

# BEST PRACTICES FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR COMPETITION

COMPETITION  
INCREASES  
**SELF-ESTEEM**



COMPETITION  
**RESULTS IN**  
EDUCATION  
EXPORT

# WHY SHOULD VOCATIONAL SKILLS COMPETITIONS BE A FOCUS, SEIJA RASKU?

Participating in competitions is an excellent way to develop the expertise of the personnel of the education organisers, offer students individual learning paths and also develop the operational activities of the entire organisation. Once the competition activities are recorded in



Image: Inka Porttila

the education organiser's strategy, implementing them in the daily life of vocational education is flexible and goal-oriented.

Vocational skills competitions increase the appeal of and appreciation for vocational education. Through the competitions, everyone can see what types of professions people graduate for in vocational education and what types of skills and career opportunities the graduates have. At the same time, competitions help shape vocational education and training and are a good way of highlighting needed reforms in vocational education.

Seija Rasku is the chairman of the Board at Skills Finland and Counsellor of Education at the Ministry of Education and Culture.

## COMPETITIONS IN FIGURES

**Taitaja** – Finnish national competition for VET students,  
**TaitajaPLUS** – national competition for VET students with special needs and  
**Taitaja9** – handicrafts competition for pupils in comprehensive schools.  
598 competitors  
99,180 visitors  
424 partners, monetary value EUR 2.3 million  
*The figures are from the Taitaja2017 competition.*

**EuroSkills** – European Championships in youth's vocational skills  
480 competitors from 28 countries  
75,000 visitors  
30 competitors, 26 experts and 25 educational institutions from Finland  
30 partners of the Finnish national team  
*The figures are from the EuroSkills Gothenburg 2016 competition.*

**WorldSkills** – The World Championship in youth's vocational skills  
1,255 competitors from 58 countries  
125,000 visitors  
27 competitors, 24 experts and 23 educational institutions from Finland  
82 partners of the Finnish national team  
*The figures are from the WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017 competitions.*

**Abilympics** – a vocational skills competition for those who need special support  
650 competitors from 35 countries  
60,000 visitors  
9 Finnish competitors, 10 trainers and 5 experts from 4 Finnish vocational colleges  
*The figures are from the Abilympics Bordeaux 2016 competition.*

Reporter: Emmi Oksanen  
Layout: Joe Ville Järvinen

# NETWORKING, EXCHANGE AND EXPORT – THE MANY FACETS OF COMPETITIONS

**Exchange students to Singapore, competitions in China and education export to Brazil. This is what occurs when the growth in skills and competitiveness is recorded in the strategy of a school.**

Competition activities are a tool that the Turku Vocational Institute uses to promote the top expertise recorded in the strategy. In practice, the educational institution encourages students from different fields to compete or otherwise take part in competitions.

## The power of networking

Management also participates in competitions. Service Area Director **Hannu Immonen** is Finland's technical delegate in the WorldSkills competition.

– It gives us contacts with every one of the 76 other countries that participate in the competition. Networks are useful, for example, when we seek out student and teacher exchanges and work placements for students, says Immonen.



Image: Vesa-Matti Väärä

Due to the WorldSkills contacts, the Turku Vocational Institute is sending hospitality, restaurant and tourism students to Singapore for student exchanges and it has helped start competition activities in China.

As a technical delegate, Immonen has supported Häme University of Applied Sciences in education export to Brazil. In his technical delegate role, Immonen conveys information also to other education organisers. Teachers also network domestically and internationally through competitions.

– They are able to see what type of vocational skills and pedagogic skills exist in other countries, improve their skills and update their knowledge. Networking is extremely important in today's world.

As competitions are policies of the educational institution and they have allocated budgets, participating teachers can commit themselves to support them. In addition, the Turku Vocational Institute has an assigned coordinator for competitions. The coordinator is a teacher with solid competitive experience and has what is needed to support others in competitions.

# TAITAJA IS **MUCH MORE** THAN JUST A COMPETITION

**Taitaja is an enormous learning event, not just a competition.**

A lot more people participate in the Taitaja competition than just competitors and those who promote the competition. In the Taitaja2016 event in Seinäjoki, 110 students from Sedu Education were completing Finnish, Ethics and elective courses by facilitating career paths for nearly 4,000 junior high school students. They were mentored by Guidance Counsellor, Sedu's acting Head of Education **Anne Rintala** and her colleague, Project Manager **Sini Rauhala**.

Together with Rauhala, Rintala organised school tours for junior high schools, career path registration, trained career path facilitators and organised the facilitation of career paths during the event.

## **"I'm glad I participated"**

Most Sedu students received five competence points and a lot of learning about public speaking, for example, by facilitating the career paths.



– The students really liked facilitating the career paths. Many commented how wonderful it was that they had the courage to participate.

Students learned how to grasp the attention of a group and maintain it through heavy congestion, in addition to presentation skills.

– They also certainly learned something about organising events as well.





## More condensed training is better

Anne Rintala feels that when organising Taitaja, it should be remembered that in addition to the competition, Taitaja is an enormous event and Finland's best showcase for vocational education.

– I do not think of Taitaja as just a competition.

According to Rintala, organising career paths went well as a whole. The facilitator training could have been started a bit later.

– We started training facilitators already in September. As there was a long time from the autumn to the actual event, not everyone was motivated for the training right away. The training could have been started later, in January, for example. Also the cooperation between career path guides and sports guides could have been better planned in advance. Now they did not necessarily know each other right at the start. Rintala is satisfied with the interest expressed by junior high school students.



**Veera Ollikainen, a third year business student is also studying the entire curriculum of upper secondary school**

*"I facilitated career paths for junior high school students at the Taitaja2016 competitions. I rotated groups from one location to another and told them about my studies. This allowed me to complete five skills points in free electives. I was able to practice presentation skills and learned how to work with those that are younger than me. Facilitating career paths also thought how to lead large groups in a big event. The experience may be useful later in my career at exhibitions, for example. It would have been fun to participate in the Taitaja competition, if the age restriction wouldn't have been a problem. I'm a 25-year-old adult student."*



# THE TAITAJA9 TRUCK TOUR WAS VERY POPULAR

**Salon Seudun Ammattiopisto took the Taitaja9 competition to schools with trucks. It really paid off. Nearly 300 three-person teams participated in metalworking, catering and construction industry tasks in ten schools.**

Previously, the school has organised a Taitaja9 competition during the Open Doors event and 50–60 teams participated.

– This was a lot of participants. The school and Taitaja9 gained a lot of visibility. We also received a lot of good feedback from junior high school students and from guidance counsellors, rejoices **Tiina Lakanen**, the Taitaja9 representative for the Salo region.

Organising the Taitaja9 competition as a truck tour will be continued in 2018.

– The basic idea will be the same, but we will focus more on the overall look and visibility.

Lakanen agreed on the tour dates for September 2017 with the junior high schools in the Salo region already in the spring. The team picked September as the timeframe, so that the weather would be good enough for an outdoor event.

## A step closer to junior high schools

Metalworking, automotive, catering and construction industry students, Technical Design Teacher Lakanen, the school's Director of Sales and Marketing **Mika Rautiainen** and drivers for two trucks participated on the tour. The team of 12–16 people went to the schoolyard of each junior high school for the entire school day. Students monitored and judged the tasks completed in the competition. In addition to three competition tasks, the students of the junior high schools heard about the education possibilities at Salon Seudun Ammattiopisto. Competition partners Technology Industry of Finland and the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries also introduced themselves to the students.

– I believe that the competition created interest in student candidates to apply to our school. The tour did take a lot of time, but we are now a step closer to junior high schools.



# SOLIDARITY AND COMPETITION EXPERIENCE FROM SCHOOL COMPETITIONS

The Federation of Education in Jokilaakso JEDU has already organised Jedu Skills school competitions during three autumns.



Image: Tuula Leskinen

Competition experience, introduction of students to teachers, hidden training, team work and marketing. All of these were in the mind of **Keijo Makkonen**, Director of JEDU, when he proposed organising JEDU Skills to the steering group of the federation.

In October 2017, JEDU students competed in their third JEDU Skills in over 20 events. The Federation of Education in Jokilaakso JEDU operates in Northern Ostrobothnia in seven localities 30-50 km from each other. Even the competitions are in different localities.

– The students and teachers of different locations are able to get to know each other. Teachers learn best practices from each other and students obtain competition experience. At the same time, the competitions are effective marketing, says Keijo Makkonen.

JEDU Skills are also preliminary rounds for the Taitaja semi-finals. If they so choose, the best competitors can participate in the Taitaja semi-finals. As the teachers and students at different locations have already gotten to know each other at JEDU Skills, they are already a familiar team at the Taitaja semi-finals.

## The Competition Manager provides leadership

JEDU Skills are organised by JEDU's Competition Manager. The practical arrangements are carried out together by the teachers and students that are part of the industry and school participating in the competition. During the first autumn, there were less than 10 industries, the next autumn there were 15 and over 20 on the third time.

– When an industry participates, the teachers agree on how work is to be divided among themselves.

The competitions are public. JEDU sends news releases to media on the competitions. At some localities, the sites have invited comprehensive school students to participate as audiences. In some events, company representatives have served as judges in addition to the teachers. JEDU Skills are well-liked and more are to come.

– The competitions have been received very well by both students and teachers. This is also a way to highlight all of the education of a specific location and to develop education at all locations.

# TEACHER vol 2.0

**Teacher Markku Vengasaho joined the competition activities with full vigour. He has brought together young students, local entrepreneurs, vocational qualification students and the top professionals of the industry.**

– I am no longer the same teacher as I was five years ago. My role as a teacher and teaching methods have changed, Teacher **Markku Vengasaho** says.

He is a teacher at Saimaa Vocational College Sampo and also the event manager for confectioners. Vengasaho feels that the competition activities has allowed him to learn teamwork skills understand the power of networking. If he has a difficult problem to resolve, help can be requested from the network and someone can help as quickly as in fifteen minutes.

## **A teacher learned to become an enabler**

– When a youth is creating his own future, I think how I could create a professional spark in him that would result in him becoming inspired by a sector. The student and competitor have their own view and the idea is not that they do what I feel is best. In order to understand this, Vengasaho has had to learn how to listen with humility.

Work as the Skills manager and as a WorldSkills trainer for **Emeliina Papinniemi**, who won gold medal in WorldSkills Abu Dhabi 2017, has been worth the effort.

– This has been among my best projects during working life and good training for the upcoming reform. I've been in the working life for 22 years. Sampo's confectioner education is currently also very popular.



Image: Joachim Wunch

## **Coaching and education together**

Vengasaho also combined Papinniemi's training with the Excellence in Skills to Entrepreneurship training. He invited top experts to Sampo to train Papinniemi; youth services students, apprenticeship students, entrepreneurs from South Karelia and industry teachers from different parts of Finland.

Attracting top talent to a vocational institute in Lappeenranta sounds like a difficult task, but it is possible if you can find enthusiastic people.





**Teija Ripattila, Chief Training Manager, Skills Finland ry**

“This is a financially effective method for combining training and education. In addition to the expertise, the student will also receive the certificates for completing qualifications.”

Image: WorldSkills

– Many are willing to share information on their top expertise to others. Once the number of participants is large enough, the fee per person is not too high.

Apprenticeship students were working on their vocational qualification in the group and those in secondary school were working toward their education. A local foundation supported the participation of entrepreneurs. An apprenticeship student also developed competition recipes with Papinniemi.

– Often, combining education with training is mostly limited by one’s own thinking.

**Benefitting companies want to participate**

Vengasaho also funded Papinniemi’s WorldSkills competition trip through a company partnership.

– I first asked myself how a specific company could benefit from funding Emeliina’s competition. If I could think of a good reason and have it clear in my mind, I would be able to get a company to participate.

For example, the WSC2017 preliminary rounds were held at Keittiömaailma, a partner company. Previously, the preliminary rounds had been held on school premises. Vengasaho focused on acquiring funding from a few companies. They would also obtain visibility on Papinniemi’s website and on the work coats of the competing team.

As a developer type, Vengasaho suspects that he would become bored if he would have to work alone as a teacher.

– When I am part of a team, I can give so much more.

# WHY SEND AN EXPERT TO INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS?

**International experience improves the quality of education. Networks may also result in education export.**

Sending an expert is an important way to keep an educational institution at the frontline of development.

– Competitions are a way to refresh expertise and professional practices and to create international relationships that would not otherwise be possible, says Industry Manager for technology industries **Jukka Kosunen** of the Savo Educational Federation of Municipalities (Sakky).

Sakky's teachers have discovered a lot of ideas, equipment and other teaching tools, which the school has then later acquired.

## Starting education export

In summer and autumn 2017, Sakky organised WorldSkills training camps for the first time for Swedish, English, Russian and Chinese competitors.

– This has allowed us to start education export. Selling these products would not have been possible if we would not have been active in competitions.

Sakky has sent experts to WorldSkills or Euroskills competitions for 15 years already. A good expert is enthusiastic, competent, speaks fluent English and will do the job again.

– The best benefit is obtained when serving as an expert two to three times.



Image: Heli Laitinen

## A wide base provides a better foundation for progress

Sakky uses the old competition tasks from Taitaja competitions in teaching at every locality. Approximately 70–90 students from Sakky participate in the Taitaja semi-finals every year. Using a wide base, students and teachers are better able to strive to reach the top of the industry in international competitions.

Sakky has compiled competition stories by students on its website and on social media. At Taitaja information sessions, competitors aim to inspire younger students to participate. It has paid off. In autumn 2015, for example, one student expressed the will to participate in the Taitaja competition on the very first day of school. And the student was in the Taitaja finals in spring 2017.

# WHY IS THE EXCELLENCE IN SKILLS TRAINING WORTHWHILE?

**Hairdressers who have completed the excellence in skills training are in high demand on the labour market.**

**Heli Råglund**, a hairdressing teacher, feels that when a student has the motivation to learn more than on average, she suggests that the student completes the Excellence in skills module, which is worth 15 competence points. Hairdressing students at Stadin Ammattiopisto can complete the course by, for example, competing in Taitaja competitions and other competitions and by carrying out different types of projects, such as shows and well-being events.

## **Companies want a competitor**

It is a good idea to complete the curriculum, because it is appreciated by employers in the industry.

– Employers have noticed that completing the module is evident in the student's technical

abilities and the will to develop, says Råglund. By completing the module, the student is also able to acquire special skills that are not offered by the basic education. If you participate as a student in making musicals and shows, it is more likely that you will be employed to work with them later.

Through competitions, students can acquire technical skills, improve the ability to cope with pressure and market themselves to employers as employees willing to develop.

– There is a lot of competition in the hair care industry. Many companies encourage their employees to participate in competitions and may even expect it. Completing the module may also expedite finishing the studies.



**Veera Rantanen, a third-year hair care student at Stadin Ammattiopisto**

*"I wanted to complete the module, because I was interested in competing. I participated in the Taitaja2017 semi-finals and I served in the finals as an assistant to an Italian competitor. It improved my technical skills and I learned to believe in myself in a new way. In the Taitaja finals, I learned co-operation skills and was able to create relationships. I met a photographer through the competition and have done makeup work for his advertising photo shoots after the competition."*

Image: Inka Porttila

# 10 WAYS TO MAKE USE OF COMPETITIONS



## 1. **Get fully involved.**

When an enthusiastic teacher receives the necessary full support, he or she will develop education. Everyone benefits from this.

## 2. **Market the educational institution with competition experience.**

Student participation in competitions and teachers being active in them indicate that the school motivates students and has a high level of expertise.

## 3. **A teacher that participates in competitions is a better teacher than before.**

Let him or her share their expertise with others and encourage it.

## 4. **Organise a Taitaja9 competition as a truck tour for junior high schools.**

Provide guidance counsellors at junior high schools ready introductory materials of the competition and school and stay in contact with the guidance counsellors.

## 5. **You can participate in Taitaja in other ways than just competing.**

A participation certificate and competence points are issued for contributing to arrangements. They are beneficial for demonstrating skills in the future.

## 6. **Organise your own school competitions.**

They are a good way to develop the education in your educational institution and offer students competition experience.

## 7. **Appoint a competition coordinator, who is to create an annual calendar schedule and support competitors and students.**

This allows at least one person to always be on top of competitions.

## 8. **Include competitions in budgets.**

## 9. **Ask companies to participate in the training for international competitions.**

## 10. **Create relationships.**

Relationships created in international competitions may later result in education export, for example.