

Country Report FINLAND

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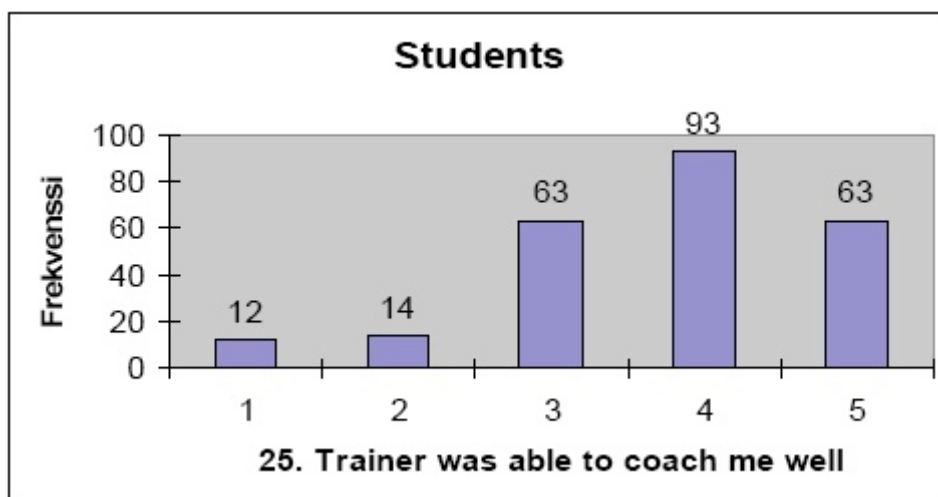
1. Background and Country Context

In education and training executive powers exist at different levels of government, central, regional and local. Central government is represented by ministries and central administrative agencies that report directly to the appropriate ministry. The National Board of Education is one such agency reporting to the Ministry of Education. Ongoing changes will see these administrative units transformed into expert agencies. Regional government is divided according to 6 provinces.

The trend since the 1980s has been towards decentralisation. In education and training, most of the decision-making power is at the local level. At national level the most important decisions taken refer to time allocations in education, core curricula and qualification requirements. These are at a general level and thus local curricula are prepared on the basis of core curricula.

According to Finnish law, the aim of VET in Finland is to raise the level of vocational skills and competences of the population; develop the world of work and respond to its skilling needs; and promote employment. Since 1989 there have been important changes in vocational education and training. First, **on-the-job training** was introduced in Finnish vocational upper Secondary education. The goals of on-the-job training are defined at the regional level together with students, teachers and in-company trainers. The goals have to follow also the regional school curricula. These curricula, in turn, must follow the national core curricula. Second, **skill demonstrations** were introduced in 2006 into vocational upper secondary education. This means that during the regular 3-year vocational upper secondary education the students have to perform 3 to 5 skill demonstrations, which are assessed together with the student him/herself, teachers and trainers. As a result of these two innovations, training has become a challenge in Finland, particularly as concerns the cooperation between companies and vocational schools, or vocational upper secondary schools more specifically.

According to different research and a national evaluation of on-the-job learning, those two initiatives have been successful and important. The students are more motivated and all parties involved also think that they learn effectively during their on-the-job training periods. The students' experiences from the practice communities have been mainly positive, although they have found some shortcomings in guidance. Most of the students appreciate the trainers and assess that their coaching skills are good. Learning at school and on-the-job have become better integrated but with some considerable differentiations between schools, vocational areas and regions. The biggest challenge is to increase the connectivity between on-the-job training and learning at the vocational schools. In some segments this linkage already works well such as in the social and health care sector. Often, this requires changes in the management of schools and the teachers' work and very good cooperation between schools and workplaces in the region.



(Source: Eerola, T, & Majuri, M. 2006)

The system of students' workplace learning also has had positive effects on the learning of the working communities. Major developmental challenges for educational organisations include: i) making management clearer; ii) increasing team working; iii) enhancing cooperation and openness in general; and iv) making use of external support in development work. Development efforts are also needed to collect data and share experiences of good practise.

In many areas the idea of regional cooperation is strongly supported at the management level, but at the shop-floor level it has been usually taken longer to develop. Also, teachers' commitment vary (Tynjälä & al. 2005; Eerola & Majuri 2006; Majuri 2007). Another effect have been increasing numbers of applicants to vocational training programmes in the last few years: from 58,212 in 2003 to 63,850 applicants in 2006 to vocational upper secondary schools.

The national core curricula for different fields will be renewed in the near future. One main focus will be on evaluating the on-the-job learning and the quality of it. This will also lead to foster the trainers' role. One objective in the future will be to define and recognise the trainers' role in the vocational education and training process. The recommendation of the labour market and national organisations to increase the cooperation between vocational education and working life has proven to be very useful.

Another objective is to further develop the training system in higher education. Some pilot projects have been addressing this issue and supported the development of the training of trainers in higher education.

2. Organisation: How is the work and training of trainers organised?

In Finland, there are no formal qualification requirements for trainers. The Finnish education system has not officially recognised the trainer function. In apprenticeship training, the apprentices work in enterprises under the guidance of a senior, experienced worker or foreman, but their theoretical instruction takes place in VET institutions and is provided by qualified teachers. Trainers in an enterprise who are responsible for students in vocational upper secondary education and training during their compulsory 6-month on-the-job learning period likewise are experienced foremen and skilled workers. They frequently have a vocational qualification, but no pedagogical qualifications.

Vocational teachers, by contrast, are experts in their own vocational field *and* teaching. They participate in planning the on-the-job training and assess the learning and training process, at the same time marketing the institution's know-how. Employees at workplaces are in turn experts in their own vocational field and in the company's business. Vocational competence and expertise grow out of cooperation between these two groups. The institution has to inform employers about their responsibility for occupational health and safety issues. Above all, the institution must make sure that students are aware of the basics of occupational safety prior to starting on-the-job training.

Especially in the Vocational Upper Secondary Education the school plays an important role by guiding and developing the on-the-job training. The school ensures the quality of the training by means of continuing cooperation with workplaces. The school can be active in several ways, e.g. by

- Setting up permanent cooperation links with companies and helping to establish and maintain good on-the-job training practices;
- Participating in regional development initiatives;
- Developing and promoting supervision and assessment practices;
- Ensuring that teachers have sufficient work experience and access to continuing education;
- Training and preparing on-the-job instructors;
- Keeping contacts and communication with the social partners;
- Monitoring national and regional businesses to be aware of changes in educational needs.

The workplace, instructors and supervisors

Prior to starting a period of on-the-job training, the employer and the educational institution must collaborate and ensure that the student has been adequately prepared for the work in question, including knowing about to follow instructions on labour protection. During the training, the employer is responsible for students' occupational safety in accordance with the law and other regulations applicable to employees even if the student does not have an employment contract with the employer.

The company appoints an on-the-job instructor, who will participate in instructor training courses. The instructor's duties and use of time shall be agreed upon at the workplace to ensure a good planning and time allocation for student supervision. On-the-job instructors guide students' performance of learning assignments, answer students' questions and give feedback on their performance and the tasks carried out. Giving feedback is considered one of their most important tasks. Pedagogical skills, openness and well developed team working skills are therefore important. Instructors are expected to constantly improve their supervision skills. The educational administration has been able to offer courses for instructors.

As a supervisor, the instructor familiarises the student with:

- the company's production and business processes;
- work assignments, supervising their performance;
- occupational safety regulations.

As a trainer and adviser, the instructor

- plans the training periods and organises the work to promote learning, together with others involved;

- provides expert supervision and opportunities to observe the course of work processes;
- gives support and feedback;
- promotes an atmosphere of good learning and team working in the workplace;
- promotes opportunities for on-the-job training in the company.

The assessment of on-the-job learning should preferably be based on a variety of methods, such as:

- work demonstrations and assignments;
- documentation, reports and possibly tests;
- project results;
- portfolios;
- assessment by peers;
- skills demonstration and a final project.

Teachers and on-the-job instructors are responsible for assessment. All parties concerned should be aware of the objectives and principles of student assessment, including

- **Why** an assessment is carried out;
- **Who** makes the assessment;
- **When** an assessment is carried out;
- **What** is being assessed;
- **How** an assessment is being made;
- **How** those participating in the assessment are guided.

Typically, the skills demonstrations are included in the on-the-job training. From August 2006 onwards skills demonstrations were incorporated into all qualifications completed in upper secondary VET as a way to improve and assure the quality of training. Students need to show how well they have achieved the objectives of their vocational studies and that they have acquired the vocational skills required at the labour market. Skills demonstrations run throughout the entire period of education and training and are being organised in cooperation with workplaces. One major objective is that they are being organised as close as possible to a realistic work situation.

For some years workplace instructors have been able to participate in courses worth 3 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) points, which are based on core curricula approved by the Finnish National Board of Education. During the ESF-period 2000-2006 almost 25,000 workplace instructors underwent training (i.e. every year about 4,000 start in vocational upper secondary education). There is still a need to educate more trainers and the variation between different sectors and regions is sometimes considerable. A good situation both in qualitative and quantitative terms seems to be in the health and service sector as well as in large companies. A special challenge is to train trainers in small companies (SMEs).

The guidelines consist of four main areas including:

- Vocational education and the cooperation between companies and vocational schools;
- Student based coaching ('opiskelijälähtöinen oppiminen');
- Implementing the on-the-job training and skills demonstrations;

- Assessment of the students.

According to the EUROTRAINER expert interviews the above guidelines will be updated in the near future. Then the applicability of the guidelines for the training of trainers working at other levels and forms of education (polytechnics and adult education, for example) will also be considered. At the moment the guidelines focus on issues and problems within vocational upper secondary education and training. So far the guidelines have worked well and they have been considered flexible enough.

The different education providers have offered continuing education for the trainers on various topics such as training ethnic minorities, e-learning and students with learning difficulties. However, during the last two years the most important topic for the continuing training of trainers has been the implementation of skills demonstrations. Overall, the continuing education for trainers has not been very systematic.

The education providers are responsible for arranging the training of trainers in their own region. Since 1998, different models for different branches, companies and regions have been developed in hundreds of projects. Very often the most active teachers have been the trainers of trainers. In many projects there has been training also for these trainers of trainers. The training of trainers has been arranged for example

- in companies for all trainers from one company;
- in the vocational schools either for different branches at once or only for one branch;
- as consultation projects in companies before, during and after students' on-the-job training period so that the teachers can coach the trainer on training and assess the student (good experiences in small companies).
- as web-based courses.

The training of trainers is one way of networking within the region or even nationally. For example for vocational education, adult and higher education it is mandatory by law to participate in developing local businesses. A very important aspect of this networking is that all participants learn from each other, also the institutions and teachers when active in these processes. In the most effective examples the training of trainers has had additional positive effects on the development of the workplace; instruction skills, work safety and the work culture, for example.

At the regional level, some big challenges remain. The education providers are responsible for arranging the training of trainers, but the organisation and management of the training of trainers as well as on-the-job training varies considerably. It would be an asset if teachers actively participated as a trainer and participant in the training of trainers in order to ensure that the needs of the schools and workplaces are met. In some cases it has been difficult to get enough teachers to participate in these processes. There should be some kind of education and support for education providers, school management and trainers' trainers.

Especially from the smallest companies it is very difficult to get trainers to traditional courses. There have been very successful projects, where the teachers train the trainers at the workplace. In the most promising example cases these consultation projects were connected to the coaching and skills demonstration during students' on-the-job training. Some projects have developed e-materials to support these processes. Sometimes there have been so-called network meetings with the nearest companies so that trainers could share their experiences and learn from each other.

3. Economy: How is the work and training of trainers financed?

Training that companies provide is usually financed by the companies themselves. In most cases, there are no full-time trainers in the companies, but part-time trainers are ordinary employees who receive a normal salary. The training activities are just one part of the employees' work. In some fields, e.g. health care, the institutions have to pay the employer for the students' on-the-job-learning period, but this is an exception.

In Finland, the training of trainers has been financed by ESF funds during 2000-2006. According to the expert interviews the establishing and continuation of the training of trainers is one of the biggest issues after the ESF-period 2000-2006. The big challenge is to set up a structure and programmes for the next ESF period. During the former ESF period some regional models have been developed, which were very cost-effective and worked well without relying on any extra funding. It is expected that some ESF funding will still be available during the next ESF period to support the training of trainers. Quite many education providers have already developed a system of training of trainers without external funding as a regular part of the school management.

4. Selection and Allocation: How are trainers selected and how are human resources allocated?

The selection and recruitment of trainers and allocation of human resources is done by the companies. Most trainers are part-time trainers; full-time trainers are the exception. In most cases the trainers are motivated to carry out their training tasks, only that they feel that they would need more time for the training activities. Employees also expressed that they would expect to be rewarded and get some extra pay for performing training activities. The overall quality the training and preparedness of trainers seem to be good, especially from the students' point of view. Students give positive ratings stating that trainers managed well in their tasks.

In big companies there may even be more qualified trainers than needed at a given point in time. They have assigned persons who are only responsible for training in their company. In SME's that is not possible.

5. Qualification: How are trainers qualified? (cf. above point 2)

Most of the continuing learning of Finnish trainers is self-initiated and voluntary and trainers themselves engage in up-dating their skills and competences. According to the EUROTRAINER expert interviews it is not possible in Finland to regulate the in-company training very strictly, because this may incur a decrease in the number of training places. A flexible system based on guidelines and recommendations that gives the education providers many opportunities to develop the training of trainers is probably more effective and suitable for Finland than a strictly formalised system. The main advantage of developing a more formalised system may be that the obtained certificates of the trainer education would be recognised and enhance the mobility of trainers. For example, when a trainer applies to teacher education or applies at a new company the formal recognition may make such moves easier. Some form of recognised certification thus would enhance trainers' mobility. As the official guidelines for the training of trainers will be updated the

trainer competences will be described at a more common level, taking into account the needs of adult education in terms of a qualification-based system.

6. Integration: How are trainers integrated in enterprises/ society?

No research data is available on this issue. Whether the trainer job is attractive very much depends on the company and the conditions in a particular work environment. Trainers generally like their job and feel that the training they are providing is important. They like to train others and share the knowledge and continuity of their work. Overall, the status of the trainers' work benefits from a rather high appreciation of their work and the role of training by students, teachers, colleagues and HR management in companies. The trainers' work could receive more public attention and be more mentioned and valued in the media, for example (Tynjälä & co 2005, Eerola & Majuri 2006).

7. Innovation

Finnish trainers usually integrate training into their overall job tasks. This makes training to be close to praxis, which contributes towards its effectiveness. The trainers are free to choose the training methods they apply depending on the learning needs, the sector and the company requirements. The targets for the training are negotiated together with trainees and the vocational teachers so that they can be achieved at the company level. The targets must also follow the school curricula and the core curricula developed by the National Board of Education. If a skills demonstration period forms part of the training period, this must also be considered, because the objectives are derived from the national core materials and the negotiations between teacher, student and trainer.

Finnish trainers certainly need to be supported with new tools and ideas for innovative training, coaching, feedback and assessment, especially for engaging young people in the learning process. There are still many trainers, who have not been trained and may work quite traditionally, applying principally methods which are based on their own experiences. However, differences exist between branches and sectors and some sectors are more innovative than others. Big companies and global players in particular have much more resources to invest into empowering their trainers and the further development of their training programmes.

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FINLAND – Summary of expert interviews

1. Introduction

Interviewee 1: I have been leading some project where we have been training trainers. I have also been head of the board of a national evaluation project that evaluated on the job training in whole of Finland. Formerly, I was a principle in a vocational secondary level school when on the job learning was introduced to the Finnish VET system.

Interviewee 2: Project manager for ESF programmes on trainers

Interviewee 3: Government official at the Ministry of Education

2. Identify major issues / key challenges in a national perspective

1. In Finland the trainer issue concerns mainly the question of **cooperation between work practice and vocational education** such as
 - The amount of on the job training, which has been increasing and is expected to increase even more in future;
 - The national core curriculum for different fields, which are going to be renewed in the nearest future; one main focus is evaluating the on-the-job learning and its quality. This will most likely also foster the trainer role in the future.
 - In the future the target should be that the trainers and their training activities naturally form part of vocational education and the work places;
 - The recommendations of the labour and other central organisations to increase the cooperation between vocational education and working life have been very useful;
 - The training of trainers is a one way for networking in the region or in some cases even nationally; the learning aspect; all the participants of network activities is very important, also for the schools and teachers when they are active in those processes;
 - In the most positive cases the training of trainers has had many side effects on developing the workplace; skills, work safety and work culture.
 - Different models are needed to train trainers, depending on the sector, region and the size of the companies;
 - Education providers have quite an autonomous position in the Finnish education system despite the fact that they have to follow the core curriculum made by the National Board of Education. They also have to be able to arrange the education for trainers.
2. Establishing the **trainers' training system** and to solve the funding problems for the future:
 - The training of trainers has been funded mainly by ESF money. A rough estimation is that 90 per cent of all trainers have been trained by ESF funds in regional and sectoral projects;

- Mostly the trainers' training has followed the guidelines established by the National Board of Education. Those guidelines have worked well but they must be updated as some trainers have trainees from all levels of vocational education.
- Various models have been developed and 25.000 trainers have been trained. However, there is still a need to educate more trainers and the variation between different sectors and regions is sometimes very big;
- The funding and development of the training of trainers after the ESF period is a big challenge. It should become part of the regular vocational education system arranged by vocational upper secondary education providers in their own regions;
- More trainers are needed in the future and this should also be an issue for employers, i.e. how companies will establish and operate the training on their own. The trainers' training has to be established as an on-going system, particularly in the light of demographic developments and mobility as a significant number of trainers may retire or change their job position or workplace. We have educated quite a big amount of trainers and their medium-age is very high. The majority of trainers that have been trained are older than 45 years.
- Funding remains a major issue of concern as there are no exact figures available about the actual costs of training. Major questions are: who will pay the funding what will the role companies be?
- Establishing the trainers training also requires support from school managers as it concerns the organisation of the work of teachers.

3. The **quality of training**

- There exist great differences in terms of the quality of training: In the social and health care sectors, for example, the situation is rather good since those sectors have the longest tradition of collaboration between vocational schools and workplaces. They have trained trainers actively and also most of the teachers cooperate with trainers regularly before, during and after the students on-the job training. In the technical sectors, by contrast, we find the worst situation despite the fact that there are examples of good practises though in many regions. For example some metal and building industries have companies that have trained their trainers themselves and tried to get vocational teachers to their courses, too.
- In the future, more systematic and encouraging quality management systems are going to be developed. Overall, the quality of training and the training of trainers also depends on the teachers' ability to cooperate, educate trainers and their active role in developing the on-the-job learning;
- to reach the quality-requirements also the heads of the schools have to develop the strategic and pedagogic management of the schools; teachers work should be organised so that they are able to cooperate and educate also the trainers and the to keep their teachers' expertise in touch with the development; the teachers " working life skills " have to be so good that the school learning and workplace learning have be connected
- Small and medium-sized enterprises need special attention for many reasons. Most students go to small companies for their on-the-job training. However, it is easier for big companies to train their trainers and most small companies think that large companies in the region and nationally govern the educational policy; the teachers and education providers so that large enterprises should somewhat take care of the small enterprises;
- There is some danger that all the skills and know-how that appears in the companies is not made available to the schools.
- The regional networking is an important aspect of quality management. When developing the training and trainers' training it should be based on the cooperation

between vocational schools and companies. For some trades or sectors also national networks may be a good solution for developing the training system. In some cases work safety issues and the development of e-learning environments have been a result of cooperation and new quality requirements;

- In some sectors there is now a competition between different companies about which companies recruits the most qualified trainees. While competitive aspects have a positive impact on enhancing the quality of training, large companies are advantaged against SMEs.
4. **Motivation of trainees:** A considerable number of students is not willing to study and hard to motivate. Those present a big challenge to trainers. Also, high rates of drop-outs an issue of concern.

3. Future Trends

- Demographic developments: Finland is encountering staff shortages, for example in the health care sector.
- Professionalisation: In Finland we cannot regulate the in-company training very strictly, otherwise there will be a lack of training places. In most of the fields the trainers themselves like to update their skills. The major challenge for the future will be the funding of the training of the trainers. Many teachers say that they do not have enough time for the cooperation.
- It is very difficult to teach trainers new learning methods. Usually trainers teach like they have been taught. In very short courses it is impossible to change this traditional orientation of trainers as concerns their training methods. Many trainers revert to their own experiences from the time when they were schooling. A long process and major innovation is needed to change this attitude. This requires not only more intensive courses, but also some research that analyses own work attitudes and developing it in different methods, including experimental methods and evaluating the coaching process. The training of trainers should also involve some practical periods with students.
- Trainers are mainly prepared to train students individually, not in groups.
- Trainers are not professionally organised. This has a negative impact on their recognition and status.
- Some guidelines have been established by the National Board of Education. However, the legal framework only to a little extent specifies the role and profile of trainers. Some more formal regulation would be good, if but not too much in order to keep some flexibility. The main objective should be to keep the motivation of trainers high and not focus too much on their competences. Trainers should not be tested and evaluated, but be inspired by good ideas and be taught new ways of working and training. They should be motivated to work with young people. Some kind of self-evaluation is good and very useful, but formal tests should be avoided.

4. Good practice examples

There are some good practice examples of methods used in the Vammala region. Some companies start to engage from basic comprehensive schools and then go further in vocational upper secondary school, considering the students as their future workforce. They also allow and encourage the students to go further to universities. The training those companies provide is considered a lifelong partnership and even the bosses are

involved in that kind of cooperation. It all started with a cooperation between a principal and a human resources manager of a company.