

Competence-based vocational qualifications in Finland

Main principles

- Qualifications are not dependent on whether the competence has been acquired through work experience, studies or other activities.
- Demonstration of skills and evaluation of skills. Vocational skills are demonstrated through competence tests. Working life and professionals in education take part in evaluation.
- Co-operation between working life and educational institutions. Representatives of workers, employers and educational institutions are involved in all phases.

Three levels in the competence tests

- vocational upper secondary qualifications
- further vocational qualifications
- specialist vocational qualifications

The system of competence-based qualifications offers the adult population in particular a flexible way to renew and maintain their vocational skills. Obtaining a competence-based qualification requires competence in the skills of the field. The skill requirements have been set, in collaboration with the trade and industry, on the basis of work modules in working life.

Compulsory training for competence-based qualifications is provided especially by organizations specializing in adult education. Qualification committees make the contracts for arranging competence tests primarily with them.

The system of competence-based qualifications started in 1995. In 2007, more than 65,000 persons took part in competence tests.

ALVAR - Quality Assurance in competence based tests

ALVAR pays attention to customer needs and makes the co-operation of test organizers possible. ALVAR is also the centre of know-how, development and services of the competence-based vocational qualification process.

ALVAR provides competence tests that have standard level or requirements and are comparable level

- gives training on organizing of qualifications
- provides information on competence-based vocational qualification system
- takes part in development of the system
- provides other support to organizers and qualification committees.

ALVAR is also responsible for other projects concerning competence-based vocational qualifications.

Benefits of competence tests produced by ALVAR

- facilitate organizing procedure, savings in time
- ensure the high quality and comparability of competence-based vocational qualifications
- enhance the credibility of competence-based vocational qualifications in working life
- are approved by the qualification committee
- are economically better alternative than production and management of own tests
- increase the reliability of test situation: same person does not act as trainer and planner of the competence test
- guidance on evaluation and the evaluation form help the evaluator to take in to consideration all the key tasks according to the requirements of competence-based qualifications

Experts produce the test

The competence tests are produced by experts in each field. The experts are experienced workers, trainers in educational institutions as well as employers (foremen or experts in technology).

Competence tests produced by ALVAR facilitate one's work.

There are two kinds of tests

- Tests for working life. The tasks in tests may vary depending of the site.
- Tests with detailed guidance on organizing procedure.

Structure of competence tests

The package also includes:

- Instructions to test organizer (educational institution)
- Instructions to candidate

- competence test / instructions to determine the tasks to be performed in the test
- instructions to evaluator
- evaluation form / self evaluation form

Training of evaluators

The training planned individually for each field facilitates the work of test organizers. The goal is to guide the evaluators into fair and reliable evaluation process. The training of evaluators is required in the contract (signed with qualification committee) for organizing competence tests.

The training is aimed for organizers or evaluators of qualifications. They should also be interested in developing their own field. Their work may e.g. be related to training of candidates for competence-based qualifications, or the persons may be responsible for on-the-site training procedures.

Training of test planners

The training provides information that helps to make the planning process more efficient.

The training is aimed for persons that have comprehensive expertise in their own field. They should also have willingness to develop the system in practise. The persons that have accomplished the training have the possibility to take part in planning nationwide competence tests.

ALVAR works in collaboration with working life

- The Association of Vocational Adult Education Centres
- Finnish Central Organisation for Motor Trade and Repairs
- Confederation of Finnish Industries, EK
- Federation of Special Service and Clerical Employees, ERTO
- Commission for Local Authority Employers
- The Trade union for the Public and Welfare Sectors
- The Finnish Metalworkers' Union
- Finnish Forest Industries Federation
- Trade Union of Education in Finland OAJ
- Finnish National Board of Education
- Service Union United PAM
- Association of Support Service Industries
- Wood and allied worker's Union
- The Finnish Construction Trade Union

- Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries RT
- Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions
- The Finnish Real Estate Federation
- Federation of Finnish Enterprises
- Finnish Electrical Workers' Union
- Technology Industries of Finland
- The Employers' Association TIKLI
- Ministry of Labour
- Finnish Media Union
- Federation of the Finnish Media Industry
- AEL Centre for Technical Training

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