

**Good practice
in validation of learning outcomes**

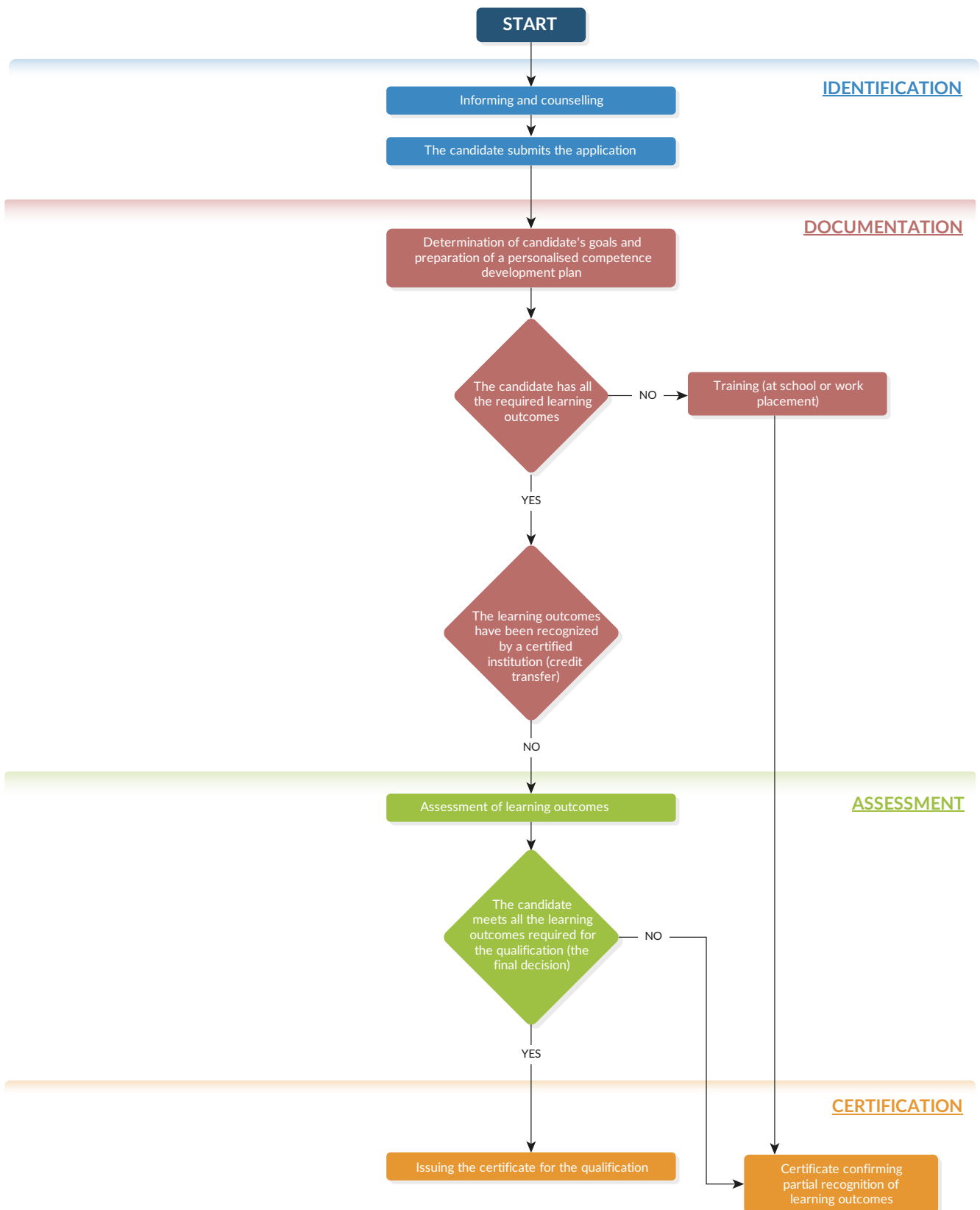
Finland

**Qualification "Hairdressing and Beauty
Care"**



Table of contents

1. Country, institution name.	4
2. Institution website.	4
3. Qualifications.	4
4. Short description of the validation process.	4
5. Detailed description of the validation process	4
5.1. Identification and Documentation of Learning Outcomes.	5
5.2. Assessment of Learning Outcomes.	6
5.3. Certification.	6
6. Validation methods.	6
7. Validation results.	7
8. Human resources	7
9. Organizational and material conditions.	8
10. Quality assurance.	8
11. Financing.	9
11.1. Internal Quality Assurance.	9
11.2. External Quality Assurance	9
11.3. Appeals Procedure.	10
Comments.	11



1. Country, institution name

- Finland
- Savo Vocational College (Finnish: Savon ammattiopisto) of the Savo Consortium for Education (Finnish: Savon koulutuskuntayhtymä)

2. Institution website

<https://www.sakky.fi>

3. Qualifications

“Hairdressing and Beauty Care” Qualification (Finnish: *Hius- ja kauneudenhoitoalan perustutkinto*)

Level 4 of Finland's National Qualifications Framework (Finnish: *Kansallinen tutkintojen ja muiden osaamiskokonaisuuksien viitekehys*; English: *National Framework for Qualifications and Other Competence Modules – FINQF*)

Level 4 of the European Qualifications Framework – EQF

4. Short description of the validation process

Comment

Vocational schools in Finland are institutions that also award qualifications and conduct validation.

The entire validation process is individualised. Adaptation of the process to a candidate's needs is possible by providing the candidate with counselling services at every stage. This is provided by appropriately qualified and trained vocational school teachers, who also act as assessors during validation.

If a candidate has achieved all the required learning outcomes, he/she is issued a certificate after assessment. The result of the validation is recorded in a national database. If the candidate does not have the required learning outcomes for the certificate, a further education plan is developed. Depending on the candidate's situation, he/she can continue to learn in vocational schools, at work, at state higher education institutions or through e-learning, etc.

Savo Vocational College works with labour market representatives and entrepreneurs at all stages of the process. This ensures that when planning a candidate's educational pathway, the existing requirements of employers and current labour market trends are taken into account.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Comment

A candidate who wants to gain a particular qualification contacts a vocational school, which, as already mentioned, provides educational programmes, conducts validation and issues certificates.

The validation itself is therefore part of the learning process, both in vocational schools and during professional internships with employers. The duration of validation is not predetermined; due to its individual course, it can take from a few days to several weeks.

The starting point for planning both learning and validation are the national **standards**, to which vocational schools refer when awarding qualifications.

The standards contain a description of the qualification together with its required learning outcomes. The standard also contains the thematic modules that make up the qualification, to which a number of

competence points are assigned.

Box 1. Case Example

Three migrants/foreigners went through the validation process described in this good practice. They received integration training in the Finnish language and culture at Savo Vocational College. Then a school vocational counsellor worked with the candidates and decided to conduct validation.

5.1. Identification and Documentation of Learning Outcomes

During the identification stage, the entire validation process is discussed with the candidate: the different stages of the process, possible paths for further development and sources of funding.

The starting point is an interview with the teacher acting as a counsellor and the preparation of a Personal Competence Development Plan. The plan includes: the candidate's objectives and existing skills, an action plan (description of subsequent learning and validation activities) and the outcome of the assessment. It is essential to identify and describe all the candidate's competences. These include the skills and knowledge of the individual, those acquired at work and in school or during leisure time. The additional learning outcomes the candidate has to achieve in order to obtain a qualification are determined, as well as how they can be acquired. The plan also includes information on possible financial support as well as on special needs relating to the mode of learning (e.g. due to a candidate's learning difficulties, disability or illness). The Personal Competence Development Plan is updated at each subsequent stage of validation.

Teachers often use the online skills identification and self-assessment tool, which is available at www.osaan.fi, to identify a candidate's competences. It contains descriptions of qualifications together with their requirements and assessment criteria. The tool helps to learn about the candidate's strengths and possible skills gaps as well as the resulting learning needs. This makes it easier to plan an individual's pathway to a qualification.

If the candidate has all the learning outcomes required to attain a qualification, he/she can obtain a certificate without having to undergo further learning. However, if he/she lacks some of the learning outcomes, the counsellor determines which modules the candidate must complete and the form of training: at school, in an internship, e-learning or combined.

Box 2. Case Example

During the preliminary interview, it was determined that the candidates have experience in hairdressing and beauty care. They were assigned a hairdressing and beauty care teacher as their counsellor to identify their competences. The candidates did not have any documents to prove their competences and therefore they had to have their skills tested in practice. Due to their insufficient knowledge of the Finnish language, the preliminary identification stage was conducted using photographs. The teacher prepared photographs showing the different stages of haircutting, the tools and methods used in hairdressing. The candidates were asked to describe the illustrations with the help of an interpreter. In this way, the teacher was able to identify which competences the candidates probably had and their level.

Then, for several weeks, the candidates took part in practical work at the school hairdressing salon under the supervision of teachers and counsellors, who documented the skills they presented. In order to quickly make up for the missing language skills required for the job, it was decided that the candidates should participate in an on-the-job learning position at a hairdressing salon, where they would learn about the specifics of the Finnish working environment and the hairdressing techniques they lacked. Interestingly, the on-the-job learning process turned out to be two-sided because the employed candidates also taught the Finnish hairdressers new techniques.

The documentation of the learning outcomes demonstrated both in simulated conditions (in school) and in real-life conditions (during the hair salon internships) served as evidence of the candidates' competences.

5.2. Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Assessment most often takes place through **observations in real-life conditions**.

Assessors represent the awarding body and the professional community. The role of the assessor-teacher is to supervise the whole process and to monitor whether it is being conducted in accordance with the assessment criteria for the qualification. The role of assessors representing the labour market is to check the techniques used by the candidate, how he/she is using the tools of the trade, interactions with the client and other participants of the assessment. They may also ask questions of the candidate to verify his/her knowledge and to understand why he/she is making certain decisions.

5.3. Certification

Certificates confirming the qualification are issued by the awarding bodies. The results of validation are recorded in the Koski national database, which contains the entire educational history of the candidate.

It is possible to obtain a certificate confirming the achievement of all or part of the learning outcomes required for a given qualification.

6. Validation methods

The validation methods used are:

- unstructured interview,
- analysis of evidence and statements,
- observation in real-life conditions,
- observation in simulated conditions.

The identification stage usually starts with an interview with the candidate, during which the candidate's previous experience is determined. This is conducted by a teacher who acts as a counsellor. The candidate is asked about his/her professional experience, interests, formal and non-formal education to date, and motivation. The candidate and the counsellor begin developing the Personal Competence Development Plan.

Observation is the most important assessment method in the Finnish VET system. Practical tasks are organised both in companies (observation in real-life conditions) and in an arranged space in the vocational schools awarding the qualifications (observation in simulated conditions). Observation in the workplace is organised in cooperation with employers. Candidates then perform their daily tasks at work. The assessors analyse the candidate's activities and usually ask questions to understand the basis for the decisions being made by the candidate. Observation never occurs in the same way. It provides each candidate with the opportunity to present his/her work and demonstrate possession of the learning outcomes described in the qualification's requirements.

7. Validation results

A certificate can be obtained for both the whole qualification as well as part of its constituent learning outcomes. The latter option is becoming increasingly popular, especially for specialist qualifications and for adults with more professional experience. A candidate can request and receive a certificate confirming part of the learning outcomes. Over time, such a person can accumulate more partial certificates until the whole qualification is attained.

Even if the candidate doesn't manage to attain qualification, all of his/her confirmed learning outcomes are taken into account during the next approach at validation. The Personal Competence Development Plan indicates which of the candidate's learning outcomes have been confirmed so far and which are still missing. The candidate can continue his/her learning after validation. He/she can be exempted from part of the classes on account of confirmed learning outcomes. In addition, if the outcome of the validation is negative but the candidate has small gaps in the competences, the assessors can assign specific tasks to the candidate and re-assess the missing learning outcomes within a fixed period of time (usually within a few weeks).

Box 3. Case Example

In this case, the candidates were unable to attain a qualification because they did not know Finnish well enough. They managed to confirm part of the learning outcomes. As a result, the candidates did not have to attend all the training modules usually needed to obtain a certificate and had more time to acquire the missing competences, such as learning the Finnish language.

8. Human resources

Comment

The requirements for counsellors are not legally defined, but they usually hold the qualification "Specialist in competence-based qualifications" or have completed training in the validation system provided by the awarding body. Teachers acting as counsellors also often have a Master's degree in the social sciences, educational guidance, educational theory or a similar studies programme.

The assessors in the Finnish VET system are both teachers in the awarding body as well as representatives of the professional community. Teachers who act as assessors in the validation process must have

a pedagogical teacher qualification. The awarding body is responsible for ensuring that the staff is well trained and has the appropriate skills to assess candidates. Assessors representing the labour market must always be trained by the awarding body. The training includes learning:

- the principles of an assessor's work,
- assessment methods,
- the approach based on competences,
- preparing the documentation on the assessment process,
- performing assessments and reviewing the results of assessments,
- specific issues relating to the assessment of the given qualification.

9. Organizational and material conditions

The awarding bodies are vocational schools with the appropriate technical resources. Thanks to the cooperation with employers, it is possible to conduct observations in real-life conditions of the learning outcomes being assessed in validation.

In this case example, the technical resources needed for validation consist of the required equipment of a hairdressing and beauty salon.

There is no minimum or maximum duration of validation. This depends on a number of factors: the number of confirmed competences of the candidate (previously acquired competence modules, work certificates, informal training, photographic documentation of the candidate's work); the number of thematic modules in a given qualification; the intended purpose of validation (confirmation of part or all of the qualification); the specificity of the qualification (e.g. in the case of qualifications relating to construction, some competences can only be demonstrated at a certain stage of the work, while hairdressing qualifications are not restricted in this way). In addition, planning the practical tasks that make up the validation also takes into account the individual needs of the candidates, which can prolong the process.

Box 4. Case Example

In the case of the migrants applying for hairdressing and beauty care qualifications, the validation process was longer than usual because the candidates could not provide any evidence of the skills they had already acquired and the level of their knowledge of the Finnish language made it difficult to assess their competences. The candidates had to demonstrate their competences by performing practical tasks, which considerably lengthened the process.

10. Quality assurance

The Finnish VETsystem has several different quality assurance mechanisms. There are national standards that define learning outcomes and assessment criteria. They are developed by professional communities, which are responsible for updating them. Each school must meet the standards in force; they do not create their own. They are reviewed regularly, but there is no rule on how often this is to take place. Most often, all qualifications and the entire system for awarding them are reviewed every 3 years. However, individual qualifications may be updated more frequently due to the dynamics of the labour market. This is done by dozens of sectoral professional committees, whose role is to ensure that the qualifications are useful and meet the needs of the individual sectors.

In addition to ensuring the quality of awarded qualifications, the aim of the regulations in force in the Finnish VETsystem is also its sustainability and transparency. This is facilitated by public funding, which enables the

institutions to plan ahead in the long term and provides access to the system for everyone, regardless of the financial situation of the candidates.

11. Financing

Apart from the cost of learning materials, which are borne by the students, no financial outlays are required to obtain a qualification. Candidates are entitled to a free meal and a travel allowance. There may be a small fee to obtain subsequent and specialist qualifications. Full-time students can apply for financial assistance and student loans.

Financing from the state budget of the VETsystem, in which validation is organised, ensures easy access to the validation process.

Box 5. Case Example

In this case, funding was obtained from a European Social Fund project because of the special target group – migrants. The obtained funds were allocated for counselling services, translations and the additional methods used at the stage of identification, i.e. preparation of photographs to identify the candidates' competences.

The system of financing VET rewards awarding bodies for the effective performance of their activities. What counts is the number of awarded qualifications (both partial and full), the level of students' employment after attaining the qualification or their enrolment in further studies. When granting funds, the opinions of students and labour market representatives are also taken into account. Validation is an integral part of the VET system, so it is financed from the general budget. As receipt of funding depends on the number of qualifications awarded, the institutions have an incentive to organise validation.

The VET system is financed from the state budget jointly by central and local authorities. The funds are allocated directly to the awarding bodies, which decide for themselves how to expend the funds received.

11.1. Internal Quality Assurance

Each awarding body must have an internal quality assurance system that includes a detailed description of the process of validating learning outcomes, the methods used to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the education and validation services provided. This is governed by a contract that these institutions enter into with the Finnish National Agency for Education.

In addition, the qualifications of those working within the system are constantly being improved. Assessors are trained in monitoring the quality of the qualifications' awarding process. Representatives of the professional community involved in conducting validation must be trained in assessor's skills by the awarding institution.

Moreover, the objectivity of the assessment is further ensured by the presence of a representative of the labour market and a person representing the education system among the assessors. If the assessors' assessments differ, they must work out a compromise and make a fair decision together.

11.2. External Quality Assurance

External evaluations are regularly performed by the [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#) (Finnish: Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus – Karvi). The evaluation includes an assessment of the learning outcomes of the qualification, the activities of the awarding body and its internal quality assurance system.

An important factor in ensuring the quality of the VET system is its cooperation with the labour market at the national and regional levels, as well as at the level of individual awarding bodies. Labour market representatives participate in developing professional qualifications, planning training programmes and validation processes. They cooperate in the preparation of personalized plans for the development of candidates' competences, help to organise training courses in their workplaces, and assess the competences of candidates during validation.

Information from labour market representatives on the validity and relevance of qualifications is an integral part of the system and enables the quality of provided services to be improved by adapting them to labour market needs.

The sectoral professional committees act as an external body to monitor the quality of qualifications. They may perform external audits, especially in new institutions, to support them in ensuring high quality procedures for awarding qualifications. These audits are based on existing laws and regulations and on an agreement between the awarding body and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Auditors check that the stages of validation are performed in accordance with the contract and quality assurance system. In addition, the sectoral professional committees examine candidates' appeals of the validation outcome.

In addition, statistics play an important role in monitoring and the quality assurance of qualification awarding processes. Awarding bodies are required to collect certain data and provide it to the Finnish National Agency for Education once a year.

11.3. Appeals Procedure

If a candidate has doubts about the course of the process or the outcome of the validation, he/she may lodge an appeal, which results in a review of the assessment.

The candidate must submit an appeal in writing within 14 days of receiving the result of the validation. The appeal is addressed to the assessors. If they are unable to resolve the matter, the appeal is referred to the sectoral professional committee responsible for the qualification. The committee consults the assessors and makes its decision.

If the assessment has not been performed properly, the committee asks that it be repeated and, if necessary, to have this done by other assessors. The committee may also declare the appeal unfounded and close the case. In both cases, the decision must be justified and sent for further consideration by the awarding body.

All candidates are informed about the appeals procedure before proceeding with validation. The candidate has the right to receive counselling about the preparation and submittal of an appeal.

Comments

vocational schools

Vocational schools

All qualifications providers (awarding bodies) operate on the basis of an agreement with the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) and a detailed education and training plan, which also sets forth the validation procedures. The agreement regulates which qualifications the institution is authorised to award and entitles it to assess learning outcomes and issue certificates.

conduct validation

conduct validation

Experts from Finland use the term “validation of prior learning” (VPL), which refers to non-formal and informal learning. It is often found in sources describing the Finnish solutions in English. In Poland, we refer to the validation process as “validation of learning outcomes”, as it may encompass all knowledge, skills and social competences (including those attained in formal education).

standards

standards

A description of the hairdressing and beauty care qualifications relating to the presented good practice in validation is available in English at: <https://eperusteet.opintopolku.fi/#/en/esitys/3855076/reformi/tiedot>

competence points

competence points

Since 2018, the Finnish VET system has been based on competence points and not, as before, on units of time (e.g. number of hours of study). Each module contains a number of points that do not relate to the amount of time spent learning a particular competence. Each qualification is divided into thematic modules having a specific number of points.

observation in real-life conditions

observations in real-life conditions

Observation in the working environment is the result of cooperation between training institutions, employers and the sector. This cooperation is not only about conducting the validation itself. Part of vocational training occurs in companies. Some candidates also have internships with employers. In both cases (training and internships), validation is an integral part of the agreement with the employer, and practitioners act as assessors and are trained to perform validation in accordance with the standards. The awarding body is responsible for validation and companies only cooperate with it during the assessment phase.

teachers

Teachers

Counsellors and assessors employed in vocational schools, like all permanent VET teachers, must meet the requirements set forth in the 1998 Decree on teacher qualifications. They usually have a master's degree in the field they teach. In addition, they often have additional training in pedagogical competences. They also must meet requirements pertaining to professional experience.