

Competitiveness through training for excellence

GOING TO THE TOP

- THE TOOLS OF TRAINING
FOR EXCELLENCE

Edited by
Leena-Maija Talikka
Immo Pylvänen





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I Introduction

Skills training has the aim of producing top professionals for different vocational fields, people who will succeed in working life and have a realistic possibility of performing well at international vocational skills competitions. A further goal is to motivate participants to constantly develop themselves and their own work as well as to improve their ability to cope with working life. This objective applies both to trainers and competitors.

The training of competitors for EuroSkills, WorldSkills and Abilympics vocational skills competitions is divided into three vocational skills training steps, which differ from each other with respect to the number of participating competitors, their background skills and experience as well as the content, intensity and duration of training. Training for the next upcoming event starts as soon as possible after the conclusion of a competition. In addition to analyses of participating competitors, essential aspects in the planning of training include assessments of earlier competitions and how training for them was realised, as this can promote success in future training efforts. Recognising the importance of cooperation within the entire training network and the training team is crucial. The approach to work is team-based and each member plays a significant role in determining its success.

The implementation of an excellence in skills training programme can also raise the status and appreciation of vocational education. Training for excellence develops the competence of vocational teachers by enabling international comparisons of education.

This model template for training for excellence covers separate sectors of training that in extent corresponds with ten credit units of study and can be compiled into totalities, which meet the needs of different skill and the different competence levels of individual competitors. They can be tailored to suit the skill in question as well as for different international competitions as well as to match the existing level of knowledge and ability of participating competitors. The aim is that the skills developed during training for and participation in international competitions would be recognised as studies, which contribute towards the completion of a vocational degree.

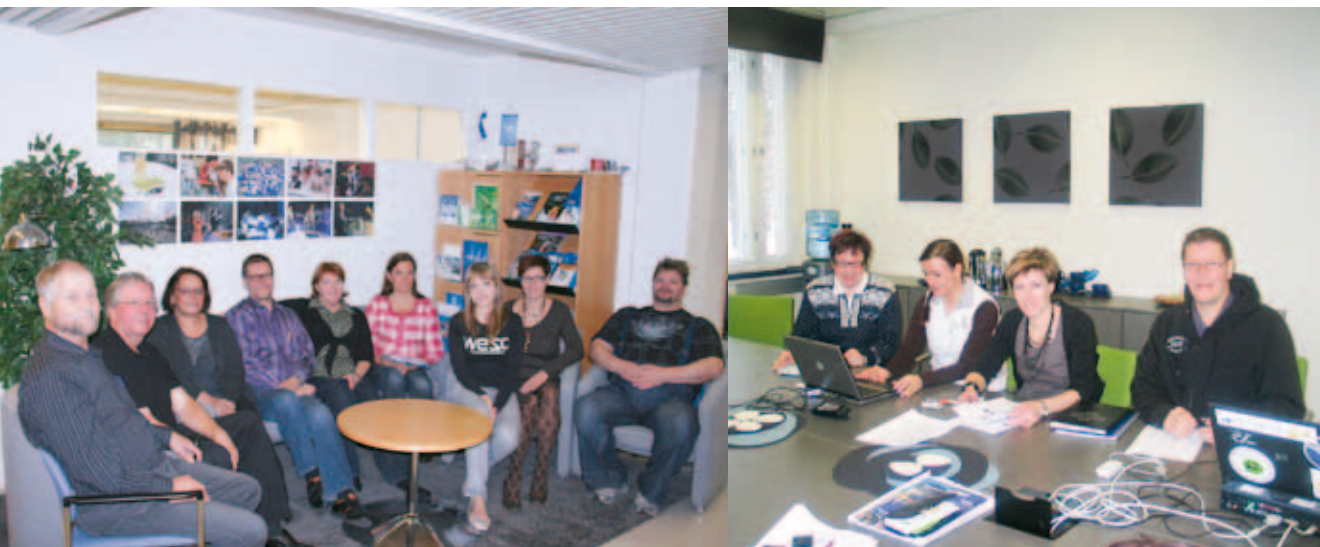
The significance of employer participation in training cannot be emphasised enough. Training for excellence should emphasise the impact that challenging work assignments have on the development of vocational excellence through both the promotion of self-esteem and the maintenance of high motivation for work. This is indicated by the study Modelling Vocational Excellence by Petri Nokelainen, a researcher at the Tampere University Research Centre for Vocational Education.

This publication was drafted by a group of skill managers assembled for the ESF-funded Excellence Through Skills Training project, which was implemented by Skills Finland. The members of the group are Skills training manager Immo Pylvänen (Skills Finland), hair dressing skill manager Tarja Korjus (Kouvola Region Vocational Institute), web design skill manager Tapio Kattainen (Helsinki Business College), welding skill manager Olli-Pekka Laajoki (Salpaus Further Education), beauty therapy skill manager Tea Lehtikevari (Vaasa Vocational Institute), polymechanics/automation skill manager Rauno Nikkilä (South Karelia Vocational Institute) and Skills apprenticeships training manager Hilikka Tuominiemi (AEL). The group was convened

and coordinated by project manager Leena-Maija Talikka of Skills Finland with project assistant Annamari Henriksson serving as its secretary. We would also like to thank Counsellor of Education Susanna Tauriainen of the Finnish National Board of Education for her numerous adjustments, corrections and good ideas.

This publication describes what a young competitor must know and master in order to gain success at international vocational skills competitions. In addition to cast-iron vocational proficiency, other key skills and mental stamina are also required – just as is the case with professional working life. Participation and success in competition also calls for basics knowledge of competitive activities.

We thank all participants for their valuable contribution!



II Roles and tasks of the training team – the creators of a personal training plan

EXPERT

When necessary, the expert will draft Finnish-language technical descriptions on the basis of those used at international skills competitions. In skill where the test project is divided into modules, the expert will compile a modular model for scoring. The expert will also participate in drafting the content of training plans and will brief the skill manager about the latest developments in the international field and on expert forums. The expert will be present throughout the entire training process and will participate in various events, such as training camps whenever possible. The presence of experts at national team camps is essential.

SKILL MANAGER

Skill managers cooperate with trainers and experts to analyse competitors participating in training, detailing their strengths and development needs before training commences. These analyses are updated at each transitional phase of the three-step training process. The skill manager will draft a foundation for skill-specific training plans together with the expert, and the two will also cooperate to monitor the realisation of training plans in practice. Experts provide skill managers with the latest knowledge available on expert forums on a continuous basis.

It is important to consider how training can be linked with the competitor's vocational studies when drafting training programmes. The provider of education that leads to a basic diploma or a further vocational or specialist vocational qualification must also be kept informed about the training and its progress. If the case involves studies carried out as part of vocational basic education or an apprenticeship and which are linked to the completion of a degree component, the training plan will be incorporated into the individual's personal study plan.

Training and the personal training plan can be incorporated into vocational studies performed as part of a basic vocational qualification. In such cases, the personal training plan can form a part of the individual's personal study plan. Test projects can be credited as demonstrations of vocational competence if they are based on evaluation grounds, which are similar to the requirements of competence-based qualifications (vocational skills requirements, objects and criteria of evaluation, methods for assessing vocational skills). Test projects can be recognised as demonstrations of vocational skills if the plan for their organisation has been approved by a body authorised to grant competence-based qualifications.

A personal training plan can serve as a component of the personalisation document for studies that prepare for a competence-based qualification. The personal training plan is a personalised form of acquiring required vocational competence. Test projects can be credited as demonstrations of vocational competence if they are based on evaluation grounds, which are similar to the requirements of competence-based qualifications (vocational skills requirements, objects and criteria of evaluation, methods for assessing vocational skills). Use of test projects as units that count towards the completion of a degree must be agreed to beforehand with the appropriate degree committee. A tripartite evaluation group can request that a degree committee recognises test projects. The degree committee in question decides on whether competence demonstrations (=test projects) are recognised as contributing to the completion of a degree as required under the organisation plan of a competence-based qualification.

TRAINER

The trainer drafts the competitor's personal training plan together with the skill manager and the competitor. This work is based on an analysis of the competitor and is performed before the commencement of training. Relevant observations as well as the competitor's own comments on development areas and progress should also be entered into the plan. The trainer should actively monitor the progress of the training process and provide support for the competitor throughout its duration. The trainer should also actively participate in training events. Information should flow effectively between training team members.

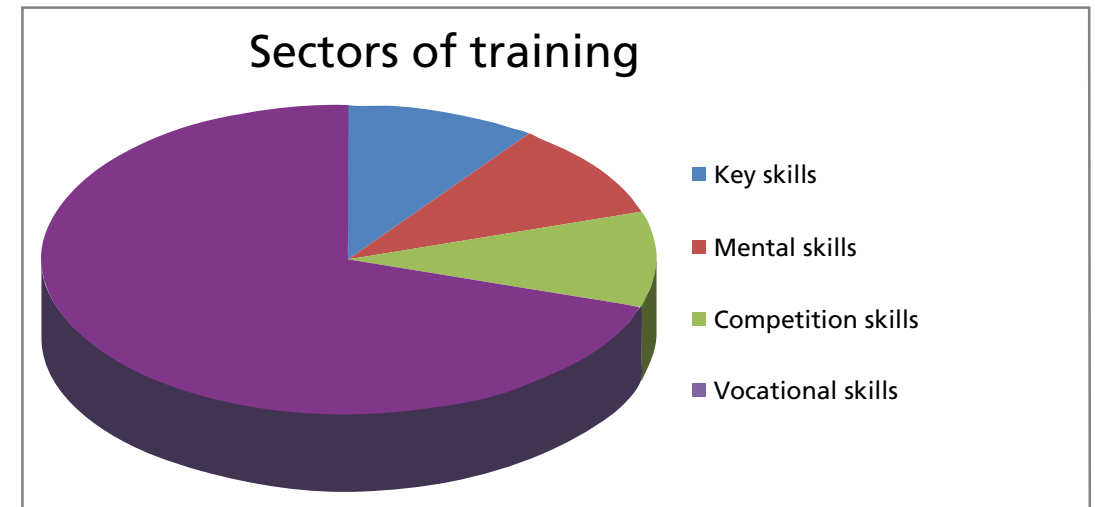
COMPETITOR

Competitors also contribute to the drafting of their personal training plans. They will keep a training diary, which they will use to relay regular reports on their proficiency as well as personal analyses of training progress and skills development to the trainer and skill manager. Competitor analyses are updated at each transitional phase of the three-step training process.



In addition to the abovementioned people, corporate workplace trainers and supervisors as well as former competitors take part in training activities. They often participate in training events and courses as specialist skills trainers.

III Sectors of training for excellence and the three-step training system



Skills Finland coordinates, develops and supports training for excellence with the aid of specific ESF-funded projects. In cases involving an international competition, training will be implemented with the aid of a three-step system. This incorporates basic training, training for excellence and national team training. The group-based basic training phase is meant for high-performing students and 3-10 competitors from around the country will be chosen for each skill. The basic training group will participate in qualifier competitions and about six will then proceed to training for excellence. The national team training phase is meant only for those chosen to compete at an international event and for their possible stand-ins, who will spar with the competitors and observe the national team's exercises in preparation for possible participation in upcoming competitions, for example. This training phase focuses on the attainment of vocational, competitive, mental and physical abilities that enable the competitor to participate in international competitions and display the same level of excellence as other top competitors from around the world.

Formation of training for excellence

These four sectors should be included in training for international competitions.

1. **Competition skills** – this section describes the general principles of competitive activities.
2. **Vocational skills** – this section describes the structure of training for excellence from the perspective of vocational competence in a manner that corresponds with the degree requirements of vocational qualifications.
3. **Key skills** – this section describes the key skills that are essential in association with competitive activities.
4. **Mental skills** – this section describes the structure of mental training.

Together, these comprise a set of matters that must be mastered by those who wish to succeed in competition.



Contents of training

1. Competition skills

This section describes:

- The meaning of a vocational skills competition, what is its aim, what does it achieve and what are the benefits of competitive activities.
- How the various competitions differ from one another (e.g. the Taitaja, EuroSkills, WorldSkills, Abilympics competitions, etc.)?
- The contents of competition regulations. The rules and regulations of international vocational skills competitions are always specified in conjunction with the final event and enter into force once the organisation responsible for the competition in question has approved them. It is important to ensure that you study the most recent competition regulations. The rules and regulations in force at the moment can be found on the home pages of each international competition. The role of the expert is very important in this, as he or she is responsible for introducing the latest information on competition rules to the training level.
- Study of the scoring system. International vocational skills competitions utilise the Competition Information System (CIS) scoring system. The principle behind scoring is that evaluation is performed on a competitor- or competitor-group-specific basis. Technical descriptions are used to divide competition test projects into evaluation components, which in turn are divided into specific evaluation targets. The test projects are modulated in a way that makes it possible to evaluate their components at the end of each day. Both objective and subjective evaluations can be employed.
- Focus on ethical questions. How to relate to your co-competitors in a competitive situation, what does fair play mean and what kind of professional ethics are required of a competitor.
- Presentations of competitive activities are also suitable tools for attracting cooperation partners as well as for other marketing.

2. Vocational skills

The young people who participate in training for international competitions are completing either a vocational basic degree, a further vocational or specialist vocational qualification or they are studying for a higher degree.

Consider the following when drafting a training plan:

- The technical description is drafted in Finnish unless there is a specific requirement to do it in English.
- Review what is already taught in Finland (degrees) and what needs to be taught separately in Skills training. Learning and training takes place both in the school and the work environment.

Degree-oriented apprenticeship education can include skills training activities. Apprenticeship training involves the drafting of an apprenticeship contract to which a personal studyprogramme is attached. A personal training plan can be incorporated into this.

- The vocational skills description is derived from the technical description (the trainer notes strengths and development areas). An analysis of the competitor is drafted before training commences.
- When organising skill-specific training events, agree on preliminary preparations and cooperation with other members of the training team.
- Take advantage of earlier experiences, for example by inviting former competitors to training events to promote peer learning.
- Skill-specific training totalities are agreed to cooperatively by the skill manager, expert and trainer and will be organised by the skill manager at a location chosen by him or her. Skill-specific training will be realised in accordance with the drafted training plan (exercises, etc.) Ensure that information reaches all of the involved parties!
- Task scheduling needs to be studied; practise is essential to scheduling.

The personal training plan should consider:

- Occupational safety and ergonomics
- Infrastructure checklist (=what is needed to complete the competition, i.e. materials, equipment, competition area, lighting, etc.) will usually be specified about six months before the event; this can give rise to new contents or techniques to be practised in training.
- Number of times exercises are to be performed, preliminary preparation, cooperation=routine
- Take advantage of old test projects
- Preliminary test projects are published about three months prior to the competition. They provide a good object for final training.
- Communication between competitors and trainers (questions and answers)
- Sustainable development and entrepreneurial activities are to be taken into account throughout the entire training process as themes that penetrate all aspects of training

Note!

The professionalism of trainers is on display throughout the entire three-step training process in, for example, how they value and develop their own work. Trainers should show interest in the competitor's progress and set a good example through the entire training process by demonstrating fairness and a sporting attitude.



3. Key skills

It is important to be aware of the non-vocational factors that affect evaluation.

Language skills

- English (standard and technical terminology)

Ability to perform in public

- Languages and communication, showmanship, cultural awareness (customs)

One key skill is the ability to ask for help and, in competitive situations, negotiate with judges who don't share the same nationality with the contestant. This conveys a good image of the contestant's language proficiency and vocational ability to the judges.

- Take advantage of video footage, e.g. tapes of earlier competitions and exercises
- Peer evaluation: the rest of the group assesses performances, the handling of feedback
- What it means to represent. Go over the competition setting and the entire process associated with the competition as well as the media attention that will follow it. Practise various situations.

Teamwork abilities

- Emphasised especially in EuroSkills competitions because most events there are primarily team skills, but teamwork abilities need to be considered also for World Skills competitions because competitors participate as a team.

Cultural awareness

- General knowledge about the country hosting the competition
- Etiquette
- National customs
- International competence



4. Mental skills

Constant, penetrates all instruction! Mental training workbook (Minkinen, Pylvänen, Airaksinen), produced by Skills Finland as part of the ESF-funded Excellence Through Skills Training project, provides help in this.

Mental training contents

- Ability to withstand pressure
- Interaction skills
- Understanding human nature, understanding yourself
- Maintaining composure
- Ability to ask for help, don't get stuck on your own
- Recovery
- Importance of humour.

Exercise/nutrition! Many educational institutions have already taken working ability certificates into use

- Importance of wellbeing
- Amount of sleep
- Amount, quality and rhythm of eating (food and drink).
- Mental training and the group-forming process will be focused on during the national team's training phase, especially during team camps.

IV Recognition of competence demonstrated as part of vocational skills competition activities

The aim is that competence demonstrated at vocational skills competitions is recognised as part of degree-oriented vocational studies. This is the responsibility of the skill manager or trainer, who describes the contents and aims of test projects to the person in charge of the competitor's studies that prepare for a competence-based qualification.

Education leading to a vocational basic degree:

If the competitor is still in the process of completing a vocational basic degree at the time of his or her competition performance, the competence demonstrated at trials or during the actual competition can be evaluated as a partial or full demonstration of vocational proficiency when this has been pre-approved in a teaching plan submitted to the organisation responsible for arranging the competitor's education.

Competence-based qualifications:

Competence demonstrated at a vocational skills competition can be submitted for recognition following a decision by a tripartite evaluation group. The prerequisites for a proposal for recognition are:

- a) the test projects performed at vocational skills competitions correspond with the requirements of competence-based qualifications (BD, VQ or SVQ),
- b) test projects are extensive enough to cover at least the vocational skills requirements of one degree component / several degree components,
- c) test projects are evaluated for the full duration of the work process.

The skill manager / trainer will discuss the matter, if possible, with the tripartite evaluation group before it submits a proposal for the recognition of competence. At this stage, the person completing the degree (=competitor) should also be heard.

A proposal for the recognition of previously demonstrated and reliably documented competence will be submitted to the body responsible for granting the degree under the organisation plan of a competence-based qualification. This body will then decide on the granting of recognition.

The person in charge of the competitor's degree studies will enter into the evaluation protocol a proposal to recognise the competitor's (degree student) demonstrated competence (=test project) as a degree component or components. A tripartite evaluation group will sign the protocol.

Which degree components to use in training must be agreed to separately for each skill (e.g. the restaurant service skill covers four (4) degree components of which three (3) are suitable for training for excellence, while all degree components are suitable in the construction metal roofing skill, etc.)

The contact details of all parties are entered into the training plan, including the particulars of the person in charge of the competitor's degree studies. Further information: www.oph.fi

Participants in training for excellence receive certificates for their completion of a step at each transitional phase of the three-step process (Skills certificate template).





Finland facts

- ▶ Population: 5.4 million
- ▶ Capital: Helsinki, population 580,000
- ▶ Area: 340,000 square kilometres
- ▶ Official languages: Finnish 91%, Swedish 5.4%
- ▶ Currency: Euro
- ▶ Major sectors of the economy (% GDP): services 69%, manufacturing industry and construction 28%, agriculture and forestry 3%
- ▶ Religion: Evangelical Lutheran 80%, Orthodox 1%, others 1%, Unaffiliated 18%
- ▶ Proportion of people with post-basic education of total population: 66%

Skills Finland

- ▶ Promotes top vocational competence and its appreciation.
- ▶ Organises and develops national vocational skills competitions in co-operation with regional training providers.
- ▶ Selects and manages Finnish teams to compete in international skills competitions.
- ▶ Organises training for young professionals in the pursuit of excellence in skills.
- ▶ Organises training for experts, trainers and specialists in skills competitions.
- ▶ Promotes research on excellence in skills.

Skills Finland is a non-profit organisation and supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education, labour market organisations, teacher and student organisations and VET training providers and institutions. Skills Finland was established in 1993.

Contact information

Skills Finland is located in Helsinki, Finland
 Tel. +358 9 8689 680, Fax +358 9 8680 6818

skills@skillsfinland.fi
www.skillsfinland.fi



Skills
 skillsfinland



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