

Good Practice: FIN GP2

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"VET in Prison"

Main features of the GP programme:

Type of programme	Type of organisation	Field of practice for organisation	Programme scope	Programme duration	Programme occurrence/frequency	Type of funding for GP
VET	Public VET organisers in cooperation with the Criminal Sanctions Agency (CSA)	VET; criminal sanctions	National curricula, VET providers local	Flexible, depending on the skill levels of students (and duration of sentence)	Continuous	State

Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP) is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

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1. What – Focus (theme, orientation)

VET programmes offered in and adapted to suit prison surroundings. Studied programmes follow national curricula and provide identical qualifications to studies completed outside prison. The core curriculum is competence-based. In our cases, learning was organised either at prison workshops under the supervision of CSA employed professionals and VET teachers or at external workplaces supervised by employers and/or VET teachers. Providing education and rehabilitation programmes during imprisonment are considered the best measures to prevent risk of recidivism. This flexible model of VET is one part of the solution as criminal sanctions clients are in many aspects in situation of risk.

2. For whom – Target group(s)

Prisoners, criminal sanction clients

3. Requirements and access

In the case of prisons, recruitment of students is carried out in cooperation with the educational providers and the criminal sanctions agency (CSA). Prisoners are free to apply to education anywhere, but in order to gain access to open prisons; they must be rated low on the security risk scale. Potential students are assessed according to criteria such as total length of sentence, personal security issues and motivation to study. Priorities, available places and facilities of each prison also affect the intake. Education providers make formal decisions of admission but the CSA and prison management always have the final say.

4. Elements of good practice

The aim of vocational education and training is primarily to produce qualifications to maintain a skilled labour force. However, our interviews confirmed that competences and qualities developed in VET are manifold and even decisive when individuals try to quit crime and integrate into the society. Studying facilitates personal development and opens up further possibilities. Building up self-esteem through education was a prevalent theme in our interviews. The idea that gaining vocational competences and positive work experience is an enabler of all other competence development was pervasive in our interviews with educators and students.

Our interviews show the importance of having developed, 1) working life competences, 2) social competences, 3) having something official to show, as prisoners often lack all three. Any studies or qualifications completed in prison are regarded official qualifications from the educational provider who implemented the education. The practice reduces chances of discrimination based on certificates.

In our studied case, all stakeholders seemed to share the same views of the importance of education. The link between educational programmes and prison workshop activities were, in most cases, also strong. This ensured that there are enough possibilities to organise learning opportunities and crediting different

competence areas.

Uninterrupted educational pathways from prison to completion of qualifications outside the prison was the strongest, perhaps most crucial element of the studied educational model. The process was developed by one educational provider to make sure there is a smooth transition from prison to normal life and that there will be no interruptions because of gaps in receiving benefits or for lack of access to other needed services. The educational provider and CSA caseworkers worked with networks of professionals from different agencies and NGOs to ensure that their students had the best possible circumstances to finish their studies.

5. Perceived challenges

The prison system has its challenges in dealing with issues of equality and diversity. The range of available AE programmes is especially limited for women and for those who do not speak Finnish. Access to education also depends on the prison location and regional offering of adult education. One of the most pressing issues in Finnish prisons is to ensure equal educational opportunities nationwide. VET offered in prisons is competence-based but not all education can be easily brought into prisons (open or closed). Prisoners' sentence plans are based on risks and needs but according to our research, education is often overshadowed by other perceived needs.

6. Testimonials

"...when you have all kinds of ADHD and stuff [...] you can't really sit in class and watch what's being drawn on the blackboard. I can work with my hands and I want to, so this is absolutely the best." (learner in an open prison)

"...and you can see that from many, maybe myself as well that if we had not had this chance, you don't know where we would be right now. We have stayed in contact a bit and it's great to hear that the guys are doing well, that they have gotten a lot from here. So it's a big deal. Really big." (a former prisoner)

7. More Information

EduMAP project's publications:

[Books and articles](#)

Academic publications that address key themes of the EduMAP project

[Deliverables and reports](#)

EduMAP's official deliverables, related reports and publications

[Good practice cases](#)

Key features from 40 'good practice' cases from 20 countries

[Working papers](#)

A selection of findings from desk and field research in 20 European countries

[Other resources](#)

Other types of resources made for the project (illustrations, comics etc.)