collect student feedback after the VET reform along with evaluation of the reform.

### 11.2.1 Monitoring and evaluation in formal education

The 2020 report commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment showed that competences are identified and recognised relatively well in formal education, particularly if the person himself/herself is active in seeking for recognition (Oosi et al., 2020).

#### Monitoring and evaluation in VET

The take-up and success of validation (or identification and recognition of competences) has been evaluated as part of broader evaluations of the 2018 VET reform. The 2019 report by the Trade Union of Education (OAJ, 2020) shows that VET teachers generally agree that identification and recognition of competence is important in the preparation of personal study plans (34%). In contrast the 2019 report by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Vehviläinen, 2019) highlights the identification and recognition of competence as an area in need of development and a challenge within the development and updating of personal study plans. More recently, the 2021 report of the National Audit Office shows that the completion of studies has been accelerated by the transition from degree-based to competence-based studies and through increasing recognition of existing competence. The study duration of the fastest progressing students has been significantly reduced. Nonetheless the National Audit Office highlights the need for a more student-centred focus, e.g. the opportunity to complete parts of the degree in smaller units in order to ensure that employees or students can complement their skills through competence-based continuing education. (Valtiontalouden tarkastusvirasto, 2021).

The 2021 report on the implementation of the VET reform, commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture, shows that out of the total of 15 432 VET graduates (study rights) during the years 2018-2020, 19% had at least one part of their degree recognised based on prior learning. In other words, 81% had not had any recognition of prior learning (Owal Group, 2021): User experiences were mainly positive, given that two-thirds of students (66%, n=2077) thought that their prior learning had been taken into account in their personal study plans. However, the focus on certificates from formal education and a variation in the processes for the identification and recognition of competences among institutions was a cause of concern. In general, recognition of prior learning worked better for adult learners than those who access VET directly from basic education. Despite advanced processes for identification and recognition of competence, there was need to ensure that VET organisers and the

National Agency for Education have a shared view on the validation principles and practices. The evaluation further pointed to the need for systematic development of VET staff in personalisation of study paths, identification and assessment of prior learning, as validation of non-formal and informal learning was not yet been fully implemented.

A more recent evaluation by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre FINEEC shows that recognition of competence acquired at work or in hobbies is in need of strengthening, given that almost half of the VET organisers and over a third of the staff estimate that their recognition is at moderate level at best. While some students have their skills recognised on the basis of summer jobs etc., in many cases the topic has not been discussed. FINEEC recommended that the concepts, instructions and guidelines for the identification and recognition of competence should be clarified at the national and institutional level, and related training should be made available for staff. (Kiesi et al. 2022)

For centralised monitoring of validation user experience is collected from VET students, workplace guidance staff and workplace contact people. Finland collects regular online survey-based feedback from VET students, workplace guidance counsellors and workplace contact people regarding VET co-operation through the national ARVO impact data service. The results are published by the national Vipunen service on the public domain. The data provides a basis to monitor the user experience of validation, but the low response rates by students affect the reliability of the data<sup>71</sup>.

Feedback from VET students is collected through a national student survey at the start and in the end of studies, apart from those in preparatory trainings or completing the degree by going directly to competence test. Feedback is collected at regular intervals, given that students can start their studies at any time of the year. The survey includes a dedicated question on validation/recognition of competences acquired outside the VET studies<sup>72</sup>.

The final survey also includes questions on the competence test(s). The results<sup>73</sup> of these surveys show generally positive student opinions on validation: 4 in the scale of 5. (See table below.) In the initial survey during the academic years from 2020 to 2022, VET students generally thought that competence acquired through other studies, work experience, hobbies or other knowledge and skills had been identified in diverse ways and taken into account in preparing their personal study plans (approx. 4.2 during the years 2020-2022 compared to 4.1 in 2019 and previous years)<sup>74</sup>. The final surveys show a slightly lower rating, but nonetheless an improvement from 2018 in terms of the assessment whether the competence acquired through non-formal and informal learning had been considered during the course of the studies and in the updating of the personal study plans (3.8 in academic year 2018, 3.9 in academic years 2019, 2020 and 2021 and 4 in autumn 2022).

There is no information on the utilization of the student feedback in local quality assurance (00si et al., 2020).

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<sup>71</sup> The number of responses to this question declined from over 60 000 in the initial survey in the academic year 2020 to about 40 700 in the academic year 2021.

<sup>72</sup> VET student feedback questionnaire:

<https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/Opiskelijapalautekyselyt%2001%2007%202022%20alkaen%2C%20englanti.pdf> (fi)

<sup>73</sup> <https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/ammattillinen/Sivut/Opiskelijapalaute.aspx> (fi)

<sup>74</sup> <https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/ layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/fi-fi/Raportit/Ammattillinen%20koulutus%20-%20opiskelijapalaute%20-%20aloituskysely%20-%20kysymys.xlsb> (fi)

Table 11.1 Table. Selected data from the final survey to VET students (based on Vipunen data)

<b>Final survey for VET students 1.7.2021-30.6.2022</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Variability</b>
<b>Personal study plan HOKS</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>
During the course of my studies my competences acquired otherwise (other studies, work experience, hobbies, other acquired competence) were identified and my personal study plan was updated accordingly.	3.9	1.2
<b>Competence tests</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>0.8</b>
I participated in the planning of my competence test(s).	4.3	1
The work tasks through which I undertook my competence tests correspond to the authentic tasks in working life.	4.5	0.8
My competence was assessed in line with the competence assessment criteria.	4.6	0.7
My assessors were professional and knowledgeable.	4.6	0.8
<b>Impact</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1.1</b>
The education and training improved my readiness for transition to working life, for work or for further studies	4.3	0.9

n=38 523

Feedback from working life is regularly collected to allow VET institutions to monitor employer experience on, and satisfaction with the operations of the VET institutions, and the training based on learning and training contracts which may cover validation. The survey for workplace guidance staff and the workplace survey were launched in July 2021 and January 2022, respectively, and the results are published in Vipunen<sup>75</sup>. The feedback from the workplace guidance personnel (identified by the student at the end of the work-based period) is continuously collected based on completed job cycles. The results are updated monthly (the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the month) with information covering two previous months. The survey shows for instance the number of competence tests organised in the workplace (nearly 70 000 during the academic year 2021) and whether its implementation with the VET institutions has gone well. The workplace survey collects feedback on employers' satisfaction with the way the VET institution is organising work-based learning. It is sent to twice a year: in January-February and July-August.

## Monitoring and evaluation in Higher Education

Eurostudent VI research, published in 2017, showed that about one third of Finnish higher education students has taken advantage of recognition of prior learning, particularly for studies completed elsewhere but also for learning acquired elsewhere. The recognition had to some extent accelerated the completion of studies. More recent monitoring data on the take-up of validation in higher education is not available. (Potila et al., 2017)

In 2019, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Mikkola and Haltia, 2019) evaluated the principles and practices of recognition of prior learning (RPL) in HEIs; it showed a variation across HEIs in the scope and contents of the guidelines available on websites. At the same time the individual case descriptions of the training organisers collected in the survey gave a diverse and flexible picture of

<sup>75</sup> <https://vipunen.fi/fi-fi/amatillinen/Sivut/Ty%C3%B6el%C3%A4m%C3%A4palaute.aspx>

the practices of identifying previously acquired skills, which often adapt to the needs of individual students. The accessibility of instructions varied, some HEIs providing information only in intranet which does not serve potential applicants. The restrictions on learning and their visibility in the instructions also varied. The report outlined a set of recommendations for HEIs to align practises and instructions for RPL in order to make it more transparent for students and applicants. While there is no monitoring to what extent these recommendations have been implemented, several HEIs have improved their validation services after the launch of national guidance for universities on recognition of prior learning.

### **Recommendations to make recognition of prior learning (RPL) more transparent for higher education students**

- (1) Explain the purpose and goals of RPL.
- (2) Ensure access to information on RPL.
- (3) Provide uniform and comprehensive process descriptions and instructions.
- (4) Develop methods of demonstrating competence.
- (5) Monitor and develop RPL.

Mikkola and Haltia (2019)

The 2021 study on the validation of prior learning was based on the intended learning outcomes of the curricula of the Finnish universities of applied sciences delivering teacher education (Saari et al 2021). The results show that despite a strong policy focus, validation of non-formal and informal learning remains in the margins of teacher education curricula which fails to facilitate efforts to form a community of practice in validation. Differences in defining validation remain an issue.

## **11.1.2 Monitoring and evaluation in the labour market and the Third Sector**

There is no centralised monitoring or evaluation of the validation in the labour market and the third sector, however the ongoing work on the Digital service package for continuous learning JOD will enable collection of monitoring data in the future.

The 2020 report commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment showed that in working life, NGOs and elsewhere, the practices for identifying skills vary: Finland has many tools and operating models for validation, but they do not reach people of working age on a large scale. The report stresses the need for new types of models to identify and recognise competence acquired at work and outside of formal education and to support people's ability to identify and recognise their own competences at all stages of life. The implementation of the Parliamentary Reform of Continuous Learning by the Working Group in Identification of Learning as well as the work in the Digital service package for continuous learning JOD is expected to enable better monitoring and evaluation of validation (Oosi et al., 2020)

The validation of competence acquired in non-formal education in liberal adult education institutions towards degree education has been facilitated by the legislative changes in 2020 and 2021. So far there is no systematic monitoring or official statistics on the take-up by learners or on the provision of competence-based courses by liberal adult education institutions, but data can be retrieved from the national Koski database and e-Requirements.

The table below shows to what extent liberal adult education providers' competence-based curricula appears in the national e-Requirement platform, including ongoing

training, and to what extent competence-based learning achievements have been registered in the Koski database by end 2022.

During the academic year 2021–2022, learning results data of a total 91 of 286 providers have been exported to the Koski database – at the permission of learners. (NB. The data can be exported to Koski only when the performance data is available, after the end of the training.)

Liberal adult education providers can export to e-Requirements their competence-based curricula which enables the transfer of study achievements to Koski database. A total of 156 or 55% of providers have exported curricula to e-Requirements. Since the launch of this possibility, in less than two years the development has been fast, which is likely to increasingly high take-up by learners during and after the academic year 2022 – 2023. Despite a specific obligation from authorities, more than half of the providers of liberal adult education have promoted the identification and recognition of competence through e-Requirements. These results highlight the underlying vast development work in liberal adult education sector on curricula development and implementation of new methods.

**Table 11.2 Progress in liberal adult education to enable identification and recognition of competence**

	Liberal adult education providers in Finland	Study rights (incl. credits) exported to Koski database since 1.1.2020	Providers that have exported data on study rights to Koski Database	Providers that have exported curricula to e-Requirements
Adult education centres ( <i>Kansalaisopistot</i> )	171	652	28	49
Folk high schools ( <i>Kansanopistot</i> ) pursuing compulsory education since 1.8.2020	73	2622 (1289)	53	58
Summer universities	19	126	5	11
Sports training centres	11	6	1	2
Study centres	12	910	4	5
Unidentified <sup>76</sup>				31
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>4316</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>156</b>

## 12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

National strategies strongly emphasise validation as a means to motivate, shorten study times and save resources. The visibility and trust in validation has been growing since 2018, among the general public and on many fronts through national initiatives, including legislation, that have emphasised the importance of validation. The key actors have been brought together by Finland’s Innovation Fund SITRA’s work that has called for the reform of lifelong learning and focus on validation. Large scale

<sup>76</sup> The mandatory information in e-Perusteet does not include the type of the education and training institution. Some liberal adult education providers have left this option open.

campaigns such as Reveal Your Skills have raised awareness of validation among key actors and the general public.

As noted in the 2018 update, the validation in the VET sector has long traditions in Finland based on the tripartite system. While the 2018 VET reform has somewhat changed the system, it is also embedding validation in all VET. Individuals have embraced validation and taken the opportunity to build up their skills and competences in the areas where needed. For most individuals getting a qualification or a part of a qualification quickly through individual learning paths is important.

Since 2018, the focus on validation has grown within the Government policy through the launch of the Parliamentary Reform on Continuous Learning. The Government (2019-2023) placed continuous learning at the centre of its policies, with buy-in from parliamentary parties and labour market actors. A range of ongoing development projects have been launched for validation and related aspects such as career guidance and foresight, digital services and infrastructure, and those financed by the Service Centre JOTPA to respond to urgent skills needs and to reach out to groups that are participating less in education and training. Mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that competence acquired in the third sector and non-degree adult education are increasingly identified and recognised.

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# European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The inventory provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

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