

IN ADVOCATION OF VOCATIONAL SKILLS

SKILLS FINLAND 1993–2013



**IN ADVOCATION OF VOCATIONAL SKILLS
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DEAR READER

Skills Finland was founded in January 1993 for the purpose of promoting Finnish vocational skills and their appreciation through competition activities. However, the roots of the association and vocational skills competitions reach much further back. Professionals of various fields have been competing against each other at least since the 1920s, and professionals in some fields were already participating in international skills competitions in the 1950s. The idea of vocational skills competitions being utilised more extensively began to take root on several fronts at the same time in the 1980s. This led to the first Taitaja Competition being held in Hämeenlinna in 1988 and the first competitors being sent to the international WorldSkills Competition in 1989. The good experiences gained from these competitions led to the founding of Skills Finland a few years later.

The purpose of this book is to compile all the small rivulets that eventually formed the stream that led to the association's founding. The book describes how the association gradually, as

the result of the significant efforts of several individuals, grew to its current proportions. The Taitaja Competition, which at first only included two competition skills, evolved into the major vocational education and training (VET) event that it is today. Despite its modest beginnings, Finland grew into a significant actor in the family of international vocational skills competitions. All of this has been beneficial to Finnish vocational skills and vocational education and training.

During the writing process, we were able to gather a large amount of information, memories and photos related to the early stages of competition activities and the association. Until now, many of these documents have been spread out across the country, stored in different people's offices, basements and attics. The numerous stories related to the history of competition activities and the association that we have found and have been able to bring to light and share through this book are equally valuable.

The world around us has changed during the association's existence. The requirements of working life, vocational skills, VET and, through them, vocational skills competitions have transformed over the years. We have sought to concretise these changes through the example of the Fashion Technology skill. Fashion Technology, formerly known as Ladies' Dressmaking, has been part of the Taitaja Competition since the beginning, and we have also been participating in this skill at the international level since our first competition. In my opinion, the skill's evolution is greatly illustrative not only of the changes in this profession and our VET, but also the changes in the goals and implementation of competition activities.

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to all of you who have given us your time, shared your knowledge and memories with us and scoured your archives, making it possible for us to create this book.

I would like to offer a special word of thanks to Pirjo Elo, whose expertise and support have been of paramount importance throughout our history project. Without her contribution,

I doubt that this book would ever have seen the light of day. I would also like to thank the other author of this book, Markku Tasala, for his outstanding work and the Vuorineuvos Petter Forsströmin Ammattikoulut Foundation for their financial support.

During this history writing process, I have had the opportunity to study the roots of the association and competition activities in depth, engage in interesting and fruitful discussions with numerous VET experts and learn a great many new things. What has made the greatest impression on me is the enthusiasm and dedication with which numerous individuals have promoted vocational skills competitions, often on top of their own jobs. For their part, discussions with former competitors have convinced me that we are on the right track.

Skills Finland was boldly founded in the middle of the 1990s recession. The key idea was to gather all parties involved in VET together to engage in development work. Let this boldness, open-mindedness and cooperation also carry us forwards, towards an even better future, in the challenging years ahead.

Eija Alhojärvi

Executive Director

Skills Finland



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History of vocational skills competitions in Finland



The Team Finland sent to WorldSkills London 2011 was seen off at the House of the Estates by Minister of Education Jukka Gustafsson. In the front row, from the left: Executive Director of Skills Finland Eija Alhojärvi, member of the Board of the International Abilitylympics Federation Markku Aunola, Minister Gustafsson, Finland's Official Delegate to WorldSkills Timo Lankinen and Technical Delegate Hannu Immonen.

Raising the appreciation of VET from the bottom to the top

The mid-1980s was a very significant time for vocational skills competitions. At the time, many different parties – who partially had the same driving forces – simultaneously launched activities that shared the same goal: increasing awareness of VET and increasing its attractiveness.

The discourse on vocational skills competitions was related to the discourse on VET that sometimes even became heated in the mid-1980s. The editorial of the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat tackled the topic on 10 February 1985 with the heading “Discrimination of vocational education falls on all of us”. The editorial stated that the reform of upper secondary education had been badly forgotten after the major decisions had been made. The business community in particular had vehemently criticised the education policy and, above all, the reform of upper secondary education. Industry demanded better qualified labour, which brought about pressure to improve the quality of education.

The goals to increase the attractiveness of VET and activities aimed at achieving these goals eventually led to the launch of regular and multidisciplinary vocational skills competitions. The first Taitaja Competition was held in

Hämeenlinna in 1988. Competition activities later became more established, grew to international proportions and, as they evolved, irresistibly drew in vocational colleges.

PRESSURE TO RAISE THE LEVEL OF VET INCREASES

The post-WWII period of rebuilding, with its war reparations, had forced Finland to develop its domestic industry and incorporate the planning of VET into comprehensive education policy. VET had expanded considerably in the 1960s due to, among other things, the fact that the 1958 Act on Vocational Colleges had imposed on municipalities the obligation to organise VET. In 1966, the Vocational Training Board (AKH) was established alongside the existing Finnish National Board of General Education. Later, in 1991, the Finnish National Board of General Education and the Vocational Training Board were combined into the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH).

In the 1970s, the development of VET was discussed in more than ten different committees. In 1974, after a basic education reform, the ideological and structural solutions for the reform of upper secondary education were outlined in a government resolution. According to this

resolution, VET had to be developed into a path to higher education that was competitive with upper secondary education in such a way that the requirements set by working life and changes to these requirements were given priority.

One of the key goals of the reform of upper secondary education was to ensure education for the entire age group. In principle, the intake of VET students was already sufficient. However, the situation was made more complicated by the fact that there were enough upper secondary school graduates not only for academic studies but also for colleges and vocational schools. The introduction of a general period common to all students was strongly criticised. The general period had provided young people with unrealistic hopes for a wide range of opportunities for further studies, when, in practice, quotas for upper secondary school graduates had already ruined these opportunities in advance in many cases. A great number of students had dropped out of school, leaving a great number of student places open at upper secondary education institutions. Another thing that was considered to be a problem was that the general period emphasised general subjects. This forced young people who were interested in practical vocational skills to return to theoretical subjects after completing their basic education.

The legislation on VET remained disjointed until the late 1980s. This disjointedness was finally rectified in the new Act on Vocational Colleges that came into force in 1987. The

reform of universities of applied sciences that was implemented in the 1990s was anticipated by the changing of the upper level of study in the fields of forestry, technology and seafaring into the higher vocational level under the new Act.

The following significant changes to the legislation on VET were made in 1991, when some of the decision-making power was transferred to vocational colleges. In spring 1994, the Finnish Government decided to reform vocational upper secondary education and training. Instead of a one-year general period followed by specialisation leading to an upper secondary or college qualification, all vocational school students would complete a two or three-year vocational upper secondary qualification. Students were offered opportunities for further studies at colleges, universities of applied sciences or in other tertiary education. Thanks to the amendments to legislation, a vocational qualification that took at least three years to complete also opened an opportunity for students to continue on to university studies.

The legislative reform was followed by a period of strong development of VET. The key goal was to improve the quality and effectiveness of education as well as its correspondence to working life. The structure of vocational upper secondary qualifications was reformed gradually by 2001. Learning at work was established as part of VET, and competence-based qualifications that required students to demonstrate their vocational skills and

achievement of the vocational study programme's goals were introduced. Internationalisation was supported by developing teaching and curricula, and the opportunities provided by vocational qualifications for further studies were strengthened. One of the goals was to ensure that education providers were sufficiently large and diverse or otherwise strong and had the capability to develop working life and meet its competence needs.

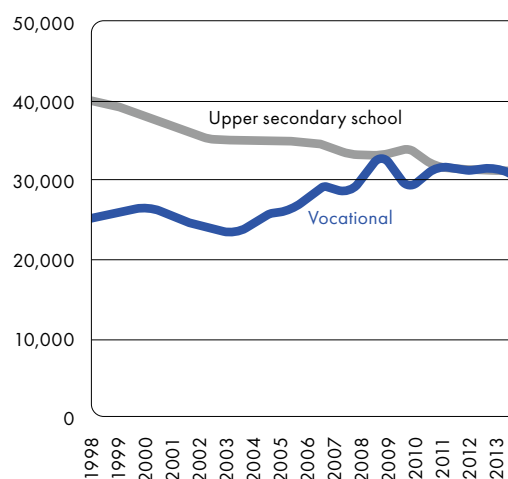
Another goal was to increase professional competence and appreciation of vocational skills and improve the attractiveness of VET. Improving the attractiveness of VET was considered to be a prerequisite in order for Finland to continue to have sufficient skilled labour in the future.

ATTRACTIVENESS OF VET INCREASES

From the start of the 2000s, the image of vocational skills and the attractiveness of VET began to be affected by the opening of educational paths, the measures taken to develop VET, high employment rates and awareness created with the help of vocational skills competitions. In addition to the aforementioned factors, the single most significant explaining factor for this is most likely the holding of the WorldSkills Competition in Finland in 2005. The preparations for the event involved large-scale development projects, and almost the entire VET sector participated in the preparations. The event's influence also elevated the national Taitaja Competition to a whole new level.

In 2008, the number of people who applied to VET as their first choice exceeded the number of applicants to upper secondary schools for the first time. In spring 2008, 33,370 young people who had completed their basic education applied

Applicants who applied to VET and upper secondary education through the joint application procedure immediately after comprehensive school 1998–2013



to vocational colleges, while 33,343 applied to upper secondary schools. This difference in numbers is even more pronounced when all the applicants who applied to educational institutions in the spring's joint application procedure are included. A total of 56,965 young people applied to VET, whereas the corresponding number of applicants to upper secondary schools was 34,185. The maximum student intake was 46,000 in VET and 41,000 in upper secondary education.

Helsingin Sanomat wrote about the outcome of the joint application procedure in its editorial

on 5 May 2008 with the heading “Vocational colleges attract more young people than upper secondary schools”:

The increase in the popularity of vocational education and training is the result of persistent work. VET no longer fixes a young person’s future to a certain level for the rest of their life; instead, vocational college graduates and upper secondary school graduates have equal opportunities to continue their studies all the way to a doctorate, for example. In fact, during their tertiary studies, vocational college graduates have the advantage of having already learned one profession that can help them find employment.

Since 2008, the popularity of VET has remained at a consistently high level.

According to Director **Mika Tammilehto**, head of the Ministry of Education’s Vocational Education and Training Unit, VET’s popularity continues to increase year after year. What has been particularly gratifying about this trend is that the applicants include more young people who previously did not apply to any educational institution.

According to Tammilehto’s view, this increase in the popularity of VET is most strongly attributed to the needs of working life. In the future, the number of exiting workers will be so high that we can expect a labour shortage.



*Director Mika Tammilehto,
Vocational Education and Training Unit,
Ministry of Education and Culture*

Practical professionals are needed, and there is plenty of work available for vocational college graduates.

The increase in popularity has also been contributed to by the strong trends in VET in the last ten years. VET has become a clearer and more practical path to a profession. General eligibility for postgraduate studies is also of utmost importance according to Tammilehto.

He also highlights the significance of the Taitaja Competition and the WorldSkills Competition in the fact that VET attracts an increasing number of young people. According to Tammilehto, competition activities have been a great way to give visibility to vocational skills and manual skills.

Development efforts through working groups and campaigns since the 1980s

PROPOSALS BY THE UNION OF GENERAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

In March 1984, the Board of the Union of General Vocational Schools (YAL) decided to set up a working group to identify ways to increase the appreciation of vocational schools and the vocational skills they provide, as well as to prepare the necessary proposals for practical measures. The working group finished its work in November the same year.

In addition to representatives of vocational colleges and the YAL office, the working group's members included representatives of the Vocational Training Board (AKH), the Confederation of Finnish Employers (STK), the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), the Union of Vocational College Teachers (AOL) and the Association of Vocational College Engineers (AOI).

According to **Juha Arhinmäki**, who served as the working group's secretary, there was a social demand for this type of working group at the time. Even though vocational schools had expanded nationally and formed a significant

part of the education system, VET was poorly known and underappreciated. Finnish society had traditionally valued book knowledge. Industrial professions were seen as dirty, heavy and taxing.

In a memo prepared by the working group, it was emphasised that the responsibility of the school system, various parties in working life and the whole society for sharing information on working life with young people would increase. It was important that the cooperation of vocational schools with businesses and labour market organisations be developed.

The working group urged those who worked with VET to make it their business to raise the self-esteem of vocational schools. The working group noted that vocational schools lacked ceremonious events and traditions that abounded in general education and at universities. In the working group's opinion, there were too few encouraging symbols, and not all places had found ways to demonstrate the skills of vocational school students to the public.

It is worth noting that the working group proposed the launch of regional and national

PANE PALLO PYÖRIMÄÄN



vocational skills competitions. In the working group's opinion, the responsibility for leading these competitions belonged to teacher organisations. The working group also recommended more efficient use of national and regional information campaigns.

GET THE BALL ROLLING CAMPAIGN

Senior Inspector for AKH **Juhani Räsänen** had presented an idea about a programme on VET to MTV's Programme Director **Tauno Äijälä** for the first time in the 1970s. It was not until the mid-1980s that Äijälä became interested in the proposal, which was definitely partly influenced by the extensive public social debate on the future of VET taking place at that time.

It was decided that the programme would be built around a knowhow competition intended for vocational college students and that it would be named *Get the Ball Rolling*. Vocational School Secretary of YAL **Juha Arhinmäki** was chosen as the campaign's project secretary, while Department Manager of AKH **Juhani Honka** was chosen as the steering group's chairman. The knowledge of sector-specific experts of the Vocational Training Board were utilised in the planning and implementation of the campaign.

The Get the Ball Rolling campaign involved a total of 330 vocational colleges, i.e. two thirds of all vocational colleges. The framework of the campaign's regional activities was formed by provincial events held at provincial capitals and vocational colleges. In November

1985, these regional events were attended by thousands of people, and they garnered a great deal of publicity in the media. In many places, vocational colleges worked together to organise various events and theme weeks. The campaign's progress was followed in different programmes broadcasted on MTV.

The competition itself comprised many stages. In the preliminary rounds held in autumn 1985, each participating class prepared an exhibition plan for presenting their own field of study to other young people. The best plan from each vocational college was sent to the provincial campaign committee appointed by the provincial government's school division. The committee assessed the submitted works and chose the best plan from each group of vocational colleges.

The best plans were then submitted to the national assessment committee, which was tasked with choosing the best plan from each group of vocational colleges. The winning classes chose three-person teams from among them to compete in a final competition broadcasted on MTV. In the end, 12 teams representing different fields of study were chosen for the final. During spring 1986, MTV broadcasted a total of ten one-hour-long episodes in which each participating class performed tasks related to their own trade. The competition included both a knowledge and a skills portion.

The competition was won by Ilomantsi Agricultural College. The team representing Mikkeli Institute of Technology took second place and the team from Imatra Business College took third place. The winning class and its teacher were awarded with a study trip to Central Europe. The second prize was a similar trip in the Nordic countries, and the class that placed third went on a trip in Finland. The prizes were donated by the Central Union of Business Employers, the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and the Confederation of Finnish Employers.

The Get the Ball Rolling campaign created capabilities for the implementation of both extensive national projects and competition activities. The enthusiasm of vocational colleges and students towards competition activities built a strong faith in the functionality of this type of concept.

PRESENTING A COAT AS A NEW GRADUATION TRADITION

In spring 1985, Tikkurila Vocational School began a whole new tradition of presenting new graduates with coats. During their graduation ceremony, barbers would be presented with white work coats, while housebuilders would don a carpenter's blue work vest. Since there was not enough time to obtain profession-specific clothing for every graduate, some of them received a blue or white T- shirt.

The idea for the coat tradition came from **Taisto Hintsanen**, director of Tikkurila Vocational School's Building Department. He said that the idea came to him in spring 1985, inspired by public debate as well as goals – written about in various missives sent to vocational schools – that were related to the development of graduation traditions and improving the image of VET, among other things.

The aim was to develop the coat tradition into a ceremony similar to the “capping” of new upper secondary school graduates. Symbolic clothing could be worn as “an occupational symbol or on special occasions, such as May Day”. The coat ceremony garnered a great deal of attention from the media, and the event was also noted by television news.

Taisto Hintsanen founded a company called Takitus Oy, which, in 1988, manufactured a high-quality professional coat made of thin Italian wool in cooperation with professional designers.

However, these coat and capping ceremonies never properly took off. Education authorities also did not support these activities in a sufficiently clear and visible manner. CEO of Häme Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Higher Education Veijo Hintsanen wrote in Skills Finland's Newsletter (9/2008) that one of the apparent reasons for the lukewarm reception was “these activities being too exclusively associated with a single vocational college”. In Hintsanen's



opinion, the vitality of the idea was also weakened by the fact that the coat and capping traditions had so clearly been copied from the student cap and the traditions related to it.

Takitus Oy worked in close cooperation with the Vocational Education Support Association, as the company's operations were related to the association's fundraising. The association had been established by private individuals in March 1988. The minutes of the founding meeting state: "Supporting vocational education and training and maintaining and developing the

The students of the Vantaa Institute of Arts and Crafts designed a student beret that was sold from 1993 onwards.

appreciation of it requires the support of both private individuals and various organisations. It has been deemed necessary to establish an association as free of 'bureaucracy' as possible to implement various projects that support vocational education and training."

The association was chaired by Rector of Tikkurila Vocational School **Jorma Sirkesalo**. The early stages of the activities involved several

persons whose names later also came up in the start-up phase of the Taitaja Competition. The first Board included Juhani Honka (AKH), **Rauno Jarnila** (Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges SAOL, previously YAL), **Kari Purhonen** (STK) and **Terttu Vääntänen** (SAK). Director General of AKH **Jorma Pöyhönen** had been invited to become the association's honorary president. Veijo Hintsanen (AKH) also later served in the association's Board.

The Vocational Education Support Association distributed annual one-time grants "to a teacher or student who has upheld the appreciation of vocational education and training in an outstanding way and promoted awareness of it". This was based on the idea of inspiring interest in vocational studies as well as promoting these studies in other ways. In fact, the association's Board continued to choose the Trainer of the Year and the Student of the Year annually until the end of the 1990s.

In 1989, the Vocational Education Support Association published a video on the coat tradition that was funded by industry and distributed to vocational colleges free of charge. Over the years, the association also held some training events and published the *Koulutus uutiset* (lit. Education news) magazine. At the turn of the millennium, the association's activities ceased in practice, even though the association continues to exist in name today.

For the development of vocational skills competitions, it was important for the Vocational Education Support Association to once again bring together people who had long been looking for the right way and format to increase the appreciation of VET. Veijo Hintsanen later summed up the matter: "The need to establish an organisation that unites the educational administration, vocational colleges and key NGOs came up both in conjunction with the organisation of competition activities and in the work of the Vocational Education Support Association."

Start of vocational skills competitions in Finland

Trade-specific competitions for the Finnish championship have been held in Finland since the early 20th century. Many trades also have decades-long traditions of international skills competitions.

FROM LOG DRIVER COMPETITIONS TO THE WORLD LOGGING CHAMPIONSHIP

Competition activities have long-standing traditions in the forestry sector. The work *Oksat pois – Moottorisahauskilpailujen historia* (Branches off – History of logging competitions), edited by **Raimo Keränen**, examines forestry competitions.

Log driving brought with it forms of competition that require skills, strength and daring. According to tradition, some type of log driver competition was organised in the Ounaskoski rapids in Rovaniemi in the early years of the 20th century. The first lumberjack ski competition was held in Lieksa in 1923, after which there were lumberjack competitions held around Finland. Among other sports, the participants competed in whitewater rafting, team rowing and poling.

In the tumult of World War II, Finland was plagued by an energy shortage, and logs in

particular were in short of supply. In 1942, Helsingin Sanomat decided to organise a national wood chopping championship. The government welcomed the competition, as it considered the competition to have a positive impact on the supply of timber. By decision of the Finnish Government, the Ministry of Transport and Public Works became responsible for organising the competition from 1944 onwards. The Finnish Wood Chopping Championship became a major media event – in 1951, the competition attracted as many as 5,000 spectators, and the radio broadcasting van of Yleisradio, Finland's national public broadcasting company, was present throughout the competition, with **Pekka Tiilikainen** as the commentator.

Towards the end of the 1950s, the chainsaw began to supersede manual tools in forestry. Consequently, the Finnish Wood Chopping Championship was replaced by the Finnish Logging Championship, which was held for the first time in Lohja in 1961. The new competition, which focused on the use of the chainsaw, was a “motorised continuation” to the Finnish Wood Chopping Championship, with its goal being to pile up as much wood as possible.



Logging competitions often comprised several tasks, such as precision felling, limbing, chain fitting, bucking by combined cuts and precision bucking. The photo shows competitors in the middle of limbing.

The spread of chainsaws also led to a need to train loggers. One-year-long basic training for loggers was launched in 1963. The learning outcomes of logger training were measured with various competitions from the start. Competition rules suitable for the training and tasks that measured the competitors' ability to use a chainsaw were developed in various working groups at the national level. The first unofficial inter-school competition was held at Evo Forestry School in 1967.

The first official World Logging Championship was held in Hungary in 1970 as a collaboration between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Finland participated in this championship for the first time in 1974. These activities became organised

in Finland in 1975, when the unofficial Organising Committee for the Finnish Logging Championship was established. It included representatives of all key parties: the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, the Vocational Training Board, Metsähallitus, the Union of Forestry Employers, the Finnish Rural Workers' Union and the Centre for Occupational Safety. Today, the world championship is organised by the International Association for Logging Championships (IALC). Since its first competition, Finland



Presentation of finished formal haircuts at the world championship in Amsterdam in 1962.

has been an active participant in international competition activities and has had the honour of hosting the World Logging Championship three times, in 1977, 1983 and 1995.

COMPETITION ACTIVITIES EMERGE IN MANY SECTORS IN THE 1950S

Competition activities have existed in the hair industry since the 1950s. The Finnish championship was at first held every other year, before it became an annual event in the mid-1960s. The competition is organised by the Association of Hair Entrepreneurs in Finland (formerly the Finnish Hairdressers' Union). The Association of Hair Entrepreneurs in Finland is also entitled to choose and send Finnish representatives to the

official World Hairdressing Championship as well as other competitions organised under the international Organization Mondiale Coiffure (OMC). Since 1997, the association has been in charge of choosing and training competitors for international competitions and organising their competition-related travel together with Helsinki Barbers' Club. In addition to world championship level competitions, Nordic championships and Europe Cup competitions have also been held in this sector.

The first Finnish Championship in Flower Arrangement was held in 1966. The Finnish championship is held annually by the Finnish

Florists' Association, the members of which send their representatives to the competition through district championships that they hold.

The hotel and restaurant industry also has decades-long traditions of competition activities. Representatives of the Finnish Chef Association participated in an international competition for the first time in Bern, Switzerland, in 1954.

Restaurant service and cooking competitions between hotel and restaurant schools have been held annually at different vocational colleges since the beginning of the 1980s, thanks to the backing of the Hotel and Restaurant Council. For their part, Nordic employer organisations have been organising Nordic student competitions since 1981. Finland was in charge of the competition arrangements for the first time in 1982. The travel and participation costs of Finnish competitors are paid out from a fund managed by the Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa. The Nordic competitions are open to two-person teams comprising a cook and a waiter from all Nordic countries. The participating teams are chosen through national competitions. Head waiters also have their own competition, which is organised by the CC Guild. The Butler of the Year competition has been held since the 1980s.

JOB SKILLS COMPETITIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Association of Industrial and Business Colleges (TELAO), a cooperation body of industrial vocational schools, was established



Kari Purhonen is a founding member of Skills Finland. He was a member of the association's Board from 1993 to 2004 and its vice president from 1993 to 1999. Purhonen was a representative, deputy director and director in charge of education policy at the Confederation of Finnish Employers and the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers for over 30 years. He was executive director of the Association of Industrial and Business Colleges (TELAO) from 1983 to 1990.

in 1930. It was tasked with promoting VET, and it sought results by organising job skills competitions, among other things, after World War II.

To the Finnish industry, particularly its metal industry, war reparations had constituted an enormous quantitative and qualitative obligation. Professionals with better skills were required in order for production to be expanded, which also set requirements for industrial schools: the level of education had to be raised. Job skills competitions were considered to be one method of improving the quality of education.

The Mechanical Engineering School of Lohjan Kalkkitechdas Oy held the first job skills competition for students who studied filing at mechanical engineering schools operated by the private industry in Kirkniemi on 27 November 1948. A total of 12 schools took part in the competition. Over the course of two periods held on a single day, the participants competed for the title of grandmaster and five money prizes. The tasks were both theoretical and practical.

After this, job skills competitions for industrial schools became a continuum, and they continued to be held for students of different trades until the late 1960s. In the end, their organisation was considered to be too laborious, and it did not seem to be creating a positive image of the industry as had been hoped.

Kari Purhonen began working as a representative of TELAO in 1983. He became interested in the old idea of job skills competitions and proposed to the Board of TELAO that the tradition be continued. The Board accepted his proposal. Lokomo Mechanical Engineering School, which operated in Tampere, held the first competition for plater-welders of vocational schools in spring 1985. The following year, KONE Vocational College held a competition for mechanics and machinists. The competition had 27 competitors from seven industrial colleges.

In spring 1988, knowing that Finland would be participating in the international Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in the United Kingdom in autumn the following year, the Board of TELAO

decided that the next job skills competition would be held with an eye towards the Youth Skill Olympics. This job skills competition, which took place between five vocational colleges, was held at the beginning of 1989 in two skills: Turning and Milling. The winners of the two skills participated in the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham as part of Team Finland, at TELAO's expense. Valmet's industrial college also paid for one competitor's entry into the competition.

Additionally, TELAO sent competitors to the Youth Skills Olympics held in Amsterdam in 1991 and Taiwan in 1993 at its own expense. The main responsibility for their training costs was borne by the backing companies, but the Federation of Finnish Metal and Engineering Industries also participated in the costs. The travel costs were paid by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

Everything came full circle for job skills competitions in summer 1992, when the educational organisation AEL, which had been an active organiser of competitions in the 1940s, received the honour of being the organiser, for the time being, of the final TELAO job skills competition. The competition was held in conjunction with AEL's 70th anniversary. The name of the competition had been changed from a job skills competition to a vocational skills competition according to the standard practice. After this, TELAO's competitions were no longer held separately, and, instead, the activities were integrated with Taitaja Competitions.

International vocational skills competitions are born after World War II

After World War II, Spain, like many other countries, experienced a dire shortage of skilled labour. To the understanding of Director General of Organización Juvenil Española (OJE) **José Antonio Elola Olaso**, it was necessary to convince young Spanish people, as well as their parents, teachers and future employers, of the importance of VET.

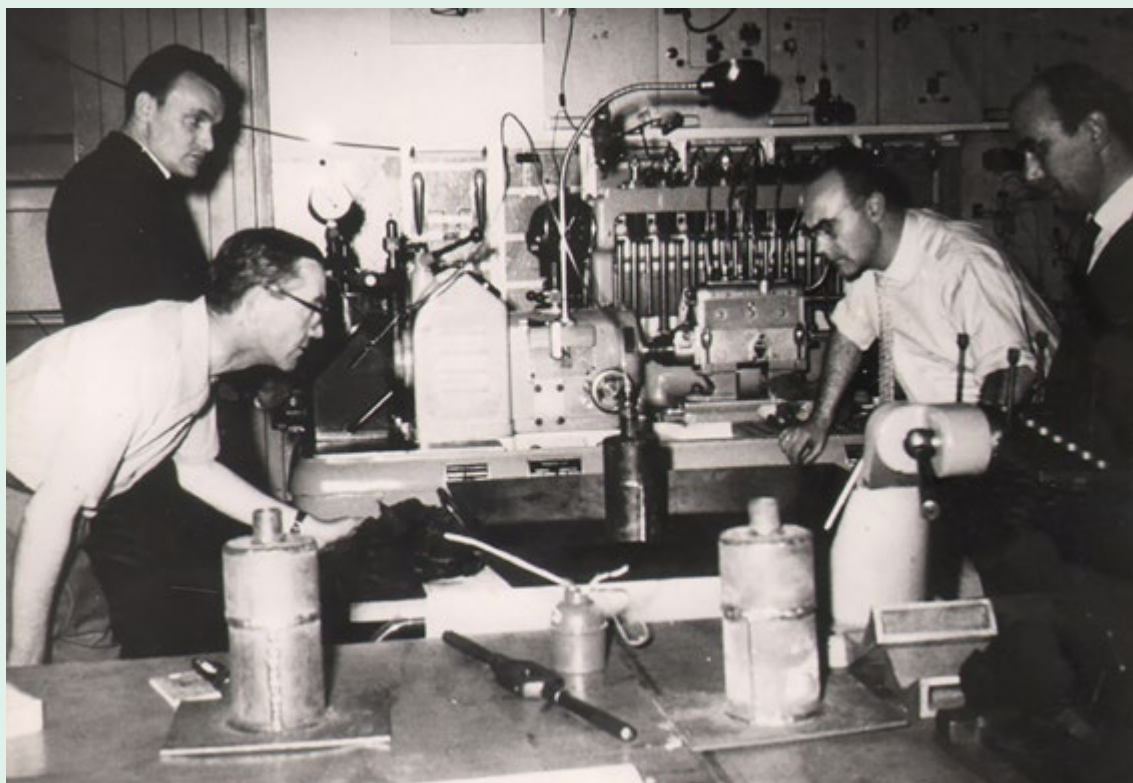
At Olaso's initiative, this idea was developed further in 1946 by a group led by **Francisco Albert-Vidal**. The project's technical advisor was **Diómedes Palencia Albert**, the director of the most notable vocational school in Spain. After considering the matter, the working group proposed a vocational skills competition intended for young people as a solution. According to their reasoning, a competition would help evoke a healthy competitive spirit in young people. Additionally, a competition event would allow the adults to discuss the competition's results and the spectators to see a wide variety of trades. The idea was highly popular within the government and among businesses and VET providers from the very start.

The first competition was held in Spain in 1947. The competition included around ten technical

skills and roughly 4,000 competitors. The competition was a success, but its planners and implementers were aiming even higher. They also wanted to compare vocational skills and competence at the international level.

Due to their common language, cultural and historical background, they initially made an offer of collaboration to countries in Latin America. However, these countries did not immediately become interested in the matter. Instead, Spain's neighbouring country of Portugal expressed its interest. As a result, an international vocational skills competition was held between Spain and Portugal in 1950. Observers had been invited to the competition from several countries. The competition held in 1953 included competitors not only from Spain and Portugal, but also from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Morocco and Switzerland. The first Organisation Committee was set up in 1954, with official and technical delegates representing the countries involved. International Vocational Training Competitions (IVTC) were thus off to a good start.

Until 1957, the competitions were held in Spain. The seventh competition was the first to take



place outside Spain. It was held in Brussels in Belgium in conjunction with the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. The competition was held annually until 1971, after which it became a biennial event.

From 1979 until 1997, the competition was called the Youth Skills Olympics. However, the competition's organiser, the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO), was forced to stop using the name "Olympics" when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) suddenly forbade its use during the processing of a collaboration initiative submitted by IVTO. The competition held in Montreal in 1999 was marketed under the name World Skills Competition. After the start of the 21st century, the organisation also first changed its name from IVTO to the WorldSkills Organisation and

soon adjusted it to WorldSkills International when both continent-specific and national member organisations began to use the name "WorldSkills" for their own organisations (such as WorldSkills Americas, WorldSkills Norway).

The first world championship, held in Spain in 1950, had two participating countries and 24 competitors. In Leipzig in 2013, there were 53 participating countries and 999 competitors.

Francisco Albert-Vidal, founder of IVTO, served as the organisation's secretary general from 1950 to 1983 and as its president from 1985 to 1992. Since 1993, the award granted to the competitor that achieves the overall highest score in the WorldSkills Competition has borne the name of the Albert Vidal Award. ■

START OF THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST TAITAJA COMPETITION

The waning of the attractiveness of VET was a cause for concern for many parties after the mid-1980s, and both official and unofficial discussions were held to rectify the issue. Dialogue between the school system and working life was already considered to be highly important at the time.

Juhani Honka, who was serving as a head of department at AKH at the time, speaks about unofficial morning coffee meetings that Honka attended together with a large number of VET influencers. These meetings were often held in the premises of the Institute of Leadership (JTO). They were chaired by **Matti Peltonen**, director of the Finnish Industrial Education Committee, while TELAO's representative, Kari Purhonen, acted as secretary.

The morning coffee meetings were attended by Director General of the Vocational Training Board (AKH) Jorma Pöyhönen, Head of the Ministry of Education's (OPM) School Department **Leevi Melametsä**, Head of OPM's Vocational Education and Training Unit **Heikki Mäenpää** and Deputy Director of STK **Heikki Hirvinen**. Director of the Union of General Vocational Schools (YAL) Rauno Jarnila was also present at some of the meetings. The meetings were also attended by expert guests, with Rector of Peipohja Vocational School **Väinö Kinnunen** being the most frequent guest.



Rauno Jarnila, long-time director of the City of Helsinki Education Department, is a founding member of Skills Finland and served on the Board of Skills Finland in 2003. Since the Youth Skills Olympics in Sydney in 1988, Jarnila has participated in most Youth Skills Olympics.

By the mid-1980s, the organisation of a vocational skills competition for vocational colleges had long been on YAL's agenda. The union wanted to model the competition after existing competitions. At the time, there were several competitions being held for vocational school students that were related to various themes, events and campaigns, such as a professional economics competition and the FYTIMA mathematics competition. However, these competitions had not garnered much publicity.

YAL began to plan a competition with the main goal of garnering publicity for the skills of vocational school students and arousing the students' interest in developing their own vocational skills. The competition had to differ enough from existing competitions and inspire

students. It was believed that the best way to succeed in this was by using test projects that comprised brainstorming, planning and implementation.

In the planning phase, the idea was to organise a competition that would be held annually and that could be incorporated into some other national competition. The aim was for the test projects to be implementable as collaboration projects by students. The plan was for the competition to culminate in an exhibition that presented the best works of the competition.

Rauno Jarnila led YAL in the mid-1980s and acted as director of the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges from 1986 to 1991. According to him, one of the most important reasons for the planning of the competition was to develop the assessment of learning outcomes, even though it had not been written down.

Jarnila emphasises that even today vocational colleges usually do not hold a final examination in the same sense as upper secondary schools hold a matriculation examination or universities require a master's thesis:

When we set out to implement the Taitaja Competition, we thought that it was important for vocational education and training to have a certain purpose and goals derived from this purpose. We did not have a reliable way to measure the vocational skills produced by different vocational colleges and compare the certificates granted by

them. Taitaja Competitions were a careful first step forwards in the pursuit of credibility for the matter in the eyes of both employers and employees. Above all, we wanted to convince young people of this opportunity.

At a meeting held on 10 December 1986, the Board of YAL decided to start preparing a vocational skills competition. An Advisory Committee was set up for this work. Juhani Honka was invited to chair it, while Rauno Jarnila was invited as the vice chairman and Juha Arhinmäki was invited as the secretary.

In addition to the aforementioned, the members of this Advisory Committee for a competition intended for vocational school students included Chairman **Mauno Anttila** (Association of Vocational College Engineers, AOI), Training Secretary **Tiina Hakala** (Union of Vocational School Students), Rector **Pauli Hyttinen** (Association of Vocational College Rectors), Senior Officer for Legal Affairs **Erkki Norbäck** (OPM), Deputy Director **Kari Purhonen** (STK), Education Officer **Reijo Päivärinta** (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK)) and teacher **Pirkko Viitanen** (AOL). Vocational Education Secretary **Saila Kora** (YAL) later acted as the secretary.

COMPETITIONS HELD IN SOUTHWEST FINLAND SHOW THE WAY FOR TAITAJA

Even before Taitaja Competitions, vocational schools had actively organised various competitions that required competitors to

possess vocational skills, talent and competence in a certain trade or task in order to succeed in the competition. One of the most significant competition events was the vocational skills competition held for the vocational schools of Southwest Finland in Turku in April 1987.

The planning process for the competition in Turku was launched in October 1986 by inviting the mechanical and metal engineering and HVAC technology teachers of the vocational schools in Southwest Finland to a planning meeting. Most of the teachers supported the idea of organising a competition. The hope was that the competition would help improve the appreciation of vocational schools.

The initiator of the competition, Rector of Forssa Vocational School **Raimo Alho**, considered it to be important that a suitable way be found for vocational school students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in order to give publicity to vocational school graduates. The test projects had to measure the achievement of the key goals of curricula and the vocational skills required in working life, in addition to motivating students and being reasonably implementable.

It was decided that the vocational skills competition would be organised for the departments of mechanical and metal engineering and HVAC technology, as these trades were the least appreciated. The competition was held separately for each class of students in their final year of study, without

having different schools or classes compete against each other. The responsibility for preparing test projects was divided amongst the schools.

Juho Kesseli, who was working as a representative of the Union of Finnish Metal Industry Employers in the Turku region at the time, says that the Metal Industry District Association of Southwest Finland participated in the event's organisation. Kesseli was left with the task of involving local industrial operators in the project, acquiring the prizes and handling communications. According to Kesseli, AKH also supported the competition financially.

The participants of the competition held at the vocational schools in Southwest Finland included a total of 328 students from 23 classes from the vocational schools of Forssa, Loimaa, Raisio, Salo, Turku and Vakka-Suomi.

This competition in Turku was also significant for the 1988 Taitaja Competition: the experiences of its organisers could be utilised in the planning of the first national vocational skills competition.

IN SEARCH OF A NAME FOR THE NATIONAL COMPETITION

It was eventually decided that the national competition, which later became known as the Taitaja Competition, would be organised for two industries: mechanical and metal engineering as

Nyky kyky -kilpa or Taitaja?

A great number of proposals for a name were collected during YAL's training days and the rector days held in Turku. All in all, almost 250

were submitted. Among others, the most inventive proposals included the following:



The word taitaja was used in many of the proposals, and it was chosen as the competition's official name. The arguments for this choice included the following: "According to Nykysuomen sanakirja (The Dictionary of Modern Finnish), taitaja comes from the verb taitaa: to be capable based on train-

ing, natural abilities or knowledge. To have a good command of crafts, one's profession, etc. In brief, a taitaja is an individual who has a good command of a special trade that benefits society." ■

well as the dressmaking industry. In a meeting held in April 1987, the Advisory Committee for the Taitaja Competition named the Finnish Vocational Advisory Council for the Metal Industry and the Board of Examiners for the Industry as planners of the competition system. Senior Inspector **Pekka Syrjälä** was asked to lead the Finnish Vocational Advisory Council for the Metal Industry, while Senior Inspector **Maija-Sisko Paananen** was asked to lead the Board of Examiners for the Dressmaking Industry. They both worked for AKH.

A proposal for a competition system for each industry was presented at a meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Taitaja Competition on 8 September 1987. It was decided that the competition would be held as a three-stage competition: school-specific, regional and national. The goal written down for the competition was “*an impressive national final culmination*”.

Chairman **Juhani Honka** introduced the Advisory Committee to the background and history of the Youth Skills Olympics that would be held in Australia in spring 1988 and provided information on the competition’s organiser, IVTO. In his report, he also considered Finland’s possible membership in the organisation.

The final item on the agenda in the September meeting was the name of the upcoming competition. It was agreed that participants of various events held in the following weeks would be urged to consider “apt and memorable suggestions for a name”.

CHALLENGE TO ALL VOCATIONAL COLLEGES IN THE MECHANICAL AND METAL ENGINEERING AND DRESSMAKING INDUSTRIES

On 15 October 1987, Director of YAL’s office Rauno Jarnila sent out a circular to all vocational colleges, interest groups and cooperation partners to inform them of the first national vocational skills competition organised in collaboration by YAL and AKH. The circular challenged all vocational colleges that offered teaching in mechanical and metal engineering or dressmaking to participate in the competition. Director General of AKH Jorma Pöyhönen had promised to act as the competition’s patron.

The aim of the competition was to inspire young people to become skilled professionals in their trade and increase their interest in developing their own vocational skills. Another aim was to draw positive publicity to students’ skills and thereby increase the appreciation of VET. All vocational colleges were urged to consider ways to make the competition event impressive and interesting to the media. It was no coincidence that Mechanical and Metal Engineering and Dressmaking had been chosen as the competition skills, as they had both lost some of their appeal and attractiveness in the eyes of students, and the number of students studying them had been dropping year by year.

YAL’s circular provided instructions for the implementation of the three-stage competition in spring 1988. The vocational college specific



TAIDOLLA TYÖELÄMÄÄN

VALTAKUNNALLINEN
**AMMATTITAITO-
KILPAILU**

AMMATTIOPILOITOSTEN OPISKELJOILLE

**TAITAJA 88 -KILPAILUN
SUURTAPAHTUMA
20.1. HÄMEENLINNASSA**

KILPAILUSARJAT:

- KONE- JA METALLITEKNIikka
- VAATETUSALA

JÄRJESTÄJÄT:

-  SUOMEN AMMATILLISTEN OPPILAITOSTEN LIITTO RY
-  AMMATTIKASVATUSHALLITUS

Yhteystiedot: SAOL:n toimisto, p. (09) 771 2272

KILPAILUAJAKATAULU:

TAMMI-HELMIKUUNSSA KILPAILUT OPPILAITOKSISSA



competitions were to be held in January. The competition did not have a set form, and the rector of each vocational college was responsible for organising it. For the regional competitions, the vocational colleges had been divided into 16 regional groups. One of the rectors in each region had been appointed as the regional manager who took care of the competition's arrangements together with the other rectors of the vocational colleges in their region. It was requested that the vocational colleges collaborate with the school departments of provincial governments in the preparation and implementation of the regional competitions.

It was decided that the final stage of the competition, the national finals, would take place in Hämeenlinna from 19 to 20 April

1988. A working group was set up to plan and prepare this major event. Its members were representatives of YAL, AKH, the University of Tampere, Hämeenlinna Teacher Training College of Vocational Schools and vocational colleges. The plan was to turn both the competition and the large-scale event into an annual tradition.

The circular also provided information on the international Youth Skills Olympics and mentioned that AKH was in the process of applying for membership of IVTO, which managed the Olympics. The circular stated that the goal was for Team Finland to make its debut in the Youth Skills Olympics that would be held in the United Kingdom in 1989.

Finland joins the International Vocational Training Organisation

While the first Taitaja Competition was being prepared, the possibility of Finland participating in international vocational skills competitions was simultaneously being looked into. Director General of the Vocational Training Board (AKH) Jorma Pöyhönen played a key role in these efforts as well as in the launch of vocational skills competitions in Finland.

Pöyhönen was involved in most of the development projects related to competition activities that the Central Administrative Board launched or in which it participated as a cooperation partner. Pöyhönen's colleagues describe him as being an internationally oriented, innovative, proactive and energetic person.

AKH had already launched international cooperation in the 1980s. It engaged in cooperation with countries such as the Nordic countries, the German Democratic Republic, the United Kingdom, Austria, the Soviet Union, Poland, France and the Federal Republic of Germany under official cultural exchange agreements.



Jorma Pöyhönen, who served as director general of the Vocational Training Board from 1980 to 1991, played a key role when Finland joined IVTO (later WSI) in Sydney in 1988.

RIO DE JANEIRO WORLD CONGRESS

Finland sought opportunities to expand its international connections. For this reason, upon receiving an invitation to the First World Congress of Vocational Training, which would be held in Brazil in September 1986, Director General Pöyhönen did not hesitate to participate, even though he was unfamiliar with the organisations behind the event. As AKH had a limited amount of resources for international activity available to it at the time,

it decided to send its director general to the congress alone.

The congress had two organisers: The International Organisation for the Promotion of Vocational Training and the International Youth Skill Olympics (IVTO) and Servico Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (SENAI). IVTO had been founded to coordinate international cooperation in VET and the global vocational skills competition for young people, i.e. the Youth Skills Olympics. For its part, SENAI was the organisation in charge of industrial VET in Brazil. The key themes of the congress included VET systems, the future of VET and teacher training.

The trip proved to be worth it. According to Juhani Honka, Pöyhönen came to his room upon his return to Finland, “with his cheeks aglow and his briefcase full of brochures”, fully convinced that Finland had to join IVTO and become active in vocational skills competitions.

At the congress in Rio de Janeiro, Pöyhönen had made the acquaintance of the Swiss secretary general of IVTO, Daniel Sommer, who was a key figure in competition activities and “has an excellent handle of both events and finances”.

Sommer was active in his efforts to include Finland among the competing countries. A few weeks after the end of the congress, he sent an invitation to the next General Assembly of IVTO, where Finland could be accepted as a new member.

In Brazil without a place to sleep

Asta Sarjala was a subordinate of Jorma Pöyhönen in AKH in the 1980s. She recalls that communicating with someone on the other side of the planet was not simple. However, they were finally able to make contact with the Embassy of Finland in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The news of the director general’s arrival in the city was successfully communicated, but the request to have a hotel room reserved got lost somewhere along the way.

“When Pöyhönen arrived in Rio, there was no reservation, and no hotel rooms were available at the time. He turned to the Embassy of Finland, which, of course, welcomed him. According to the story I heard, the director general spent that night on a mattress in the embassy’s entryway, surrounded by shoes,” Sarjala laughs.

“We’ll definitely make it to Liechtenstein’s level”

In addition to Secretary General of IVTO Daniel Sommer, Director General of AKH Jorma Pöyhönen also made the acquaintance of **Josef Nigsch**, the director general of VET for the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Pöyhönen had noted that the small Liechtenstein had achieved a higher combined score than the United States in Sydney in 1988. In an interview with Helsingin Sanomat on 21 April 1988, he stated that Finland had a realistic goal for the 1989 Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham: “We’ll definitely make it to Liechtenstein’s level!”

Josef Nigsch later became well-known not only as a great friend to Finland but also as a strict delegate who dished out sharp comments. He demonstrated both of these traits in a funny way years later at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

The general practice is that the first few meetings of the Technical Committee that follow the start of the competition feature heated discussion about the competitors’ accommodation, meals, transport and other practical arrangements. Naturally, each country’s delegate wants to ensure the best possible conditions for their own competitors and comes to these meetings with information about grievances that they have heard from their team leader. This also happened in Helsinki. The competition’s secretary general, **Eija Alhojärvi**, who fielded questions at the meeting, describes the situation as follows:

We received numerous questions, demands and suggestions for rectification. The feedback was largely constructive and required the competition organisation to take action. At some point, however, it seemed like the situation was getting out of hand. One delegate complained that too much rice was served at dinner, while another complained that there was not enough rice. When no agreement was reached, the meeting’s vice chairman, Veijo Hintsanen, proposed that the actual meeting be closed and all the delegates who still had complaints come and talk to us in person.

Veijo and I sat behind our table and, within moments, a long line had formed in front of us. To my horror, I noticed that Josef Nigsch was standing at the very end of the line, looking sullen. The line progressed and Veijo and I managed to resolve the problems. The last person to step in front of us was Josef. I sighed and dreaded what was to come. Josef stepped in front of us, smiled widely and said: “I just wanted to come and tell you that I have no complaints.” Veijo and I looked at each other and accepted the beautiful crystal decorations from Liechtenstein that Josef gifted to us.

The competition in Helsinki was the last one in the career of Josef Nigsch, friend of Finland, who retired in autumn 2005. ■



An international organisation takes responsibility for organising competitions

As early as 1954, it was considered to be necessary to establish an organisation to be in charge of organising international vocational skills competitions. The organisation was named the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO), today known as WorldSkills International (WSI). The organisation's registered office is in the Netherlands, but the staff works remotely in several countries.

The organisation operates globally and is politically and religiously independent. The purpose of its activities is to promote awareness of the importance of excellence in skills to economic well-being and success with the help of global cooperation. The most visible part of the organisation's activities is the biennial WorldSkills Competition (WSC) held for young people.

Finland joined IVTO in 1988 and participated in the competition for the first time in Birmingham in 1989. Finland was represented in the organisation by the Vocational Training Board until the start of the 1990s and by the Finnish National Agency

for Education after the Board was abolished. In 1993, this responsibility was transferred to the newly established Suomen ammattitaito – Skill Finland ry (now Skills Finland).

Finland also soon pulled Norway (1990) and Sweden (1994) into the organisation with it. Denmark had participated in two competitions at the beginning of the 1960s, but had then withdrawn from competition activities. Denmark became involved in the activities again in 1998.

The name WorldSkills was introduced at the General Assembly held in 2000, when, in addition to the competition, it also became the new name of the entire organisation (WorldSkills Organisation, WSO). However, the name IVTO still remained the officially registered name, which was why both names were often used side by side. At the General Assembly in Melbourne in 2006, the name IVTO was retired for good, and the organisation came to be solely referred to as WorldSkills International (WSI). ■



THE DECISION TO APPLY FOR MEMBERSHIP MATURES SLOWLY

After returning to Finland from Brazil, Jorma Pöyhönen started to make preparations. In January 1987, he submitted an initiative to OPM, proposing that the ministry entitle AKH to apply for membership of IVTO, which was introduced in more detail in the memo, and participate in the competition that would be arranged in Australia in 1988.

Surprisingly, the project failed to progress according to the schedule planned by Pöyhönen. It was not until September 1987 that OPM informed AKH that, in the ministry's view, there was no barrier to Finland joining the organisation and participating in its activities.

Finns in Sydney: (from the left) Jorma Pöyhönen, Teuvo Närvänen, Rauno Jarnila, Pekka Aalto, Pekka Ruohotie, Pirkko Viitanen and Maija-Sisko Paananen. Pauli Hyttinen is missing from the photo.

However, the ministry wanted more detailed information on the financial obligations that joining would bring. The missive stated that the ministry was considering requesting a statement from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. However, this plan was abandoned when Pöyhönen submitted a report in October on the organisation's background and the financial obligations that joining it would cause.

The delay in OPM's decision-making process began to agitate the parties that were in the process of preparing to launch competition activities in Finland around the same time.

Juhani Honka says that the main factors contributing to the ministry's cautiousness may have been ideological reasons related to education policy. "Back then, people would often ask whether competition would promote the development of vocational skills and whether competition should be a part of education in the first place. Looking back on the sessions of the AKH college and the discussions we had there, most of the members of the college considered everything related to having students compete against each other as a negative thing."

Associating competition with VET had also raised misgivings during the planning of the vocational skills competition for vocational schools in Southwest Finland in autumn 1986. According to Ossi Talvi, a teacher at Forssa Vocational School, the drawbacks of competition were discussed at length, but "the use of the term competition seemed to be important in order to gain publicity".

Jukka Sarjala served as the director general of the Finnish National Agency for Education from 1995 to 2002. In the 1980s, he worked at OPM as the assistant head of department in charge of general education. According to Sarjala, competition activities were regarded with prejudice in both VET and basic education at the time. "The only competition that was considered to be acceptable back then was competition with oneself."

Also worth noting is the highly critical attitude of Swedish government agencies towards vocational skills competitions at the time. According to Veijo Hintsanen, competing in vocational skills was completely against the general political thinking in Sweden in that period.

Sweden did not join IVTO until 1994. Kari Purhonen observed the efforts of the Swedish Employers Association to persuade the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). "In Finland, SAK understood the significance of competition activities and was in favour of them from the very start, whereas in Sweden LO was stubbornly opposed to the idea. Our Swedish member organisation worked hard, lobbied and took members of LO to spectate international competitions. These efforts finally yielded results. The Swedes also looked to Finland as an example," Purhonen says.

Together with Jorma Pöyhönen, Asta Sarjala prepared all the missives and memos sent to the Ministry of Education on the subject. According to her, competition was certainly often considered to be unsuitable for the Finnish education system, but it was equally as apparent that – the same thing is also expressed with various emphases in the opinions of several other contemporaries – the non-participation of Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union in particular in the activities of IVTO curbed the enthusiasm of civil servants to commit to an international organisation with a background that was not so well-known.

International Vocational Training Organisation



IVTO

CERTIFICATE

The General Assembly of the
International Vocational Training Organisation
has accepted as a Member into its organisation the

«**National Board of Education
Finland**»

under the denomination and code

Finland (FIN)

Sydney, 18 February 1988

President:


Cornelis Hubertus Beuk

Secretary General:


Daniel Sommer



AGREEMENT ON IVTO MEMBERSHIP IS SIGNED IN SYDNEY

Finland's membership in IVTO was preceded by a visit by a Finnish delegation to the Youth Skills Olympics in Sydney in February 1988. A membership application was submitted and an agreement was signed during this trip. From Sydney, the delegation also sought information and experiences for the organisation of the upcoming Taitaja Competition.

The delegation was led by Director General of AKH Jorma Pöyhönen. In addition to him, the delegation included Professor Pekka Ruohotie from the University of Tampere, Director

The negotiation on Finland joining IVTO was held in Sydney in February 1988. Pictured in the photo is IVTO's President Francisco Albert-Vidal on the right, with Chair of the Technical Committee Zae-Zung Kim and Secretary General Daniel Sommer behind him. The Finnish representatives at the negotiations were (from the left) Director of SAOL Rauno Jarnila, Rector Pekka Aalto, Rector Teuvo Närvänen, Director General of AKH Jorma Pöyhönen, Senior Inspector Maija-Sisko Paananen and Finland's Commercial Consul William Leikola (in the back).

Rauno Jarnila from the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges (SAOL), Rector Teuvo Närvänen from Valmet's industrial college in Jyväskylä, Rector Pauli Hyttinen from a rectors' association and Rector Pekka Aalto from Hämeenlinna Vocational College. Pekka Aalto's participation in the group was primarily because Hämeenlinna's vocational colleges had been granted the right to host the first

Taitaja Competition in April 1988. “For me, the competition was a study trip in preparation for the responsibility for organising a national competition,” Aalto says.

Besides the male-dominated official delegation, the trip’s other participants included Senior Inspector Maija-Sisko Paananen and dressmaking teacher Pirkko Viitanen (Finnish Association of Vocational Teachers), both of whom were members of the Advisory Committee for the Taitaja Competition established by the Union of General Vocational Schools. In her own words, Paananen forced her way to the trip to Sydney. She applied to AKH for a travel allowance, but failed to get one. “I took out a loan with the bank because I felt that the matter was that important. I’d planned to take one week of the two-week trip as a holiday,” Paananen says.

The Youth Skills Olympics in Sydney were held in conjunction with the Second World Congress of Vocational Training. The competition itself was opened with pomp and circumstance by the Australian prime minister. The competition was attended by 350 competitors from 19 countries who competed in a total of 37 skills. The most successful countries were Korea and Taiwan. The Youth Skills Olympics were a dream come true for **Tjerk (Jack) Düsseldorf**, who was Australia’s official delegate at the time and later served as the organisation’s president. “When Bryan (**Bryan Jones**, technical delegate for Australia) and I saw this event for the first time in the USA in September 1981, we were

just as enthralled then as all the people who have visited the competition venue over the last five days are now. I remember how, during the competition in the USA, we went out for coffee and agreed between us that we would keep working together until we were able to bring the competition to Australia,” Düsseldorf says in the Youth Skill Olympics News publication in February 1988.

Maija-Sisko Paananen later assessed the competition’s level in her article in the Taitaja 88 newsletter as follows: “What would have been the chances of Finns to succeed in this competition? To my understanding, young Finnish experts in dressmaking who have good nerves, are used to independent thinking and decision-making and who have completed a three-year vocational basic qualification, embraced what they have learned and gained work experience would have placed among the top three.”

The negotiation regarding Finland’s membership was attended by Secretary General **Daniel Sommer**, Chair of the Technical Committee **Zae-Zung Kim** and President Francisco Albert-Vidal as representatives of IVTO. At the same table also sat Commercial Consul of Finland **William Leikola**, who assisted with the practical arrangements. The certificate of membership in IVTO was signed on 18 February 1988. The signatories were Secretary General Daniel Sommer and Vice President **Cornelis Hubertus Beuk**, who served as IVTO’s president from 1992 to 1999.

Unexpected travel expenses for Valmet

Valmet Oy incurred unexpected additional expenses during the competition trip. The Youth Skills Olympics were being held at the same time as the Winter Olympics in Calgary. Rector Teuvo Närvänen, who was from Jyväskylä, boasted at the start of the trip that if **Matti Nykänen**, who was from the same town, won the gold medal in ski jumping, Närvänen would treat the whole delegation to dinner. "Nykänen won three Olympic golds in the same competition, so we ate three amazing dinners at Valmet's expense," Rector Pekka Aalto recalls.

Lost membership application

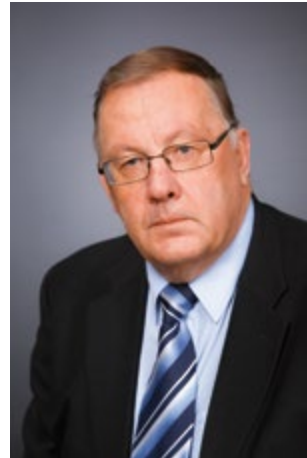
When the Finnish delegation was supposed to ceremoniously present its membership application to representatives of IVTO, the delegation noticed that they had not brought it with them. But there was no need to worry: Maija-Sisko Paananen had a copy of the application packed in her luggage. Paananen ran to get the piece of paper from her hotel, and this allowed the formalities to be taken care of in the appropriate manner.

Taitaja 88 is held as a large-scale event in Hämeenlinna

In the increasingly fierce international competition of today, skilled professionals can no longer be produced without up-to-date and competitive VET. Professionals require not only sharper vocational skills but also the ability and desire to adapt to changes and develop themselves, their cooperation skills, creativity and entrepreneurship. These are among the key words that VET is aimed at and that the professionals of today have already adopted!

With these words, Rector of Hämeenlinna Vocational College Pekka Aalto and Rector of the Teacher Training College's Vocational School Antti Punkari welcomed people to Finland's first Taitaja Competition, which was held in Hämeenlinna on 19 and 20 April 1988.

Hämeenlinna had been chosen as the location for the finals, as it was a significant city of vocational education as well as the location of the University of Tampere's professorship in vocational education and training. What was also significant was that the Hämeenlinna Region Federation of Municipalities for Vocational Education and Training, which maintained Hämeenlinna Vocational College, was a member of the Finnish Association of



Pekka Aalto was a member of the Organising Committees for the Taitaja Competitions in Hämeenlinna. Starting from 1988, he has attended nine WorldSkills events. Pekka Aalto was the director of the Joint Municipal Authority of Hämeenlinna from 2008 to 2013. He was the leading rector of Tavastia Education Consortium from 2002 to 2007.

Vocational Colleges (SAOL). The competition was organised by SAOL and the Vocational Training Board in collaboration with Hämeenlinna Teacher Training College of Vocational Schools and its vocational school. In the following years, Hämeenlinna hosted the Taitaja Competition a total of five times: in 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992 and once again in 1998, the ten-year anniversary year of the competition.

The idea behind the Taitaja Competition was that “the competition and the lectures related to it form a large-scale national event, a Taitaja Day, where experts in VET come together”.

Taitaja 88, the Finnish championship competition held at Hämeenlinna Vocational College and the Teacher Training College’s Vocational School, was ultimately attended by 16 experts in Mechanical and Metal Engineering and 16 experts in Dressmaking. The competition in Mechanical and Metal Engineering took place on a single day, while the Dressmaking competition took place over two days. For students, the path to the finals was long. First, they had to make it to the top ten in the competition held at their own vocational college in order to make it to the next stage, the regional competition. The winners of the regional competitions received the honour of participating in the finals. The organisers sought to prepare the test projects in such a way that they corresponded to professional work as defined in the curriculum.

The Taitaja Competition was held at the same time as a VET training event that gathered a total of almost 400 teachers, rectors, financial directors and other experts in the field together from all over the country. This training comprised lectures by experts and discussion sessions. The aim was to consider challenges in vocational education and the future of vocational skills competitions.

PROBLEMS IN VET WERE SOLVED AT HYDE PARK

The VET training event included a session called “*Hyde Park Corner*”, where both professionals and students had an opportunity to express their views through three-minute-long speeches. Among other things, the speakers proposed that bureaucracy be reduced and decision-making power be transferred to vocational colleges themselves. One teacher urged for models to be sought from the business community and called for vocational colleges to have a performance responsibility “*that extends all the way down to the level of individual teachers*”. The speakers also proposed various types of reforms to the VET system.

Many of the speeches given during the Hyde Park Corner included poignant criticism of the reform of upper secondary education and the rigid legislation related to it. Instead of “harmonisation and running a system”, teachers called for trade-specific development. According to one speech, vocational colleges should invest in teachers and their mental resources specifically.

The role of teachers was also put centre stage in a speech by a student: “The basic education of teachers must be developed and invested in. They should familiarise themselves with working life – a week is not enough, they need a year. The level of teaching should also be controlled.” The speaker in question was a catering student specialising in management.

Many of the commenters praised the idea of organising the Taitaja Competition. It was believed that raising competitiveness would contribute to the development and appreciation of education. The speakers called for a continuation to the Taitaja Competition. They raised questions that competition organisers of the future would have to consider:

- What would the number of participating basic educational programmes be?
- Would all these basic educational programmes participate every year?
- How would the trial competitions be organised?
- Can the competition's trade-specific specialisations and requirement level be oriented towards the Youth Skills Olympics?
- Can a test project cover a further vocational qualification or a part of one?
- Will the prize system function as it does now?

DEMANDING TEST PROJECTS IN MECHANICAL AND METAL ENGINEERING

The participants in the competition in Mechanical and Metal Engineering were students who were studying to become mechanics, machinists or plater-welders. Hämeenlinna Vocational College

was in charge of the competition's arrangements, and Lecturer **Keijo Maaranen** served as the competition manager.

The working group that prepared the test projects deemed that a single competition day was not enough time to make a meaningful product. Because of this, the working group ultimately decided that the competition would comprise five separate and narrow sub-projects. There were a total of seven test projects offered, four of which were mandatory to everyone, and the competitors also had to choose one of the remaining three projects. The free-choice project was considered to be clearly the most demanding. In addition to practical work skills, most of the projects also involved parts that measured theoretical knowledge.

Mandatory projects included reading drawings, measurement technology, turning and installation. The free-choice test projects were welding and plating work, milling/CNC and pneumatics. For both mandatory and free-choice projects, competitors had an hour to complete each project.

The competition was won by Matti Mertanen, a student of the machinist programme for upper secondary school graduates at the Central Vocational School of North Karelia. He remembers his installation test project well. He worked on some type of prefabricated workpiece and was tasked with applying tolerances to the workpiece according to the

measurements, improving its surface quality and turning a groove. The measurement test project involved the use of multiple different measurement tools. The assessment focused on both the correct use of the tools and the precision of the measurement results. “As I’d graduated from upper secondary school, all the tasks related to mathematics, calculation and measurement were easy for me. But completing the machining project was demanding.”

Now, looking back on his competition performance after more than 20 years and comparing it to his own experiences of working life, it is difficult for Matti Mertanen to find much in common between these two experiences. “In the test project, you had to stay extremely sharp for the whole time. In working life, it’s simply not possible to stay sharp for eight hours straight. Working life involves more routine tasks and making large batches of the same piece,” Mertanen muses.

Despite winning the Taitaja Competition, Mertanen did not get to compete in the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989, as by then he would have been overage: the age limit was 22.

THE WINNER OF THE DRESSMAKING COMPETITION DARED TO STAND OUT

Machines and devices were borrowed for the Dressmaking competition from companies that supported the event. The materials required for the competition were also donated by



Riikka Suutari, who won the competition, noticed that her competition outfit was completely different from the outfits made by the others. Her design, “Pyöräillen diskoon” (“Cycling to the disco”), comprised a pleated skirt with a belt, sailor pants and an open-back blouse. The outfit was otherwise black, but the skirt was a light shade of orange.

companies in the industry. The competition manager for the Dressmaking competition was Department Director and Lecturer at Hämeenlinna Vocational College Kirsti Häkkinen.

As there were more candidates for the national finals of the Dressmaking competition than could be included, due to the restricted number of participants, the candidates were asked to provide a preliminary plan for the product they would be making in the competition.

The candidates were tasked with designing a casual outfit and specifying its purpose of use, functionality and the materials used. The plans for the model and its manufacture were submitted to the competition manager by the due date. The competition itself took place over two days.

In the test projects in Dressmaking, scores were assigned based on assessments of the working methods, quality, finishing touches, overall impression, cutting, fabric patterns and the model's design. The competitors personally ordered the amount of fabric, thread and other supplies they needed for their project. Another element that was assessed was how successful the competitors were in estimating the amount of material needed.

Two of the five members of the jury were working life representatives. In an interview given to the newspaper Hämeen Sanomat on 21 April 1988, member of the jury **Maija-Sisko Paananen** stated that all the competitors performed well technically. In its assessment, the jury also emphasised the significance of creativity and found something new and original in the best works.

Before the publication of the competition's results, the audience was treated to a fashion show in which the competitors wore the clothes they had made and presented their creations to the accompaniment of music. At this stage, none of them yet knew how they had placed in the competition.

The boldness and creativity demonstrated by Riikka Suutari in her work was rewarded, and she was chosen as the winner. The jury particularly praised her pattern making, design and the sophisticated work methods that were well-chosen for the material.

Vuokko Lindfors, who had taught Suutari at Kouvola Vocational College, praised her protégé's performance. In an interview with a newspaper, she stated that the aim of education in this field was for "graduates to be able to work for the industry as pattern makers in close collaboration with fashion designers. As part of their vocational skills, they should be able to catch up with the latest fashion trends as quickly as possible. The piece of clothing designed and implemented by Riikka shows that she is up to date in her own field."

Riikka Suutari did not wish to participate in the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989, which is why it was decided that the competitor who placed third, namely **Minna Karevuori** from Seinäjoki Vocational College, would be sent instead, as, at the time, she was considered to possess such strengths that would make her the most likely person to succeed.

THE FIRST TAITAJA COMPETITION WAS A SUCCESS

The vocational skills competition in Hämeenlinna was a major success. VET could also be congratulated for this success: After all,



College-specific competitions were held in January at almost all vocational colleges that had a programme in mechanical and metal engineering or the dressmaking industry. The photo was taken during the Mechanical and Metal Engineering finals.

the title of Taitaja (lit. expert) could also well be regarded as an acknowledgement of up-to-date VET provided at the vocational college of the winning student.

Due to the tight schedule, there had not been enough time to market the first Taitaja Competition particularly widely, but it was still received with enthusiasm at vocational colleges. Almost all vocational colleges that provided education in mechanical and metal engineering and dressmaking participated in the competition. The participants for the finals in Mechanical and

Metal Engineering were chosen from among roughly 3,000 vocational college students. As for the Dressmaking competition, more than 700 girls originally took part. Due to problems with space, the number of finalists in both skills ultimately had to be limited to the winners of the regional competitions.

Even though the competition in Hämeenlinna did not see an actual rush of spectators, the event was still attended by a considerable number of teachers from various vocational colleges and media representatives: the first

Taitaja Competition was widely publicised in newspapers and on radio and television.

Some sensational headlines were also written on the event. “The final competition in Hämeenlinna for Finland’s most skilled vocational school students was coloured by mild national euphoria: How do our highly appreciated upper secondary school students feel about that?” was the headline of the newspaper Turun Sanomat on 21 April 1988.

One of the people invited as a guest and speaker at the training event was **William W. Norris**, director of Skill United Kingdom (Skill-UK), a member organisation of the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO). Director General Jorma Pöyhönen had made his acquaintance during the congress in Rio de Janeiro. During their discussions in Rio de Janeiro, Norris and Pöyhönen had noted that the VET systems in their countries shared many similarities and had discussed ways for vocational skills competitions to be used to develop VET. In the report he prepared after his visit, Norris shared his assessment of the Taitaja Competition. He paid attention to the ambitious level of the Ladies’ Dressmaking skill as well as the good competitive spirit in the Mechanical and Metal Engineering skill.

In the speech he held at the seminar, Norris whole-heartedly welcomed Finland to the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989.

As Finland is the first Scandinavian country to participate in the Youth Skills Olympics, I am certain that the international organisation will give you a particularly warm welcome. Based on my observations, I am certain that you will prove yourselves to be appreciated forerunners whose goal is to encourage the young, vocationally trained population towards better and better performances.

How are the first Taitaja winners doing today?

SUUTARI WORKS AS A SEAMSTRESS

The first winner of the Dressmaking competition, **Riikka Suutari** from Anjalankoski, is still very proud of her Taitaja title. She has carefully saved even the smallest pieces of fabric and the draft pattern, competition instructions and a newspaper clipping of the memorable event that, for a moment, changed her life. The only thing she no longer has is the winning outfit, as it was collected by Kouvola Vocational College, which wanted to keep the masterpiece product produced by its own student.

Suutari was interviewed several times after her win, particularly by newspapers published in her town. The memory of being interviewed by **Timo T. A. Mikkonen** in the current affairs programme *Tänään, tässä ja nyt* on MTV3 still makes her squirm in embarrassment. *"I wore my competition outfit to the studio. I was so terribly nervous that I completely blew the interview."*

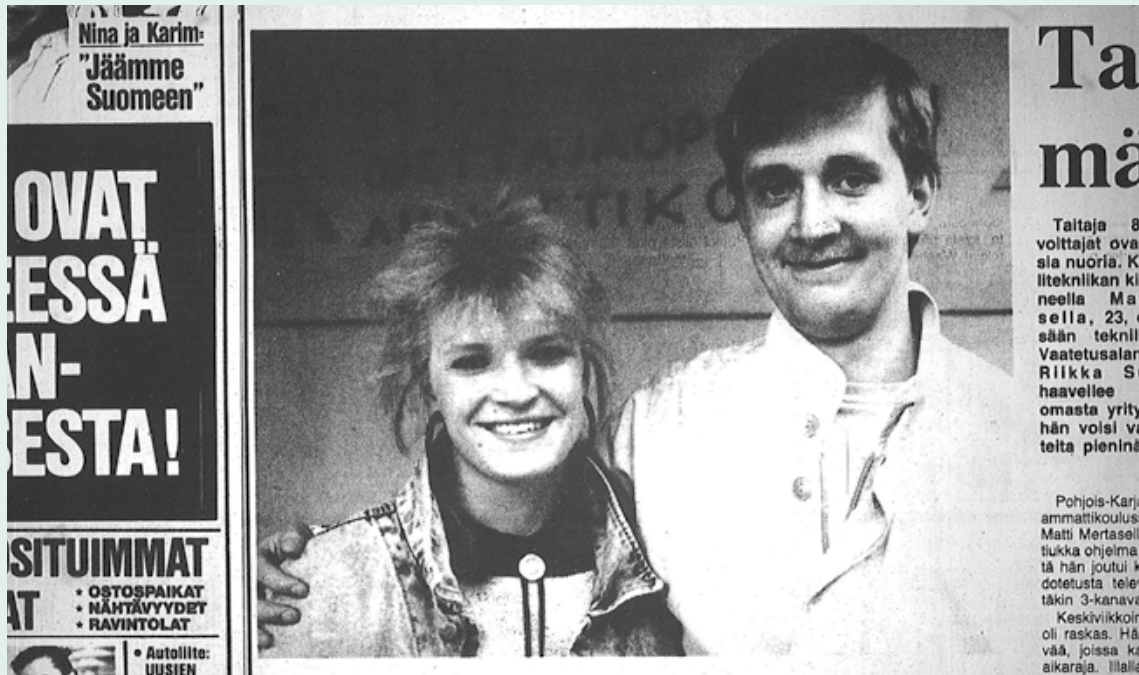
Both of Riikka Suutari's parents worked at a paper mill. Her mother sewed clothes for her two daughters. Suutari started making clothes for dolls at a young age. When she was a little older, she sewed clothes for herself because it was important to dress differently from everyone else.

Suutari was admitted to a two-year study programme in dressmaking at Kouvola Vocational College, where she specialised in pattern making and cutting. She graduated in spring 1988 – the same spring as when she participated in the Taitaja Competition.

Riikka Suutari still lives in her home region. She and her common-law husband have two daughters. She recalls how her children once found her competition folders and the newspaper articles and asked her in wonder whether their mother had once been a celebrity.

She once showed the certificate she had received from the Taitaja Competition at a job interview, which evoked admiration in the employer. It also certainly did not hurt that the head cutter of Artella, the company in question, had been a member of the jury in the regional competition held in Kuopio. Artella specialised in making work wear for office employees. Suutari worked there as a pattern cutter for three years until the company met with financial difficulties and was forced to dismiss employees.

Suutari was unable to find other work in her field in her home region, so she applied for work in trade. *"I never completely stopped sewing. In my*



The newspaper Hämeen Sanomat published a photo of the first winners of the Taitaja Competition on 21 April 1988. Pictured in the photo are Riikka Suutari and Matti Mertanen.

free time, I've worked as a seamstress and made anything and everything, starting from baby clothing. I've sewn wedding dresses and formal wear for many of my friends. I've always been making clothes for my children and godchildren."

MATTI MERTANEN BECAME A MECHANICAL/AUTOMATION ENGINEER

Matti Mertanen, the winner of the Taitaja Competition in Mechanical and Metal Engineering, was born in Polvijärvi, North Karelia, where his parents worked as farmers. In his youth, Mertanen had two dream jobs: ambulance driver and kindergarten teacher. "I was not admitted to training for orderlies because of my allergies. As for why I didn't get into training for kindergarten teachers, I think it was because of my singing skills," Mertanen says.

Mertanen was admitted to the machinist programme for upper secondary school graduates at the Central Vocational School of North Karelia and graduated from there in spring 1988, when he also participated in the Taitaja Competition. "I was even interviewed for television, some current affairs programme of Yleisradio. Of course I was proud of the recognition I received. In my small home village, I think I became a celebrity," Mertanen laughs.

The following autumn, he continued his studies at Wärtsilä Institute of Technology, which is now part of Karelia University of Applied Sciences. Mertanen graduated with a Qualification in Mechanical and Automation Engineering in

1992. "I didn't have the chance to utilise my Taitaja title in my career, as I changed trades. I only worked as a machinist at my summer jobs."

Over the years, Mertanen has worked as a design engineer under several industrial employers. During his career, he has designed paper roll packaging lines, automated assembly equipment and technology related to boiler plants, among other things. At the start of

the 2000s, he and his wife made a radical decision and he left his permanent job at Perlos Automation's factory in Kontionlahti – the couple moved to Namibia for four years.

After returning home from Namibia, Mertanen has been working as a design engineer at the regional office of the consulting firm Etteplan in Joensuu. ■

Trailblazers in competition activity in the dressmaking industry

Around the time when the first Taitaja Competition was held, **Annamaija Aro** was working as a dressmaking teacher at Seinäjoki Vocational College. At the start of the 1990s, she took over the position of Maija-Sisko Paananen, who had retired, as senior inspector, first with the Vocational Training Board and then with the Finnish National Agency for Education.

After the competition in Hämeenlinna, Aro trained the first Finnish competitor for the dressmaking competition at the Birmingham Youth Skills Olympics. She had been involved in vocational skills competitions for many years in various roles, first serving as a skill manager, “*even though that title didn’t officially exist yet at the time*”. She served as an expert for the first time at the Taiwan Youth Skills Olympics in 1993. Aro served as an expert at five international competitions, including the competition in Seoul in 2001, where she served as chief expert.

Aro was also a member of the working group that planned the dressmaking industry competition for the first Taitaja Competition. Maija-Sisko Paananen had visited the Youth Skills Olympics in Sydney as an observer and returned home from this trip with a great amount of materials, which the working group was able to examine during its meetings. “In Sydney, this skill was implemented in the same way as it had always been. The test projects were based on a pre-prepared pattern, and everyone carried out their work using the



Trailblazers in competition activity in the dressmaking industry. Pictured on the left is Senior Inspector of AKH and OPH, Senior Ministerial Adviser Annamaija Aro (in office from 1991 to 2009). On the right is her predecessor, Senior Inspector of AKH Maija-Sisko Paananen (in office from 1968 to 1990). Pictured in the portrait in the background is Paananen’s predecessor, Inspector of AKH Kerttu Toukolehto (in office from 1945 to 1968).

same fabric and the same pattern,” Aro says. “In our opinion, vocational skills were understood more broadly in our training. We wanted to build a competition that measured skills that were characteristic to the VET we provided. In other words, our notion of VET covered the entire design and manufacturing process, from pattern making to the finishing touches.” ■

Taitaja gradually takes shape between 1989 and 1992

HÄMEENLINNA ALSO HOSTS TAITAJA 1989

The Taitaja Competition in 1989 was organised in accordance with the previous year's concept, which had been found to be good. The competition was once again held in Hämeenlinna, with the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges (SAOL) and the Vocational Training Board (AKH) acting as organisers. Similarly to the previous year, the competition was held in mid-April. In addition to Mechanical and Metal Engineering and Dressmaking, the competition skills also included Construction Engineering.

Similarly to the previous year, the competition was held in conjunction with a Taitaja training day that was intended for experts. Its purpose was "to familiarise the participants with the requirements set for vocational skills and the competence of vocational college students through lectures and the vocational skills competition". One of the key questions addressed during the training day was whether VET ensures sufficient vocational skills.

Each competition category had its own working group handling the preparations.

The construction engineering group included representatives from AKH; the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry, which represented employers; the Finnish Construction Trade Union, which represented employees; and vocational colleges involved in this industry. The prizes presented at the final were once again donated by the Finnish Industrial Education Committee.



In the construction industry competition, the competitors built a wooden mould for a reinforced concrete beam on the first day, and reinforced the beam and its projection on the second day.

The organisation of the vocational college specific and regional trial competitions, which had been found to be onerous, had been lightened. Vocational colleges were given free rein to choose their own representatives

TAITAJA · CHAMPION



TAIDOLLA
TYÖELÄMÄÄN

VALTAKUNNALLINEN

AMMATTI- TAITO- KILPAILU

AMMATTIOPPILAITOSTEN
OPISKELIJOILLE

TAITAJA·89
HÄMEEN-
LINNASSA

KILPAILUSARJAT:
HÄMEENLINNAN
AMMATTIOPPILAITOK-
SESSA: VAATETUSALA

OPETTAJAOPISTON
AMMATTIKOULUSSA:
KONE- JA METALLITEKNIikka
RAKENNUSTEKNIikka

JÄRJESTÄJÄT:



SUOMEN AMMATILLISTEN
OPPILAITOSTEN LIITTO R.Y.
AMMATTIKASVATUSHALLITUS

KILPILUAIKATAULU:

YLEISÖ ON TERVETULLUT
SEURAAMAAN VALTAKUNNALLI-
LISTA LOPPUKILPAILUA

13.4 1989 KLO 10-18
14.4 1989 KLO 8-15

for the regional competitions. Some of them chose their representatives through a trial competition, while others settled for a decision that was based on an assessment by teachers.

The regional competitions were carried out in March according to a condensed regional division: the competitions were held in eight areas around the country. A total of 4,000 students from 104 vocational colleges participated in the different stages of the competition.

The final competition in construction engineering was held over two days. Both days started with a written vocational knowledge test. On the first day, the competitors built a wooden mould for a reinforced concrete beam. On the second day, they reinforced the beam and its projection.

A new procedure was tested in Mechanical and Metal Engineering. It involved the competitors completing a part of the task in advance. Each competitor designed their own device for the competition and made all the necessary parts for it in advance at their vocational college. In the actual competition, the competitors then assembled, adjusted and finished the device. The finished devices, as well as the stages of their manufacturing process and the methods used, were also presented to both the judges and the audience.

In the opinion of Keijo Maaranen, lecturer at Hämeenlinna Vocational College, the products



made by the students differed from each other too much with regard to their manufacturing method and level of difficulty for them to be comparable to each other. One competitor from Tornio brought in a hydraulic cylinder with a 3-tonne capacity. The boy in question had spent a week drawing up the plans and four days making the device. “Then there was someone who brought in some type of small gadget that they had worked on for a day or two. The jury had difficulties ranking the performances,” Maaranen states. “In the end, who could guarantee that the competitor in question had definitely made the device personally? This trial was left as a one-time thing.”

In Dressmaking, the competition arrangements were implemented as usual. In the final competition for 1989, the competitors were tasked with making a velvet jacket with a lining.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW SKILLS

Hämeenlinna was once again the host city for the third Taitaja Competition, which was held in 1990. A total of a hundred vocational colleges participated in this competition. Through seven regional competitions, a total of 28 were chosen for the national final. AKH and SAOL were in charge of the arrangements, as they had been in the previous years.

The number of competition skills increased to four. This time, the competition granted the title of Taitaja in Construction Engineering, Dressmaking, Automotive and Transport Engineering as well as Catering and Hotel Services. The last two industries were included for the first time. In contrast, Mechanical and Metal Engineering had been left out of the competition on this occasion.

A brand new workshop hall had been obtained for the use of the Taitaja Competition in the extension of Hämeenlinna Vocational College, which significantly alleviated the problems that the competition had had with space. The competition was also able to carry out the Catering and Restaurant Service skill in new and modern facilities.

The test projects in Automotive and Transport Engineering emphasised the areas of electronics, troubleshooting and customer service. The competitors were also forced to consider the interaction between the customer

and the mechanic when they had to try to deal with a customer who had come to complain about repairs.

The test project in Catering and Hotel Service entailed planning a starter, a main course and a salad for 50 customers of a staff restaurant. In the implementation phase, the table was set for six people. The assessment particularly paid attention to the practical implementation of plans. Competitors were also required to possess a sense of style with regard to the appearance of the meal and table setting.

As in previous years, a training day was implemented in conjunction with the final competition day. It was held in a brand new and modern auditorium. This time, the main topic of discussion at the Taitaja Competition was demands for VET to have its own final examinations. Several newspapers featured the subject in their headlines.

Training Representative of the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry **Juhani Vesama** stated in the newspaper *Aamulehti* on 27 April 1990 that the federation was pushing for a national final examination with might and main. The previous spring, the construction programme had been the most popular study programme among the young people who applied for VET: there were four times more applicants than there were student places. In Vesama's opinion, a clear goal would lend itself to motivate studies. In the interview, he states



1992

Valtakunnallinen
loppukilpailu
Hämeenlinnassa
7-8.5.1992
Aluekilpailut
2.4.1992

Kilpailualat:
rakennustekniikka, kone- ja metallitekniikka,
auto- ja kuljetustekniikka, puutekniikka,
puhtaanapito, somistus.

TAITAJA

champion



that a public demonstration of competence would raise the appreciation of all VET.

In a newspaper article published in Hämeen Sanomat on 28 April 1990, Veijo Hintsanen emphasised that competition activities can be used to create opportunities for the final examination practice to also be expanded to vocational upper secondary studies. The same topic was also addressed by Director of SAOL Rauno Jarnila in the same article:

Vocational colleges do not have a national final examination that would test the vocational skills of students who are concluding their studies. The comparability of studies completed at different times and in different places is mainly safeguarded by adjusting the level and content of teaching.

The first competition in visual merchandising in 1992 was implemented as pair work.

Taitaja Competitions cannot be a replacement for national further vocational qualifications. Instead, the experience gained from the competitions over the years can be utilised in the creation of a system of qualifications.

TAITAJA COMPETITION EXPANDS AGAIN AFTER A GAP YEAR

The first four Taitaja Competitions were held at Hämeenlinna Vocational College. In 1991, a gap year was held in order to assess the competition's principles and practical arrangements. During this gap year, the competition was, by way of exception, held at Pirkanmaa Vocational

College only for the construction industry. For this reason, the event was called Rakennus-Taitaja 91 (lit. Construction Expert 91). This competition was organised by the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry, the Finnish Construction Trade Union and vocational colleges, and it was implemented in three stages. The final competition had eight young participants who competed in Bricklaying and Boarding, among other things.

The two-day final competition also featured skills demonstrations by the competitors who would travel to the Youth Skills Olympics towards the end of June, i.e. bricklayer **Petri Vastamäki**, carpenter **Arto Saastamoinen** and painter **Petteri Valo**. The purpose of this was to provide the competitors already selected for the national team with competition experience and a feel for working under the eyes of an audience. Vastamäki's bricklaying project was modelled after the upcoming test project in Amsterdam: the brickwork was to form a tulip pattern.

After the gap year, a Taitaja Competition was once again held in Hämeenlinna. The 1992 competition was the final competition in which SAOL was involved. The new rules on the organisation of competitions elevated vocational advisory committees to a key role at the local level, as they were considered to be the best suited for implementing competitions at vocational colleges due to their composition and nature. The regional division into seven areas for regional competitions was kept unchanged. The organisation of regional competitions was

left to each area's regional advisory committee, which was responsible for deciding on the location of the regional competition, the test projects and the assessment criteria. Regional competitions were held for sectors in which the National Education and Training Committee for the sector in question had agreed to support the competition.

In addition to vocational colleges, the 1992 competition was attended by students of business colleges, institutes of home and industrial economics as well as colleges of arts and crafts. It was organised by Hämeenlinna Vocational Adult Education Centre, Hämeenlinna Vocational College, Hämeenlinna Institute of Business and Information Technology, the Finnish National Agency for Education and SAOL.

A total of 40 competitors from around Finland had been selected for the final competition through vocational college specific and regional competitions. There were five competition skills: Automotive and Transport Engineering, Mechanical and Metal Engineering and Construction Engineering as well as the new skills of Cleaning Services, Wood Technology and Visual Merchandising.

For the first time, the audience also had the opportunity to vote for the winner. The competition in Visual Merchandising was intended for students of business colleges. The test projects, which were completed in pairs, were displayed in the display windows of stores located along Reska, a pedestrian street in the

centre of Hämeenlinna. The winners were chosen by an expert jury, but the audience also had an opportunity to vote for their favourite.

In his greeting in the programme of the Taitaja Competition of 1992, Director General of OPH **Vilho Hirvi**, who served as the Taitaja Competition's patron, emphasised that the trend towards European integration was also forcing Finland to dismantle its closed systems of protection and enter into open competition across the board. "Now, for the first time, vocational education and training and the results it yields are being put forward for comparison and assessment by European standards in a concrete manner. It is high time that we equip our own system with elements of assessment that will allow us to convince expert juries that carry out international comparisons and provide our high-quality education with the appreciation it deserves."

Topics addressed at the Taitaja training days included the internationalisation of VET and the challenges posed by European integration to Finnish competence. The lectures examined VET in Estonia, Germany and Sweden. Another theme discussed was flexibility in VET and final examinations. The trade-specific instructor-led working groups formed at the end of the day contemplated the development of final examinations at vocational colleges.



Finland's representatives at the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989.

Pictured in the photo are, from the left: Mika Hokkanen, Turning, Jukka Nivala, Milling, Minna Karevuori, Ladies' Dressmaking, and Janne Virtanen, Electric Welding. In the front, from the left: Harri Nyman, Carpentry, Juha Salminen, Bricklaying, Jari Paulin, CNC Technology.

Finland becomes involved in international skills competitions

Finland participated in the international Youth Skills Olympics for the first time in 1989. The competition was held in Birmingham, the United Kingdom, from 27 August to 3 September 1989. It included a total of 37 skills and 382 competitors. The competitors represented 21 countries. Finland's first competition delegation comprised 16 official representatives.

COMPETITORS WERE CHOSEN FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM THROUGH SEVERAL PATHS

The Finnish competitors were chosen as representatives in many ways and through several different paths. A press release published by the Vocational Training Board before the competition described the training and selection of competitors as follows: "The Finnish youths who will be participating in the Youth Skills Olympics have been chosen after several trials and other competitions. Some of those who will be travelling to England were found through the Taitaja Competition. Industrial colleges and various trade unions have also held competitions to find skilled young people. However, a victory in the national Taitaja Competition does not yet guarantee a ticket to the Youth Skills Olympics, as the level of the international

skills competition is high. The maximum age for participants in the Youth Skills Olympics is 22, an age by which participants from other countries have been able to obtain a great deal of work experience. Coaching the Finnish youths is necessary, as those who study at vocational colleges are still too young and at the level of beginners in their vocational skills for the tough international competition. However, success achieved in the Taitaja Competition can serve as a stepping stone and make it possible for the individual to become one of the trainees."

The participant selected for the Ladies' Dressmaking skill was **Minna Karevuori**, who had taken third place in the 1988 Taitaja Competition. Karevuori had been in training for one academic year together with her alternate, **Virve Akkanen**. The training period lasted for a total of 200 hours, containing guidance in both tailoring and dressmaking. At the Nuori ja käden taidot event in Tampere in 14–15 May 1988, the trainees made a suit according to a model chosen by Vice Mayor **Kaarina Suonio**. **Jari Paulin** represented Finland in CNC Technology. He had graduated from the machinist programme at Lohja Vocational College in 1987 and been trained at Valmet's factory in Jyväskylä.

At the competition, Paulin represented Valmet's Industrial College. **Jukka Nivala** from ABB Strömberg's Industrial College in Vaasa participated in Milling, while **Mika Hokkanen** from Kone's Industrial College in Hyvinkää participated in Turning. They both won in their own skills at a competition held by the Association of Industrial and Business Colleges (TELAO) in spring 1988.

The winner of the national welding competition, **Janne Virtanen** from Pori Technical Vocational School, represented Finland in Electric Welding. The competitors who competed in Bricklaying and Carpentry had been chosen and trained by the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries and its regional organisations. The competitors who travelled to Birmingham were bricklayer **Juha Salminen** and carpenter **Harri Nyman**. Salminen had only placed fourth at the bricklaying competition held between vocational training centres in Joensuu in spring, but the competitors ahead of him had been unable to participate in the Youth Skills Olympics due to their age.

TOOLS FOR THE COMPETITION FROM THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE'S MEETINGS

When Finland joined the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO) in 1988, Jorma Pöyhönen was chosen to represent the country as the official delegate, while Juhani Honka was appointed technical



Veijo Hintsanen was the CEO of Häme Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Higher Education from 1993 to 2013. He is a founding member of Skills Finland and was a member of the association's Board from 1993 to 2014 and the Executive Committee from 2000 to 2014. Hintsanen was Finland's technical delegate at the WorldSkills International Organisation from 1988 to 2009 as well as vice chairman of the Technical Committee and member of the Board of Directors from 2003 to 2011. He served as jury president at seven WorldSkills Competitions between 1989 and 2001. Hintsanen was a member of the Advisory Committee and Board of Directors for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 and vice president of the WorldSkills Competitions in Helsinki in 2005, Shizuoka in 2007 and Calgary in 2009.

delegate. Pöyhönen and Honka had previously participated in the General Assembly of the IVTO that was held in Bonn, Germany, in 1987 as observers.

When Juhani Honka left his position as head of department at the Vocational Training Board (AKH) and transferred to the business sector in 1988, his position as head of department was taken up by Veijo Hintsanen, who worked as an office manager at the Department of Industrial Education. Hintsanen also inherited the role of



Finnish Technical Delegate Veijo Hintsanen (on the left) and Official Delegate Vilho Hirvi at a meeting of IVTO.

technical delegate from Honka and participated in his first meeting in this capacity that same year.

IVTO's Technical Committee held a meeting in London in October 1988 and another meeting in Washington in April 1989 prior to the competition in Birmingham. At these meetings, the committee agreed on details concerning the preparation of test projects for the different skills, arrangements for the skills, the assessment of test projects and the work of experts. The technical delegates were reminded that every judge, i.e. expert, had to come to the competition with a complete proposal for a test project in their own competition skill. The final test project was not chosen from among the proposals until on location. The experts' duties also included editing the final test project and

proposing improvements to the implementation of the skill and test project in preparation for the next competition.

At the meetings, the committee also discussed problems previously identified in the work of the experts. In surprisingly many cases, the competitor from the country of the expert who had prepared the test project seemed to perform notably well in the competition. The committee intended to carry out further analysis to determine the impact of both the origin of the test project and the work of experts on the performance of competitors in more detail. There was also clear evidence that competitors without an expert from their own

country were at a disadvantage compared to other competitors. At the time, the number of experts that each country was allowed to send to the competition was no more than 60% of the number of competitors.

Finnish Technical Delegate Veijo Hintsanen made the following observations about the competition practices:

During the competition, it seems to be common for the experts to agree on policies for the next competition that are not documented in any way in some cases. Insider information increases inequality between countries and makes the competition very difficult, particularly when new member countries are participating for the first time. In any case, there is hardly any documented information available on previous competitions or the competence requirements for test projects. Of course, this also applies to the matters “agreed upon” that seem to be surprisingly abundant in various skills. Challenges and inequalities related to language skills were also already clearly apparent in the very first competition. There were a great number of things that needed to be fixed. At the time, IVTO’s activities were still at a recreational level. The same can be said for the competition activities in Finland at the time, as they were carried out by a small group of people on top of their own jobs.

Finland’s official delegates in IVTO (later WorldSkills International)

1988–1991	Jorma Pöyhönen
1991–1999	Vilho Hirvi
2000–2011	Timo Lankinen
2012–	Seija Rasku

Finland’s technical delegates in IVTO (later WorldSkills International)

1988	Juhani Honka
1988–2011	Veijo Hintsanen
2012–	Hannu Immonen

From the beginning, Finland took on an active and visible role in the organisation. At the meeting in London, the committee hoped that Finland would influence other Nordic countries and inspire them to join IVTO's activities. At the Washington meeting, Finland was chosen as the host country for IVTO's 1990 General Assembly.

FINLAND'S SUCCESS IS MODEST IN BIRMINGHAM IN 1989

The Youth Skills Olympics held in Birmingham was the 30th time that the competition was held. The location of the competition was historic – after all, the Birmingham area was the area where the Industrial Revolution once started. The significance of the competition to the United Kingdom was described as follows in the competition brochure: “1989 will be one of the most exciting and significant years in the history of vocational education and training in the United Kingdom. The need for well-trained and committed young people in our country's industry and trade has never been higher. New jobs are being created, and competition over the training and recruitment of young people will be tough to ensure that the United Kingdom is able to meet the challenge posed by the European Common Market in 1992.”

For his part, the competition's patron, Prince **Philip**, compared the Youth Skills Olympics to a sports competition in his greeting: “We strongly support our international athletes, but

think about how much more important it would be to support these young people whose skills lay the foundation for our economic well-being.”

The Youth Skills Olympics were opened ceremoniously in the arena of the newly completed National Exhibition Centre by Prince **Edward**, and the opening speech was given by IVTO's President Francisco Albert-Vidal. According to Team Leader **Riitta Lampola**, however, the person who made the biggest impression on the Finnish competitors was British Prime Minister **Margaret Thatcher**. At the closing ceremony, she held an encouraging speech for the competitors that clearly spoke to them.

Two halls of the National Exhibition Centre had been reserved for the competition. The acquisition of the machines, equipment and materials for each skill was handled by shop masters appointed by the competition organiser. In addition to the equipment available, the competitors were also allowed to use their own personal tools and measurement equipment.

In accordance with the rules, a period of 22–24 hours was reserved for completing the test projects. After the end of the competition, the participants had the opportunity to examine each other's works and discuss their competition experiences. The work of the experts, for which two days had been reserved after the end of the competition, ended with a “computer processing day” and a meeting of the Technical



Finland's representatives at the Youth Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989.

In the back row from the left: Janne Virtanen, Electric Welding; Minna Karevuori, Ladies' Dressmaking; Mika Hokkanen, Turning.

In the front row, from the left: Director General of the Vocational Training Board Jorma Pöyhönen and Team Leader Riitta Lampola as well as competitors Harri Nyman, Carpentry; Jari Paulin, CNC Technology; Juha Salminen, Bricklaying; and Jukka Nivala, Milling.

Committee. At this meeting, the committee approved the results, assessed the competition and made their final conclusions regarding it.

Finland's official delegate at the event was Jorma Pöyhönen, while Veijo Hintsanen served as technical delegate and jury president of the Industrial Electronics group. Finland's experts were Maija-Sisko Paananen (Ladies' Dressmaking), Teuvo Närvänen (Milling) and **Heikki Oikarinen** (Carpentry). The official delegation also included three technical observers: **Pekka Tuomi** from the Welding Society of Finland as well as **Pirjo Vuorre** (later Heikkilä) and Pekka Syrjälä from AKH. Riitta Lampola, who was working at AKH's Curriculum Office at the time, had been chosen as Finland's first team leader.

The most successful countries in the competition

were Korea, which amassed 16 medals, and Taiwan, which won 14 medals. Finland's success in this first competition was very modest. The highest placement was achieved by Minna Karevuori, who placed eighth in Ladies' Dressmaking. Both of the competitors who participated in construction skills and the competitors who participated in CNC

Technology and Electric Welding placed last in their skills. The competitor who competed in Turning placed 13th (out of 15 competitors), and the competitor who participated in Milling placed 11th (out of 12 competitors). None of the Finnish competitors reached the limit for obtaining a Medallion for Excellence, i.e. a score of 500 points. Minna Karevuori came closest with her 485 points. According to the competitors' own assessments, the reasons for this lack of success included their short training period, limited guidance, insufficient familiarity with the machines used in the competition and the fact that the test projects differed greatly from practical work carried out in working life in Finland.

Riitta Lampola recalls that the competitors were forced to carry out their participation in the competition without much mental training and with relatively limited support, as the team leader and experts were also attending the competition for the first time. They did not yet have the necessary experience and knowledge. "We held some meetings at AKH when the competitors visited to try on their competition outfits," Lampola says.

When the competitors later assembled at Helsinki Airport, the nervousness in the air was palpable. Most of the competitors were travelling abroad for the first time. Most of them also wondered whether their language skills were sufficient. However, they improved their language skills during the trip. Lampola shares an example. "As soon as we landed in

London, one of the competitors asked me to shop for them because they thought that their English wasn't good enough. To my great surprise, however, this same competitor was happily talking to competitors from other countries at the competition's closing ceremony a few days later."

On the first day of the competition, the Finnish competitors and experts were very surprised when competitors from other countries arrived at the competition venue carrying large toolboxes. Lampola particularly recalls the shiny mahogany toolboxes brought by the South Koreans, which shocked the Finnish competitors. The Finns had been under the impression that the necessary tool would be provided on site. "We had to start scraping together the necessary tools. We got some of them so late that some of the competitors got a later start to their test projects," Lampola says.

According to Lampola, most of the competitors found the competition itself to be stressful. Working with unfamiliar tools under the eyes of tens of thousands of spectators was not easy when the competitors were insufficiently prepared for the situation.

Even now, years later, Lampola thinks that the Finnish youths were thrown into the competition as "guinea pigs" without sufficient training and support. Lampola emphasises that Finland's trailblazing competitors should be proud of their performance, regardless of their placement in the actual competition.



Minna Karevuori received a Best of Nation medal as recognition for being the national team's best competitor in Birmingham in 1989. Her medal was presented to her by Chairman of the Organising Committee Charles Tindall.

One of the significant reasons mentioned in newspapers for Finland's poor success was the Finnish education system. Elsewhere in the world, people primarily learned a trade through traditional apprenticeship training or a comparable channel, whereas Finnish students studied in a school setting. Because of this, Finland's fellow competitors from other countries had accumulated significantly more work experience by the age of 22.

ANY HOPES FOR A MEDAL ENDED WITH KAREVUORI'S INJURY

Among the Finnish competitors, Minna Karevuori was the closest to earning a Medallion for Excellence, but she was unlucky, as an accident ruined her chances in the competition. Karevuori's right hand hit the metal lower section of an overheated sleeve ironing board, and she burned her middle finger and ring finger badly. The blisters on the upper joints of her fingers had to be treated at an outpatient clinic. When Karevuori returned to the competition venue with padding around her fingers, she was given an extra half hour for her work as compensation. However, this was not enough time, as she had yet to start the manual work phases that included making buttonholes, among other things. The padding around her fingers made it impossible to perform that type of work.

Karevuori bravely gathered herself and continued working until the end of the

competition, even though she failed to make the buttonholes and attach the buttons. This decisively reduced her score.

The competitors were tasked with making a correctly slimmed beige suit that included a small pencil skirt and a red silk blouse. The same practice was always followed in international skills competitions in Ladies' Dressmaking: the products were made of different materials, usually wool and silk, in order to demonstrate the competitor's ability to work on different types of materials.

Maija-Sisko Paananen served as Finland's expert. Every expert had to assess the performances of ten different competitors without participating in the assessment of their own country's competitor. In Paananen's opinion, a clear dichotomy could be seen in the judges' approaches: the Asians versus the Europeans. The Europeans represented newer working methods that utilised technology more. In Asian countries, the work was oriented more towards manual labour and focused on sewing.

The competition was won by the Taiwanese representative. Second place was taken by the British competitor, and Switzerland and Austria tied for the bronze medal.

The expert group for Ladies' Dressmaking stated in its joint feedback that there was a great deal of need for improvement in this skill. The preparation of proposals for test projects had

to be harmonised, the selection of test projects had to be clarified and the assessment criteria had to be specified. The lack of a common language caused problems with interpretation, and interpretation into different languages took time away from planning. There was insufficient time for negotiating the assessment criteria and procedures prior to the start of the competition.

LESSONS LEARNED FOR THE NEXT COMPETITION

The Finnish observers who participated in the competition carried out their duties with enthusiasm and due care. Numerous reports were published after the competition, assessing the competitors' performance and the continuation of competition activities in Finland.

A total of 42 VET influencers participated in the study visit organised by the Vocational Training Board to the Youth Skills Olympics. The travelogue prepared by the travellers emphasised the significance of accumulating experience:

The Finns, of course, ventured into their first competition with insufficient prior knowledge and little training. Still, all respect to the Finnish women: the Finnish competitor in Ladies' Dressmaking was apparently very close to a perfect performance. However, even her success was undermined by an unlucky accident in which she burned her finger.

Training for the next competition is also probably already underway in Finland. It is absolutely necessary that we obtain all possible advance information on everything ranging from administrative matters related to the competition to the actual competition trades that we intend to participate in.

In our opinion, Finns should determinedly and regularly participate in this type of international event, as it creates natural cooperation between Finnish vocational colleges and the Finnish production sector and serves international requirements in the best possible manner.

Forssa Vocational Training Centre sent a three-person group to Birmingham for the purpose of observation and familiarisation. This group included Rector **Heikki Paulamäki**, vocational teacher **Matti Tiainen** and Director of the Building Department **Timo Sirkiä**, who was chosen as the first full-time executive director of Suomen ammattitaito – Skill Finland ry seven years later.

The travelogue of the group from Forssa mentioned a four-day bricklaying competition in which the competitors were tasked with making a two-part brick wall with corners and embossing. The group particularly observed the various working methods of the participants and paid attention to different tools. The observers noted that the practices followed at Finnish construction sites could unnecessarily slow down the competition performance.

Juha Salminen's fate was to ultimately be the last among the thirteen competitors, as he failed to finish his work. The Australian who won the competition finished his work in good time, leaving plenty of time for putting in the finishing touches.

In the opinion of the group from Forssa, the chances of Finnish competitors to succeed in the future without considerable changes were poor. The group thought that results could not be achieved in the competition skills under Construction and Building Technology with the training, qualifying and competition system in place at the time. The biggest challenges existed in the development of routines, speed, the ability to read drawings and the knowledge of the material.

The group's reports states:

By the next Youth Skills Olympics, which will be held in Amsterdam in 1991, we should quickly create a competition system that allows us to gather the top youth in different trades together. If we can also include a period at the end for the competitors to practise test projects while monitoring both their quality and speed, we believe that Finland has the potential to wedge its way to the top of the world. This would, at least, provide good chances in the bricklaying competition. The only way to achieve this is for the competitor to learn the routines and speed from working life, leaving time

for them to practise the other required factors. In our opinion, the key roles in the development of this type of competition system are played by trainers, the industry and the Vocational Training Board.

Finnish Technical Delegate Veijo Hintsanen compiled his experiences in Birmingham in a memo titled "Lessons learned for next times":

- Do not assume anything, play it safe.
- Choose the skills with care; do not trust instinct or rumours.
- Offer your own experts for every skill and stick with them until the end.
- Teach the rules and trade descriptions to the experts well in advance.
- Make the complexity and significance of the test project clear to both the experts and the competitors.
- Make it clear to the experts that the result of the competition is often already decided when the experts' test projects are chosen.
- Only choose competitors who have the nerves for it.
- Obtain and utilise the test projects for the 1989 Youth Skills Olympics and train the competitors by using test projects from previous competitions.
- Make sure that the competitors are sent to the competition with all the necessary tools

and measurement equipment, protective equipment, additional lighting, etc.
– play it safe.

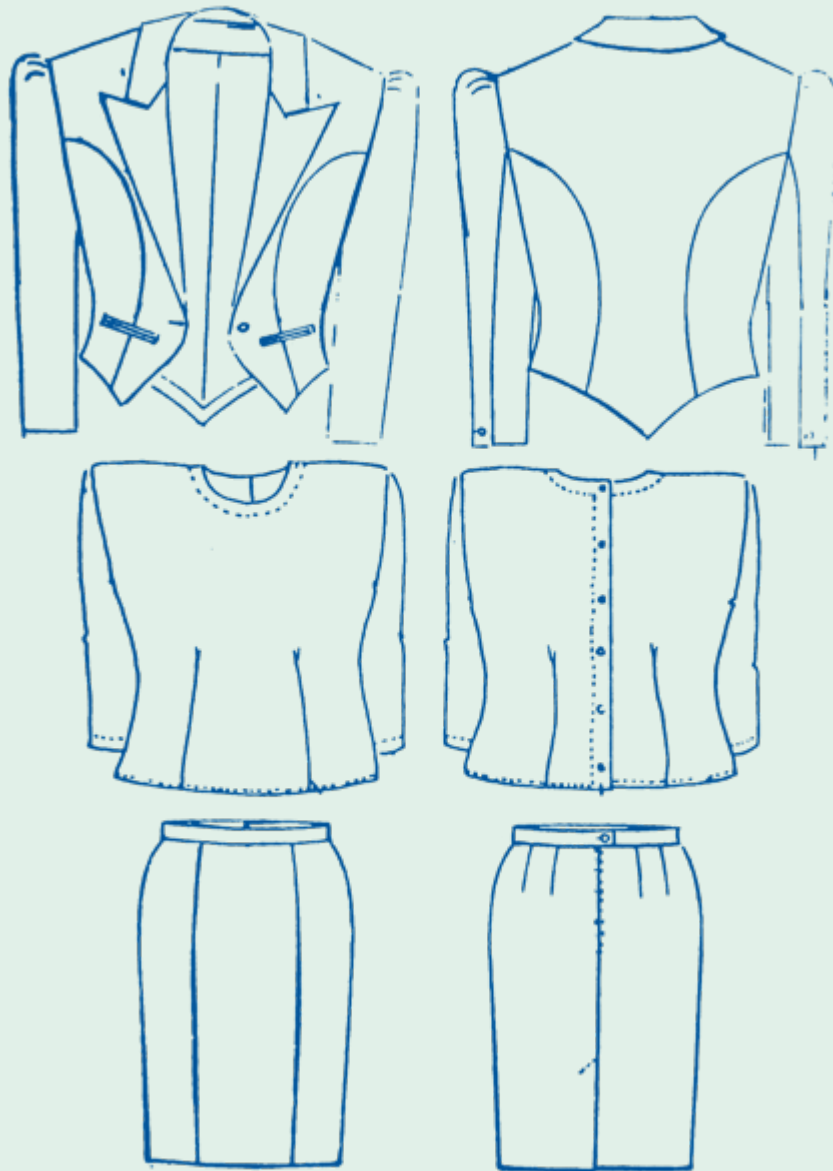
- Make sure that the national Taitaja Competition is developed in the direction of the Youth Skills Olympics with regard to both its test projects and assessment criteria.
- Integrate the business community into the activities more closely.
- Expand activities related to the Youth Skills Olympics to new trades suited for us, such as automotive and electrical engineering, food technology, women's and men's hairdressing, restaurant service (only if sponsors can be found).
- Reorganise and establish a Finnish national Youth Skills Olympics organisation and take care of budget funding for the next years well in advance.

In Hintsanen's opinion, the national Skills Olympics Committee had to comprise top managers of industry, business, education policy and VET. An operative group would have to be established to coordinate practical activities, and it would have to comprise key individuals of AKH, industry and vocational colleges. A training ring would have to be built for each Olympic skill, comprising the youths being trained as well as their trainers and training managers. Many of these thoughts were gradually implemented at least in some form when the competition and training system was developed over the next few years.

FINLAND HOSTS IVTO'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Finland, which had only become a member of the IVTO two years earlier, was granted the honour of hosting the organisation's General Assembly, as well as meetings of the Technical Committee and Management Committee in conjunction with the General Assembly, in August 1990. All in all, the meetings and other related activities lasted five days. The Vocational Training Board was in charge of the meeting arrangements. The General Assembly was attended by guests from 23 IVTO member countries and countries that were applying for membership.

At the General Assembly, new Technical Descriptions that corresponded to technological development were approved for all competition skills. They served as skill-specific instructions that complemented the competition rules in the planning of test projects as well as in the organisation of competitions and assessment of performances. Outdated skills were removed from the range of competition skills and new ones were introduced. New countries were also accepted as full members of the organisation at the assembly. "After the changes, all continents, excluding Antarctica, are now involved in the organisation's activities," stated a press release published about the event.



The test project for Ladies' Dressmaking in 1989. Finland's proposal for a test project had been a woman's suit. The pattern making and manufacturing processes for the proposal had been carried out at Roihuvuori Vocational College. However, the final test project was developed based on a proposal by the Spanish expert.

Test project in Ladies’ Dressmaking in Birmingham in 1989

The competitors were provided with the pattern, materials and additional supplies. If a competitor asked for additional materials, 5 points were deducted from their score. The competitors had 24 hours to complete their work. The following instructions were distributed to the competitors.

JACKET

- The competitor chooses the support materials and determines the areas where they will be attached. The lining must be cut by using the pre-prepared pattern / jacket pattern. The lining must have a fold in the centre at the back. The lining must be attached by hand to the cuffs and hem, and the sleeve lining must be attached to the armhole.
- The buttonhole in the centre at the front must be sewn by hand / keyhole buttonhole.
- A round-end buttonhole must be sewn to the slit in the sleeve by hand, without cutting the buttonhole open. The buttons must be sewn on by hand.
- The folds in the sleeve cap must be placed symmetrically (two folds at the front and two at the back).
- The shoulder pads must be sewn by hand.

SKIRT

- Fusible tape at the waist. Two hangers.
- Buttonhole and button sewn by hand.
- Zipper sewn to the centre back seam by hand or by machine / symmetrically.
- Lining sewn by machine – including the hem.
- Hem fastened by hand.

BLOUSE

- The competitor chooses the support materials and where they are fastened.
- The blouse – including the buttonholes – must be sewn by machine
- Six buttons and buttonholes must be sewn in the centre at the back.
- The buttons must be sewn on by hand.
- All the seam allowances must be neatened together.
- A double-fold hem, distance of machine stitching from the edge no more than 1.5 cm.

The actual meetings were held at Hanasaari Training Centre in Espoo. The programme in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area also included industrial visits, such as a visit to Nokia's production facilities, among other things. After the official meetings, there was a two-day trip to the Jyväskylä region that included a tour of Valmet's factories in Rautpohja and the Jämsänkoski mill of United Paper Mills Ltd. The evening programme featured, among other things, a tour aboard a steam barge on Lake Päijänne and an evening snack enjoyed on a shore outcrop, illuminated by torches. On the last evening, the participants went to a sauna at the newly completed Majvik Training Centre of the Municipal Union of Technical Professionals in Kirkkonummi.

In his letter to the meetings' hosts, Jorma Pöyhönen and Veijo Hintsanen, Secretary General of IVTO Daniel Sommer profusely praises the meeting arrangements and other related activities, which offered an excellent picture of Finland and the Finnish way of life. He remarked that there was a record number of participants and pointed out that most of the guests were visiting Finland for the first time. Sommer summarised the experience at the end of his letter: "We were very happy and enjoyed your hospitality very much!"

Since its successful hosting of the General Assembly, Finland has had several more chances to demonstrate its hospitality. The arrangements for the 2005 WorldSkills Competition were prepared at a meeting of

the Technical Committee of the WorldSkills Organisation, WSO (now WorldSkills International, WSI), that was held in Finland in autumn 2004. Even after 2005, Finland has hosted numerous meetings of WSI's technical working group and one meeting of the Board of the European Skills Promotion Organisation (ESPO). Additionally, members of the Board of WSI and other experts have visited both the annual ship seminars of Skills Finland and the Taitaja Competition.



Finland has hosted meetings of the working groups of WSI's Technical Committee several times between 2003 and 2009. Pictured from the left are Secretary General of WSI David Hoey, Chairman of the Technical Committee Liam Corcoran, Technical Delegate for the Netherlands Peter van den Berg, Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi and Technical Manager of WorldSkills Montreal 2009 Brian Pardell.

Finland as a proactive reformer of competition skills

The range of skills included in international vocational skills competitions for young people was narrow and reduced at the beginning of the competitions' history in the 1950s. The skills were based on craftsmanship and simple technique. The two key skill groups were metalworking and woodworking.

At the end of the 1960s, the range of skills already included 30 skills: more than ten were related to mechanical and metal engineering, four were related to electrical engineering, another four were related to wood technology, five were related to construction engineering and two were related to the textile, dressmaking, leather and shoe industry. Ladies' Hairdressing and Jewellery were exceptions among the engineering-oriented range of skills.

When Finland joined IVTO in 1988, the skills were still, at their core, the same as they were at the end of the 1960s. The techniques used were often very old-fashioned. For example, technical drawing was still carried out by using a drawing board, and metalwork was most often based on manual technique. Almost without exception, the test projects solely measured manual skills.

New skills that foreshadowed a change were CNC Machining (CNC = Computerised Numerical Control) and Graphic Design Technology. The range of service sector skills had expanded

from Ladies' Hairdressing to also include Men's Hairdressing, Cooking and Restaurant Service. Car mechanics had gained their own competition skill at the end of the 1970s.

Changes were pursued more strongly in the 1990s when new member countries joined the organisation. The Nordic countries, Australia and the USA in particular had pushed for reforms. By the start of the 2000s, the competition had introduced Mechatronics, CAD, Information Technology/Software Applications, IT PC/Network Support, Refrigeration, Landscape Gardening, Floristry and Car Painting as new skills. The competition has largely switched to CNC Technology in metalwork and fully to Electric Welding in welding. Technical Drawing and Gas Welding have been discontinued as competition skills.

At a meeting held in 2002, WSO's Technical Committee decided on new significant changes that were implemented at the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki in 2005. Based on Finland's initiative, it was decided that the first three skills of the old skill range (Installation, Press Tool Making and Instrument Making) would be replaced by a single modern skill that was named Polymechanics. Additionally, CNC Turning and CNC Milling were combined into a single skill (CNC Machining), while Manufacturing Team Challenge, which had been tested in the previous

competition and which covered both design and implementation, was adopted as an Official Skill. Beauty Therapy and WEB Design were also introduced as new Official Skills.

Due to the small number of participants, Construction Steel Work, Pattern Making and Plastering were removed from the range of skills featured at the competition in Helsinki. The reforms were also sped up by the newly introduced rule change that required a larger number of participants than in previous years in order for a skill to be organised.

New skills tested in Helsinki as Demonstration Skills included Printing, Telecommunication Distribution Technology, Transport Technology and, as a renewed skill, Sheet Construction Steelwork, among others. Of these skills, at least Printing seems to continue being successful as an Official Skill, despite involving expensive equipment. Transport Technology already ran into insurmountable problems in the 2007 competition in Shizuoka due to both left-sided traffic and Japanese street signs. After all, some of the tasks were carried out on streets and roads, under real conditions, which was why it was not possible to include the skill in the competition programme in Japan. Caring, which was implemented in Helsinki as a Demonstration Skill, was tested in the 2007 competition, after which it also became an Official Skill.

In 2007, Japan, the competition's host country, had a great need to include the skills required by its key sponsors in the competition programme, in one way or another. Among others, this list of

required skills included some of the old machining skills that had already been removed from the list of Official Skills according to the rules. After long and difficult negotiations, a solution was found to the problem by following Finland's initiative to introduce a new skill group called Host Member Skills, for which the host country could choose the skills, provided that a sufficient number of competitors from other countries could be obtained for them. In the competition in Shizuoka, there were as many as five of such skills. This skill group was later included in the rules of WSC. It has also been used to resolve many tricky problems in the preparation of later competition.

In addition to the requirement concerning the number of participants, content requirements have also been set for new skills. A skill must cover at least three of the following content requirements: planning, manufacturing, communication and marketing. Over the years, the range of skills has become more varied. In addition to traditional techniques, it now also covers the service industry more extensively. Finland has also considered the new service industry skills to be important and has sent competitors to most of them. The competence requirements are highlighted better, and the skills have been renewed to also include planning. Tremendous progress has also been made in the competitions' implementation with regard to visibility, clarity and audience-friendliness. One goal that has been considered to be important is increasing teamwork, but this has been obstructed by the increase in skill-specific participation costs. EuroSkills Competitions have made significantly faster progress with regard to teamwork and communality than WorldSkills Competitions. ■

The first medal is won in Amsterdam in 1991

The 31st Youth Skills Olympics were held at the large RAI Convention Centre in Amsterdam at the turn of June and July in 1991. There were 37 competition skills, and the competition was attended by 434 competitors from 25 countries. All in all, Finland sent ten competitors and six experts to the competition in Amsterdam. They competed in Sewing, Cooking, Restaurant Service, Turning, CNC Turning, Metal Milling, Welding, Bricklaying, Carpentry and Painting.

PRACTICE AT THE DUTCH NATIONALS IN 1990

Construction industry skills were strongly present in Finland's international competition activities from the beginning. This was due to the enthusiasm and investment of the industry's employer and employee organisations, the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry and the Finnish Construction Trade Union into the matter. The construction industry continuously highlighted its demand for final examinations and professional passes to be implemented, and it also considered that competition activities played its own role in their promotion.

It was customary to select representatives for Bricklaying at Youth Skills Olympics through a Finnish championship competition between vocational training centres. At the beginning of 1990, the championship was won by bricklayer **Petri Vastamäki**, who studied in Forssa and came from Ypäjä. The Federation of the Finnish Building Industry proposed that Vastamäki and the other competitor selected for the Youth Skills Olympics, carpenter Arto Saastamoinen, participate in the Dutch national competition held in Amsterdam in November 1990 as guest competitors. An opportunity had risen for this type of arrangement based on personal relationships and discussions had in Birmingham.

The Vocational Training Board (AKH) welcomed this plan. This participation was considered to be a good way to prepare for the Youth Skills Olympics, which would be held in the same city the following year. The aim was for the participants to visit the competition venue and learn more about the local tools and materials used in bricklaying. It also provided an opportunity to determine the current level of Dutch competitors, as a Dutch competitor had taken sixth place in the touch competition in Birmingham. The trip was confirmed when the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry



Petri Vastamäki finished in a superb fourth place in Bricklaying at the Dutch national competition. The competition was a dress rehearsal for the 1991 Youth Skills Olympics, as it was organised in a similar manner to the competition held in Birmingham the previous year.

promised to pay for the trip for the competitors and their assistants.

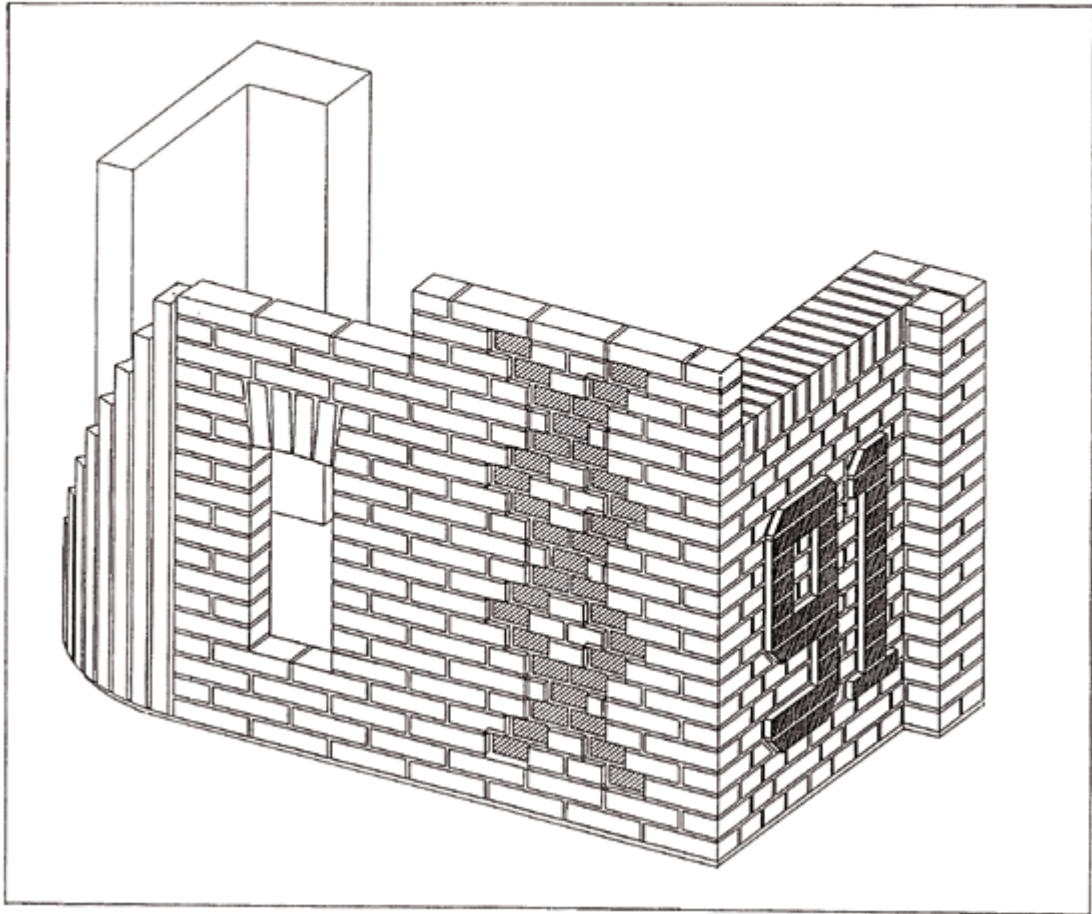
Around the time when the competition was held, the Netherlands were also visited by a group of VET representatives who went on a trip organised by the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges (SAOL). The travel programme of the Finnish experts included visits to the Dutch Ministry of Education and several vocational colleges, among other things.

The Vocational Training Board had asked Timo Sirkiä whether he would attend the upcoming

Olympics as an expert in Bricklaying. Sirkiä also attended the national competition in Amsterdam as an external observer and participated in the work of the group of judges in order to grasp the standards and assessment criteria for the skill.

Timo Sirkiä and vocational teacher **Matti Tiainen** considered the Dutch national competition to be relatively demanding. The method used by the Dutch competitors to repoint a wall deviated slightly from the method used by Finns:

TEST PROJECT



The test project proposal planned by Timo Sirkiä was chosen as the test project in Bricklaying for the Youth Skills Olympics held in Amsterdam in 1991. Sirkiä utilised the test projects implemented in Birmingham in 1989 and Amsterdam in autumn 1990.

Instead of immediately leaving mortar deeper from the surface, they would use a tuck pointer trowel to scrape out the mortar in the joints for repointing roughly every four hours. A special aspect of the brickwork was vertical bricks in the top section. Because of them, the participants had to cut out 3–5 mm from the vertical sides of the stones in order to successfully complete the overlap and still leave a 10-mm joint. The Dutch competitors had a special brick chisel that was relatively good for this task. At this stage, Petri had to resort to using borrowed tools, as the judges also wanted to see Petri taper the stones in the same way.

At the end of the competition, every participant's work was unfinished with regard to the jointing. Petri Vastamäki's placement in this high-level competition was a respectable fourth. The competition's organisers gifted him with a masonry hammer and chisel as keepsakes, so that he could practise tapering bricks before the Youth Skills Olympics. Regarding his gift, Vastamäki said: "That cutting tool was a little like a sickle blade. You placed it on top of a brick and cut through the brick with a hammer. It made working on the bricks faster and more precise. The best part about the trip was getting to know the local work materials. We later tried to develop those tools for the Youth Skills Olympics. We'd learned from the previous time. We tried to build a toolbox that was as comprehensive as possible."

In their travel report, Sirkiä and Tiainen stated that the competition was clearly a dress rehearsal for the next Youth Skills Olympics, as it was organised in a similar manner to the competition held in Birmingham the previous year. In their opinion, the trip was a success and met the goals set for it. They also conveyed information to Finland about the local education system and competition activities.

Petri Vastamäki's practising for the next Youth Skills Olympics was made difficult by the fact that he completed the entire training period during his military service. He had only been granted a short leave for the Dutch national competition. His meetings with Timo Sirkiä and Matti Tiainen, who were his trainers, were few in number. "I had trained at Forssa Vocational Training Centre some weekends. We would carry out work that had been included in test projects in previous Olympics, but it wasn't possible to engage in long-term practice," Vastamäki says.

A FINNISH PROPOSAL IS CHOSEN AS A TEST PROJECT

AKH had appointed Timo Sirkiä as an expert in Bricklaying for the Youth Skills Olympics in Amsterdam. Each expert had to propose a test project prior to the start of the competition, and Sirkiä had already started working on his own proposal in February.

Sirkiä succeeded in his work, as it was the first time that a proposal by a Finnish expert was

chosen as a test project. In his planning process, Sirkiä utilised the test projects implemented in Birmingham and Amsterdam, and he also received important information about them from **Heikki Oikarinen**, who had served as an expert in Carpentry in Birmingham. Once Sirkiä completed his first draft proposal, he finished its details and the preliminary brick spacing together with vocational teacher Matti Tiainen. Sirkiä implemented the actual drawing process with the help of AutoCAD software, as this allowed the work to be made to look more impressive. In June, the test project proposal was complete, after many corrections and finishing touches. Sirkiä prepared the assessment instructions in English.

The experts started their work at the location of the competition a week before the start of the competition. In addition to Finland, the experts in Bricklaying included experts from England, Ireland, the USA, Switzerland, Australia, Germany and the Netherlands. A representative from Taiwan, the host country for the next competition, was present as an observer. A German was chosen as the chief expert.

After a day of the experts getting to know each other and organising themselves, it was agreed that the experts would communicate with each other in English and German. The process of choosing a test project and modifying it into the final test project commenced immediately. Two rounds of votes were taken on the test project proposals brought in by the experts.

Finland's proposal won the first round of votes, with Australia's proposal coming in second. In the second round of votes, Finland won, and Sirkiä's proposal was chosen as the basis for the test project. Sirkiä later mused on the different proposals:

There were considerable differences between the works with regard to drawing and presentation style. Some of the works were difficult to read and understand, while



Hannele Marttiini (on the left), Veijo Hintsanen and Pirjo Heikkilä at the competition in Amsterdam in 1991.

others were too difficult to carry out in 22 hours. Five of the works depicted a windmill in some shape or form, and many featured a logo version of the Amsterdam coat of arms. The chosen work had to require bricklaying skills while also looking impressive from the spectators' point of view.

The test project prepared by Timo Sirkiä, which was modified by the experts together, involved

decorative brickwork and included forming the tulip pattern on the Amsterdam coat of arms. 60 per cent of the assessment criteria were related to objective assessment, i.e. precise measurement. The rest of the points were given based on a subjective assessment: points were given for appearance, joints and projecting brickwork, among other things. "I don't know if the test project corresponded to the everyday work of a professional, but we had to make the differences between competitors visible in some way. The works didn't differ from one another a great deal when inspected visually, so we had to look for the differences through measurements," Sirkiä says about his test project.

Before the start of the competition, the experts were scheduled to participate in a congress that addressed the quality of VET. On the day after the congress, the experts inspected the competition venue as well as the tools and materials used in the competition.

On the eve of the Youth Skills Olympics on 28 June 1991, the competitors had an opportunity to get to know both each other and the competition venue, and they were introduced to the jury and the shop master. That same day, the competitors had an opportunity to try out their tools for three hours.

The competition itself started on Saturday, 29 June. Each competitor was provided with the instructions in their own native language. If none of the experts spoke the language in question, the competitors could

use an interpreter. The test projects had been translated into each competitor's native language. After the start of the competition, the experts were tasked with monitoring the progress of the competition and make sure that everyone followed the rules and agreements.

On the second day of the competition, it began to look like most of the competitors would be unable to finish their work. By unanimous decision, the experts proposed to the competition management that the time reserved be extended by an hour, which was accepted. On Tuesday, 2 July, the competition was over. In the end, only one work was left unfinished, so the test project had proved to be correctly prepared and scaled. The assessment of the works began immediately after the competition concluded.

The subjective assessment was carried out first. Work after work, points were assigned with number cards according to the assessment instructions. If the difference between the points assigned by two experts was more than two points, the matter was discussed and one of the two experts changed their points. This work progressed relatively slowly, as there were a great number of works to assess. The next day, the process continued with an objective assessment. The tally of the scores started in the afternoon and continued late into the evening, even though the work was carried out in groups.

PETRI VASTAMÄKI TAKES BRONZE IN BRICKLAYING

The Finnish national team's performance was clearly better in Amsterdam than in Birmingham, resulting in one bronze medal and one Medallion for Excellence. Despite this, Finland's overall competition performance was relatively poor: Among the 25 countries, Finland placed 18th.

As was expected, the top places were taken by industrial countries such as Taiwan, Korea, Germany, Switzerland and Japan. The only European countries lower than Finland in the placements were Portugal, Spain, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar.

The strong investment by cooperation partners in the construction industry into the training of the Finnish competitor in Bricklaying yielded great results in Amsterdam. Petri Vastamäki won Finland's first ever medal in an international vocational skills competition. "The competition venue was a large hall that became hot in the summer and was very crowded. I'd familiarised myself with the materials the previous autumn. We'd also planned the working methods in advance. The test project followed the same pattern as the previous test projects that we had practised," Vastamäki recalls, thinking back to his competition experience.

Another competition skill related to the construction industry was Carpentry. The Finnish competitor in this skill, carpenter **Arto Saastamoinen** from Vantaa, took last place. He was forced to complete a test project that, by Finnish standards, had nothing to do with the work of a carpenter. The project was some type of "a three-dimensional contraption", for which it was difficult to find a connection in practical life.

Anne Äikäs, who participated in Ladies' Dressmaking, took fifth place and earned a Medallion for Excellence with her score of 508.

The Amsterdam Youth Skills Olympics were the first to also include Cooking and Restaurant Service. **Mikko Olanterä**, who participated in



An award ceremony was held for the competitors who had been successful in the Amsterdam Youth Skills Olympics. During the ceremony, Minister of Education Riitta Uosukainen presented Petri Vastamäki with an award cheque worth 10,000 FIM and Anne Äikäs with a cheque worth 5,000 FIM.



Restaurant Service, and **Satu Katoniemi**, who participate in Cooking, had studied at Espoo Hotel and Restaurant College. Olanterä took 11th place in his skill, but received a special mention for his naturalness in customer service. Katoniemi was in shared 12th place in the final results.

Both competitors encountered surprises in the competition, as the restaurant industry had long-standing gourmet traditions in Central Europe, which was why a great deal was required from both cooks and waiters. In an interview published in the *Länsiväylä* newspaper on 4 August 1991, Katoniemi stated that the cooking methods and ingredients themselves were already different. “In Central Europe, they have long lunches and good service, whereas in Finland the principle is to feed the customer quickly and bring in a new customer. If we applied European customs, the

The 1991 Finnish national team. Team leader Kari Kiiski is on the right in the photo.

The Finnish team comprised: Kari Aalto, CNC Turning; Juhani Johansson, CNC Machining; Teemu Kangas, CNC Milling; Satu Katoniemi, Cooking; Jarkko Mäenpää, Welding; Mikko Olanterä, Restaurant Service; Arto Saastamoinen, Carpentry; Jari Valo, Painting and Decorating; Petri Vastamäki, Bricklaying; and Anne Äikäs, Ladies’ Dressmaking.

restaurant would go bankrupt in two weeks,” summarised Mikko Olanterä, who participated in the Restaurant Service competition.

After the competition in Amsterdam, there was a great deal of discussion in Finland regarding practices observed during the competition that were against the rules and unfairness in the assessment of the performances. In the *Insinööriopettaja* magazine (3/1991), **Senior**



Petri Vastamäki was once very proud of his bronze medal, which he still keeps in a safe place. At the time this book was published, he was working as a building inspector for the City of Somero.

Shining bronze medal at Somero City Hall

Petri Vastamäki's father was a carpenter, while his mother was a dental hygienist. Three of his younger brothers chose the metal industry, but Petri himself became interested in the construction industry. He first studied house building at Forssa Vocational School, after which he worked at a local construction site for a year.

After gaining work experience, Vastamäki attended a 12-month bricklaying course at Forssa Vocational Training Centre. "I'm sure that my choice of profession was also influenced by the good pay earned by bricklayers at the time."

Vastamäki had been chosen as a representative for the Finnish championship as the youngest trainee at his vocational school – he was only 19 when he won the championship in the 1990 bricklaying competition between vocational training centres. Participation in the Dutch national competition and the Youth Skills Olympics were, of course, exciting experiences for the young man. "They were some of my first trips abroad."

Vastamäki was proud of his achievement. Forssa Vocational Training Centre, which was later converted into an adult education centre, wanted to hold on to this skilled professional after his successes at competitions. Vastamäki worked there as a part-time vocational teacher for several years. He also did bricklaying work on the side.

In the early 1990s, Vastamäki went to study at Hämeenlinna Vocational College for three years and graduated with a degree in construction management in 1995. At the end of the 1990s, companies no longer wanted to hire bricklayers as permanent employees. "I had to establish a company. I founded it as a sole proprietorship, and I was the only employee in the company. In the 2000s, I also used subcontractors to some degree."

Vastamäki served as an expert in Bricklaying at the competitions held in St Gallen, Switzerland, in 1997 and Montreal, Canada, in 1999. He says that he attended training organised for experts by Skill Finland. The language courses in particular were useful. "My language skills have never been good, but I still always somehow managed to carry out my tasks in the group of experts. The test projects had changed since my day, and for the worse. Before, all the cuts were made by hand. Now the competitors were allowed to use electrical tools. There was one sawing tool per every two competitors, so one competitor had to wait for their turn. It was quite a chaos, with the competitors all running around the hall while carrying bricks."

Since 2008, Petri Vastamäki has been working as a building inspector for the City of Somero. ■

Ministerial Adviser Pirkko Vesterinen from the Finnish National Agency for Education called for the rules to be clarified to curb unfair judging. In an interview given to the same magazine, Director of OPH Veijo Hintsanen also criticised the assessment: “In the current system, the areas that are based on subjective assessment are particularly unfair. The countries that don’t have an expert in the jury suffer. The work of the judges is afflicted by calculation.”

In the same newspaper article, Veijo Hintsanen emphasised that a relatively poor overall success is not necessarily due to poor-quality education in Finland. It was simply that there was not a sufficiently efficient system in Finland that would identify the top performers. In contrast, the final examinations used in Central Europe were bound to bring forth people’s talents. In several industrial countries, competence demonstrations, degrees and vocational skills competitions that measure vocational skills are an essential part of VET and training in vocational skills.

In September 1991, an award ceremony was held for the competitors who had been successful in the Amsterdam Youth Skills Olympics. During the ceremony, Minister of Education **Riitta Uosukainen** presented Petri Vastamäki with an award cheque worth 10,000 FIM and Anne Äikäs with a cheque worth 5,000 FIM. The Federation of the Finnish Building Industry remembered Vastamäki separately with a valuable Rolex watch.

In her speech, Minister Uosukainen emphasised that the system of vocational skills competitions places Finnish competence under international assessment and comparison in an important way. In her opinion, the activities will require an increasing amount of funding and support outside the educational administration in the future. She challenged labour market organisations to participate in development work and its funding. “The Finnish education system has been found to be very good in international comparisons, with one exception: on average, we are able to train students of a good level, but our school system fails to bring top experts to the fore,” Uosukainen commented.

THE LACK OF COMPETITION SUCCESS WAS DISAPPOINTING

Timo Sirkiä reviewed the experiences from the Youth Skills Olympics in Amsterdam in a critical manner in his memo (28 August 1992). The team’s performance at the competition had been disappointing. According to Sirkiä, this lack of success could also be partially attributed to Finnish society. As examples, Sirkiä mentioned the lack of a competition tradition in VET and the work ethic of the young people in the welfare state, among other things. In Sirkiä’s opinion, Youth Skills Olympics were highly valued elsewhere in the world, and many countries participated in them with large teams. In these countries, the returning competition team was often welcomed back by at least the country’s prime minister.

Sirkiä emphasised that it was important for Finland to participate in competition activities for the sake of visibility, but the goals of developing professional competence were even more important. For the most part, the competition skills were comparable to Finnish industrial competence with regard to their tasks and standards. “However, the skills are continuously being developed, and Finland has been tasked with assessing the suitability of the works in the construction industry and preparing a proposal for their development in 1992. This type of activity makes it possible to influence the competition’s image and convey one’s own view of professional competence today and in the future.”

In his bulletin (9 July 1991) on the Youth Skills Olympics in Amsterdam and the next competition that would be held in Taiwan, Veijo Hintsanen also brought up the problems in the Finnish competition system. In his opinion, there was no point in sending representatives in many skills on a long and expensive competition trip to Taiwan if they could not be trained in the manner required by the competition.

In Hintsanen’s opinion, the construction industry had handled the matter the best up until that point. He once again brought up the need to establish an organisation that focused on competition activity. “As an alternative or supplement to sector-specific solutions, Finland could, just like many other countries, have a fund or foundation through which both

national Taitaja Competitions and international Skills Olympics would be taken care of.”

Hintsanen compiled a memo on vocational skills competitions and their organisations on 18 August 1991. In this memo, he compared the Finnish system to the operating models implemented in other countries. He stated that Finnish participation in international vocational skills competitions has, almost across the board, been characterised by amateurishness and weak commitment.

Particularly in the competitors’ training, Finland has been so far from the level of the industrial countries in both Central Europe and the Far East that there has been no chance of success. A comparison of the systems of the countries that participate in Youth Skills Olympics shows that, in almost all cases, the industry or, more broadly, the business community plays a key role both in the organisation of national vocational skills competitions or further vocational qualifications and the training of competitors for international vocational skills competitions. In most countries, a separate national organisation has been created for vocational skills competitions, relying either solely on the private sector or being a joint organisation between the private sector and public administration. The latter has been implemented by using different methods of organisation: fund, foundation, association or cooperation agreement.

In Finland, the arrangements for the Youth Skills Olympics had been close to the model used in Ireland, in which the activities had primarily been funded by the state through the educational administration. In contrast, there had been conscious efforts to keep the national Taitaja Competitions separate from the educational administration's direct control or funding. As these arrangements had always involved major problems, there was good reason to look into alternative operating models. "The most essential question is how prepared the various parties are to participate in organising and funding the activities. How and under what terms," Hintsanen contemplates in his memo.

2

Finland becomes
a skilled organiser of
skills competitions



Suomen ammattitaito – Skill Finland ry is founded

At the beginning of the 1990s, it became apparent that Finland required an impartial organisation that would be tasked with developing the appreciation and attractiveness of VET and organising competitions. Although the prospect of establishing a foundation had been discussed in various contexts, it was deemed that a registered association would be more appropriate. The leading idea was to have the association chaired by an individual who was sufficiently influential and had direct contact with the educational administration.

It was also essential to involve vocational colleges and the business community. After the disbandment of the Vocational Training Board (AKH) and the establishing of the Finnish National Agency for Education (OPH), it did not seem like an easy task to find someone

to replace AKH's Director General Jorma Pöyhönen, who retired in 1991, as the leader of competition activities. At the very least, not someone with the same level of enthusiasm and dedication. However, these concerns were for naught: **Vilho Hirvi**, the first director general of the brand-new OPH, gladly accepted the challenge.

At the 1992 Taitaja Competition, Hirvi gave recognition to vocational skills competitions in his welcoming speech. In his opinion, they also played a role in the ability of the Finnish education system to meet the educational challenges posed by the trend towards European integration.

The Taitaja Competition has served as a trailblazer in seeking new approaches and ways of thinking for the demonstration

PERUSTAMISKIRJA

Me allekirjoittaneet perustamme täten Suomen ammat-
titaito - Skill Finland -nimisen yhdistyksen, lii-
tymme yhdistyksen jäseniksi ja hyväksymme sille
ohkeen liitetyt säännöt.

Helsingissä tammikuun 11. päivänä 1993

<i>Vilho Hirvi</i>	Vilho Hirvi
<i>Jarmo Nurmi</i>	Jarmo Nurmi
<i>Matti Pekko</i>	Matti Pekko
<i>Esko Lenkila</i>	Esko Lenkila
<i>Tapani Tikenoja</i>	Tapani Tikenoja
<i>Arto Saarinen</i>	Arto Saarinen
<i>Piipponen Heikkilä</i>	Piipponen Heikkilä
<i>Veikko Hintssanen</i>	Veikko Hintssanen
<i>Jenna Kuisma</i>	Jenna Kuisma
<i>Kari Purhonen</i>	Kari Purhonen
<i>Petri Pohjonen</i>	Petri Pohjonen
<i>Reuno Jarnila</i>	Reuno Jarnila
<i>Pirjo Elo</i>	Pirjo Elo
<i>Ilhem Heid</i>	Ilhem Heid

Founding members of Skill Finland

Founding members 11 January 1993

- Elo Pirjo
(Vocational Education Financial Directors)
- Hamid Ilhan
(Finnish National Agency for Education)
- Heikkilä Pirjo
(Finnish National Agency for Education)
- Hintsanen Veijo
(Finnish National Agency for Education)
- Hirvi Vilho
(Finnish National Agency for Education)
- Jarnila Rauno
(City of Helsinki Education Department)
- Lankila Esko
(Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges)
- Nurmio Jarmo
(Trade Union of Education in Finland)
- Pekko Matti
(Vocational Education Foundation)
- Pohjonen Petri
(Union of Vocational Adult Education Centres)
- Purhonen Kari
(Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers)
- Saarinen Arto
(Union of Vocational College Rectors)
- Tikanoja Tapani
(Private Entrepreneurs' Foundation)
- Kuisma Jaana
(National Union of Vocational Students in Finland)

Member organisations in 1993, in order of joining

- Association of Industrial and Business Colleges
- AEL Centre for Technical Training
- Union of Automotive Industry Employers
- Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers
- Finnair Aviation Academy
- Union of Finnish Metal Industry Employers
- National Union of Vocational Students in Finland (SAKKI)
- Union of Vocational College Rectors
- Western Lapland Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Education
- Vocational Education Foundation
- Vocational Education Financial Directors
- Technical Institute of Turku
- Finnish National Agency for Education
- Vakka-Suomi Vocational College
- Union of Vocational Adult Education Centres
- Kokkola Vocational College
- Pieksämäki Vocational College
- Savonlinna Vocational College
- Trade Union of Education in Finland
- Seinäjoki Vocational College

and assessment of vocational skills. The competition has provided VET with positive publicity and laid a foundation for the development of the assessment that is carried out in the final stage of a student's studies. Because of this, competition plays an important role in the transition of Finnish VET to the EU era.



THE NEW ASSOCIATION LAUNCHES ITS ACTIVITIES IN THE MIDST OF THE 1990S RECESSION

Veijo Hintsanen prepared a draft in which he wrote down his thoughts on the purpose and goals of the new association's activities, among other things. **Mayor of Kokkola and Chairman of the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges (SAOL) Esko Lankila** was tasked with writing the rules of the association based on this draft.

Vilho Hirvi convened the founding meeting on 11 January 1993. This event, held in the office of OPH's director general, was attended by a group of influential parties who had an interest in the development of VET. The founding document was signed by the representatives of the parties that had already decided to participate in the association's activities at this stage.

The association was named Skill Finland, and the city of Helsinki was marked down as the location of its registered office. The mission of the newly founded association was to promote

Vilho Hirvi (1941–2001) served as director general of the Finnish National Agency for Education in 1991–1994 and as chief of staff at the Ministry of Education in 1995–2001. He convened Skills Finland's founding meeting, was a member of the Board of Skills Finland in 1993 and chaired the Board from 1994 to 2000. Hirvi was Finland's official delegate in IVTO from 1995 to 1999.

appreciation and awareness of VET in society, the learning outcomes of VET and the interest of students in the continuous development of their vocational skills and independent entrepreneurship.

According to the rules, the association carried out its mission by

1. monitoring the status of VET and the appreciation of vocational skills in society and by submitting initiatives and proposals concerning these matters
2. organising national vocational skills competitions in the industrial and service sectors
3. supporting the participation of Finns in



Esko Lankila (1928–2009) was a founding member of Skill Finland and the first president of the Board from 1993 to 1994. He wrote the first rules of the association.



Individual members have been an important network between the association and educational institutions since the start of the association's activities. Director of Ylä-Savo Municipal Federation of Education Matti Notko from Ylä-Savo Vocational College has been a long-standing and active member, who is proud to wear a membership badge on his chest.

international Youth Skills Olympics and the international promotion of vocational skills that is related to them

4. distributing grants and scholarships
5. carrying out communication and publication activities related to its own area of activity.

The association's goal was not to make a profit or other financial gain for those involved in it, and its activities were also prohibited from becoming primarily financial in nature in other ways.

The association's purpose and mission have remained unchanged to the present day.

Esko Lankila chaired the Board until 22 December 1993, after which Vilho Hirvi took over as president. **Kari Purhonen** was chosen as the Board's vice president and Pirjo Heikkilä as its secretary. **Hannele Marttiini**, who worked as department secretary at OPH, was appointed treasurer. The other people chosen as members of the Board were **Pirjo Elo**, **Eero Heinäluoma**, **Reijo Paananen**, **Veijo Hintsanen**, **Jaana Kuisma**, **Jarmo Nurmio**, **Matti Pekko**, **Petri Pohjonen**, **Arto Saarinen** and **Pentti Rauhala**.

The Board convened three times in 1993. It launched the association's activities, created a financial foundation for it and established the Work, Member Acquisition, Taitaja and Olympics Divisions to assist it.



The most important mission of the Taitaja Division was to prepare rules for the 1994 Taitaja Competition. During the first year of operation, it convened five times. It was decided that the Olympics Division would not launch its activities until 1994. The goal set by the Olympics Division was for Finland to participate in 15 skills at the 1995 Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon. The division was tasked with organising the selection and training of competitors for the competition.

The Member Acquisition Division convened once during the year. It focused on spreading information on the association's activities, primarily through various organisations. According to the rules, both organisations and private individuals could become members of

Founding members at the 15th anniversary gala of Skills Finland. In the photo from the left: Jaana Ylitalo, Matti Pekko, Veijo Hintsanen, Arto Saarinen, Petri Pohjonen (in the foreground), Kari Purhonen, Rauno Jarnila, Pirjo Elo, Ilhan Hamid. Absent from the photo are Vilho Hirvi, Jarmo Nurmio, Esko Lankila, Tapani Tikanoja and Pirjo Heikkilä.

the association. In the first year, the membership fee was 1,000 Finnish marks for organisations and 100 Finnish marks for private individuals. At the end of 1993, the membership fee had been paid by 25 private individuals and 20 organisations.

The action plan for the association's first full financial year, 1994, was approved at an annual meeting on 11 April 1994. In accordance with the plan, "The association's goal is to consolidate its activities during its first full financial year.

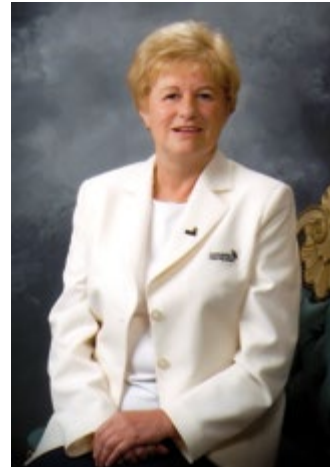
In these activities, special attention will be paid to the association's public image. The aim is for the association and its goals to become known to the state and municipal administrations as well as the business and educational communities. Key targets of influence at various levels include political decision-makers, the business community and organisations. The key role is played by the staff and students of vocational colleges that provide VET."

In 1994, the association was still focusing on acquiring members and funds. For the 1994 annual report, the association was already able to list 45 organisations and 36 individuals as members.

The year 1994 saw the first Taitaja Competition coordinated by the new association, in addition to which the association participated in the Next Step fair for the first time, identified the skills that Finland would participate in at the Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon and launched preparations for these skills.

The timing of the association's founding in the middle of the 1990s recession brought its own challenges to the launching of the activities. As a result of the recession, the state, municipalities, educational institutions and companies carefully calculated every single Finnish mark that they invested and the benefit it would yield.

Pirjo Elo represented Vocational Education Financial Directors in the association's Board. According to Elo, VET was at a low ebb in



Pirjo Elo is a founding member of Skills Finland. She served in the association's Board from 1993 to 2006 and in the Executive and Finance Committees from 2003 to 2011. Elo, who worked as the administrative director of the Eastern Uusimaa Municipal Training and Education Consortium, represented Vocational Education Financial Directors, which she chaired from 1998 to 2005.

those times. There was a need to both increase the attractiveness of VET and, above all, improve the vocational skills of students. Hot topics in VET included preventing the social exclusion of young people, staff lay-offs and the uncertainty caused by a reform of the legislation on financing.

"For example, Vocational Education Financial Directors got involved for the simple reason that if VET is not attractive, the finances will not be functional either. It has been of great importance that financial directors have commendably understood the value of competition in the development of education, even though it has generated additional costs on many occasions," Pirjo Elo states.

The finances grow along with the association's activities

The association's first annual budget was tight. According to the income statement for the first year of operation, the association spent FIM 2,647 on its activities and awarded FIM 15,000 in grants. The association received a subsidy of FIM 100,000 from the Private Entrepreneurs' Foundation for supporting vocational skills competitions. The Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges supported the launch of the association's activities and the development of vocational skills competitions with two donations of FIM 10,000. The association accumulated a total of FIM 157,400 in subsidies and FIM 20,400 in revenue from membership fees.

The following year of operation was still modest in terms of numbers. The income statement for 1994 reveals that the costs incurred from activities were a little over FIM 21,000, while the costs incurred from the Taitaja Competition were a little less than FIM 13,000. During the year, the association had received a total of FIM 115,000 in subsidies and a little over FIM 43,000 in revenue from membership fees. Important supporters in the association's early years included Finland's Slot Machine Association, which granted subsidies for the promotion and support of young people's vocational skills.

After three years in operation, the association had accumulated some funds of its own, and when the Ministry of Education decided to grant an annual general subsidy, the association was able

to expand its activities significantly. During its first years in operation, the association had no full-time employees. Senior Inspector of the Finnish National Agency for Education Pirjo Heikkilä served as the association's executive director on top of her own job. Department Secretary Hannele Marttiini had also been taking care of the practical matters related to both the association's activities and competition activities on top of her own job from the start. In 1996, the association was able to hire its first full-time executive director. The first EU projects were launched in 2001. With project funding, the association has been able to lay a sturdy groundwork for excellence in skills training and develop Taitaja9 Competitions, which are intended for comprehensive school pupils in Year 9.

The impact of the WorldSkills Competition held in Helsinki in 2005 started to become highly visible in the association's finances from 2003 onwards. Until then, the revenue in Euros from cooperation with businesses had been low. However, businesses had played a significant role in the association's activities from the very start. Since WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, cooperation and networking with the business community has continued and become more diverse. ■

Elo says that Vilho Hirvi personally undertook to increase the appreciation of VET. Hirvi considered the situation to be an economic and national problem that had to be overcome. His contribution was decisive in the launching stage of the association's activities. The association's activities started on a small scale, driven by volunteers. The members of the Board received no attendance fees or other compensation, but the director general of OPH always treated them to a delicious cup of coffee with pastries.

Hannele Marttiini got her first taste of vocational skills competitions in 1988 while working at the Department of Industrial Education at AKH, where she had assisted her supervisors, first Juhani Honka and later Veijo Hintsanen, who were actively involved in the launching of competition activities. "In the early years, all the practical arrangements for Finland to participate in international skills competitions were taken care of by AKH and later by OPH, primarily at the Department of Industrial Education. I immediately became interested and wanted to participate."

Hannele Marttiini recalls that the most important electronic tools at the time were word processing equipment and a telefax. There was a great amount of paperwork before a competition, and practical matters were taken care of by a small, enthusiastic group on top of their own jobs.



Hannele Marttiini, who worked as secretary to the director general of the Finnish National Agency for Education for many years, served as treasurer of Skills Finland from 1993 to 1995. She led the Finnish national WorldSkills team from 1995 to 2005.

THE ASSOCIATION TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TAITAJA COMPETITION

The Taitaja Competition of 1992 was the last one of its kind organised by the Finnish Association of Vocational Colleges (SAOL), as SAOL's activities were discontinued in 1993. In 1993, instead of Taitaja, a competition called Rakennus-Taitaja was held only for the construction industry. Skill Finland assumed responsibility for the Taitaja Competition from 1994 onwards. The competitions held between 1994 and 1996 were organised in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education and the education and training committees for various sectors. The responsibility for organising vocational college

specific competitions fell to local vocational advisory committees that decided upon both the test projects and assessment criteria. The finals were implemented as trade-specific competitions around the country. In 1996, the Taitaja Competition included nine competition skills. The same year also saw separate competitions in Floristry as well as the Internet and Multimedia, which was held in Aulanko in conjunction with a training conference called Interactive Technology.

The association was able to write down the following, very positive assessment in the annual report for 1996: "After a few quieter years, the Taitaja Competition is coming back to life. We are continuously seeking new ideas for the development of the Taitaja Competition to help us involve more and more vocational colleges in these activities."

Everyday life of civil servants

Civil servants sometimes found themselves in surprising situations. When the Finns were preparing for the Youth Skills Olympics in Taiwan in 1993, Veijo Hintsanen received a package sent as air cargo from the competition organiser. Due to the vagueness of the package, it had roused suspicions among Finnish customs officers and got caught stuck in customs. "I had no choice but to go to the airport to resolve the situation. So there I was, opening the package in front of the eyes of a stern-faced customs officer. The package revealed cables, tiles, bricks, pieces of fabric and all sorts of other small items," Hannele Marttiini says.

The contents were sample materials used in test projects in Youth Skills Olympics. As the customs officer had never even heard of vocational skills competitions, Marttiini had to give him an introduction to the matter and explain which skills the samples in question were intended for. "This tile is for Wall and Floor Tiling and this piece of fabric is for Ladies' Dressmaking... The customs officer growled something in reply, but he eventually agreed to give me the contents of the package. And I didn't have to pay a customs duty."



Janne Rantala (on the right) shared the gold medal in Bricklaying with the Taiwanese competitor at the competition held in Taipei in 1993.



Finland wins its first gold medal in the 1993 Youth Skills Olympics

In its first annual report in 1993, Skill Finland was immediately able to report good news. Bricklayer **Janne Rantala** had won a gold medal in the Youth Skills Olympics held in Taipei, Taiwan, in June. The association awarded the competitors who had been successful in the competition, namely Rantala and electric welder **Mikko Nieminen**, who had won a Medallion for Excellence, with one-time grants of 10,000 FIM and 5,000 FIM, respectively.

In addition to Bricklaying and Electric Welding, Finland participated in Metal Milling, CNC Machining, Industrial Wiring, Carpentry, Painting and Ladies' Dressmaking as well as Mechatronics, which was included as an Official Skill for the first time.

According to the team leader, Counsellor of Education **Pirkko Vesterinen** from the Finnish

National Agency for Education, the team spirit within the team was very good, and the spirits were high almost throughout the entire event. In her review of the competition, Vesterinen proposed that special attention be paid to two factors in training in the future: the ability and desire of the competitors to compete, rather than just their skills, as well as the foreign culture and living in it. According to her, things such as mealtimes posed problems to some of the competitors.

Electric welder Mikko Nieminen, who earned a Medallion for Excellence, describes his experiences at the competition as follows in an interview with the Sakki magazine:

"It was pretty hot, yeah. It gets warm when you do electric welding in any case, but the competition hall was located in the hottest

spot. The highest temperature they measured in the hall was 47 degrees Celsius, so we definitely weren't cold. We drank many litres of liquids during those 5–7-hour days. I was a little lost, especially on the first day, with all the unfamiliar systems and pretty heavy time constraints, so it would be nice to go a second time... Unfortunately, you can't. Those are the rules."

All in all, Mikko Nieminen considered the competition in Taipei to be a very positive event. "It was a great experience. My self-confidence did increase a great deal. Afterwards, it's nice to reminisce about having been able to keep up with 16 foreigners. They're no better there than we are here." Even before the Olympics, Mikko had contemplated going abroad for work, and his experience at the competition may even have given more impetus to this idea. "I'll definitely go work abroad at some point. As long as I'm young and able to go, I plan to go and seek experience."

The gold medal achieved by Janne Rantala continued the string of success in the construction industry. After all, Finland's first ever medal, **Petri Vastamäki's** bronze from the Youth Skills Olympics in Amsterdam in 1991, had been won in Bricklaying. Janne Rantala had been trained by **Timo Sirkiä** and **Matti Tiainen**. In Taipei, Sirkiä also served as an expert in Bricklaying. After the trial competition, Rantala was trained half a dozen times for a total of seven weeks.

"We divided our training duties so that I took care of technical training, while a professional bricklayer provided basic training. We took the training really far with the Finnish Construction Trade Union and the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry, and we worked well together. After all, we won medals at the Olympic level in three consecutive years, first bronze, then gold and finally silver. The silver medal was won by **Sami Ojanen** in Lyon in 1995. This success was largely due to the fact that, together with the unions, we got our representatives from working life. We had a one-year-long training period for which we used an apprenticeship," Sirkiä says.

In Taipei, the competitors had to produce decorative brickwork featuring a sunrise on one side, the year 93 on another side and the Olympic flame on the third side. It was a demanding test project, and only seven out of the 15 competitors completed their work by the deadline. Janne Rantala was not surprised by the test project. "When I saw the drawings, I immediately knew that I'd make it. There was nothing scary about them."

The only thing Rantala was worried about was his toolbox: had he brought all the necessary tools with him? Electric tools, which were in common use at Finnish worksites, were not allowed in the competition. The Finnish team had learned this in Birmingham in 1989.

Rantala's worries proved to be well-founded, as one essential tool was missing from his toolbox:

a carbide saw intended for cutting bricks. The competition used hard refractory bricks with a large grain size, which crumbled easily. In Finland, they were only used for making fireplaces. Finnish bricks broke evenly when hit with a hard and swift blow, but being hit like this caused the bricks used in the competition to crumble completely.

Rantala demonstrated steady nerves and resourcefulness in solving this problem. He started choosing the most intact bricks by rubbing them against each other. The sound created by this motion told him how usable the brick was. A broken brick made a gravelly noise, and when you tried to cut one, it crumbled in your hands. In contrast, an easy-to-cut brick made a sharp noise. This method allowed Rantala to continue the competition without losing too much time on preparatory work.

When, after the end of the competition, the Finn was tied in points with the Taiwanese competitor and achieved a shared victory, the World Trade Center almost burst at the seams from the Finnish spectators' joy.

Rantala's parents accompanied him on the competition trip. His father, Pentti, a second-generation bricklayer, said that he had full trust in his son, knowing that his concentration was phenomenal. Even so, Rantala's father was moved by the gold medal. The hands of Rantala's mother, Sirpa, were so shaky with emotion that she was unable to fasten a golden

bracelet around Janne's wrist. The bracelet was the family's present for their son.

IS EUROPE ABLE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE POSED BY THE FAR EAST?

Finland had prepared for the 1993 Youth Skills Olympics in Taiwan more carefully than for the previous two Youth Skills Olympics. Trial competitions had been held in an increasing number of skills, and training was also at a somewhat improved level. This time, thanks to a change in the rules, the Finnish team had been able to send its own expert for every skill that the country was participating in, which had been considered to be of utmost importance for success.

Training Manager at Valmet **Teuvo Närvänen**, who had already participated in two Youth Skills Olympics as an expert, was now chosen to be chief expert in Metal Milling. In other words, he was the first Finn to lead a panel of experts. Senior Inspector of OPH Annamajja Aro served as an expert in Ladies' Dressmaking for the first time at the competition in Taiwan.

At the Youth Skills Olympics' feedback day event on 10 September 1993, Director General of OPH and member of the Management Committee of the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO) Vilho Hirvi brought up the success of Far Eastern countries, which he thought was contributed to by the special training implemented in these countries.

Janne Rantala built a brick barbeque for Mauno and Tellervo Koivisto

A project called Vocational Skills Under Control was created around bricklayer Janne Rantala, Finland's first gold medallist from the Youth Skills Olympics. The project lasted more than two years. Its aim was to increase the appreciation of vocational skills by organising events that gave young people an opportunity to witness the best bricklaying skills in the world in action. At the same time, the project sought to disseminate information on various forms of training, the Youth Skills Olympics and Taitaja Competitions. The project was funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Union of Vocational Adult Education Centres, the Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ), the Finnish Construction Trade Union, the Confederation of Finnish Construction Industries, Skill Finland, Optiroc and Tiileritehtaat. The project had access to OAJ's communication channels, and it was coordinated by the National Education and Training Committee for the Building Services and Construction Sector.

Visitors were able to admire demonstrations of gold medallist Janne Rantala's skills at more than ten public events related to the Vocational Skills Under Control project that were held around Finland in spring and summer 1994.

At different types of events, Rantala always built a brick barbeque that was most often designed by his trainer, Timo Sirkiä. These barbeques were donated to both public figures and various organisations. The

idea was that the brick products would advertise great vocational skills throughout their lifespan.

Rantala built his first barbeque at the Next Step fair held in January 1994. This barbeque was donated to the presidential couple, **Mauno and Tellervo Koivisto**, for their summer residence in Tähtelä, Inkoo. Rantala installed the barbeque in June, together with Timo Sirkiä and **Pertti Törmälä**.

At Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, Rantala skilfully built the peculiar Waves of Music barbeque, designed by **Pia Purhonen**, under the interested eyes of Prime Minister **Esko Aho** and his influential entourage. Esko Aho later received his own barbeque.

According to Rantala, his experiences of the project were very positive; the events were attended by a large number of people and the work garnered a great deal of interest. It is also most likely thanks to the Vocational Skills Under Control project that Finland achieved success again in construction sector skills at the Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon in 1995.

How did the project get its name? When Janne Rantala was asked whether he was able to do tiling in addition to bricklaying, he replied: "Yes, I have that under control too." This was the origin of the project's name: Vocational Skills Under Control. ■

The competitors from Korea, Taiwan and Japan participated in full-time training for one to three years, depending on the skill and background company.

“Success in the Youth Skills Olympics is highly appreciated in several countries. Beating the young people from Japan, Korea and Taiwan is increasingly difficult for other countries. Based on the results, we can ask how Europe intends to meet the challenges posed by the vocational skills of the Far East or whether we choose to give up,” Vilho Hirvi said.

Hirvi also brought up the same thing that Minister of Education **Riitta Uosukainen** had pointed out two years earlier: our education system was not bringing top experts to the fore to a sufficient degree. Hirvi emphasised the significance of Youth Skills Olympics as a learning event. He thought, for example, that the test projects in Taipei could be used to develop the Finnish system of competence-based qualifications. Quality assessment was becoming an increasingly essential tool in the development of VET both nationally and internationally.

Lecturer **Seppo Huhtiniemi** from Pirkanmaa Vocational College had been involved in organising Taitaja Competitions and trial competitions for Olympic representatives since the beginning. After the competition in Taiwan, he commented in his newspaper column that the experience gained from

international competitions plays its own role in the planning and development of Finnish teaching. Huhtiniemi’s experience as a trainer was limited to Taitaja Competitions, but this level of experience was enough for him to note that training manual skills is just as demanding as training athletes.

In Huhtiniemi’s opinion, training is suitable for school environments, as it, for its part, increases the motivation of both teachers and students to strive for good vocational skills.

In the memo he wrote on the competition in Taiwan on 10 September 1993, Veijo Hintsanen, who had transferred to the position of leading rector at Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) at the beginning of the 1990s, once again criticised the Finnish education system and particularly the fact that young people had been trained for decades “to serve someone else through continuous training removed from actual working life, in which the main ideology has been to ensure educational equality and the provision of general and basic capabilities as similarly as possible across the country”. In Hintsanen’s opinion, new life should be breathed into the whole system in the form of a new type of operating culture that would appreciate the different talents of individuals, innovativeness, internal entrepreneurship and the distinctive profiles of vocational colleges.

Hintsanen already wondered in early 1993 whether Finland met the prerequisites to apply

to become the host of the 2001 Youth Skills Olympics. However, it was decided later in the autumn that Finland should not apply to become the host with insufficient experience. It had also turned out that, due to the principle of continents taking turns hosting the competition, the competitions in 1999 and 2001 would, in any case, be held outside Europe, as it had already been decided that the competitions in 1995 and 1997 would be hosted in Europe. Hintsanen assessed:

Holding international skills competitions is impossible without a national system in place. The creation of a national system requires high-level decision-making and commitment, as described above, as well as a leader who is accountable for results and able to create the necessary organisation and work with background influencers to obtain sufficient financial support for the cause. The national system can be built on the foundation formed by Skill Finland, which was founded in spring 1993. However, a national Youth Skills Olympics Committee is needed to support it and ensure the commitment of the top decision-makers to creating the national system and organising Olympics.



Interested listeners at Skills Finland's seminar, held in the conference facilities of Viru Hotel in Estonia in 2008. The seminar's theme was "The future and top experts".

The association grows and achieves more success in competitions

SKILLS SHIP SEMINARS BECOME A TRADITION

One of the goals recorded for 1994 was to look into the possibility of holding a ship seminar for rectors and vice rectors in January 1995. The preparations for the seminar started in 1994, and the seminar was implemented in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education on board M/S Silja Symphony from 26 to 28 January 1995.

The seminar's theme was Skill as the goal – quality as a criterion. During the two seminar days, the attendees presented Finnish and international assessment strategies and discussed the improvement of the quality of VET. Light was shed on the theme by individuals such as Development Manager **Kaisa Kautto-Koivula** (Nokia Telecommunication), whose presentation examined the expectations towards the quality and effectiveness of education from a corporate point of view, as well as Adjunct Professor **Urpo**

Sarala (University of Helsinki, Department of Education), who taught the listeners about the components of the quality of teaching in VET. Foreign guests were also invited to the association's first seminar. The Dutch president of the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO), **Cees Beuk**, spoke about the organisation's activities as well as the Dutch VET system and the assessment of the quality of VET. Sweden had joined the organisation the previous year, and it was represented at the seminar by Head of Department of Skolverket **Sten Petterson**, who spoke on the topic of the Swedish assessment system.

The feedback was so good that it was decided that a similar seminar would also be held the following year. The association's Board assessed that the same theme could be continued by deepening the perspective. Another aim was for the association to maintain the discourse on the quality of education and develop quality certificates.

A significant tradition, which has only strengthened its position over the years, had been born. In a way, the ship seminar was a continuation of the first Taitaja Competitions' tradition of holding expert seminars. Its purpose was to gather VET professionals together once a year for a two-day event to gain information, exchange thoughts and experiences, brainstorm, network and find inspiration. Implemented in the form of a Helsinki–Stockholm–Helsinki cruise, the

seminar has also played an important role as a tool in the association's fundraising since the beginning.

FINNS ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN LYON IN 1995

The Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon in 1995 was attended by 500 competitors and almost as many experts from 28 countries. The competitors competed for the championship in 37 Official Skills, of which 20 featured a Finnish participant. If we also include those who participated in the Demonstration Skill, the total number of Finnish competitors in Lyon was 24. The team was now so large that the competition rules allowed Finland to send two team leaders to support the competitors. Hannele Marttiini from the Finnish National Agency for Education was appointed as the second team leader to assist Pirkko Vesterinen. This marked the beginning of Marttiini's career as a team leader, which continued until 2005.

The Finnish team was highly successful in Lyon. The team came home with two golds, one silver and five Medallions for Excellence. The competitors in construction industry skills were once again strongly in the limelight: **Kasimir Kvist** won the gold medal in Wall and Floor Tiling, while Sami Ojanen took silver in Bricklaying. **Jarkko Pakaslahti**, who participated in Carpentry, earned a Medallion for Excellence.

Developing things together at ship seminars

Topical themes essential to the development of VET and competition activities have annually been picked as themes of the seminars. The first seminar already attracted more than a hundred participants. Since then, the number of participants has varied between 150 and 300.

The speaker at the seminars have been prestigious representatives of the government, businesses, labour market organisations, education providers and research; national and international top experts in their own fields; representatives of the sports community; and some of the best experts in vocational skills competitions. The seminars have also traditionally given space to young experts and their views.

The structure and concept of the seminars have remained roughly the same over the years. The programme is packed and factual, but time is usually reserved on the second day for anyone who wants to explore Stockholm to do so. In the last few years, an increasing proportion of the seminar guests have passed on exploring Stockholm in favour of holding their own meetings and training sessions.

Some years, the programme for the second day has been divided into two themes, with one theme addressing competition activities and the other examining the development of VET on a more general level. The organisers have sought to add variety to the seminar programme by including question times and panel discussions. In 1996, the association tested a new type of non-stop workshop; the participants had an opportunity to familiarise themselves with multimedia and the Internet during the trip!

At the seminar held in 1996, which was themed "International future", Emeritus Director General Jorma Pöyhönen was presented with Certificate of Honorary Membership in IVTO. The association had to wait for more than ten years for the following Finnish honorary memberships: Veijo Hintsanen was appointed honorary member of WSI in 2011, while Timo Lankinen was appointed honorary member in 2012.

The association's major project in 2005, the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki, was also visible in the focus areas in the seminar programmes. In 2003, the title was "Major project – Youth Skills Olympics 2005". For the next two years, the seminars bore the title "Year of vocational skills 2005 – towards the WorldSkills Competition".

The 2008 seminar was exceptionally held in Tallinn in cooperation with the Estonian sister organisation of Skills Finland, Innove.

In 2013, the association turned 20, while the Taitaja Competition turned 25. In honour of these anniversaries, a two-day anniversary seminar was held at Hotel Vanajanlinna in Hämeenlinna. The second day of the seminar included a group reflection session – a hike in Vanaja – that resulted in the association writing down the goal of organising EuroSkills 2020 in Finland in its strategy as its clear strategic intent. At Vanajanlinna, awards were also presented to parties that had distinguished themselves in the early days of the association and the Taitaja Competition. ■

The other Finns who received a Medallion for Excellence were **Jukka Kenttämies** and **Jarkko Vähä-Tahlo** in Mechatronics, **Teija Mattson** in Ladies' Dressmaking, **Lukas Bäckström** in Automobile Technology and **Mikko Levoska** in Restaurant Service.

Finland also participated in the Global Multimedia Challenge, which was featured in Lyon as a Demonstration Skill. The other participating teams came from Australia, the USA, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Malesia. Twelve judges assessed the young people's work over a period of four days.

The team competition was carried out in a peculiar manner: two members of the four-person team worked at the competition venue, while the other two worked in their home country. **Jussi Tuominen** and **Kari Helenius** wrote articles and took photos of the competition events in Lyon. They sent the materials over the Internet to Finland, where **Timo Oksanen** and **Janne Ostrovski** compiled the materials into a website and sent them back to France.

The Finnish team was put together at the last minute, but the end results show that the selection of competitors and the division of labour between them were spot on: Finland won the gold medal. Three of the team members were studying or had studied information technology at the Forssa campus of Häme University of Applied Sciences. When the competition was held, Jussi Tuominen was



The competitors in construction sector skills were once again strongly in the limelight in Lyon in 1995. Kasimir Kvist (on the right) won the gold medal in Wall and Floor Tiling, while Sami Ojanen took silver in Bricklaying.

studying at Hämeenlinna Institute of Business and Information Technology.

Janne Ostrovski described the team as a correspondence and editing team that developed and maintained a website together. The team members in France needed social and technical skills, while the team members in Finland mainly needed technical skills. "We performed consistently well in our work throughout the competition, which was definitely one of the keys to our victory." In Ostrovski's opinion, the competition skill and test project anticipated the future. In the mid-1990s, extensive multimedia training was not yet being provided anywhere in the world. On the other hand, this provided an equal basis for all the teams that participated in the competition: the competitors were self-taught and interested in the industry in one way or another.

The Global Multimedia Challenge was not included in the competition in this form ever again. In Ostrovski's opinion, technology took a major leap forwards in the mid-1990s, the concept of multimedia expanded and the use of the Internet increased. The reporter's part in the competition skill was left as a one-time experiment. However, Information Technology/Software Applications had been a competition skill since the 1993 competition in Taiwan. Web Design was first introduced at WorldSkills St Gallen 2003, where Finnish competitor **Joni Aaltonen** earned a Medallion for Excellence for his performance and was soon after hired for the WSI organisation's IT and communication technology team.

In Team Leader Pirkko Vesterinen's opinion, it was gratifying that Finland achieved success in both traditional and new skills in Lyon. Youth Skills Olympics have always been an unforgettable experience for young professionals, their teachers and experts as well as everyone who has actively participated in the competition arrangements.

I have gotten to know young Finnish people who are either still in training or who have recently graduated from a vocational college and become young professionals. I have seen how they react in a tense competition situation and after the situation is over. I have sensed the intensity of the atmosphere and the great enthusiasm among the young people. I have also heard



Senior Ministerial Adviser Pirkko Vesterinen was the leader of the Finnish national WorldSkills team from 1993 to 1995 as well as an expert in Restaurant Service in 1991.

how well they get by in a foreign language in a foreign country. I can only say that we can be very proud of them.

Finland also had reason to be proud of its experts. A test project proposal prepared by a Finnish expert was chosen as the actual test project in two skills at the next competition: Timo Sirkiä's proposal was chosen for the second time in Bricklaying, while Annamaija Aro's proposal was chosen for the first time in Ladies' Dressmaking. The proposal that Aro presented in Lyon had been prepared with teamwork in Finland.

THE COMPETITION IS INFLUENCED BY WORLD POLITICS

In May 1995, France had elected a new president, **Jacques Chirac**. Soon after his election, Chirac

had ordered nuclear testing to be continued on Mururoa Atoll in French Polynesia despite harsh international criticism. For their part, the budget cuts implemented by the president and the abandonment of pension reforms stirred up a spirit of protest in France during the autumn, resulting in strikes. In November–December, the country witnessed the largest general strike since 1968. The restless protest atmosphere also reflected in the Youth Skills Olympics held in mid-October.

Bricklayer Sami Ojanen described the mood in the host city as electric. The opening ceremony of the Youth Skills Olympics had to be postponed due to a bomb threat, and an evening get-together was cancelled for the same reason.

Ojanen mentions one particular meal as the most peculiar experience of the competition days. He and two other Finns were sitting at a table when suddenly a French gentleman came up to their table, “chattering in French”. The Finns did not understand the language and were also a little tired after the competition day. The Frenchman finally had enough of monologuing and said in English that he hoped that they enjoyed their meal. “Immediately, a group of reporters and filming crew crowded around our table. One reporter spoke very disparagingly about the man to us in English. It was only then that we realised that the fellow in question was President Jacques Chirac.”

Due to the good success of the Finnish youths at the Lyon Youth Skills Olympics, the limited appreciation shown by the media was, for the first time, addressed more seriously and extensively in Finland after the competition.

In an interview with the *Palkkatyöläinen* magazine (31 October 1995), VET Secretary of the Metal Workers’ Union **Pekka Porvali** heavily criticised the unenthusiastic welcome received by the Olympic team and the indifference of the media. “When a highly respected industrialist declares that Finns will only succeed in the world with excellent skills, this statement is shared quickly and efficiently in the media. But when world champions in vocational skills return home, the only ones who have the time of day for them are one media representative and the director general of the Finnish National Agency for Education.”

Editor-in-chief of Helsingin Sanomat **Keijo K. Kulha** wondered about the same thing in his column “Youth Skills Olympics” (HS 19 November 1995), asking: “Were the reception and level of publicity befitting the success achieved?” In Kulha’s opinion, Youth Skills Olympics are an excellent way to compare vocational skills in different countries. According to him, success at the competition reflected the level of education, the quality of work and even work ethics in the participating country. “It’s a competition for professionals, not amateurs!”

In his column, Kulha also addressed the overvaluation of academic education, which showed no signs of subsiding despite the fact that an academic degree by no means guaranteed a job. In his opinion, it must be possible to offer young people the option of vocational education and training that can meet their needs while ensuring more secure job prospects for them.

I hope that competitions like the Youth Skills Olympics and the success achieved in them by Finnish competitors will also attract more attention to manual skills that will be more significant in the future. Everyone has the chance to find their own success factors and focus their efforts on them. This also allows the nation to succeed well in tough international competition.

TIMO SIRKIÄ BECOMES THE ASSOCIATION'S FIRST FULL-TIME EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The year 1996 was momentous for the association's activities: the Ministry of Education decided to award an annual general grant of 250,000 FIM to the association for the organisation of national vocational skills competitions for young people as well as for the training and participation of young people in international Youth Skills Olympics. Additionally, the Private Entrepreneurs' Foundation supported the association's activities with an annual grant of 100,000 FIM.

The general grant allowed the association to hire a full-time executive director. Timo Sirkiä was asked to take on this position starting from the beginning of April. It was a fixed-term employment relationship that continued until the end of 1997. Sirkiä had already been asked to take the job in 1993, but the matter had been abandoned due to a lack of funding.

The Finnish National Agency for Education provided the association with a workspace in its own premises in Hakaniemi, free of charge. The executive director's duties included managing the association's basic activities, Taitaja Competitions and, every two years, international Youth Skills Olympics. "Taitaja Competitions were a big deal for us. We sought participants for the competition and organisers for the regional competitions and the final competition. We were helped by the strong support from unions. Construction and electrical industry unions in particular participated in the activities by providing prizes and sometimes acting as judges at competitions," Sirkiä recalls.

Various financing solutions were conceived in order to run the competition and training activities. For example, the skills related to the automotive industry and Ladies' Dressmaking were funded with challenge competitions. For Ladies' Dressmaking, this meant that companies in the industry challenged each other to contribute a certain amount. Annamajja Aro and Timo Sirkiä were in charge of issuing the challenges. In return for the money they

Sami Ojanen inherited his vocational skills from his father

Bricklayer Sami Ojanen won silver at the Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon. When Peräseinäjoki-born Ojanen is asked when he started practising bricklaying, his answer is always the same: "At age six, when I was helping my father build a chimney and fell from a roof for the first time." Ojanen is a fifth-generation bricklayer. He completed his first Ostrobothnian wall at age 12, together with his father, **Heikki Ojanen**.

Sami Ojanen studied in the building construction programme at Törnävä Vocational College in Seinäjoki. While preparing for the Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon, he was working in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. "Back then, if you wanted to train, you had to be prepared to put in a lot of effort yourself. Every month, I took one week away from contract work to practise at Forssa Vocational Adult Education Centre."

Janne Rantala, the gold medallist from the previous competition, also comes from Ostrobothnia. The fathers of these two young men knew each other, having worked at the same construction sites. After being chosen for the national team, Ojanen visited Rantala to discuss their competition experiences. "Sure, Janne was a role model for me and sparked me for the competition. I've also honestly told him that."

After Lyon, Ojanen worked in the employ of Seicon Oy, currently Peab Oy, in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and carried out brickwork at notable construction and renovation sites, the best-known of which were the contemporary art museum Kiasma, Tennispalatsi and the head office of Outokumpu.

Ojanen, who was living in Vantaa at the time, returned to Ostrobothnia in 2000. He is currently living in Seinäjoki with his wife and two children and has founded a company that focuses on building fireplaces.

A TV COMMERCIAL MADE SAMI OJANEN A CELEBRITY

Sami Ojanen became known to the whole of Finland as the Juhla Mokka man thanks to a lucky coincidence. He contacted the Paulig Group, the leading coffee manufacturer in Finland, in order to participate in an artisan competition organised by the company. The competition had already been held, but a director of a production company that made commercials for MTV3 became interested in the bricklayer. "They were continuously looking for artisans for a series of Juhla Mokka commercials. The director became interested when I talked about my shared career with my father."



The series of coffee commercials had been running on television for a couple of decades, and artisans were competing for the chance to appear in the popular series. In the early 2000s, a couple of dozen experts were screen-tested for a single commercial.

Heikki and Sami Ojanen went to a screen test, after which the decision to film a commercial was made. The filming was carried out at two worksites in Peräseinäjoki in 1996. "These commercials had no script. The director chatted with us while keeping the camera rolling the whole time."

The filming lasted for three days and resulted in almost two hours of tape. A 30-second snippet

Sami Ojanen became known to the whole of Finland as the Juhla Mokka man after he and his father, bricklayer Heikki Ojanen, appeared in a series of Paulig commercials that featured artisans.

was cut from this material for the 45-second-long commercial. The commercial had a major effect: it provided Sami with job opportunities and recognition that he carries to this day.

In 1999, the coffee company held a public vote for the best Juhla Mokka artisan commercial. There was something in the warm chat between the bricklayers that touched the hearts of the Finnish people, who appreciate work and vocational skills. The commercial won the contest, receiving one third of the votes cast. ■

contributed, the companies got their names featured in an industry magazine.

Timo Sirkiä addressed the instability of the association's fundraising in his piece for the member bulletin of Skill Finland (1/1997). In his opinion, the association had come to the end of a road in its development and now "had to choose a direction and functions while looking towards the future". In his opinion, the activities had to be more far-sighted and systematic.

The funding of the association's activities largely relied on grants and donations from the private and public sectors. Sirkiä considered it to be very important for "functions to be developed for the association that will allow it to sell itself to third parties and, through this, fund its own activities".

Skill Finland received grants that were directly allocated to the training of competitors participating in Youth Skills Olympics for the first time in 1996. Postipankki Youth Foundation, which had been founded to support youth recreation and culture, granted 50,000 FIM for training in Cabinetmaking for 1996 and 1997.

The Taitaja Competition held in Turku in spring 1997 was attended by a record number of competitors. A total of 194 competitors had signed up for the 12 skills featured at the competition. Throughout his term of office, Sirkiä's goal was to combine the



Timo Sirkiä was the executive director of Skill Finland from 1996 to 2000. He was a member of the association's Board in 1995 and an expert in Bricklaying from 1991 to 1995.

Executive directors of Skills Finland

1993–1996	Pirjo Heikkilä (held the position alongside her own work)
1996–2000	Timo Sirkiä
2000–2002	Juhani Honka
2003–	Eija Alhojärvi

competitions in different skills under one roof. The competition in Turku was a step in this direction. The competition's main event was held at the Technical Institute in May, and it comprised the final competitions in eight

skills. In addition to the main event, there were separate competitions for four skills held in a decentralised manner around the country. The final competition for the automotive industry was held at Haaga Vocational College in conjunction with the Mestarimekaanikko (Master Mechanic) competition organised by the Association of Automotive Technical Societies in Finland, while the final competition in Men's and Ladies' Hairdressing was held at the City of Helsinki Beauty College, the competition in Surface Treatment was held at Tampere Hall in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Master Painters' Union and the competition in Plating and Welding was held at Tampere College.

That same year was the first time that the association's Board presented certificates of honour to the vocational colleges that had trained the winners of the Taitaja finals. They were presented in conjunction with the ship seminar held in January.

SUCCESS IN SOFT TECHNOLOGY SKILLS AT THE ST GALLEN COMPETITION IN 1997

Finland participated in the Youth Skills Olympics for the fifth time in St Gallen, Switzerland, in July 1997. The results were the best that Finland had achieved up to that point in its competition history: The 19-person Finnish national team achieved three medals and eleven Medallions for Excellence. This clearly exceeded the level of success achieved in



Barber Toni Kylätasku won the silver medal with his competition pieces in St Gallen in 1997.



Finland participated in Autobody Repair for the first time in the competition held in St Gallen in 1997. Competitor Janne Forsvik, focused on his competition performance.

Lyon, which had been the team's goal. Finland was 15th in the comparison between countries, which was a little above average.

Executive Director Timo Sirkiä was happy about this achievement by the Finnish team. In an interview with the Spektri magazine (4/1997), however, he brought up the good results achieved by other small European countries. According to Sirkiä, Switzerland,

Austria and Luxembourg carefully considered which trades and skills they had a chance to succeed in.

“With this tactic, Austria has placed first in the comparison between countries twice. Instead of focusing on the number of competitors, it focuses on quality.”

In Sirkiä’s opinion, Finland’s strategy had always emphasised learning over success. The Finns had continuously and boldly been looking for new skills to compete in. According to Sirkiä, the positive trend demonstrated by the team was encouraging. The training carried out in 1996 and 1997 had clearly yielded results.

In previous Youth Skills Olympics, competitors in construction skills had been the most successful among the Finnish competitors. In Switzerland, it was the turn of soft technology skills to come into the limelight. In Ladies’ Dressmaking, the seams finally came together properly: **Anu Savolainen**’s performance earned her a bronze medal. Savolainen had to share third place with four other competitors, but this did not reduce the medal’s value. The competition was very close, as the gold medal was also shared between Switzerland and Thailand.

Barber **Toni Kylätasku** won the silver medal in Men’s Hairdressing. Hairdresser **Sanna Furu** was a respectable third in Ladies’ Hairdressing. Men’s and Ladies’ Hairdressing had been introduced as a new skill at the Taitaja



Helmi Halabi was working at the Vocational Beauty School of Helsinki and was involved in planning the first Taitaja Competition intended for hairdressers in 1994. Halabi served as a trainer in Beauty Therapy in 1994, as an expert in 1997–2001 and 2005 and also as a skill manager in 2003.

Competition in 1995, and the competition in St Gallen was only the second time that Finnish barbers and hairdressers were participating in the Youth Skills Olympics.

Finnish competitor Sanna Furu was trained for St Gallen by **Helmi Halabi**, Furu’s teacher from the Vocational Beauty School of Helsinki who served as an expert at the competition. Halabi herself had been involved in competition activity related to the hair industry in Finland and abroad for a long period of time in the roles of competitor, trainer and judge.



Sanna Furu was chosen for the St Gallen team on account of her successes in the Finnish Hairdressing Championship and the Grand Prix of Hairdressing. The three best trainees formed a qualifier group that competed amongst itself for a year. The trainee with the highest score became the Finnish representative.

Helmi Halabi participated in training for experts in order to obtain information and taught the trainees about the test projects implemented at Youth Skills Olympics. According to Sanna Furu, the test projects for international skills competitions had been prepared based on the principles followed in the education systems of different countries and the compromises made in these principles. “Old-fashioned hairstyles,

The Finnish national team in St Gallen in 1997, together with Team Leaders Timo Sirkiä (far left) and Hannele Marttiini (far right).

The team comprised Janne Forsvik, Autobody Repair; Sanna Furu, Ladies' Hairdressing; Kirsi Kautto, Floristry; Keijo Kivioja, Welding; Toni Koskela, Bricklaying; Matti Kumpulainen, CNC Turning; Toni Kylätasku, Men's Hairdressing; Juha Liitola, Mechatronics; Kimmo Niemi, Industrial Control; Tomi-Pekka Nieminen, CNC Milling; Touko Palviainen, Cabinetmaking; Kimmo Puola, Mechatronics; Petri Päckilä, IT/ Software Applications; Markku Randell, Painting & Decorating; Mikko Salonen, Automobile Technology; Anu Savolainen, Ladies' Dressmaking; Esa Tilli, Wall & Floor Tiling; Timo Toropainen, Mech. Eng. CADD; Veli-Pekka Vehmaa, Pattern Making; Jenni Yrjölä, Restaurant Service.

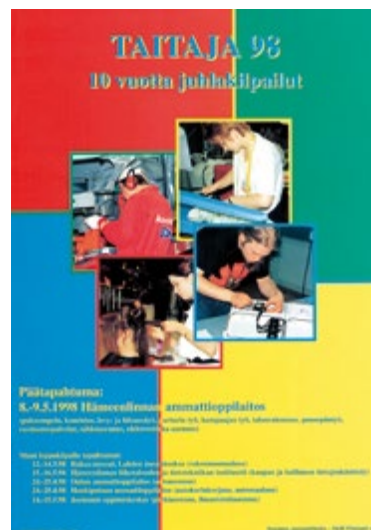
such as marcel waves, were still done in many countries. They had already disappeared from Finnish education.”

In St Gallen, the hairstyles were implemented on mannequin heads, with the exception of two hairstyles. The live models were assigned by lottery among the competitors. The system was not equal, and the use of live models has been completely removed from the WorldSkills Competitions of today.

In Halabi’s opinion, Sanna Furu was an ideal trainee who practised tenaciously. In the final phase of the training period, excellence in skills training was purchased from respected professionals in the field for Furu and most of the other competitors who participated in Youth Skills Olympics or WorldSkills Competitions. Furu’s strong language skills, positive attitude, excellent interaction skills and ability to accept feedback were also highly beneficial. Halabi recalls that, at the competition venue, Sanna made a great impression on a Swiss businessman, who would have been ready to hire her immediately.

THE TAITAJA COMPETITION RETURNS TO HÄMEENLINNA FOR ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY

In summer 1997, the Board of Skill Finland decided to extend the employment of Executive Director Timo Sirkiä until 30 April 2000. Information and member acquisition



campaigns continued to play a very important role in the new association’s activities. The Nordic cooperation launched the previous year gained concrete forms when Finnish youths participated in the Norwegian national welding competition in November 1997.

The association celebrated its anniversary in 1998: The Taitaja Competition was held for the tenth time. The organisers wanted to take the anniversary year’s competition back to Taitaja’s birth place, Hämeenlinna. The preparations for the event were launched in autumn 1997. The Taitaja Division established by the association included representatives of the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Confederation of Finnish Industry and Employers, Service Sector Employers Palta, the vocational colleges that organised the final competitions, the provincial government, the City of Hämeenlinna and School of Professional Teacher Education (HAMK).

Competing matured Sanna Furu into an entrepreneur

In Sanna Furu's opinion, every competitor has their own way of training and psyching themselves up. However, the principle is that if you want to earn a prize, you have to practise hundreds, or even thousands, of times, with unlimited repetitions.

After graduating from upper secondary school, Sanna decided to fulfil her dreams and began studying hairdressing, even though the guidance counsellor tried to urge her to go into some other field.

In 1996, after two years of studying in a programme for upper secondary school graduates, Furu graduated with a qualification in hairdressing from the Vocational Beauty School of Helsinki. She worked for two different employers in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area for a couple of years. "I'd planned to start studying to become a teacher in my field immediately after graduating, but my teacher and expert Helmi Halabi urged me to first experience working life, which was a smart thing to do."

Instead of becoming a teacher, Furu became an entrepreneur. However, she has been able to witness the development of educational institutions

as a member of the Advisory Committee for Hairdressing at Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty.

"I HAD TO START A COMPANY IN ORDER TO TRAIN"

Helmi Halabi encouraged her talented student to participate in competitions in her field. Furu performed reasonably well. She says that stopping competing felt downright impossible after she had been chosen for the junior national team after the first competition.

Before the Youth Skills Olympics in St Gallen, Furu had already represented Finland in the World Championships in Hairdressing in both the junior and youth national teams. When she was training for St Gallen, she had already entered working life and tried to practise in between serving customers. "When my lunch hours and breaks weren't enough, I had to go and practise at school on my days off."

In competition activities in the hairdressing sector, it was necessary for competitors to share in the costs; among other costs, they had to personally cover the models' pay and travel to and from



competitions. “The monthly salary for a new graduate was so low that the whole equation gradually became impossible. If I wanted to train, I had to found a company.” Because of this, Furu first became a sole proprietor in 1998 and rented a commercial premise connected to a beauty salon. After a few years, she found a commercial premise in the centre of Helsinki, set up a hair salon there and changed her business into a limited company in 2002.

In 1999, Furu successfully participated in two international skills competitions. That year, the main competition of the season was the Europe Cup final in Moscow. The next year, Sanna Furu won the Finnish championship.

According to Furu, the hair sector did not yet know anything about the Youth Skills Olympics in the mid-1990s. In contrast, the Finnish, European and World championship titles awarded in the sector’s own competitions were

Entrepreneur Sanna Furu (now Ruskomäki) works at her own business in the centre of Helsinki. She appreciates competition experience when hiring new employees.

highly appreciated back then and remain so today. However, within ten years the Taitaja and WorldSkills Competitions became well-known thanks to great PR work, leading to them also finding an appreciated place for themselves within the diverse family of competitions.

SANNA FURU NOW HIRES “ATTITUDE”

All the publicity and success led to work “pouring in through the doors and windows”, which made it necessary to hire more hands to do the work. Many of the hairdressers who worked as contract entrepreneurs at the hair salon owned by Furu had a competitive background. **Iina Björklöf**, now Korhonen, represented Finland at WorldSkillsMontreal 1999.

Furu continued competing until the start of the 2000s. After her competitive career, she had also served as a judge at several national and international skills competitions. She served as a judge at the Taitaja Competition held in Jyväskylä in 2003. “The same types of qualities are required in both competing and entrepreneurship. You must be disciplined, diligent and social. The thought process in which you learn to shut everything out and focus only on your competition performance is useful in working life. Training teaches you how to complete a work task quickly, without sacrificing quality,” Furu muses.

In Furu’s opinion, competition activities are a good measure of vocational skills. She has also used success in competitions as a yardstick of work attitude when hiring people. “If an applicant’s CV includes a mention of participation in the Taitaja Competition or some other competition in the sector, it’s a huge plus. The fact that you have both a hungry attitude and are capable of healthy self-criticism is an unbeatable combination in manual trades.”

In Furu’s opinion, excellence in skills that is obtained through competition activities is generally valued and utilised far too little in working life. She thinks that the test projects correspond to the skills needed in salon work in Finland. They help young people prepare for working life, which is one of the purposes of competition activities. In her opinion, it is depressing that a hairdresser who has achieved success in a competition is, as the newest employee, forced to settle for the lowest pay grade when starting work. “This is why those who are successful in competitions in our trade are often independent entrepreneurs.”

Now that she is older, Sanna Furu has noticed that founding her business was her “growing up process”. She learned to know herself but also take responsibility for others. “Today, I spend a lot of time thinking. When I was younger, I was scared that if I stepped aside and refused a job that I’d been offered, everything would run away from me. Now I know that I’ve earned my skills with so much blood, sweat and tears that they can’t be taken away.” ■

Hämeenlinna Vocational College bore the main responsibility for the event's practical arrangements. It covered a total of a little over FIM 250,000 of the competition's costs. The college's actual share of the costs, after participation fees, seminar fees and donations are deducted, was ultimately a little less than FIM 140,000.

In addition to a general grant of FIM 250,000, Skill Finland also received a grant of FIM 100,000 from the Ministry of Education for organising the 10th anniversary competition. The anniversary competition also received support from a great number of companies and organisations in the form of money, prizes and supplies of materials.

A total of 61 vocational colleges signed up for Taitaja 98. This was a 20% increase in sign-ups compared to the previous year, the association was pleased to note. A trial competition could now be held in several skills: Automobile Technology, Machining, Plating and Welding, Painting of Buildings, Housing Construction, Furniture Making, Catering Services and Electrical Installations. The final competition featured 16 skills, ten of which were included in the main event held at Hämeenlinna Vocational College from 8 to 9 May 1998. There were almost a hundred competitors in Hämeenlinna.

In his closing speech for the competition, Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education **Jukka Sarjala** noted that,

despite efforts being made, the appreciation of VET is not at the same level as the economic significance of vocational skills. In that sense, it is necessary to be aware of and inform the public about the skills of Finnish vocational colleges in order to boost the image of VET.

THE FIRST EUROSILLS COMPETITION IN GRONINGEN IN THE NETHERLANDS IN 1998

Not only was 1998 an anniversary year for the Taitaja Competition, it was also the year when the first EuroSkills Competition was held. The Dutch and British Skills Organisations had founded the EuroSkills Organisation in 1997 in order to develop VET and vocational skills competitions in Europe. Its mission was to promote the development of VET within the European Union and Eastern Europe and increase cooperation between Member States. Its other purpose was to organise a EuroSkills Competition every other year. The founding of the organisation was partially an answer to the launch of vocational skills competitions between Asian countries in 1996.

The first EuroSkills Competition was held in Groningen in the Netherlands at the end of October 1998, largely organised by the Dutch Skills (now Skills Netherlands). The competition featured 27 skills and 170 competitors from 20 countries. The test projects had been prepared by using the test projects for the 1997 Youth Skills Olympics as a basis, and for many skills



the test projects were almost exactly the same as in St Gallen a year earlier.

According to Timo Sirkiä's assessment, the organisation of the competition was lacking in many areas, which was mostly due to the fact that many of the individuals in charge of the competition had not previously worked in a position of responsibility and they were also few in number. Additionally, the Baltic countries did not send any experts to accompany their competitors, which resulted in there not being enough judges in the competition. This first competition also had a relatively small number of participants, and several skills featured more than one competitor from the same country.

In the photo from the left: Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Jukka Sarjala, Lecturer Jukka Järvinen from Hämeenlinna Vocational College and member of the Board of Skill Finland Pekka Porvali examining the test project for the 1998 Taitaja Competition.

In other words, the competition was not particularly popular the first time it was held.

Arto Tikkunen, who served as an expert in Jewellery, recalls the difficulties that occurred in the arrangements as follows: "There was a terrible storm the night before the competition, and one of the competition tents collapsed. The workstations in the tent in question were scattered around the competition area,

including in the vocational college's corridors, and the competition was able to start normally.”

However, according to Timo Sirkiä, the problems did not impact the great atmosphere which the competition's organisers had managed to create. Sirkiä says that the competition was, in every way, lighter and more relaxed than WorldSkills Competitions usually were.

Finland participated in this first EuroSkills Competition with three competitors. Raahel Vocational College sent a welder to the competition, while the Lahti Institute of Arts and Crafts sent a jeweller and a cabinetmaker. These educational institutions bore all the costs incurred from the competition in cooperation with companies and their other background organisations.

Finland had great success in the competition: every Finnish representative won gold in their skill.

Call for Ladies' Dressmaking to meet the requirements of the business community

Training in Ladies' Dressmaking had found its own implementation method over the years. A training programme that utilised apprenticeship had already been adopted for the training of **Minna Karevuori**, the very first competitor, for the 1989 world championship.

Urged by Maija-Sisko Paananen, Annamaija Aro had brought in the talented master tailor and lecturer **Raimo Hietanen**, who was teaching at the Pyyrikki campus of Tampere College. Paananen had her own name for him: Mr. Buttonhole. "At the time, we were already making all buttonholes by machine. The competitors in Ladies' Dressmaking didn't know how to make a buttonhole by hand because that skill was not usually needed in the making of women's clothing, but it was required for a long time in the test project for Ladies' Dressmaking at Youth Skills Olympics. Every jacket had one to five keyhole buttonholes that had to be placed on the sleeve cuffs, for example. Hietanen was excellent at making a buttonhole by hand." The cooperation with Raimo Hietanen continued until his retirement in 2008.

After Birmingham, it had become a practice to set up the training groups for the skill in Tampere, which allowed the trainees to participate in lessons taught by Hietanen. The girls who competed for the chance to represent Finland in the national team had signed apprenticeship agreements with Tampere-based companies. The apprenticeship practice was continued until recently.

According to Aro, after the industry was hit by the recession and cooperation with companies became more difficult, it was decided that the girls would come to Tampere for a year to study in a training programme aimed at either a further vocational qualification or a specialist vocational qualification. Most of the competitors completed a further vocational qualification during their training, after which their participation in the international competition was considered to be a merit for them if they decided to continue their studies. According to Aro, this was a good practice: it also guaranteed that the competitors had access to students' social benefits.

According to Annamaija Aro, who had served as an expert since the beginning of the 1990s, the

system has been consciously developed so that the national competition has gradually taken on more and more of the characteristics of the test projects implemented at Youth Skills Olympics. Among other things, the design portion had already been removed from the test project at the Taitaja Competition held in 1990. Many considered this change to be unfortunate and in conflict with the Finnish notion of the profession, but if Finland wished to pursue international success, there was no other choice. The Finns had often tried to change the content of the test projects to make them more modern, but in vain.

After the competition in Taiwan, Aro criticised the method in which the skill was implemented in her memo, dated 4 August 1993. In her opinion, the problem was that the experts who had been involved in the competitions for many years and resisted changes had prevented the skill from evolving to meet the requirements of the business community. "They considered the competition to be a haute couture level competition, i.e. at the level of the individual creations by large fashion houses – creations that can cost anything, involve a great deal of work by hand and are only available to the richest people in the world." In contrast, Aro, in her own words, saw the competition as being at the level of prêt-à-porter, which means that while the quality is still high, the role that craftsmanship plays is at a reasonable level. For example, buttonholes and some other visible parts could be sewn by hand, but the lining and other hidden parts were sewn by machine.

After a long period of pressure and also partially as a result of cabinet machinations by the Technical Committee of WorldSkills International, the skill was renewed for WorldSkills Calgary 2009. The skill's previous name, Ladies' Dressmaking, was simultaneously replaced by the name Fashion Technology. Finland also played a very strong role in this change. "Even water can penetrate stone if it drips long enough," Veijo Hintsanen said afterwards. ■

Finland becomes the host of WSC2005

In its action plan for 1999, the association was able to state the following: “The year 1999 was a good one, overall. The association’s visibility improved in many forums over the course of the year, and the activities strengthened their position in the field.”

Ambitious goals had been set for the development of the Taitaja Competition. The association set out to negotiate with the largest education providers in Finland, with the aim of turning the Taitaja finals into larger events in which Finnish championships are up for grabs in a larger number of skills at the same time and which also feature other activities. In order to ensure trade-specific visibility, the association also continued to pursue the goal of organising Taitaja finals in individual trades in conjunction with trade fairs.

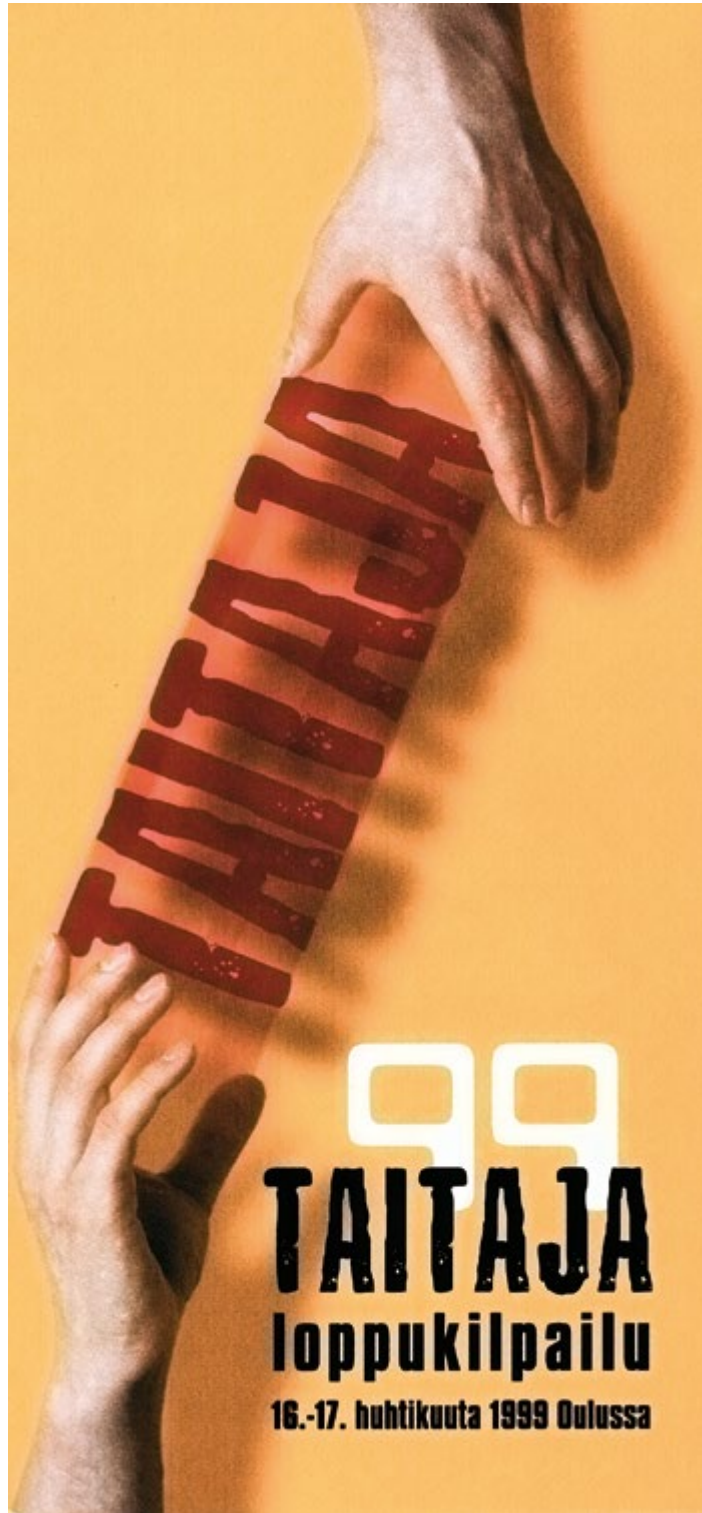
The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training took up the challenge and held the main event of the Taitaja Competition in its premises in April 1999. The competition skills featured were Men’s Hairdressing, Ladies’ Hairdressing, Housing Construction, Furniture Making, Catering Services, Electrical Installations, Electronics and Plumbing. Additionally, competitions were organised in other skills around the country: a competition in Surface

Treatment in conjunction with the Rakentaja 99 Fair in Tampere; all the competitions related to the automotive and transport industry at Seinäjoki Vocational College; a competition in Information Technology in conjunction with the ITK 99 conference in Hämeenlinna and a metal industry competition at Tampere College.

There were a total of 18 competition skills, and the competitions attracted a record number of participants, which also increased the number of regional and trial competitions.

During that year, the association prepared a development plan for competition activities for 2000–2005. The goal set for this development was “to turn the Taitaja Competition into a notable VET training and competition event that, by itself, gathers young people and representatives of the education sector under the same roof. The primary mission is to determine whether the Taitaja Competition can be a separate fair and training event.”

The EuroSkills organisation had approached both Skill Finland and several other Finnish parties to get them to join the newly founded organisation. In summer 1999, Timo Sirkiä prepared a report on the advantages and disadvantages of a potential membership. Based





WorldSkills Competition 1999 was held at Montreal's Olympic Stadium.

on this report, the association's Board found that Skill Finland would be a natural Finnish member of the organisation and that joining it would strengthen the association's activities. The only elements that were considered to pose a challenge were the work and financial resources required. The Board decided to launch negotiations to secure funding. However, these negotiations failed to lead to a level of security that would have allowed the project to continue. The executive director's workload was already unreasonable, and it was not possible to add yet another new form of competition to it. It was not until the boost generated by WSC2005 that Skill Finland was able to increase its personnel and opportunities opened up to expand the association's activities.

1999 was also a significant year with regard to Nordic cooperation. Nordic organisations that organised competition activities kept in continuous contact with each other, and they also agreed on the promotion of common matters in the international organisation at their cooperation meetings. Plumbers participated in the international competition for the first time in Montreal in 1999. That same year marked the launch of a joint practice among the Nordic countries that proved to be functional: before the WorldSkills Competition, a Nordic championship was held in plumbing. The first

Nordic championship, held in Trondheim, Norway, was attended by all the Nordic countries. The competition was a good way to prepare for WSC, as it made it possible to build a Nordic cooperation network that was also significant for skill training. The tradition of holding the Nordic Championship in Plumbing continues to this day.

30 TOP EXPERTS TRAVELLED TO THE COMPETITION IN MONTREAL IN 1999

The competition in Montreal was the first competition to be referred to as the WorldSkills Competition (WSC), instead of Youth Skills Olympics. After Montreal, the name ammattitaidon MM-kisat (lit. World Championships in Vocational Skills) was gradually adopted in Finland, and it became permanently established in the early 2000s.

The competition was held at Montreal's Olympic Stadium, which was normally used as a baseball field and fair venue at the time. The competition was attended by 600 competitors from 32 countries.

Finland once again systematically increased the size of its team, sending 30 competitors for 28 skills. These skills included two skills that were based on work in pairs: Mechatronics and Landscape Gardening.

Trade-specific steering groups were in charge of preparations for the competition. The competitors were chosen from skill-specific



The photos of the competitors who achieved success in Montreal adorned the association's marketing materials. Barber Ritva Honkanen won gold in Men's Hairdressing, and car painter Jukka Markkanen took silver in Car Painting.

training groups that, at best, comprised of more than a dozen young people who competed for the chance to represent Finland. Almost all those who participated in the training were aiming to complete a further vocational qualification in their own trade. The training utilised apprenticeship training, self-motivated education and financial support received from companies.

Skill-specific training units were in charge of the training, which was implemented at vocational colleges, adult education centres, universities of applied sciences and companies. Additionally, a great number of companies and organisations supported the WSC in Montreal in different ways.

Before WorldSkills Competition 1999, training was also provided to the experts for the first time. The World Class Skill Expert training, which was worth 10 credit units, was implemented in cooperation with the School of

Professional Teacher Education (HAMK), and it was attended by all the 28 experts chosen for WorldSkills Montreal 1999. All in all, Finland went to the competition well prepared.

The Finnish competitors performed well in Montreal. The colour of the medal won in hairdressing changed from the silver earned two years earlier to gold: barber **Ritva Honkanen** from Hyvinkää won in Men's Hairdressing. Car painter **Jukka Markkanen** from Vantaa won silver in his skill. In addition to these two medals, the Finnish competitors earned eight Medallions for Excellence. In the medal statistics, Finland was 15th out of 34 countries.

Skill Finland awarded both medallists a one-time grant of FIM 10,000. The competitors who had earned a Medallion for Excellence received one-time grants worth FIM 5,000. Minister of Education **Maija Rask** invited the Finnish national team to a prestigious award presentation ceremony at the Government Banquet Hall.

Competition activity was relatively new in all the Nordic countries, which was why Sweden had proposed that a joint Nordic presentation video be prepared of the WSC in Montreal. Presentation materials were also needed in Finland, but the association did not want to collaborate in this matter. Instead, a video was implemented as a student project at the Arts and Crafts School of Oulu. The video "Young Finnish professionals on their way to the top of

the world" was available for purchase at a cost price, and it was used to a commendable degree for communication and marketing purposes.

EXCITEMENT AND HARD WORK IN LISBON – FINLAND IS ASSIGNED AS THE HOST OF WSC2005

The year 1999 was historic: The decision to apply for Finland to host the WorldSkills Competition was finally made in Montreal. Hosting WSC had already been a dream for Jorma Pöyhönen, but, in Veijo Hintsanen's words, Finland was "still so firmly in its diapers at the time that applying to host the competition could not even be considered seriously".

Instead, we made it our goal to increase the Finnish team systematically, one competition at a time, until we were familiar with most of the competition skills. Then it finally happened in 1999. In the middle of WorldSkills Montreal 1999, Chief of Staff Vilho Hirvi and I came to the conclusion that we were sufficiently equipped to apply for WSC2005. We left on the spot and dashed to the Business Lounge at our hotel to prepare and submit Finland's media release. The content was simple and clear: Finland would apply for the right to host WSC2005.

Senior Ministerial Adviser Timo Lankinen had been working as the director general for vocational education and training at the Department for Education and Science Policy

at the Ministry of Education since 1997. He had heard about vocational skills competitions even before WSC1999. However, it was not until Montreal that he understood what this activity was all about. Lankinen took a quick two-day trip to Montreal as an observer in the middle of Finland's busy first presidency of the Council of the European Union. "You can't get a correct understanding of the scale and excellence through a video or DVD. When you see the event with your own eyes, that feeling is comparable to a religious experience. From Montreal onwards, I was wholeheartedly on board," Lankinen says.

According to Lankinen, competition activity took a big leap forward in Finland when the Taitaja Competition was brought out from inside the walls of vocational colleges. When it became big and diverse enough, it also began to interest third party visitors.

Lankinen was appointed Finland's official delegate at the beginning of 2000, after the WorldSkills Competition in Montreal. According to him, the decision to apply for the right to host WSC fuelled the wave that, over the next few years, also raised the national competition to its current level of success and prosperity:

I have sometimes heard people wonder what we need international skills competitions for, when national competitions are often found to be more significant from the perspective



Markku Aunola, long-standing rector of Kiiipula Vocational College, was responsible for submitting the application for Finland to host WSC2005 in 2000. He has been a member of the Board of Skills Finland since 2007. Aunola is one of the key developers of vocational skills competitions for special needs students. He is Finland's representative in the Board of the International Abilitylympic Federation (IAF).

of education providers and other operators. At those times, I have said that the Taitaja Competition would not exist without international competitions. They have provided us with the target level that has existed since the competition in Birmingham. The national competition and the training activity surrounding it were built to support international skills competitions. We would not have dared to set out to organise such a large-scale international event if we did not trust that there are strong VET providers in Finland that have the capability to assume responsibility for the project.

Lankinen points out that elsewhere in the world vocational skills competitions are organised by working life organisations and companies. The Finnish competition system, which had been built in cooperation with education providers from the very beginning, linking it to the goals of VET, is exceptional and functions well.

Once the dust had settled in the aftermath of WorldSkills Montreal 1999, Finland set out to launch the application process. According to the rules of WorldSkills International, the decision on the host country is always made five years before the competition is held. The Ministry of Education, which officially applied for the right for Finland to organise the WSC2005, assigned the task of preparing the competition application to Häme University of Applied Sciences. Juhani Honka, who was the director of the School of Professional Teacher Education (HAMK) at the time, recruited **Markku Aunola** to prepare the application. The application was finalised once and for all at the Ministry of Education.

At the time, Markku Aunola was working as a principal lecturer in special needs education at the School of Professional Teacher Education (HAMK). At the beginning of February 2000, he took leave from his job to focus on the project. According to Aunola, the commission comprised of two parts. Firstly, he carried out background research for Timo Lankinen by compiling base materials for arguments to be built for the Finnish Government, as the organisation of a major international event also had to be greenlit by a higher authority.

Secondly, he had to identify the required competition arrangements and prepare the application. Aunola's task started swiftly and grandly. At the urging of Veijo Hintsanen, his first order of business was to reserve Helsinki Fair Centre and the Hartwall Arena for three weeks towards the end of May 2005 under his own name, as no official organisation yet existed for the competition. "It was the longest continuous reservation of Helsinki Fair Centre that had ever been made. The person to whom I submitted the reservation request later recalled it as the most peculiar situation of their career."

Aunola contacted the organisers of the WorldSkills Competition in Montreal and flew to Canada to meet with them. He was familiar with the place, having been a member of the large group of observers from the School of Professional Teacher Education that had attended WorldSkills Montreal 1999 the previous autumn. The Canadians proved to be very cooperative.

Aunola wrote about his return trip in an article in the electronic newsletter of Skills Finland (1/2009) as follows:

I have sometimes afterwards thought that it would probably not be possible to get through airport security today with such weak explanations and while carrying exact floor plans of the Montreal Olympic Stadium – particularly with this face.

We also immediately started making promotional materials for the meeting in Lisbon. We knew that we were competing against the Japanese for the competition, and we wanted to make a good first impression. DVD was new technology back then, and we decided to make a DVD instead of traditional presentation materials. Thinking back on it now, we managed to make a decent presentation on Finland in a short amount of time and with meagre resources. The DVD also depicted Helsinki Fair Centre, Hartwall Arena and the Taitaja Competition. The audio was available in three languages, and the DVD depicted Finnish competitive crazes, ranging from wife carrying to sand skiing.

Finland's application emphasised the competition and training system that was being built. The training activities related to the system were in the process of being launched. It would improve the capability of Finns not only to participate in international competitions but also organise them. The application pointed out Helsinki's strong experience in organising major international congresses and events.

The decision on the WSC2005 was made at IVTO's 50th anniversary General Assembly, held in Lisbon, Portugal, in June 2000. Finland was represented at the General Assembly by Timo Lankinen, Veijo Hintsanen, Juhani Honka and Markku Aunola. It was Lankinen's first time attending as the official delegate.

According to Honka, the initial situation was as exciting as it could be: during the discussions held early in the week, the Finns got the notion that most of the participants in the General Assembly would be voting for Japan. At a reception organised by the Finns, they showed the DVD to representatives of the General Assembly and presented their ideas related to the event. Over the course of the week, the situation began to turn in the Finns' favour. Aunola states in his interview that the delegation showed a part of the DVD at the official General Assembly while Timo Lankinen gave a speech. "Of course, there was insane lobbying going on all the while. Veijo Hintsanen had been involved for many years, so he was able to take advantage of his personal connections."

According to Aunola, what was particularly pronounced in the Finns' efforts were Hintsanen's lobbying skills and Lankinen's ability to act diplomatically with the representatives of Japan, the country competing against Finland. The Finns would have been prepared to take the matter to a vote, but for the Japanese, losing the vote was too high of a risk. They had worked hard to get the right to host the competition, and losing would have meant losing face. Their hard efforts are also demonstrated by the fact that **Tadao Sugama**, who was Japan's official delegate at the time, had travelled to Helsinki in spring 2000 to persuade Finland to give up its application for WSC2005. However, polite discussions did not lead to the result he was hoping to achieve.

With the active assistance of President of WSI **Jack (Tjerk) Düsseldorf**, a compromise was reached with the Japanese on the final evening before the concluding meeting: WSC005 would be granted to Finland, while Japan would host the next competition in 2007. One of Finland's strong arguments was that the current EU programming period would end after 2005, and there was no information available on funding for the next period. Because of this, Finland could not accept the postponing of its own proposal to 2007. Another argument in favour of the proposed solution was the possibility of Japan organising both WSC and Abilympics at the same time in 2007, which would be a first in the competitions' history. In the end, this was the unanimous decision made at the meeting.

In summer 2000, Aunola left the School of Professional Teacher Education to become the rector at Kiiipula Vocational College. He never participated in the arrangements of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 after that, but he also could not completely escape them. A few years after the success achieved in Lisbon, Helsinki Fair Centre reached out to him to confirm that the reservation was still valid, as it was still in his name.

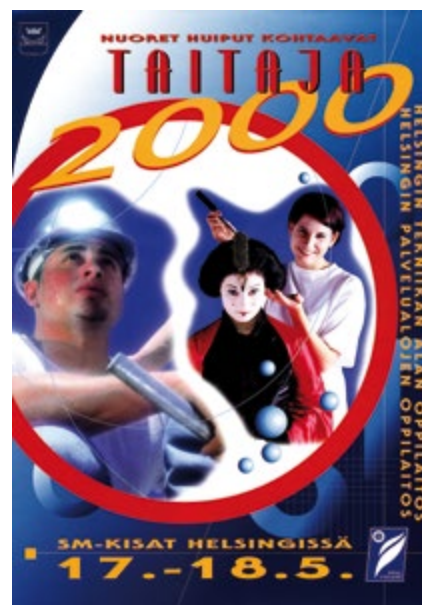
The journey towards WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 begins

After the competition for the right to host WSC2005 was resolved in Finland's favour, Vilho Hirvi stated in an interview with the Tietotaito magazine (2/2000) that being able to host the competition was an enormous challenge and honour. According to him, the right to host the competition was ultimately granted to Finland because "Finnish activity and education and the Finnish business sector are appreciated around the world". In Hirvi's opinion, making the arrangements for the competition was one of the largest and most ambitious VET development projects.

From the very start, the goal was not only to organise the best WorldSkills Competition in the competition's history, but also to develop Taitaja Competitions and Finnish VET as a whole. In order to succeed, the competition project required cooperation from the entire Finnish VET sector.

THE TAITAJA COMPETITION AS PART OF HELSINKI'S ANNIVERSARY YEAR 2000

In 2000, the City of Helsinki turned 450. Among other events in honour of the anniversary, the City also took on the task of



organising the Taitaja Competition in May. The competition was closely related to the Nuori Osaaja 2000 (Young Expert 2000) event held on the same week. The City of Helsinki Education Department's Vocational and Adult Education and Training Division was in charge of the arrangements for the competition. According to **Kristiina Holopainen**, a representative of the Education Department who gave a presentation on the competition to the association's Board in May, Helsinki wanted to invest in the event properly in order to raise the appreciation of the

Taitaja Competition to the level it deserved. The Education Department considered the Taitaja Competition to be an excellent thing for the marketing of VET, and it was also prepared to participate in the WSC2005 project. The Education Department had already reserved funding for it in advance in case Finland was granted the right to host the competition.

The competition was decentralised to five educational units of the City of Helsinki. The competition included 18 skills and 170 competitors. The event was open to the public, and the locations were planned so that visitors had an opportunity to walk around and watch the competitors work. Students served as guides at the competition venues. All the vocational upper secondary institutions in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area had been invited to participate in the competition.

The event had a grandiose setting: the opening ceremony was held at the new Sanoma House, while the closing ceremony and award presentation were held at the Old Student House. The competition was opened by Chairman of the City Board of the City of Helsinki and MP Raakel Hiltunen, and the main speech was given by Timo Lankinen, the new president of Skills Finland. CEO **Seppo Kievari delivered the greeting from Sanoma House**, and the competitors were given a motivational speech by two competitors who had been successful at WorldSkills Montreal

1999: Iina Björklöf (Ladies' Hairdressing) and Jukka Markkanen (Car Painting).

In the brochure for Taitaja2000, Vilho Hirvi contemplated the significance of competition in education as follows:

Even though a Finnish proverb says that "a cat lives on praise", feedback is still an important source of inspiration and motivation for people. Feedback is based on assessment. Competition, striving and assessment of performance are traditionally accepted in the areas of culture and sports. In education, competition has been treated with more restraint – there have been concerns that competition disheartens those who are weaker. However, even in education, the attitudes have. Quality and the development of its assessment are key themes. Competence demonstrations, competence-based qualifications and competitions are also commonplace in education in this new millennium.

Two traditions were started at the Taitaja Competition in Helsinki that continue to this day. At the closing ceremony, **Raakel Hiltunen** and Committee Counsel **Pentti Arajärvi** hung the first gold, silver and bronze medals in the history of the Taitaja Competition around the winners' necks. The second tradition began when Vice Mayor **Antti Viinikka**, who represented the competition's organiser, presented the



Taitaja medals were awarded for the first time at the competition held in Helsinki in 2000.

Taitaja Challenge Trophy to the Lahti Region Educational Consortium, the organiser of the following year's competition. The same challenge trophy was in use until 2011, when it had accumulated the names of as many as 12 education providers in recognition of their roles as hosts to the competition and their valuable contribution to the development of VET in Finland. Both the medals and the challenge trophy had been designed and manufactured at the Lahti Institute of Arts and Crafts, and they had been donated to the association by the Lahti Region Educational Consortium. The second Taitaja Challenge Trophy in the competition's history was introduced in Jyväskylä in 2012. It had also been designed and implemented at Salpaus Further Education, the successor of the Lahti Institute of Arts and Crafts.

TIMO LANKINEN BECOMES THE ASSOCIATION'S PRESIDENT AND JUHANI HONKA BECOMES THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In spring 2000, long-time President of the Board of Skill Finland and former Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Vilho Hirvi, who had been working as the chief of staff at the Ministry of Education since 1995, gave up his position as president. The association's annual report for 2000 describes Vilho Hirvi's term in office as follows:

During the term of President Hirvi (1994–2000), the association's activities



Timo Lankinen was the president of the Board of Skills Finland and Finland's official delegate in WorldSkills International from 2000 to 2012. Lankinen worked as the director general of the Ministry of Education's Vocational Education and Training Unit from 1997 to 2007 and as director general of the Finnish National Agency for Education from 2008 to 2011.



Juhani Honka was the executive director of Skills Finland from 2000 to 2002. Honka has attended WorldSkills Competitions with the Finnish team several times since 1989, serving in various roles. He was an active influencer in the early stages of the Taitaja Competition and Skill Finland.



and position have strengthened. The significance of national and international vocational skills competitions as part of VET has increased among vocational colleges and in the industry. Hirvi's opinions were valued in the international organisation.

Senior Ministerial Adviser **Timo Lankinen** from the Ministry of Education was chosen as the new president. The new vice president was Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Jukka Sarjala, who had been a member of the association's Board since 1997. The first person to be appointed as

The AKVS project group at the opening ceremony of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 at Helsinki Ice Hall. From the left: Tomi Karvinen, Heikki Saarinen, Tuija Kuisma and Elisa Tuominen with Seija Rasku from the Finnish National Agency for Education.

an honorary member by the association was Emeritus Director General Jorma Pöyhönen.

Other significant changes also took place in the association's administration during the year, with the first full-time executive director, Timo Sirkiä, resigning from the association in July. Sirkiä had significantly developed the association's activities. The annual report for

2000 assessed that “thanks to his efforts, Taitaja Competitions have evolved into their current form, which is functional in practice and serves both competitors and the audience”.

After Timo Sirkiä’s resignation, the association had started to look for a new executive director. When Finland was granted the right to host WSC, the role and profile of the executive director had to be reconsidered, as the individual being sought would also have to serve as the secretary general for the competition held in Finland.

At the beginning of September 2000, Juhani Honka was asked to become the new executive director. Honka’s first task was to launch the WSC2005 project and, above all, build a core team that, at that stage, was planned to comprise the executive director and five other individuals.

THE SUCCESS OF WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005 IS ENSURED WITH ESF-FUNDED PROJECTS

Two projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) played a significant role in the development process set in motion by WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. It was clear from the beginning that the small association’s resources were not enough to manage two major projects. It was a natural solution to share the responsibility and work with a cooperation partner, namely Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK).



Heikki Saarinen was a principal lecturer and project manager of Skills projects at Häme University of Applied Sciences and HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education from 2003 to 2007. He was a trainer at HAMK Skills Trainers’ Academy from 2008 to 2011. He was in charge of coordinating educational activities and providing training at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. Saarinen has been involved in WorldSkills Competitions in various roles since 2003.

The School of Professional Teacher Education (HAMK) was in charge of the project for the development of competition specialist training, called Improvement of Vocational Skills through Coaching and Competition (AKVA). Skill Finland managed a project called Skills Training of Top Experts (HUVA), which was carried out at companies. A positive funding decision was made on both projects in 2000. As some of the last work he carried out, Timo Sirkiä participated in launching the application process.

THE GROUNDWORK IS LAID FOR A NETWORK OF EXPERTS IN SKILLS COMPETITIONS

The first goal of the AKVA project was to create a nationwide system of experts in vocational skills

competitions as well as a training programme intended for them. The term expert referred to experts, competition organisers and vocational trainers.

In the follow-up project to AKVA, training was closely linked to competitions. Linking training to the planning and implementation of competitions allowed it to be incorporated into the development of the competition system in accordance with the project's goals. The primary target groups were the teachers of vocational colleges as well as the workplace instructors and supervisors at companies who participated in the development and implementation of vocational skills competitions and training and coaching in 2003–2005. HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education later also managed an ESF-funded project called Accessing Working Life Through Training (2006–2007). During the project, training was provided to workplace instructors and trainers of workplace instructors.

The total budget of the AKVA projects between 2000 and 2007 was EUR 3 million. The projects made the expertise of the School of Professional Teacher Education available to the Skills network and strengthened HAMK's position within the network.

Heikki Saarinen, who started managing the AVA project in August 2002, says that he became involved in vocational skills competitions at the initiative of Juhani Honka, who worked as the executive director of Skills Finland.

The AKVA project kept Saarinen so busy that he worked in the role of project manager on a full-time basis for several years. The training projects were fully reliant on funding from ESF. Many of the European countries that participated in competitions were somewhat jealous of this idea by the Finns. According to Saarinen, they commented that “you sure were clever to notice that ESF funding was also suited for this purpose”.

A MODEL IS BUILT FOR TRAINING COOPERATION IN THE HUVA PROJECT

The Finnish National Agency for Education made a positive decision on the funding of the HUVA project on 31 October 2000. The project was described as follows in the project application:

The aim is to develop the skills of the employees of the companies that participate in the project in cooperation with vocational colleges. The aim is to develop the skills of young people employed by companies in such a way that they evolve into top-level experts. The project develops coaching and training models that lead to excellence in skills while simultaneously increasing individuals' motivation to pursue continuous self-development and innovative development of work. The project utilises the various forms of learning at work, organises training at work and other coaching and also compares the skill

level of young people and its development from an international perspective.

The project kicked off in autumn 2000 with the launch of training in 21 skills.

A functional training network was built during the project, formed by the vocational colleges appointed as skill-specific training units and the training companies that cooperation with them. The key operators in the network were the skill managers, experts and trainers. The network built a three-tier training model that divided training into basic training, excellence in skills training and national team training periods. The total costs of the HUVA I and HUVA II projects in 2000–2007 were roughly EUR 5.3 million.

Thanks to the HUVA project, Finland gained a functional training network that allows the expertise of both vocational colleges and companies to be extensively combined.

The work that started in the HUVA project has been continued with two more ESF-funded projects managed by the association. The Competitiveness with Excellence in Skills Training (HUKI) project was carried out between 2008 and 2010. Its main goal was to compile and further develop good models created in training and disseminate them as widely as possible for the use of companies and vocational colleges. A project called Competitiveness and Quality for Vocational Education Through Excellence in Skills (KILTA) was launched in

2011. Its goal was to improve the quality and competitiveness of VET by promoting the skills of teachers and workplace instructors as well as their ability to train top experts and utilise good training practices in all their activities.

TAITAJA9 IS CREATED THANKS TO A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN TECHNOLOGY

While carrying out the AKVA project in 2000–2003, HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education was also managing the Komes project (Improvement of the Attractiveness of the Mechanical, Metal and Electrical Industries). Its target group comprised teachers of mechanical, metal and electrical trades at vocational upper secondary institutions as well as workplace instructors of companies operating in these industries.

The Komes project was led by **Marja-Terttu Tanttinen**, an expert from the Technology Industries of Finland. The project comprised three sub-projects: on-the-job learning, a competence demonstration pilot project and attractiveness. According to Tanttinen, the project was considered to be very important at the Technology Industries of Finland, which was why he personally monitored that the goals were achieved. “The sub-project with the best results was on-the-job learning. What became important with regard to attractiveness was the idea about a new T9 competition, which evolved into the current Taitaja9.”

Taitaja9, which had proven to be a huge success, was built based on plans by Espoo Vocational College (now Omnia). Its first final competition was held in Espoo in 2002.

After the Komes project ended, Skills Finland applied to ESF for funding for the development of the Taitaja9 Competition. Project funding was granted for the period 2003–2007. The project was used to expand the competition to cover all the vocational fields and fields of study in such a way that it was comprehensive both regionally and with regard to each field of study.

ESF PROJECTS – AN INGENUOUS IDEA

The AKVA and HUVA projects, as well as their follow-up projects, were implemented between 2000 and 2007. The seven-year time period was long enough for the development work. This period saw the completion of both a system for training competition specialists and a system for training young people aiming for international skills competitions. The projects had been planned to complement each other, and concrete cooperation was carried out between in the process of preparing for vocational skills competitions. The project results were tested at three WorldSkills Competitions: St Gallen in 2003, Helsinki in 2005 and once more in Shizuoka, Japan, in 2007.

The ESF-funded projects have been praised as an ingenious idea that, for its part, ensured the finances for the competition in Helsinki

and laid the groundwork for the training of individuals recruited for the organisation in charge of the competition's arrangements. They paved the association's way to success and laid a strong groundwork for its activities for years to come after WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

At the beginning of 2008, Skills Trainers' Academy was founded as part of HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education to continue using operating models that had been found to be good during project activities. The academy is a part of the Skills network and works in close cooperation with Skills Finland. The Academy's mission is to consolidate the training of experts that was carried out for many years in the form of the AKVA projects.



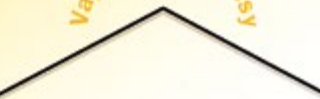
The Taitaja Competition in Lahti in 2001 was an impressive regional and national event. Of the 28 skill competitions, 24 were held under the same roof at Lahti Sports and Fair Centre. Pictured in the photo are the competitors and test project in Joinery.



SUOMEN MESTARIT
Taitaja
2001



Vapaa sisäänpääsy



Koulutus ja työelämä
yhdessä
saman katon alla

18.-20.1.2001
Lahden Messukeskuksessa

OPPI JA TYÖ

Pääasia
KOULUTUSMESSUT

Internet: taitaja2001.phkk.fi


PÄIJÄT-HÄMEEN
KOULUTUSKONSERNI

ALL SKILLS BROUGHT UNDER THE SAME ROOF FOR THE FIRST TIME IN LAHTI IN 2001

The right to organise the Taitaja Competition for 2001 had been granted to the Lahti Region Educational Consortium. As Timo Sirkiä had resigned from the association and a new executive director had yet to be chosen, many of the responsibilities that belonged to the association, such as organising regional trial competitions, fell to the Taitaja Competition's organiser. The event's project manager, **Aki Kauranen**, took overall responsibility for the event in an excellent way. In the annual report for 2001, the Taitaja Competition was assessed as follows: "From the association's perspective, Taitaja2001 was a huge success that even exceeded expectations in many ways. Taitaja2001 was the first exercise for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. It provided an excellent demonstration of the organising abilities of the Lahti Region Educational Consortium and proved that the event already had a great number of committed friends, advocates, supporters and actors."

The Lahti Sports and Fair Centre proved to be an excellent arena for this type of event. The goal of gathering all skills under one roof, which had been set years earlier, was finally met in 2001: As many as 24 of the 28 skills were organised at Helsinki Fair Centre. In addition to the Official Skills, there were four Demonstration

Skills. There were a total of 233 competitors. The competition had 150 partner companies and other supporters. The event attracted a total of 20,000 visitors. The competition in Lahti laid the groundwork for a new concept in which the Taitaja Competition and an education fair were combined into an impressive regional and national event.

In 2001, based on the successful competition held under one roof in Lahti, the association's Board defined the criteria for the organisation of the next Finnish championships. The goals set by the association were that as many of the competition skills as possible were to be organised under one roof and that other events supporting the competition, such as an education fair and seminars, were to be organised in conjunction with the event. The host town also had to offer training in as many of the competition skills as possible. The vocational colleges and companies in the region had to work in seamless cooperation for the competition. The organiser was still required to have the capability to invest time and effort in the event and also take financial responsibility for it.

Funding from ESF was utilised in the arrangements for Taitaja2001. In fact, the Board of Skills Finland expressed the wish that future organisers of Taitaja Competitions would also make use of this funding opportunity.



Vocational skills competitions were undergoing a boom, and Taitaja Competitions had, in many ways, taken a step towards becoming a major event. In order to continue this trend, the association's efforts in 2001 focused particularly on the development of the rules of the Taitaja Competition and building a system of semi-finals.

A NEW NAME AND LOOK FOR THE ASSOCIATION IN 2001

The year 2001 laid the groundwork for the association's activities in the coming years. A project for changing the rules was launched at the beginning of the year. In this project, the

association wanted to take into account the consolidation of the Taitaja Competition, the process of building a training system that had been launched in the HUVA project and, above all, the 2005 WorldSkills Competition granted to Finland.

The changes to the rules were accepted in the association's actual meeting in May. The association's name was changed to Skills Finland in accordance with the international practice. The association's activities had taken on such well established forms in 2001 that the section in the old rules that stated "organising national vocational skills competitions for the industrial and service sectors" could be



Chairman of SAK Lauri Ihalainen and CEO of TT Johannes Koroma launched a challenge campaign that raised funds for the Finnish national team's competition trip to Seoul in 2001. From the right: Lauri Ihalainen, President of Skills Finland Timo Lankinen and Executive Director Juhani Honka.

reworded more specifically as “granting the right to organise the annual national vocational skills competition Taitaja and by organising international vocational skills competitions for young people in Finland”. The association prepared for the WSC2005 project by increasing the number of Board members from the previous 7–12 members to 10–20 members. The following section was also added to the rules: “With regard to the composition of the Board, the association tries, at least, to take into account that the members are representatives of employer and employee organisations that represent the labour market, as well as teachers, students studying a trade and education providers.” The purpose of this was to ensure the inclusion and commitment of all key interest groups to the activities.

After the new name had been accepted, a new graphic look was prepared for the association. A “Skills” logo had previously been designed at Häme University of Applied Sciences for the ship seminar. The Board found it to be functional, and it was therefore decided that the entire association’s new look would be designed based on the logo.

Next, the association set out to develop the look of the Taitaja Competition. The aim was to design a look that fit the Skills family while

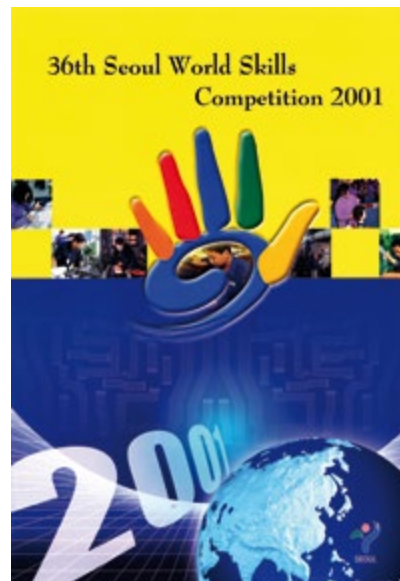
also being flexible in such a way that every competition organiser could put their own mark on it. The new look was displayed for the first time at the Taitaja2002 event.

A new look was also created for the youth national team, Team Finland, and WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

The theme of the association's activities in 2001 was the systematic and active pursuit of publicity. The Taitaja2001 event in Lahti was a great start to these activities. According to the annual report, they really picked up speed in May, when CEO of the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers (TT) **Johannes Koroma** and Chairman of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) **Lauri Ihalainen** opened the WorldSkills Seoul 2001 challenge campaign. A camera crew also travelled to Seoul and made a half-hour-long TV programme of the event. The programme was broadcast at the beginning of 2002 as part of the Opintoportti programme on TV1. Publicity was also garnered through the Ministry of Education's Time for a Job campaign. According to the annual report's assessment, the pursuit of publicity was successful: during the year, the association garnered approximately 200,000 column centimetres of space in the press and was also featured in numerous radio programmes and pieces of online news.

LABOUR MARKET ORGANISATIONS BECOME VISIBLY INVOLVED IN SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL TEAM

In September 2001, Finland participated in the WSC held in Seoul, South Korea, with one of the largest teams in the competition. Labour market organisations took on a visible role in supporting the national team and international skills competitions by launching a national challenge campaign.



Acting together in public was a natural continuation to the previous cooperation between employer and employee organisations. One good example of this cooperation was a practice that prevailed in the construction industry. Construction industry skills were strongly present in Finland's international

competition activities from the beginning, and Finland also achieved success in them. What played an important role in this was the enthusiasm and contribution of the industry's employer and employee organisations, the Federation of the Finnish Building Industry and the Finnish Construction Trade Union, to the matter. Competitions were seen as a way to promote training in the industry.

Ihalainen and Koroma opened the WorldSkills Seoul2001 challenge campaign in Helsinki on 16 May 2001. The aim was to raise FIM 45,000 per every competitor going to Seoul. The challenge campaign was open to all, and the organisers particularly hoped that trade and employer unions, industry associations and companies from different industries would participate in it. The idea was for each party to challenge three operators. The donor was able to specify which competitor or skill it wished to give its support to. The campaign's progress could be followed online. At the campaign's opening ceremony, it was emphasised that the most important thing was participation, not the amount donated. The first operator to take up the challenge was Service Union United (PAM). In total, the challenge campaign raised FIM 341,200, which was equivalent to roughly one fourth of the total costs incurred from sending the national team to the competition.

Ihalainen's visible presence was a continuation to the association's previous active efforts for vocational skills competitions. SAK had already

had a representative in the Advisory Committee that planned the first Taitaja Competition. Over the years, trade unions and organisations had also carried out significant and functional cooperation with competition organisers by donating prizes and participating in training.

Lauri Ihalainen emphasised later, at the Taitaja event in Joensuu in 2004, that the appreciation of VET had to be improved. He believed that



Competition results are always an exciting read. From the left: expert in Plumbing Hannu Immonen, expert in Painting and Decorating Jaakko Lainio, Team Leader Hannele Marttiini and expert in Floristry Hanne Viljanen. Pictured in the background is Marko Varjos, future expert in Joinery.

competitions were a good tool in realising this goal. "Moreover, those who take the vocational school route can now also continue their studies," Ihalainen pointed out. "We need capable professionals in various industries. That's why vocational schools are a very important option."

Employers also considered competitions to be important. **Ossi Jalonen**, a representative of the Finnish Central Organisation for Motor Trades and Repairs who spectated the competition in Seoul, considered international and national Skills competitions to be an excellent thing for the automotive industry. In an interview published in the Suomen Autolehti magazine, Jalonen called for capable and professional people to the rapidly evolving automotive industry and applauded competitions for providing more visibility to the industry as well as opportunities to attract capable young people to it. Jalonen also emphasised that competitions introduce new dimensions to the joint activities between companies and vocational colleges, which is essential in the development of the quality and appropriateness of training.

ATTENDING WORLDSKILLS SEOUL 2001 IN ORDER TO LEARN, OBSERVE AND COMPETE

At the beginning of 2001, the association's payroll already included two other people besides the executive director: Marketing Director **Jorma Sonninen** and Liaison Manager **Eeva Laurila**.

President of the association Timo Lankinen assessed the situation as follows:

Over the next few years, our preparations to organise the Youth Skills Olympics in Helsinki in 2005 will provide a significant

channel that serves national goals and the goals of the association. The project must be viewed as a development project spanning several years that will have a widespread impact on improving the appreciation of VET and vocational skills and satisfying labour needs in the years to come. Organising the competition will dominate the association's functions; after all, the association bears the main responsibility for organising the competition.

During the year, the association began negotiating an agreement on facilities and rent with Helsinki Fair Centre. The facility reservation made in Markku Aunula's name was finally transferred under the responsibility of Skills Finland. A sponsor strategy was put together and negotiations were launched with corporate partners and equipment suppliers. Together with the Ministry of Education, the association started preparing to set up the Advisory Committee and Organising Committee.

A three-person delegation from WSO, comprising President Jack Düsseldorf as well as Chairmen of the Technical Committee **Franz Schropp** and **Liam Corcoran**, visited Finland in August for a tour and inspection. The delegation was introduced to the competition's arrangements and venue as well as the status of the event's preparation process. Particular topics of discussion included cooperation between Skills Finland and WorldSkills

Terrorist attacks in New York throw the opening ceremony into disarray

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York took place on 11 September 2001, right before the opening ceremony of WorldSkills Seoul 2001. The shocking news was also heard at Tempf Hotel in Seoul, where the Finnish team was staying.

At the time, Hannele Marttiini and **Juhani Nieminen** were serving as team leaders. Marttiini talked about the incident in Skills Finland's Newsletter (6/2008):

The US team was participating in the WorldSkills Competition. How would they cope with the news? Their team leader said at the morning meeting that the team had stayed up the whole night, watching the news. All the competitors had been able to contact their homes, and, fortunately, none of them had friends or relatives among the victims. The team had decided together that they would stay in the competition. The competition's opening ceremony was held that evening. I bet that all the speakers of the opening ceremony had to rewrite their speeches during the day. There was a deep sense of compassion for all members of Team USA. This incident also affected our own young people. It was important to them to

contact their homes and take a moment to talk to their families. Juhani and I did our best to quash the wildest rumours that the young people heard from each other. At the closing ceremony on the last night of the competition, I was asked why we hadn't changed our flight route home like the Norwegians had done.

Annamaija Aro served as an expert in Ladies' Dressmaking in Seoul. In a Newsletter article (8/2008), she also recalled the memorable morning on which the competitors had come to visit the competition venue. "Everyone remembers where they were then, including me. As chief expert, it was my duty, despite the grief and depression, to instil faith and motivation in the competitors, so that they could concentrate and succeed in the most important trial of their young lives." ■

as well as the sponsorship arrangements. The association received full acknowledgement for the planning of the event and the status of the preparation process.

Skills Finland invested significantly into the WorldSkills Competition held in Seoul, South Korea, in September 2001. The purpose of this was to obtain information and experience for organising the competition in Finland, and the aim was to send both a competitor and an expert for as many skills as possible. In addition to the national team, a great number of Finnish experts travelled to the competition as observers.

Finland's official national team comprised 32 competitors, 31 experts, two team leaders and Finland's two official delegates to WorldSkills. Additionally, the competition in Seoul was attended by almost the entire staff of Skills Finland and five observers recruited by the association.

The association also organised a study trip to Seoul for representatives of its key interest groups. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the key individuals to the opportunities offered by the competition and commit them to the arrangements for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. The trip was attended by a total of 70 people, including the Members of Parliament and members of the Education and Culture Committee **Kaarina Dromberg**, **Leena Rauhala** and **Unto Valpas**.



The competition in Seoul was attended by more than 250 people from Finland, who were there to compete, assess, learn, spectate and support. All the attendees had undertaken to observe the competition's arrangements in accordance with a division of duties prepared in advance and report on them after the competition. The scale of the event and the high requirements set for its arrangements were one common and shared observation and topic of discussion on location. All the experiences and observations were documented in a report titled "Skills Seoul".

Several PR events were held in Seoul that marketed WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 and Finnish expertise. The representatives of Skills Finland also attended many different events related to the competition as well as seminars, conferences and receptions. A six-piece burr was the ace in the hole at Finland's exhibition booth. Thanks to the burr puzzle, the booth attracted a great number of visitors, particularly

young people, some of whom spent several hours trying to assemble the burr. All in all, Finland was highly visible at the WorldSkills Competition's venue, namely the Coex Convention & Exhibition Center.

The Finnish competitors earned two silver medals and eight Medallions for Excellence at WorldSkills Seoul 2001. The two silver medallists were **Tanja Kokkonen**, a florist from Simpele, and **Sampo Ahokas**, a competitor from Uukuniemi who competed in IT PC/Network Support.

The success of the Finnish team was celebrated after the competition at a reception held at the House of the Estates by Minister of Education Maija Rask. In addition to the national team, the event was attended by a prestigious group of invited guests. The minister of education presented all the competitors with certificates of honour from WorldSkills International, while **Pentti Herkama** presented the medallists and the receivers of a Medallion for Excellence with one-time grants from the Private Entrepreneurs' Foundation.

Editor-in-chief of the Opettaja magazine **Hannu Laaksola** examined Finnish activities related to vocational skills competitions in his editorial, published on 2 October 2001: Laaksola paid attention to the fact that there are still vocational colleges that do not sufficiently

appreciate these competitions: "Many teachers are forced to work for the competitions without additional compensation or praise, even though winning the competition boosts not only the winner's reputation but that of the vocational college as well." Laaksola pointed out that the next WorldSkills Competitions would be held in Switzerland in 2003 and in Helsinki two years after that. "In order for Finns to be able to demonstrate their capability when the competition is hosted in Finland, the preparations should start now. The level of Finnish vocational skills is high. Finnish vocational colleges need to both dare and want to show that to the world. It would be important for students, teachers, vocational colleges and the whole country."

THE FIRST BEST OF TAITAJA IS CHOSEN IN IMATRA IN 2002

Competitive zeal increased in Finland steadily from 2000 onwards. As many as seven applicants sought the right to organise Taitaja2002. All of the applications were assessed based on specified criteria, and the association's Board ended up granting the competition to the Imatra Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Education. The matter was made public in conjunction with the Taitaja2001 event in Lahti. Later that spring, the government granted the right to organise the 2003 event to the Jyväskylä Educational Consortium, which had been one of five applicants.

Best of Taitaja winners 2002–2013

Taitaja2002, Imatra

Petri Hämäläinen, Industrial Control
Kouvola Region Vocational College
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, gold medal in Industrial Control

Taitaja2003, Jyväskylä

Veera Lång, Floristry
Keuda, Mäntsälä

Taitaja2004, Seinäjoki

Ville Hietikko, Automobile Technology
Jyväskylä Vocational Institute
WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007, 18th place in Automobile Technology

Taitaja2005, Turku

Susanna Paananen, Restaurant Service
Turku Vocational Institute

Taitaja2006, Tampere

Hilla Sorsamo, Landscape Gardening
Countryside College of Southwest Finland

Taitaja2007, Joensuu

Pasi Tahkola, Plumbing
Oulu Vocational College
EuroSkills Rotterdam 2008, 7th place in Plumbing and Heating
WorldSkills Calgary 2009,
5th place and Medallion for Excellence in Plumbing and Heating

Taitaja2008, Espoo

Sakari Hartikainen, Architectural Stonemasonry
North Karelia Vocational College

Taitaja2009, Vaasa

Sami Puhakka, Mechatronics
North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium

Taitaja2010, Oulu

Mette Pöckelmann, Horse Grooming
Axxell, Ekenäs

Taitaja2011, Kuopio

Teemu Mikkonen, IT PC/Network Support
South Karelia Vocational College
EuroSkills Lisbon 2010, gold medal both as an individual and in a team, Office ICT Team

Taitaja2012, Jyväskylä

Vilma Hassi, Fashion Technology
Tampere College

Taitaja2013, Joensuu

Jaakko Ekman, CAD
Salpaus Further Education
WorldSkills Leipzig 2013, 17th place
Mechanical Engineering Design – CAD



Petri Hämäläinen – the first Best of Taitaja and WorldSkills Champion from 2005

Petri Hämäläinen's triumphal march started from the Taitaja Competition held in Imatra in 2002. Petri, who was studying at Kouvola Region Vocational College at the time, won in Industrial Control. At the closing ceremony, Petri was awarded with the first Best of Taitaja title in the history of the

Taitaja Competition. Petri was given a Volvo S40 for a year. In an interview he gave immediately after the competition, Petri announced that he intended to stay in the electrical trade, which had good employment prospects and a reasonable salary level.

Petri Hämäläinen won gold in Industrial Control at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. In 2002, he had been chosen as Best of Taitaja in Imatra.

Being chosen as Best of Taitaja was just the beginning of Hämäläinen's road of success. He graduated from both an electrical engineering programme at Kouvola Vocational College and upper second school in spring 2002 and was admitted to Lappeenranta University of Technology to study electrical engineering. However, Hämäläinen never lost his zeal for competition, and he decided to start training with the aim of participating in Industrial Control at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. He was trained by Jarmo Kainu-maa from the Intermunicipal Federation of Vocational Education in Western Uusimaa. In 2003, Hämäläinen visited St Gallen as a competition attendee in order to familiarise himself with the atmosphere at WorldSkills Competitions, after which he continued his training.

At WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, Hämäläinen's performance earned him a gold medal. He received a score of 538 and shared gold with the Swedish competitor. Neither competitor minded sharing the victory, as for these two young men the best things about the competition were the international contacts and the confidence they gained in their own vocational skills through success. Hämäläinen listed good nerves and a slow temper as the keys to his victory. In an interview published in the Kouvola Sanomat newspaper on 3 June 2005, he also mentioned his height as a trump card. "193 centimetres is the standard height for an electrician; you can even replace the fluorescent

lamps at the office without a ladder," laughed the professional, who had a sense of humour.

In 2006, Hämäläinen was chosen to represent Finland at the first WorldSkills Youth Forum held in conjunction with the WorldSkills meetings held in Sydney, Australia. Finland's other representative was **Katri Heikka**, who competed in Ladies' Hairdressing in 2001.

Petri Hämäläinen graduated from Lappeenranta University of Technology in May 2009 and immediately started working at Fingrid Oyj. Hämäläinen lives in Porvoo with his wife and two children and he enjoys volunteer firefighting in his free time.

When asked about his memories of the Taitaja Competition and being chosen as Best of Taitaja, Hämäläinen replies: "I have very pleasant memories from the year I was chosen as Best of Taitaja, for example, but it's difficult to pick out anything specific. The competition itself was extremely strenuous work, with no time to sit around and be idle; it also didn't leave many memories. Perhaps the most vivid memory I have is having practised the test project for Helsinki so much that I was immediately able to spot the 30% that had been changed when I got the drawings. I also realised that I probably wouldn't have any problems. And I didn't, except in the fault finding task, which Jarmo took me to task over afterwards. I don't know if I got zero points for that or a couple of pity points."

In any case, the points were enough to win the title of WorldSkills Champion. ■

Taitaja2000 was held at Imatra Exhibition Centre in January. For the second time in the Taitaja Competition's history, an education fair was held under the same roof. Trial competitions were now held in as many as 13 skills, and the finals were attended by 257 competitors. The assessment of test projects and performances was developed in trade-specific steering groups. The areas that were under development in Imatra included the sign-up system, result service, special stages, Taitaja advisors and the operation of the jury, for example.

The Taitaja Competition had evolved significantly in a year, and more and more vocational colleges had become involved in it. The semi-finals were now attended by 47 per cent of the vocational colleges in Finland, and the total number of competitors was 538. The competition held in Lahti a year earlier had involved 30 per cent of all education providers, and there had been 300 competitors.

Internationality was strongly present in Imatra. The seminars featured lecturers from Russia, Germany, Sweden, Estonia, Canada and the United Kingdom. For the first time in the Taitaja Competition's history, foreign guest competitors were also offered the opportunity to participate. There were a total of seven guest competitors from Russia, Sweden and Germany. **Vesa Markkanen**, who served as the project manager of Taitaja2002, recalls that the foreign guests provided excellent reviews of the competition's arrangements. Head of Training & Education at

Sick AG **Hans Farina** from Germany said the following about the competition: "You have done really great work here. The atmosphere here is the same as in the Seoul Olympics."

Pupils in Years 7–9 at local comprehensive schools were transported to the Taitaja event by bus and provided with guided tours of the competition venue. A "Planning Guide for the Future" was prepared for comprehensive school pupils and distributed in schools at the beginning of January. Parents of students were also invited to the event. There were a total of 15,000 visitors.

Markku Sorveli gave the event the following review in the editorial published in the *Etelä-Saimaa* newspaper on 19 January 2002: "The charm of vocational skills could truly be felt at the Taitaja event, and the competition was able to demonstrate that a factory hall or industrial hall can very well serve as an interesting working environment."

The competition in Imatra became a turning point for the Taitaja Competition's visibility in the media. This was particularly due to the fact that a full-time information officer had been hired to work for the project from November 2001 to February 2002. Communication became more active, which was visible in the doubling of the number of press clippings and the increasing of TV time compared to the previous year. The competition in Lahti was only addressed in two television programmes,

whereas the competition in Imatra was featured on every TV channel. New media were also utilised in an innovative way in the communication. For the first time in the Taitaja Competition's history, the event could be watched live online from across the world for approximately 25 hours. The livestream was produced by communications students from Tampere College, under the supervision of their teacher, **Ari Lehto**.

The competition in Imatra started a tradition that continues to this day: the choosing of the Best of Taitaja (lit. the expert of experts). According to the criteria defined by Skills Finland, in order to be chosen as the Best of Taitaja the individual was required to demonstrate "absolute superiority in their own competition skill as well as pride in their own skills, trade and vocational training". The Best of Taitaja was also required to be positive and outgoing by nature.

The Best of Taitaja is chosen annually by the competition's jury, based on proposals submitted by the skill-specific juries. The Best of Taitaja undertakes to act as an ambassador of VET and competition activity for a period of one year. As a concrete prize, Best of Taitaja is granted the use of a car donated by a corporate partner of Skills Finland for a period of one year.

The person chosen as the first ever Best of Taitaja was **Petri Hämäläinen**, who won in

Industrial Control and later won a gold medal in his skill at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

TAITAJA9 IS LAUNCHED UNDER THE NAME T9 COMPETITION IN ESPOO IN 2002

The idea for the Taitaja9 Competition was fathered in autumn 2001 by vocational teacher **Pekka Ruokomäki** from Matinkylä Vocational College. At the beginning of 2001, Ruokomäki had been hired for the national Komes project, which aimed to promote the attractiveness of the mechanical, metal and electric industries. His job was to familiarise himself with the situation in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area in particular and find new ways to increase interest in technology industries.

Ruokomäki recalls the events of autumn 2001 as follows:

One day in autumn 2001, I started developing various competitions for pupils in Year 9. At the end of the day, I could ask the other teachers for their opinions on the T9 Competition I had planned. It was based on a track-like competition that would be audience friendly and interesting. When I was thinking of a name for the competition, I first considered Sähäkkä9 (lit. heated9) in reference to the competition's pace. It was followed by the T9 Competition, which referred to technology. For its part, the number nine referred to the target group,

pupils in Year 9, but also the number of test projects. The intention was for the competition to be in the form of a nine-event competition.

The idea was well received by all parties. The steering group of the Komes project welcomed it. In November, Espoo Institute of Technology (AMTEK, now Omnia) appointed a working group that was tasked with preparing and implementing this first competition.

Even though there was a strong faith in the competition's success, threats also existed. Was there enough time for marketing and communication related to the competition? Would the competition have a sufficient number of teams? Could the staff be made to tackle the planning and implementation of the tasks with enthusiasm?

The ultimate goal is to market technology industries to comprehensive school pupils in a new way. Harnessing competition for this purpose seemed like a usable method. However, it was already clear at the time that competition only serves as a tool. "You have to be careful to not let competition itself gain too significant of a role when looking at the big picture. The important thing is cooperation in its various forms between different types of educational institutions and companies," Ruokomäki mused when planning the competition.



The inventor of the Taitaja9 Competition, Pekka Ruokomäki, organised the first competition in 2001. Since then, he has organised several Taitaja9 Competitions in different years.

The first competition was implemented on a very tight schedule. The competition was officially announced in conjunction with the Espoo Education Fair on 15 January 2002. The competition was also marketed at the Next Step fair in Helsinki towards the end of January. The Doors Open Days held at the Espoo Institute of Technology at the beginning of February featured T9 task points built at different departments. They allowed visitors to find out more about typical test projects used in competitions.

Saturday, 2 March 2002 was chosen as the competition day and the gym of Matinkylä Vocational College, where four tracks were built, was chosen as the competition venue. There were 30 teams, with the furthest travelling all the way from Kemi.

The test projects had been prepared so that they served as introductions to various professional tools. The example test projects were made available online in advance, so that the teams could practise doing them if they wished.

The competition was won by the team from Saarnilaakso School in Espoo, while Pappilanmäki School from Padasjoki took second place and Eilisenvaara School from Karinainen came third.

The total costs of the event were approximately FIM 180,000. The funding was provided by the Espoo Institute of Technology and the Komes project as well as the participating technology industry unions and companies.

Skills Finland contributed a small amount to the competition's arrangements. The association's Marketing Director Jorma Sonninen gave a speech at the competition's opening ceremony, and the association helped obtain a photographer for the competition. Skills Finland also donated baseball caps to the competitors and T-shirts to the judges.

The competition was a great success, and the feedback gathered about it was primarily so positive that the decision was made to continue these activities. Since 2004, Skills Finland has been implementing the competition as part of the Taitaja event.

The event in Matinkylä was of some interest to the media. A reporter from Helsingin Sanomat

Taitaja9 test projects in 2002



- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Electrical | Extension cord |
| 2. Metal | Barbeque fork |
| 3. Construction | Birdhouse |
| 4. Wood | Dowel joint |
| 5. Graphic | Booklet folding |
| 6. Automotive | Changing a tyre |
| 7. Physics | Centre of gravity |
| 8. Dressmaking | Sewing a button |
| 9. Installation technique | Step ladder |

was present all afternoon, and an article about the competition was published in the Sunday issue (3 March 2002) with the title “Young people were encouraged to become metal workers in Espoo”.

Despite the hurried implementation, the competition’s concept had been well and thoroughly thought out. With regard to its principles, the competition has remained the same to this day. What is interesting is that even many of the small details have remained unchanged in the arrangements. Even today, the main prize is a scooter. And the finals are still hosted by a celebrity who is well-known among young people. The first competition was hosted by entertainer **Juha Laitila**, who had previously studied a metal trade at Leppävaara Vocational School.

START OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION ACTIVITIES

The significance of VET research was already emphasised in conjunction with the major VET event held in 1988. Research cooperation was also one of the reasons given for the decision to join the International Vocational Training Organisation (IVTO): “Members gain access to the results of studies conducted by the association, which is very important for Finland. After all, Finland does not yet have many traditions in VET research. International studies form the basis for national research.

They also speed up the creation of traditions in this field of science.”

In 2002, all the ESF projects built to develop vocational skills competitions were gathered under a single concept called “excellence in skills”. The research and publication activities of Skills Finland were implemented as part of development projects in cooperation with HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education.

In 2002, Skills Finland hired **Hannele Kokotti** as project director. She was also tasked with promoting research activities.

HAMK had published a work called “Ammattitaitokilpailutammattitaidon kehittäjänä ja mitaajana” (Vocational skills competitions as developers and measurers of skills), edited by **Seppo Seinä**, in 2001. The observations made by teachers of HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education at WorldSkills Montreal 1999 had been compiled in the report as separate articles.

In 2003, research results were completed on companies’ commitment to vocational skills competitions. Hannele Kokotti’s licentiate thesis “Huippuosaamista ja vetovoimaa sitoutumalla. Yritysten sitoutuminen ammattitaitokilpailutoimintaan Suomessa” (Excellence in skills and attractiveness through commitment. Corporate commitment to vocational skills competitions in Finland) was accepted at the

University of Tampere in 2004. The research results were used as a basis for the preparation of a cooperation and commitment model that was utilised in the development of WSC2005, Taitaja Competitions and Taitaja9 Competitions as well as cooperation with training companies and competition specialist training.

Skills Finland made progress in building its own research network. In 2003, the association was involved in three international forums. Together with its partner organisations, the association prepared a scientific conference called Youth and Work Culture 2005, which was held in conjunction with WSC2005.

The first book in the series of Skills publications was published at the beginning of 2003. It was a collection of articles called “Valmennuksella kohti huippuammattitaitoa” (Towards excellence in vocational skills with training), edited by Hannele Kokotti and **Pia Rupponen**, and it became a seminal work on international skills competitions and training.

The second publication in the series, “Ammatillinen huippuosaaminen” (Excellence in vocational skills) by Pekka Ruohotie and Juhani Honka, was released the same year.

Final culmination of the competition preparations

EIJA ALHOJÄRVI BECOMES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The association also started preparing for WSC2005 by looking for larger new premises. In 2002, the office of Skills Finland moved from its “birthplace” at the Finnish National Agency for Education to Itä-Pasila, where it became a tenant of the OKKA Foundation. The reason for the move was the anticipated need for additional personnel. At that stage, the Finnish National Agency for Education did not have additional space to give to Skills Finland.

Juhani Honka had to leave the position of executive director for personal reasons in 2002, in the middle of the preparations for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. Marketing Director Jorma Sonninen, who had come to work for the association at the beginning of 2001, served as acting executive director of the association until the end of April 2003.

From the start of 2003 onwards, the association moved on from planning the competition to the implementation phase, and hiring a new executive director became necessary.

On 1 May 2003, forester Eija Alhojärvi started working as the new executive director of Skills



Eija Alhojärvi has been the executive director of Skills Finland since 2005. She was the secretary general of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. Alhojärvi was a member of the Board of WorldSkills Europe (formerly ESPO) from 2007 to 2013.

Finland. Marketing Director Jorma Sonninen, who had been appointed secretary general of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 in May, resigned from the association in November, after which Alhojärvi was also appointed the secretary general in charge of WSC2005.

Eija Alhojärvi had worked in VET for her whole career as a civil servant. She started her career in the Vocational Training Board’s (AKH) Department of Forestry Education, af-



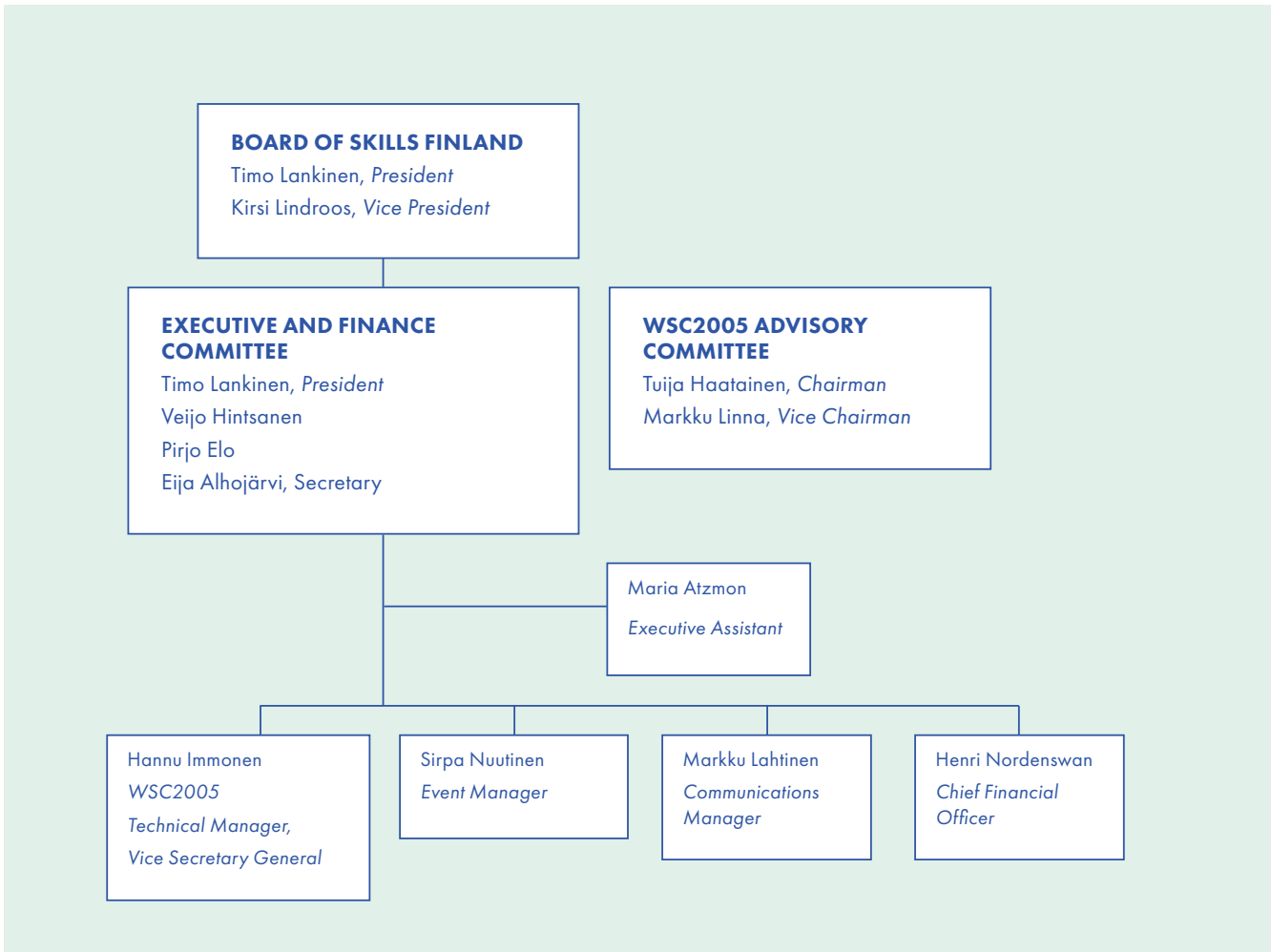
Actors of Skills Finland. In the front, from the left: Sirpa Nuutinen and Eija Alhojärvi. At the back, from the left: Markku Lahtinen, Henri Nordenswan, Veijo Hintsanen, Timo Lankinen and Hannu Immonen. Missing from the photo are Pirjo Elo and Kati Lundgren. Photo: Raimo Uotila.

ter which she held many different positions in both AKH and the Finnish National Agency for Education. Alhojärvi transferred to the Ministry of Education in 1995, after Finland joined the European Union. France held the Presidency of the Council of the EU at the time, and Alhojärvi's proficiency in French was needed at the ministry. Alhojärvi transferred to the position of Skills Finland's executive director from the Ministry of Education's Vocational Education and Training Unit.

Alhojärvi had come into contact with vocational skills competitions for the first time when she had learned about competition activity between forestry professionals while working at AKH. Alhojärvi was also involved in the Get the Ball Rolling campaign, in which she

was responsible for the arrangements for the final competition in forestry. She had been introduced to WorldSkills Competitions in Seoul in 2001, when she participated in a trip organised for representatives of interest groups.

In an interview published in *Ammatti-kasvatuksen aikakauskirja* (3/2003), Alhojärvi hoped that, in her new position, she would also be able to make it possible for competition activity to be utilised in European cooperation in VET. According to her, competition activity made it



possible to find new perspectives into the comparison of education systems and, through this, promote the common European goals of improving the quality and appreciation of VET.

The members of the core organisation of the WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 project were recruited within a short period of time in 2003. All the core actors started their work almost simultaneously. Alhojärvi recalls the situation as follows:

Making the new organisation operational was a challenging process. The newly chosen actors had to assume their duties on the fly, as there was no time for a job orientation or training. What brought its own challenges, though also its own richness, was the fact that all these individuals came from highly different organisations and working cultures. However, they made it through the situation by learning together, and the organisation was fully operational after the WorldSkills Competition held in St Gallen in June and after everyone had taken their holidays.

The association's staff had increased to 13 people by the end of 2003.

THE WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005 ADVISORY COMMITTEE IS SET UP

The association's Board had been expanded to 19 members at the beginning of 2003, so that it comprehensively represented all the key actors in the WSC2005 project. The Board's Executive Committee was formed by President of the Board Timo Lankinen, member of the Board Veijo Hintsanen and Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi. Auditors had recommended that the association's Board set up a Finance Committee alongside the Executive Committee for planning and monitoring the still increasing finances. As finances were an integral part of all decisions, the association came to the solution that the Finance Committee would comprise the Executive Committee as well as Board member Pirjo Elo. In practice, the committee always convened with this more extensive line-up of the Finance Committee, and Executive Committee became the committee's established name.

On 2 May 2002, the Ministry of Education appointed the authoritative WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 Advisory Committee, which was in charge of the guidelines concerning the competition's arrangements and publicising the competition event. The Advisory Committee was appointed by Minister of Education Maija Rask, who also served as its first chairman. Rask was succeeded in the position of chairman by Minister of Education **Tuula Haatainen**.



Restaurant Service at the Taitaja Competition in Jyväskylä in 2003.

The vice chairman was Chief of Staff **Markku Linna** from the Ministry of Education.

The Advisory Committee convened a total of four times. Its term culminated in the competition's closing ceremony, at which several members of the Advisory Committee had the honour of presenting medals.

TAITAJA2003 IN JYVÄSKYLÄ ATTRACTED A LARGE AUDIENCE

The national Taitaja2003 Competition was held at Jyväskylä Exhibition Centre towards the end of January. In addition to Jyväskylä Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Education, the responsibility for organising the competition was also shared by Äänekoski and Jämsä Region Joint Municipal Authorities for Vocational Education and JAMK University of

Applied Sciences. There were 35 competition skills and a record-breaking 32,600 visitors.

The event's preparations included visits to WorldSkills Seoul 2001 and the Taitaja event in Imatra. According to the project's director, **Esko Junttila**, they kept their video camera rolling most of the time, and what they experienced and saw in Seoul was eventually realised in many of the details in Jyväskylä.

In Jyväskylä, the organisers also invested in a large-scale international congress called "Northern Lights – Tietotyön haasteet ammatilliselle koulutukselle" (Northern Lights – The challenges posed by knowledge work to vocational education and training). The congress was organised by JAMK University of Applied Sciences and the University of Jyväskylä, and its purpose was to determine what changes information technology causes to various professions and professionals in various trades. Other events held in conjunction with the



Cleaning Services at the Taitaja Competition in Jyväskylä in 2003.

competition included the Next Step education and job fair as well as the national Study Days for Guidance Counsellors, among other things.

"The Taitaja Competition is evolving into an institution," noted the final report on the competition in Jyväskylä. The developmental leap between Imatra and Jyväskylä was significant in many ways: The competition in Imatra in 2002 was attended by 48% of all vocational colleges, while 74% were in attendance in Jyväskylä. A total of 534 competitors signed up for the semi-final in Imatra, while 1,001 competitors signed up for the semi-final in Jyväskylä, which was able to include as many as 26 skills.

The Taitaja event garnered a great deal of publicity in the press and on the radio and television. The event garnered 500 media clippings, whereas the corresponding number had been 355 in Imatra in 2002 and a little over a hundred in Lahti a year before that. **Jukka Soini** assessed the significance of the event as follows in an editorial published in the *Keskisuomalainen* newspaper on 30 January 2003: "Combining a vocational skills competition with a fair is a good idea. In any case, shining the spotlight on vocational skills is appropriate in a time when people are only inclined to believe in the glory of IT companies and a long chain of theoretical studies. However, the truth is that the value and appreciation of VET will increase further in the next few years."

COOPERATION WITH THE NEXT STEP FAIR

In 1994, the association participated in the Next Step education fair for the first time, which marked the start of long-standing cooperation. The National Union of Vocational Students in Finland (SAKKI) launched Next Step fairs in 1990 with the aim of improving the appreciation of VET. In 1995, Skill Finland introduced itself at the Next Step fair with its impressive “Cheer Finland to victory” booth. The booth had been erected in cooperation with the Finnish National Agency for Education and certain training companies, and some of the competitors already chosen for the 1995 Youth Skills Olympics in Lyon made an appearance there. The booth also hosted the trial competition for the right to represent Finland in Bricklaying. The trial competition was judged by Janne Rantala, the gold medallist in the skill from 1993. Over the following two years, the association attended the fair with a joint booth it shared with the Work in the Industry in Uusimaa project. Closer cooperation between the Taitaja Competition and the Next Step education fair was tested in Jyväskylä in 2003 and Turku in 2005, when Taitaja and Next Step were held at the same time under the same roof. The main idea was to provide young people with both experiences and information. The education fair allowed young people to immediately find information on the trade and training that had piqued their interest in the Taitaja Competition.

For a long time, Next Step was the larger and more well-known of these two events, but the Taitaja Competition continuously grew in scale and popularity. The closer cooperation between the events ultimately foundered precisely due to the growth of the Taitaja Competition; it was no longer possible to find a sufficiently large venue for holding a joint event. After 2005, cooperation has continued on a smaller scale.

WORLDSKILLS ST GALLEN 2003 IS THE LAST CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT WORLDSKILLS ARRANGEMENTS

WSC2003 was held in St Gallen, Switzerland, at the end of June.

St Gallen had hosted the WorldSkills Competition in 1997 and was now tasked with organising a second competition within a short period of time and in an exceptional manner. The right to host WSC2003 had originally been granted to the United Arab Emirates, which was forced to give up the competition projects at the WorldSkills Organisation’s (WSO) initiative. The reason for this was major shortcomings in the progress of the competition’s arrangements.

Due to the difficulty of the matter, decision-making was delayed to a very late date, ultimately leaving WSO with two alternatives: either postpone the competition to provide additional time for the preparations or assign the



The Finnish national team taking the stage at the opening ceremony of WorldSkills St Gallen 2003. The women are wearing Unikko dresses sponsored by Marimekko.

responsibility for organising the competition to another country. The first alternative was found to be difficult, as the date of WSC2005 had already been finalised. What became a challenge was finding an organisation that would dare take over the responsibility for organising the competition despite the short preparation time. To everyone's relief, Switzerland announced that it was prepared to host the competition if St Gallen, the location of WSC1997, would be accepted as the location for the competition. It was later noted that the framework of the organising mechanism and the competition venue for WSC2003 were somewhat the same as six years earlier.

For Finland, the competition in St Gallen was the last opportunity to learn before Finland would be hosting its own competition. Finland

prepared for the event with due care and set its goals high.

Five main goals were set for the participation in the competition:

- sending a competitor and an expert to all the skills that would be featured in Helsinki two years later
- collecting as much information as possible on the competition's arrangements
- strengthening the national network and its competence

- creating good and functional cooperation relations with key actors of the WorldSkills

Organisation and the St Gallen competition organisation

- marketing WSC2005 both nationally and internationally.

Finland was successful in its goal regarding the sending of competitors and experts. A total of 43 Finns competed in 37 skills under a record heat wave in St Gallen that June. The Finnish team was the third largest in the competition, having the same number of competitors as the host country of Switzerland.

The Finnish team also achieved great success, medalling in five skills. **Johanna Laaksonen** won gold in Floristry, while **Erno Sundell** won silver in Industrial Electronics. Bronze medals were earned by **Mika Vilpo** in IT PC/Network Support and **Markus Jauhiainen** in Graphic Design Technology. The bronze medal in the Manufacturing Team Challenge was grabbed by a four-person team comprising **Tommi Elg**, **Mikko Huuskonen**, **Antti Murto** and **Inari Vanhala**.

Hannu Immonen served as Finland's second team leader in St Gallen. He says that the improvement of the training system was behind the team's success. Systematic training was visible both in the team and the final results. According to Immonen, the conditions during the competition also contributed to the success.



Gold medallist Johanna Laaksonen's competition piece.

The Finnish team lodged in the premises of a local agricultural college in a peaceful rural setting. The vocational college was located at the edge of a small village, on top of a hill. The place was great and the conditions were terrific. For example, the team had access to the vocational college's sports field, where they played football. Finland was lucky, considering that many teams had to lodge in army barracks.

Veijo Hintsanen describes the success of the whole team as follows in his post-competition report:

Finland's success at WSC2003 was better than at any previous competition. Five medals and 18 Medallions for Excellence exceeded even the boldest of expectations. The team spirit was also better than ever before. Both the competitors and experts took care of their part excellently. Several test project proposals submitted by Finnish experts were accepted into the next competition's test project bank, and at least five Finnish experts

were voted as candidates for the roles of chief expert or deputy chief expert in their own skills at the next competition. The work of the experts now exuded more certainty and stronger self-confidence. It was also visible in the improvement of the team spirit. Good progress has also been made in language skills. The young competitors of previous competitions were now highly successful as experts.

There were a total of over 500 Finns present in the small village of St Gallen during the competition, even though Midsummer, which is perhaps the most cherished public holiday among Finns, was being celebrated back in Finland around the same time. This was a strong demonstration of the participants' commitment and wish to contribute en masse to the preparations of WSC2005. Skills Finland was responsible for the travel and participation arrangements of not only the competitors, experts and Skills actors, but also 20 technical observers, 127 study trip participants and 13 VIP guests.

An enormous amount of feedback was gathered about the competition. The division of labour and duties had been agreed upon in advance, and various analyses and assessments were conducted from many different perspectives. After the competition, the observations and suggestions for development were compiled into reports for use by all those who were involved in arranging the competition. It says something about the common volunteer spirit that many of

the study trip participants voluntarily took on assessment and development tasks. This work served as the basis for the study paths developed by the Vocational Teacher Education College of JAMK University of Applied Sciences that were launched at WSC2005, for example. Based on them, a functional concept was later developed for the Taitaja Competition in cooperation between JAMK, organisers of Taitaja and Skills Finland.

The actors of Skills Finland were able to monitor the preparations and the course of the events from front-row seats. **Sirpa Nuutinen**, who had been chosen as the event manager for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, had arrived at the competition venue in St Gallen well before the start of the competition and was able to persuade the organisers to provide Skills Finland with its own office, one table and two chairs at the competition organisation's open-plan office. As a result, all actors of Skills Finland had access to the event's nerve centre throughout the competition, allowing them to monitor the arrangements up close in a very concrete manner. "It was such an educational experience that we decided to offer the same opportunity in Helsinki to the organisers of the next competitions, namely Japan and Canada. This became a permanent practice from WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 onwards," Eija Alhojärvi says.

However, not all of the trip was spent working. In honour of Midsummer's Eve, Skills Finland organised a cruise on Lake Constance that gave the participants the opportunity to admire the

landscape in three countries. The cruise was a success and garnered a great deal of praise, and no wonder, as it offered a well-deserved break in the middle of the sweltering work week.

A WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 reception was held during the event. It was hosted by City Manager of Helsinki **Eva-Riitta Siitonen** together with President of the association's Board **Timo Lankinen** and Finnish Ambassador to Switzerland **Antti Hynninen**. The purpose of the reception was to market the competition in Helsinki to the representatives of foreign delegations. The reception was attended by 150 Finnish and international invited guests. Among the individuals invited was F1 driver **Kimi Räikkönen**, who was already living in Switzerland at the time. However, he did not attend the reception.

The staff decisions made at meetings of WSO in St Gallen were significant to Finland's competition preparations. The Australian Jack Düsseldorf was elected for a second four-year term as the organisation's president. The German-speaking countries had nominated the Swiss **Daniel Sommer**, who was working as the organisation's secretary general, to run against Düsseldorf. Düsseldorf won the vote with a clear majority. The election of the chairman of the Technical Committee was also significant. In St Gallen, the Irishman Liam Corcoran was elected as the new chairman. However, the most important thing for Finland's competition preparations was the fact that **Veijo Hintsanen**,

Finland's technical delegates

Mishaps could also not be avoided in the hustle and bustle of the competition days, according to **Eija Alhojärvi**. For one reason or another, the St Gallen competition organisation had misplaced some of the accreditation cards of the Finnish observers. **Sirpa Nuutinen**, who had arrived at the location of the competition earlier, was supposed to meet the people who were arriving later at the airport. **Sirpa** was also supposed to bring the accreditation cards allowing entry to the competition venue with her. The cards could not be found anywhere, what should they do now?

Sirpa, who had been at the competition office for a week, managed to locate a device there that was used to print the official cards and decided to act independently. The titles printed on the cards caused some head scratching, as it was **Sirpa's** first competition and she did not have a clear understanding of the event organisation or the titles used. **Sirpa** looked at the list of titles for a moment and, reckoning that technical delegate sounded like a good title, made accreditation cards for the whole group from Skills Finland.

The face made by Finland's only actual technical delegate, **Veijo Hintsanen**, was worth seeing when **Sirpa** greeted him at the airport wearing a card around her neck that said "Sirpa Nuutinen, Technical Delegate of Finland".

“You ought to go see Sanna Furu”

During the competition days, St Gallen was experiencing the heat wave of the century, for which even the competition’s organisers had not been able to prepare. The hot weather particularly caused problems for the competitors, as the temperature could rise dangerously high in the unventilated tents. The temperature also posed its own problems for the spectators. The lodging places were located far from the competition venue, spread across the Swiss countryside and all the way in Austria. The working days lasted from early morning until late evening, sometimes into the night, and there were no opportunities to take a shower or change clothes during the day. It was one of those days.

Eija Alhojärvi recalls: “Hannele Kokotti and I had been on the move all day with students who were participating in a study trip. At one point, we visited the Leaders’ Forum, where we unexpectedly found ourselves carrying out practical tasks, carrying tables and chairs

for the competition organiser. From there, we rushed to the other side of the village, where one of the numerous evening events organised by Skills Finland was being held. The weather was horribly hot, we were soaked in sweat, our shoes chafed our feet and our hair hung wet against our scalps. There was nothing left of the hairstyles we’d sported that morning.

We arrived at the highly ventilated event venue, where we were welcomed by Veijo Hintsanen. Veijo looked at us for a moment before stating, with a serious look on his face: “You ought to go see Sanna Furu.” Hannele and I glanced at each other and simultaneously burst into laughter, with neither of us seemingly able to stop. After that day, Hannele and I have met up at Sanna Furu’s place several times.”

the technical delegate for Finland, was elected as vice chairman of the Technical Committee and member of the Board of WSO. This provided Finland with a front-row seat to the influencing and decision-making within the organisation. Cooperation was smooth between Corcoran and Hintsanen, and the management of competitions was in good hands from a Finnish point of view.

SWITZERLAND OFFICIALLY PASSES ON THE BATON TO FINLAND

The baton for organising WSC was officially passed on from Switzerland, the previous organiser, to Finland at the closing ceremony of WorldSkills St Gallen 2003. Chief of Staff Markku Linna gave a speech on Finland's behalf during the ceremony.

The latter half of 2003 was a very chaotic period in the history of WSO. The previous year, the organisation's headquarters had been transferred from Switzerland to the Netherlands by decision of the General Assembly. The transfer had been prepared by requesting offers from the member countries/regions. Finland had also been asked about its willingness to host the headquarters in Finland in 2001. The matter was considered by the Board of Skills Finland on 21 January 2001, and the Board concluded that the idea would not be feasible until after 2005. Ultimately, offers were submitted by France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The decision was made as a result of a close vote.

The Dutch **Rudi van den Hurk** had been elected secretary general in conjunction with the relocation of the organisation's headquarters. The information blackouts and other problems related to the changing of the secretary general caused all of the test projects prepared for 2005, as well as all the revisions and changes made to the skill-specific Technical Descriptions and guidelines during the competition in St Gallen, to disappear after the competition. Finland never gained access to them. The organisation's old website was also closed. As a result, the Finns and the new secretary general spent much of their time fruitlessly hunting down the missing information and papers.

Cooperation with the WSO office and the new secretary general was launched with active efforts in 2003. Secretary General van den Hurk participated in a ship seminar held by Skills Finland in March and a meeting of the association's Board in August. President Düsseldorf acquainted himself with Helsinki Fair Centre and the competition arrangements in June and visited Finland again in December with the secretary general. At the end of December, the secretary general resigned from his position. The process of electing a new secretary general progressed slowly, and the situation became more and more difficult for Finland. In practice, Finland had to work without the assistance of WSO's secretary general for the whole preparation period, up until late 2004. However, it helped that a new practice allowed the next competition's host



country to appoint an ex-officio member, who had the right to speak in debate, to WSO's Board for the duration of the preparation period. As a result of this, both delegates of Finland, namely Veijo Hintsanen and Timo Lankinen, were members of WSO's Board during the preparation period for WSC2005. The relative weight and opportunities for influencing were high, with the Board only comprising a total of six elected members.

WSO's new secretary general, **David Hoey**, took up his duties in November 2004. However, he already attended the WSO's General Assembly in Hong Kong in May. That meeting marked the start of the long-standing and warm cooperation between Finns and David Hoey,

David Hoey (on the right) started working as WSO's secretary general in November 2004. Liam Corcoran (on the left) was chosen as the Technical Committee's chairman in 2003. Veijo Hintsanen (in the middle) has worked closely with them both over the years.

which continues to this day. Eija Alhojärvi recalls: "The situation turned completely on its head. With David, we had an open and confidential relationship. It was clear that we would start preparing the competition together, in mutual understanding. We learned the work together and taught each other." The friendship that continues to this day between David Hoey and many of the Finns who participated in the competition arrangements also dates back to those days and experiences of working together. Finland's situation was also made easier in

2004 by the fact that, early that year, WSO had appointed a technical development group comprised of experienced technical delegates from different countries to assist with the competition arrangements. The group convened for the first time in Finland in March, in conjunction with the Skills ship seminar.

In November 2004, a meeting of the WSO Technical Committee was held in Helsinki. At the meeting, the committee made numerous decisions concerning the competition in Helsinki, including a confirmation of the final competition skills: 34 Official Skills and five Demonstration Skills. The technical delegates from different countries toured the competition venues, namely Helsinki Fair Centre and Helsinki Ice Hall, and acquainted themselves with the competition arrangements. Hannu Immonen recalls that one workshop, equipped with promotional items, had been set up in the exhibition centre's hall as an example. The intention was to provide the delegates with a picture of what the competition area would look like when finished.

“We also wanted to bring our own workshop supervisors to the meeting,” Immonen says. Each workshop supervisor presented the plans concerning their own skill to the technical delegate in charge of the skill. Hannu Immonen recalls that the situation was very exciting for many of the workshop supervisors, as it was the first time that they had to explain the status of the preparations to representatives

Translation assistance from the chief executive officer

Veijo Hintsanen, who served as Finland's technical delegate in Hong Kong in May 2004, recalls the following about the meetings:

“The WSO General Assembly in Hong Kong was peculiar in the sense that, during that week, I never had the time to leave the hotel where we were staying and where the meetings were also held. We spent all evenings and early nights preparing meeting materials for the following days, either with regard to Finland's presentations or the working papers of the WorldSkills committees. One night, Timo and I were working hard to revise Finland's PowerPoint presentations with regard to their content, spelling and grammar, as they were needed for the following day's meetings. Timo in particular was always very critical with regard to these things and set high quality requirements for presentations.

David Hoey, who was doing his own preparations in that same large room, immediately helped us translate our “Finglish” into better English. We worked well past midnight. For David, it was a particularly short night, considering that he first spent a great deal of time assisting us and then noticed that his own computer had completely crashed. During the rest of the night, he reinstalled software and managed to get his computer to work, but then he still had to finish his own presentation in the small hours. We were quite sold after this exceptionally selfless aid operation.”

”Not possible, next item”

There was some real wrestling going on at the meetings about the final competition skills and their implementation. Veijo Hintsanen recalls:

“At the meeting, many parties still tried to influence the competition arrangements with regard to the car brands used in the automotive sector skills, for example. After long and heart-breaking speeches, I once again had to respond to the additional proposals laconically, from behind my chairman’s podium: “not possible, next item.” The supplier of the car brand chosen for the competition was such an important sponsor that it was simply not possible for us to deviate from the previously agreed policies and agreements.

Another interesting discussion was had about the organisation of Bakery. We had previously announced that this particular Demonstration Skill could not be featured at the competition in Helsinki. The reasons for this were, for the most part, financial, but there were also problems arising from the premises at Helsinki Fair Centre and safety regulations. Because of this, we had no drive to organise the skill competition, considering that we had our hands full with work and other unsolved problems. The matter was eventually resolved when we announced that the skill competition would be held at one of the vocational colleges in the Helsinki region, which led to the number of participants falling clearly below the required number and the problem being removed from the agenda.”

of WorldSkills International in English. The presentations and discussions went well, and the workshop supervisors noted that they managed very well in the company of foreign people.

And most importantly, this meeting had laid the groundwork for later cooperation. This was another practice started by the Finns that was permanently adopted by WorldSkills International. The preparatory meeting held in Japan for WSC2007 was attended by the workshop supervisors as well as the chief experts and deputy chief experts.

In Helsinki, the technical delegates also inspected the planned accommodation and transport arrangements and tested the meals planned to be served to the competitors at Helsinki Fair Centre and the hotels. The reviews provided on Finland’s competition arrangements at the meeting were positive. Chairman of the Technical Committee Liam Corcoran stated in a media briefing held after the meetings that he was convinced that the WorldSkills Competition hosted in Helsinki would be the best of all time. It provided a good basis for continuing the preparations.

VET PROVIDERS TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE

The organising concept and operating method for WorldSkills Competitions had to be considered carefully, as there was no ready model suitable for Finland available. It was

already clear during the preparation of the application that special national goals would also be set for the competition project. The project had to contribute both to the building of Finland's own national competition system and, above all, the development of VET as a whole. It was also just as clear from the beginning that Finland's competition arrangements would largely rely on the contribution and expertise of education providers.

The competition project provided vocational colleges with many opportunities to develop their own competence and operations. It was already emphasised in the association's annual report for 2001 that WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 would provide all vocational colleges with an excellent opportunity for vocational guidance, work placements at different levels, Operation A Day's Work, connections with working life, final projects and exercises as well as on-the-job learning.

Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Vilho Hirvi had launched the Equipment for Schools Through Competitions (KOKKO) practice in 2000. Hirvi reflected on the challenges in the competition project from the perspective of machinery and equipment purchases as follows: "Competitors must have access to the best possible equipment and tools, which, for its part, increases the costs. It would still be possible to save in these costs if vocational colleges timed their equipment purchases for shortly before the competition and

made the newly purchased equipment available to the competitors. One competition would not cause much wear and tear, so the vocational colleges would still be left with equipment that was as good as new afterwards." This plan was ultimately carried out. The education providers who were planning on investing in machinery timed their purchases to the date of WorldSkills Helsinki, which allowed the association to tender a great number of orders on their behalf, and the vocational colleges received a considerable quantity discount from the joint orders.

Hannu Immonen recalls that the system worked well, despite the great amount of work required by the tendering process. The kitchens needed for three skills required the most work. The association was unable to find a corporate partner that was interested in supplying the kitchens, despite reaching out numerous times and engaging in many negotiations, and education providers were unwilling to purchase kitchens. Time was starting to run out and the financial risks were high, as the price of the required kitchens was over EUR 1 million in total. The budget for the competition simply would not have covered the kitchen purchases. The situation was finally resolved roughly eight months before the competition: Electrolux announced its willingness to cooperate. The kitchens were finally delivered to the location. Some of them were purchased by education providers, while the rest were sold by Electrolux through its own channels.

In 2003, the association focused particularly on building cooperation networks. Immediately after taking on the position of technical manager, Hannu Immonen started negotiations on cooperation with education providers. The work consisted of the same type of itinerant work that Timo Sirkiä had become experienced in immediately after the founding of the association. It was simply that the scale was now significantly larger, and there was a very limited amount of time available. In negotiations with education providers, the association utilised the expertise of teachers who had attended the competition in St Gallen as either experts or technical observers. They had a good and realistic understanding of how the skills were organised and what resources they required. Hannu Immonen says that the work of an itinerant was hard, yet rewarding. The mood was good and there was volunteer spirit in the air. None of the education providers declared outright that they did not wish to be involved. Each of them then participated according to their own goals and capabilities, with large education providers making a larger contribution and small ones making a smaller one. There was a clear common will.

The first cooperation agreement between Skills Finland and an education provider was signed on 21 October 2003. With the agreement in question, the Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training (OSAKK) took on the responsibility for organising as many as four competition skills. **Matti Määttä**, who was

the joint authority's director at the time, said at the signing of the agreement that it was a matter of honour for him to represent the first education provider to sign an agreement. The signing was held with pomp and circumstance in the Ministry of Education's premises in the presence of photographers. The event concluded with coffee and cake.

Agreements were signed with education providers on the organisation of all Official Skills, with the exception of Mechatronics, Demonstration Skills and the Presentation Skills that were Finland's responsibility. The last of the agreements was signed in conjunction with the Taitaja Competition held in Seinäjoki in January 2004. There were a total of 21 education providers that took responsibility for arrangements. Turku Vocational Institute was the second organiser besides OSAKK to organise four skills. Salpaus Further Education and the Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa each took responsibility for three skills.

Salpaus Further Education was responsible for organising the Cabinetmaking, Joinery and Jewellery skills. Salpaus offers broad training in the wood industry and produces capable professionals for the diverse carpentry industry of Päijät-Häme. For its part, the jewellery training provided by Salpaus is well-known both nationally and internationally. "It was a matter of fact that Salpaus would participate in WSC2005 through these traditional trades that require manual skills. Salpaus wanted to



shine the spotlight on traditional skills from Päijät-Häme and, by setting an example, inspire Finnish youths to educate themselves and participate in vocational skills competitions,” says **Marita Modenius**, rector of Salpaus Further Education.

The planning of the competition skills was linked to the education programme implemented in cooperation with the AKVA project of Häme University of Applied Sciences. Training already started at WorldSkills St Gallen 2003, even though actual agreements with organisers had yet to be made. Individuals who had experience in either Taitaja Competitions or serving as an expert in international skills competitions had been chosen as observers for St Gallen.

The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Education (OSAKK) was the first skill organiser with whom an agreement was signed. Director of OSAKK Matti Määttä and Timo Lankinen signing the agreement. In the top row, from the left: Juhani Mankinen, Sauli Jaara and Eija Alhojärvi.

Training started in Finland in November 2003, after most of the workshop supervisors had already been appointed, and it continued up until the writing of the final report after the competition. Systematic training helped ensure not only the quality of the organisation of skills but also that the preparatory work remained on schedule. Training events were also an excellent way for the vocational teachers who served as skill organisers to network, learn from each other and maintain their motivation throughout the long and partially arduous process. The

training outcomes, the teachers' motivation and the commitment of the education providers was ultimately visible in the project's results. The efforts of the Finnish workshop organisers garnered special praise in international reviews.

The well-perceived Finnish training concept was utilised again two years later, when Secretary General of WSI (former WSO) David Hoey and Hannu Immonen organised a training period in Japan for the workshop supervisors of WSC2007 in accordance with the Finnish training programme.

Because involving VET providers and vocational colleges in the competition arrangements was considered to be essential from the perspectives of both the development of VET and the competition arrangements, the Ministry of Education allocated a discretionary appropriation to the Finnish National Agency for Education for the period 2003–2005. It was intended for the promotion of the appreciation and attractiveness of vocational upper secondary education and training through competition activity. The appropriation was granted for projects by education providers. The intention was to enhance learning and draw attention to the quality of professional competence by developing student projects, on-the-job learning and vocational skills demonstrations, intensifying cooperation between vocational colleges and companies, improving the machinery and equipment and strengthening the expertise of vocational

colleges and teachers. Grants were allocated to a total of 29 education providers, with the total amount allocated increasing to a total of EUR 4.5 million over three years. According to Counsellor of Education **Sirkka-Liisa Kärki** from the Finnish National Agency for Education, education providers took up the challenge in a very positive manner and took care of the development projects in an exemplary way.

MOST OF THE SKILLS WERE IMPLEMENTED WITH THE TURNKEY PRINCIPLE

The responsibility for organising competition skills was assigned to education providers with agreements, with the exception of Mechatronics, which was organised by one of the competition's official partners, Festo Oy.

The skill arrangements were made either based on the turnkey principle or in such a way that the responsibility for organising the skill was shared with Skills Finland. The turnkey principle meant that the education provider was responsible for the overall arrangements for the skill, including all the machinery, equipment and materials required in the competition. Skills Finland was responsible for supplying the required basic technology, such as electricity, water and compressed air, as well as furnishings and general structures, for all skills. This principle was used in the implementation of 22 Official Skills and all the national Presentation Skills.

In addition to organising skills, the education providers also took on many other tasks related to the competition arrangements. This made it possible to provide many students – of vocational colleges as well as universities of applied sciences, upper secondary schools and institutes of adult education – with the opportunity to participate in the event and develop their own skills.

The decision to include students caused particular challenges to the project and its cooperation partners. For example, the producer chosen to implement the opening and closing ceremonies had to be prepared to cooperate with educational institutions and also supervise on-the-job learning on top of their other work. The entire content of the performances was primarily produced by educational institutions, and only the technology was left to a professional in the field. Eight educational institutions and a total of over 300 individuals participated in the implementation. **Vesa Ruotonen**, the producer of the opening and closing ceremonies, recalls his feelings as follows:

At the first meetings, the teaching staff of the departments apparently thought that the opening and closing ceremonies would not amount to anything sensible. This was most likely due to the teachers' limited experience: they were not arranging an end-of-year ceremony but a major international event in a gigantic hall. Disbelief warred with belief. The students did not share the same sentiments. This was because I

emphasised that the responsibility always ultimately lay with the producer. In the end, as the events progressed according to the script to the minute, the feeling of success was particularly great: instead of a major catastrophe, the organisers experienced the triumph of action.

A COMPUTER-BASED SCORE-KEEPING SYSTEM IS DEVELOPED AT HAMK

In 2003, the Taitaja Competition adopted the method used by international WorldSkills Competitions to keep score. In Jyväskylä, scores were still calculated with the help of Excel spreadsheets, which proved to be an unreasonably laborious and slow method.

It was decided that a database-based score-keeping system would be built for the next Taitaja Competition, which would be held in Seinäjoki. **Tommi Saarinen** and **Janne Ostrovski**, students of the Degree Programme in Data Processing at Häme University of Applied Sciences, were hired to carry out this work. Ostrovski had been a member of the team that won gold in the Global Multimedia Challenge in the Youth Skills Olympics held in Lyon in 1995. The two men started their work in summer 2003 by practising in the facilities and with the equipment of the School of Professional Teacher Education. The first development version was completed that autumn.

WSC2005: skills and skill organisers

1	Polymechanics Turku Vocational Institute	13	Autobody Repair Savo Consortium for Education, Savo Vocational College	20	Bricklaying Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa, Mäntsälä College
3	Manufacturing Team Challenge (MTC) The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training, Oulu College of Culture and Technology	15	Plumbing The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training, Oulu College of Culture and Technology	21	Stonemasonry North Karelia Educational Federation of Municipalities, North Karelia Vocational College
4	Mechatronics Festo Oy	16	Industrial Electronics Turku Vocational Institute	22	Painting & Decorating TAO, Turku Federation of Vocational Institutes
5	Mech. Eng. CADD Forssa Vocational Adult Education Centre	17	Web Design Finnish Business College	24	Cabinetmaking Salpaus Further Education, Lahti Region Educational Consortium
6	CNC Machining Tampere College	18	Electrical Installations (Commercial Wiring) North Karelia Educational Federation of Municipalities, North Karelia Vocational College	25	Joinery Salpaus Further Education, Lahti Region Educational Consortium
9	IT/ Software Applications Finnish Business College	19	Industrial Control Intermunicipal Federation of Vocational Education in Western Uusimaa	26	Carpentry The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training, Oulu College of Culture and Technology
10	Welding Vaasa Vocational Adult Education Centre				
12	Wall & Floor Tiling The Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa, Mäntsälä College				

27	Jewellery Salpaus Further Education, Lahti Region Educational Consortium	34	Cooking Haaga Institute Foundation, Helsinki Culinary School	D44	Printing Jyväskylä Vocational Institute
28	Floristry The Municipal Union for Countryside College of Southwest Finland	35	Restaurant Service Haaga Institute Foundation, Helsinki Culinary School	D46	Sheet-Construction Steelwork Kouvola Region Vocational College
29	Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty	36	Car Painting The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training, Oulu College of Culture and Technology	D47	Tinsmith Turku Vocational Institute
30	Beauty Therapy The Joint Authority of Education in Espoo Region, Espoo Institute of Health and Social Welfare	37	Landscape Gardening Häme Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Higher Education, HAMK	D48	Transport Technology Jyväskylä Vocational Institute
31	Ladies' Dressmaking Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty	38	Refrigeration AEL Centre for Technical Training	PRESENTATION SKILLS:	
32	Confectioner / Pastry Cook Jyväskylä Vocational Institute	39	IT PC/Network Support Turku Vocational Institute	Forestry Machinery Jämsä Region Further Education College	
33	Automobile Technology Hämeenlinna Region Federation of Municipalities, Tavastia Further Education College	40	Graphic Design Technology AEL Centre for Technical Training	Practical Nurse The Joint Authority of Education in Espoo Region	
		D43	Telecommunication Distribution Technology Vaasa Vocational Institute	Decoration Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa	

Other responsibilities of education providers

Excursions for competitors and experts
Porvoo Vocational College

Building of the Fair Centre
Turku Vocational Institute

Study paths
Jyväskylä Vocational Teacher Education College

IT infrastructure and IT support
City of Helsinki Education Department

Accreditation
City of Helsinki and Hervanta Vocational
College

OPENING CEREMONY AND CLOSING CEREMONY

Orchestra and choir
Pop & Jazz Conservatory

Transport
Savo Vocational and Adult Education Centre

Props and projection
Oulu College of Culture

Competition guides
The City of Helsinki Education Department

Costumes, make-up and hairstyles
Helsinki City College of Culinary Art,
Fashion and Beauty (Helpa) and
Espoo College of
Health Care and Social Welfare (ETSO)

VIP car transport
Häme University of Applied Sciences,
Driving Instructor Education Centre

Stage decor
The Crafts and Arts Centre of Pirkanmaa

Security
Oulu, Seinäjoki and Vantaa

Floral arrangement
Mäntsälä Vocational College

TV broadcasting of the competition
Tampere College,
Jyväskylä Vocational Institute and
Helsinki Business Polytechnic (Helia)

Television filming and IMAG
Tampere College



*The developers of the CIS system,
Tommi Saarinen (left) and Janne Ostrovski.*

During that autumn and winter, Ostrovski and Saarinen continued developing the version. Their team was also joined by **Tapio Niemelä** around that time, after which the men continued working on the specialisation project related to the topic as part of their studies. After the data system's completion, they trained the organisers of the Taitaja Competition held in Seinäjoki in 2004 in operating the system. Ostrovski and Saarinen were also in charge of maintaining the data system and implementing the scorekeeping during the competition.

According to Ostrovski, the team in fact developed two data systems between 2003 and 2005. The first of them, Taituri, was created for the needs of Taitaja2004. The second was built for WSC2005, but it was tested at Taitaja2005. The latter system was commissioned from HAMK by WorldSkills International, and it was developed under the name CIS (Competition Information System).

The developers could trust in Taituri's technical functionality in peace, as the traditional desktop application did not use a computer network. However, the changing of the WorldSkills assessment practice between 2003 and 2005 posed an additional challenge to the programmers. In subjective assessment, the competition switched to a system of five judges, similarly to the system used in ski jumping. The purpose of this was to prevent and reduce judging errors and their impacts on the final scoring of competition performances. The rules on assessment also included many other small details that all had to be incorporated into the programme. The preparations were supervised on the WorldSkills Organisation's behalf by the experienced British expert **Peter Neate**, who later played a key role in the development and management of the result services for the WorldSkills Competitions held between 2005 and 2011.

According to Ostrovski, CIS did not yet cover all the areas required for WorldSkills Competitions during the Taitaja Competition held in Turku in January, which was why the working group had to improve and develop the system during the event. CIS was completed fully shortly before WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

The main idea behind the CIS system was that it recorded all the assessment criteria and points, based on which the system calculated the final scores and country-specific summaries. If necessary, all the elements assessed by

each judge could be checked in the system afterwards. This substantially improved the competitors' legal protection. The system also included various settings that made it usable in the national competitions of different countries.

After WSC2005, the Finnish team spent another month on finishing the software and analysing and correcting any problem areas observed. The software was released to WSO in late July 2005.

A new further developed version (CIS NG) was introduced at WorldSkills Calgary 2009. It had been developed from the system made by the Finns by WSO's IT group. Ostrovski was involved in the specification and planning of the further development in 2008, but did not participate in the new version's final implementation.

TAITAJA2004 WAS HELD IN SEINÄJOKI

Taitaja2004 was held in late January. The main responsibility for the event, which was hosted in the premises of Seinäjoki Arena, was borne by Seinäjoki Vocational College. The competition was held at the same time as the Senuko education fair and the international congress "Entrepreneurship – A Good Choice", which were hosted at Seinäjoki Sports Centre. The Taitaja9 finals were held as part of the Taitaja Competition for the first time.



As the newly minted prime minister, Matti Vanhanen first served as a speaker and award presenter at the Taitaja Competition in Seinäjoki in 2004.

The event attracted a total of 30,000 spectators. Although the organisers had been prepared for the large amount of visitors and the rush of audience on the second day of the competition, the situation still led to some surprising actions: "We held a meeting with the security and traffic controllers the previous evening in which we decided to enhance security at the main entrance and improve the organisation of traffic control. Our prediction came true: we had a whopping 15,000 visitors in a single day, and the number of buses in the parking area was roughly 140 at its highest. This was enough to cause considerable problems in traffic control and at the main entrance, and it periodically completely congested the access route. The doors of the main entrance had to be temporarily closed, and the masses were directed to the other doors. The competition itself progressed normally without

any disturbances,” the competition’s director, **Jorma Sihvonen**, recalls about the rush of spectators on the second day of the competition.

In the preparation process for the competition in Seinäjoki and the training related to it, the organisers particularly improved the utilisation of the quality manual and the transmission of information from one competition organisers to another. In addition to the quality manual, the operation of national skill-specific steering groups was also developed in Seinäjoki. Thanks to the active efforts in Seinäjoki, the steering groups gained many new members, while Turku, as the next competition’s organiser, gained the backing of almost 200 professionals.

All students and personnel of Seinäjoki Vocational College were involved in the event’s preparations. The final report described this cooperation as follows: “The closer we got to the competition, the closer the cooperation was between the different people, support teams and skills. The atmosphere was superb and intense. Everyone had the same goal: we will do it!”

In their feedback, the students described the experience as follows, among other things: “It’s great that they let you take responsibility in handling things.” “It intensified the interaction between students and teachers.” “It was a great job. I had to come in to work on the weekend, but it was worth it.”



Confectioners competing at the Taitaja Competition in Seinäjoki in 2004.

The Taitaja event in Seinäjoki also garnered a great deal of international interest. Many of the countries that were preparing for WSC2005 wanted to come and learn more about Finland and the Finnish way of organising a vocational skills competition. Many countries were also looking for a model for their own national competitions. The largest delegations came from Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden.

In Seinäjoki, the greeting from the government was presented by Prime Minister **Matti Vanhanen**. He surprised the audience of the closing ceremony and, above all, **Niko Myllyniemi**, the gold medallist in Housing Construction, by presenting him with a birdhouse he had built himself.

44 COMPETITORS ARE TRAINED FOR THE NATIONAL TEAM

Training for the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki was launched in 2003, when 196 young people from various trades participated in basic training. A total of 106 of them were



*Competition in Beauty Therapy at the
Taitaja Competition in Seinäjoki in 2004.*

chosen for the excellence in skills training period, and 44 of them were chosen for the final competition team. The training was provided by 39 skill managers and 200 trainers. There were 50 educational institutions that were involved in the training as training units and over a hundred training companies.

Immo Pylvänen was chosen as Skills Finland's training manager at the beginning of 2004. Pylvänen was tasked with supervising training, taking care of the training of actors and ensuring that the training for the competition in Helsinki was implemented in the best possible manner. Pylvänen was also chosen as a team leader for WSC2005. From that point onwards, he served as a team leader in all WorldSkills Competitions until WorldSkills Leipzig 2013.

Pylvänen works as a vocational lecturer at the Building Services Engineering Department of Kouvola Region Vocational College. His first contact with vocational skills competitions took place in 1993, when a student of his participated in the Air Conditioning skill in the Taitaja Competition. Between 2001 and 2005, students of Pylvänen won the national championship in Air Conditioning every year. In addition to training for vocational skills competitions, Pylvänen had experience as a sports coach.

The preparations for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 started with the improvement of the quality of the entire training system and with the production of support materials. A new training

manual intended for both skill managers and trainees was completed in 2004. The trainer folders were renewed, and separate folders were also prepared for trainees and skill managers to facilitate the planning and monitoring of training.

Three national team camps were held before the competition. The goal of national team training was to develop the competitors' competitive and physical capabilities to a level that enabled success in the WorldSkills Competition. The training particularly aimed for a systematic working method, routine, speed and a high quality of work. The home ground advantage was utilised in many ways, including by checking out the competition venue, Helsinki Fair Centre, thoroughly in advance.

THE NEED FOR MENTAL TRAINING HAD ALREADY BEEN NOTED IN THE 1990S

The need for mental training had already been noted in the 1990s. Pirkko Vesterinen, who had served as a team leader in the 1993 Youth Skills Olympics, said after the competition that training in skills alone was not enough. It is also necessary to pay attention to the competitors' ability and desire to compete and train them in how to act in a foreign culture.

A good example of the need for mental training is provided by the story of Sami Ojanen, a competitor from Peräseinäjoki who won silver in Bricklaying in the 1995 Youth Skills Olympics. The huge audience is particularly etched into his

memory. It was estimated that the competition was attended by a little over 200,000 visitors over the four days. Ojanen recalls being extremely nervous, which caused him not to have much of an appetite. He actually lost four kilogrammes during the competition. Ojanen ruminated on the matter afterwards:

Back then, we did not have any type of mental training. It was not introduced until later. After what I experienced, I considered it to be highly necessary. When, after the competition in Lyon, I was asked to speak to the team that was going to the next Olympics, I emphasised mental training to them. If you have a few dozen spectators in Tampere and a few hundred thousand in Lyon, that is quite a difference. It sure is enough to make your knees shake!

The same thing had been pointed out in his own competition report by **Kari Pohjalainen**, who served as the expert in Pattern Making at WorldSkills Seoul 2001. In his own opinion, he had made a bad mistake: leaving mental preparation to his trainee's own discretion. Pohjalainen wrote in his report that the basic training of the competitors was apparently technically sufficient, but there should be more focus on creating a team spirit in the future "in order for the team of competitors to be self-motivated to support a depressed young individual who has partly failed in their own competition".

”Immo, I’m here with my car rolled over onto its roof!”

“In the position of training manager, I’m in charge of ensuring that training is at the WSC level and carried out appropriately in all the skills that Finland participates in,” Pylvänen says.

Pylvänen also emphasises that there must be trust between the trainer and the trainee. It also involves mutual respect. *“Even if the trainer tells the competitor to do something that feels completely stupid to the competitor at that moment, they will still do it. The competitor trusts that the trainer feels that this is important to the competitor’s development at this particular stage.”*

Pylvänen has a rather educational example of this to share. A competitor whom he had trained for the competition in St Gallen called him one morning after the competition, at five past six. Pylvänen answered his phone, groggy with sleep. *“I heard a familiar voice say ‘Hey, Immo, what should I do? I’m here with my car rolled over onto its roof.’ It turned out that the fellow had fallen asleep at the wheel on Elimäentie and driven his car out to a field, where the car had rolled over onto its roof. However, he didn’t hurt himself. In my opinion, this is the level of trust that you need to have: that the first person you call at six a.m. to ask for help is your trainer, even after the training relationship has ended.”* The competitor in question earned a Medallion for Excellence and placed sixth with his top performance in St Gallen.



Immo Pylvänen has been involved in competition activities in many roles: as a training manager, team leader, expert and trainer as well as chief judge in the Taitaja Competition.

A MENTAL TRAINER TAKES UP HIS DUTIES AT THE BEGINNING OF 2004

Training Manager Immo Pylvänen says that **Juhani Ahonen** started the mental training of the national team for the first time when the team was preparing for WorldSkills St Gallen 2003.

By profession, Ahonen was a teacher and department director at Vaasa Vocational Adult Education Centre. For many years, he worked as the coach and mental trainer of the women’s volleyball team Vaasan Vasama, which had won the Finnish championship numerous times.

Juhani Ahonen officially started working as the mental trainer of the national team for WorldSkills Helsinki in autumn 2004. The mental training started with breathing



and relaxation exercises, and stress tolerance exercises were later added to the training. Ahonen continued working as a trainer until November 2006. According to Immo Pylvänen, Ahonen was self-taught as a mental trainer and applied the mental training guide prepared by the Olympic Committee to skills training successfully.

The professional skills of Juhani Ahonen were also utilised in training the organisation in charge of arranging the competition. Ahonen held sessions for the entire staff of the office of Skills Finland that were intended to improve their stress tolerance and team spirit. Eija Alhojärvi recalls Juhani Ahonen as being a friendly individual who was well-versed in his work. “Simply by arriving at the office, Jussi alleviated the feelings of urgency and stress with his calm presence. Whenever he visited the office, Jussi also always remembered to come by and ask how I was doing. After a short

conversation, my worries and time pressures always felt smaller,” Alhojärvi says.

Ahonen managed to achieve a great deal, but his work was left unfinished, as he died of a severe disease in 2007. After Ahonen’s death, sports psychologist **Juha Minkkinen** took on the role of mental trainer. He utilised Ahonen’s approaches and added his own views and emphases to them. “Juhani focused specifically on the mental qualities required in vocational skills competitions that are, in many ways, unique when compared to sports, in which the performances, for example, are usually much shorter in duration,” Minkkinen says.

Juha Minkkinen continued working on the Mental Training Manual that Ahonen had started. He refined the book and turned it into a more concrete mental training tool together with **Atte Airaksinen**, the team’s pastor. Minkkinen has a couple of decades of experience in training national level ball sports teams and individual athletes. He has also worked as a sports psychologist of the Finnish Orienteering Federation for four years. “Training in competitive sports and skills training have a lot in common. What’s very important is the ability to perform at your best at the exact moment when it is needed. When there are long days in vocational skills competitions, it’s almost impossible to maintain peak performance all the time. At those times, the way in which you process mistakes becomes extremely important.”



The national team's support team 2005: Team Leader Hannele Marttiini (left), pastor Atte Airaksinen, WSC2001 competitors Alexander Strakh and Katri Heikka, mental trainer Juhani Ahonen and Team Leader Immo Pylvänen.

The Mental Training Manual was published as a printed booklet in 2010. It was translated into English and distributed to all WorldSkills countries in 2011. The manual was well-received, as similar training is not really provided in other countries. Finland has clearly been a forerunner in this matter.

THE ARRANGEMENTS OF WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI WERE TESTED AT THE TAITAJA COMPETITION IN TURKU

The Taitaja Competition held at Elysée Arena and Turku Exhibition Centre in Turku from 19 to 21 January 2005 kicked off a national Young Professional theme year that featured WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 as its main event. The main responsibility for the Taitaja Competition's arrangements was borne by Turku Vocational Institute. The competition was prepared and also implemented while the preparations for WSC2005 were at their peak. Many of the people who served in key positions in the Taitaja Competition continued working in the WSC organisation immediately after Taitaja. The skills accumulated during the arranging of the Taitaja Competition came in useful. The event was attended by as many as 42,000 people.

The Taitaja2005 event also included the Next Step education fair, the finals of Taitaja9 and the international congress "New Challenges for Vocational Education". The two-day anniversa-

Skills Finland offers its assistance with the mental training of Ilves

Leena-Maija Talikka, who was the project manager in charge of training at Skills Finland from 2009 to 2010, recalls: *"This happened at the International Days for Vocational Education held at Tampere Hall from 26 to 28 October 2010. The first speech of the morning was given by the head coach of the Tampere-based ice hockey team Ilves, **Raimo "Raipe" Helminen**, who spoke about hobbies, competition, winning, and losing in particular, as Ilves had just lost a match the previous evening. Raipe recounted how they had tried everything to turn their luck around, from winter swimming to psychologists, but nothing had helped. At that point, I raised my hand and told him about the Mental Training Manual recently completed at Skills Finland as part of the training for international vocational skills competitions. I said that we could send copies to the team if they wanted to try it. Raipe thanked me and accepted my offer, and so we sent them a bundle of Mental Training Manuals."*

ry seminar featured discussion on the current situation of VET and the need to modernise it from both a European and global perspective. One important theme was Finland's ten-year membership in the EU. The seminar also included discussion on the worldwide attention garnered by the Finnish education system and presented background materials of PISA research.

Turku had offered the possibility of the Taitaja Competition being utilised as a preliminary competition to WSC2005. Eija Alhojärvi says that the opportunity to test many of the implementation models and methods planned for Helsinki in advance, under the right conditions, was unique, and the opportunity was taken up with enthusiasm. Cooperation with the Taitaja organisation was seamless, and it is largely thanks to this testing that the implementation of the WorldSkills Competition was so high in quality.

Skills Finland had one WSC workshop built at Turku Exhibition Centre. The Crafts and Arts Centre of Pirkanmaa, which was responsible for building barriers and signage for the workshops in Helsinki, was able to practise erecting and dismantling these structures in Turku. The durability, functionality and general look of the barriers, company and skill information boards and skill signage were also tested in Turku. What was also valuable was the communication and marketing work carried out by Turku Vocational Institute, which provided great support to the marketing of the WorldSkills event.

Internationality was one of the themes of Taitaja2005. The tradition of offering foreign guest competitors the opportunity to participate in the Taitaja Competition was actively continued in Turku. The Taitaja Competition in Turku was already advertised in conjunction with WorldSkills Seoul 2001 and WorldSkills St Gallen 2003. "Many people were interested in familiarising themselves with the Finnish competition system because of the competition in Helsinki," says Hannu Immonen, who was working as an education coordinator at Turku Vocational Institute at the time.

In addition to the skills included in the Taitaja Competition, as many as 30 WorldSkills skills were ultimately implemented. The total number of competitors in these skills was 89, and they came from 13 countries. There were 17 Finnish competitors, and representatives for the Finnish national team were still selected in some





Competitors competing in Restaurant Service at Taitaja2005 in Turku.

skills for the competition in June. The Finnish national team was officially announced at the closing ceremony of the Taitaja Competition.

The WSC skills allowed both the Finnish and foreign competitors to test their capability and refine their skills in an actual competition environment and in an international setting. A total of 11 of the organisers of these skills were also responsible for organising them in Helsinki, which was why the event provided them with valuable information on the building and implementation of the skill.

“The competition in Turku was a major success, fulfilling its mission as a test platform for the competition in Helsinki. Based on the tests, it

was established that the basic solutions planned for Helsinki were functional. It was also important that almost the entire group of people involved in the organisation of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 was present to train for their duties. As the technical manager, I followed the testing with interest. The further the competition progressed, the more relieved I was. I knew that even though there was still a great deal of finetuning to be done, we were on the right path,” Hannu Immonen recalls.

The competition in Turku was also attended by Secretary General of WorldSkills International David Hoey and Chairman of the Technical

Committee Liam Corcoran. On the weekend after the competition, a cooperation meeting was held between the WorldSkills Organisation and the WSC2005 competition organisation. The location chosen for the meeting was Herran Kukkaro in Rymättylä. In addition to foreign guests, the meeting was attended by Finnish delegates Timo Lankinen and Veijo Hintsanen as well as Secretary General Eija Alhojärvi and Technical Manager Hannu Immonen. Finland's competition preparations were reviewed, point by point, during the weekend. The exotic meeting place – with temperatures lower than -20 °C and a lot of snow on the ground – as well as going to a smoke sauna and winter swimming after the meeting, left a permanent impression on Hoey, who was an Australian, in particular. “The idea about the meeting was excellent, even though the timing – immediately after an intensive, over a week-long Taitaja marathon – was not ideal,” Alhojärvi recalls. “The choice of location, thanks to people from Turku, was excellent. After that weekend at the latest, all the key actors of WorldSkills and Skills Finland had become welded together into a close-knit working group, ensuring seamless cooperation even in the trickiest of situations and, through it, the success of the competition in Helsinki.”

A GROUP OF A THOUSAND PEOPLE IS TRAINED FOR WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005

“I doubt that any of us fully realised, when we launched the competition project, the



Hannu Immonen was the technical manager and vice secretary general of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. He had served as an expert in Plumbing from 1999 to 2001, as a team leader in 2003 and as Finland's technical delegate both in WorldSkills International since 2007 and in the European Skills Promotion Organisation from 2008 to 2011. Immonen worked as rector of Turku Vocational Institute from 2006 to 2011, and in 2012 he was appointed director of the vocational education service area with the City of

enormity of the work or the number of people ultimately required to complete the project. I sure didn't,” says Eija Alhojärvi, who served as the competition's secretary general.

The competition organiser was, for the most part, formed in 2004. However, recruitment continued up until the start of the competition. As the actual costs required by the event became clear, piece by piece, and as much as the financial situation allowed, more helpers were hired to see the project through. Even at the last minute, a few weeks before the start of the

event, some summer employees were recruited as helpers.

The core organisation for the competition comprised a total of 45 full-time and part-time workers. The total number of hired employees and volunteers in the competition organisation during the competition was 3,250.

It was clear that seeing the project through with honour required all of the participants to be trained in their duties. “This task was made more challenging by the fact that the group of participants was very heterogeneous. There were permanent employees of Skills Finland and people hired for the project on a temporary basis. There were people who were working under agreements made with education providers or at an hourly rate. Some of the services were purchased from companies. There was also a large group of interns and on-the-job trainees as well as students and pupils who were completing their study projects. On top of that, there was also a considerable number of volunteers, both adults and youths, working in various positions,” Alhojärvi recalls.

The main responsibility for the training was borne by Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), which implemented it as part of the AKVA project. A total of over a thousand project actors took part in the training organised by HAMK. The training was closely linked with the planning and implementation processes of various functions.

Participants in the competition project

The largest groups of employees, both hired and volunteers, who participated in the competition project:

- Core organisation 45
- Accreditation functions 50
- Global Skills Village 20
- Organisation and building of skills 150
- Building and maintenance of IT infrastructure 50
- Security 70
- Study paths 190
- TV broadcasting of the competition 90
- Press centre 45
- Guides 400
- Opening and closing ceremony 665
- Excursions 300
- Conference services 30

Each education provider in charge of a skill had appointed two people to take charge of the planning and implementation of the skill. In accordance with the international practice, these people were referred to as workshop supervisors and assistant workshop supervisors. The training programme for skill organisers was launched at the end of 2003. For its part, the Helsinki 2005 Expert training was attended by all the experts chosen for the competition, roughly one third of whom were serving as experts for the first time. The expert training also included working in the national Taitaja Competition and participating in the national team's training camps.

In addition to longer training programmes, the various groups of actors were also provided with shorter orientation training programmes. For example, the entire group of civil servants involved in the arrangements by the Finnish National Agency for Education was provided with two half-day-long training sessions.

Training the competition guides was a separate and significant project of its own. The City of Helsinki Education Department was in charge of the activities and training of competition guides. The aim was to obtain 500 guides for the competition. The actual number of guides obtained was 400. The guides came from the vocational colleges, Finnish- and Swedish-language upper secondary schools and general upper secondary school for adults of the City of Helsinki as well as apprenticeship training.

Additionally, there were 13 top guides from Helsinki Polytechnic Stadia who supervised the guide groups. The scope of the guide training was 1–3 credit units, and its implementation involved Skills Finland, the AKVA project of Häme University of Applied Sciences, the City of Helsinki Education Department's divisions and educational institutions, Stadia, the Helsinki City Tourist & Convention Bureau and the City of Helsinki Information Office. All the guides who participated in the training were divided into 13 different task groups according to their wishes. The guides worked at the opening and closing ceremonies, the airport, hotels, info booths and accreditation as well as in the roles of skills guides and team guides. Guide services were also offered to the Finnish and international competition organisation as well as VIP guests. Some of the training was common to all guides, while some training was differentiated according to the guides' duties. The training was incorporated into the courses of various educational institutions, and it was included in the studies of the participants. During the training, the students were provided with a comprehensive information package on tourism and the sights in Helsinki as well as VET and the competition.

In addition to training for project actors, HAMK organised training in the development of vocational skills and internationality for vocational teachers. Besides theory, this training included practical observation at the competition venue.

The whole extensive training project ensured, for its part, the smooth implementation of the competition. It also laid the groundwork for the development of the Finnish system of vocational skills competitions for the coming years. “I believe that it was also meaningful from the perspective of the development of VET. There is no way that a course attended by over a thousand vocational teachers and other people who work with VET would not be visible in normal everyday work after the competition,” Alhojärvi muses.

WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 – the best competition of all time

“In the more than 50-year history of the Youth Skills Olympics, WorldSkills Competitions have drawn their strength from the traditions and culture of each host country. And we’ll be doing the same thing – in the Finnish way in May 2005,” President of the association’s Board Timo Lankinen said in 2001.



The competition’s symbol, the fist of blacksmith Ilmarinen from the Kalevala, the Finnish national epic, represented the six fundamental pillars of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005: young people and the future, vocational education and training, new experiences and joy, international cooperation, fair competition as well as quality and vocational skills.

THE OUTCOMES OF LONG-TERM PREPARATIONS ARE WEIGHED

It was finally the day for which everyone had been preparing for almost five years: Wednesday, 26 May 2005, the first day of the competition.

The process of building the competition at Helsinki Fair Centre had commenced two weeks earlier.

Concurrently with the start of the building process, the entire competition office relocated from the premises of Skills Finland on Asemamiehenkatu to temporary facilities on the third floor of Helsinki Fair Centre, above the main entrance.

The office windows provided a good view of the arrival of competition attendees. “On the morning of the first day of the competition, I watched the area in front of the main entrance start filling with attendees. I felt amazing, relieved and even nervous. I realised on a very concrete level that the success of our many years of preparations would be weighed over the next four days,” Eija Alhojärvi recalls.

Timo Lankinen described the challenging nature of the whole projects afterwards as follows:

Organising a large-scale event has been a major challenge to Skills Finland and all its member organisations and cooperation partners. A WorldSkills event is also an exceptional challenge in terms of organisation. It differs from other large-scale events due to its multidimensionality, among other things. It requires expertise that combines understanding of VET, competence in organising large-scale events, understanding of Finnish and foreign production and service companies as well as international vocational skills competitions. Building an area covering more than 90,000 square metres into a modern production and service company in two weeks is one example of a unique challenge. The quantity of machines, equipment, software, networks and materials is definitely a record so far in Finland. Additionally, the number of visitors was exceptionally large, and the service needs and structures posed major challenges.

Almost all of Helsinki Fair Centre's premises were in use by the event, some as workshops and the rest as offices and meeting rooms. Most of the skills were successfully placed in six halls, in addition to which the competition used outdoor areas of the fair centre.



Akseli Gallen-Kallela: The Forging of the Sampo, 1893 oil on canvas, 200 × 152 cm The Finnish National Gallery/Ateneum Art Museum
Photo: The Finnish National Gallery/Antti Kuivalainen

“Now the master, Ilmarinen, The renowned and skilful blacksmith, From the fire removes the iron, Places it upon the anvil, Hammers well until it softens, Hammers many fine utensils, Hammers spears, and swords, and axes, Hammers knives, and forks, and hatchets, Hammers tools of all descriptions.”

Rune IX Origin of Iron, Healing of Väinämöinen

“From his couch arose the artist, From his couch of stone, the blacksmith, And began his work of forging, Forging Sun and Moon for Northland.”

Rune XLIX Restoration of the Sun and Moon

“Quick the artist of Wainola Forges with the tongs and anvil, Knocking with a heavy hammer, Forges skilfully the Sampo; On one side the flour is grinding, On another salt is making, On a third is money forging, And the lid is many-colored.”

Rune X Ilmarinen Forges the Sampo, Translated by John Martin Crawford



The building process was carried out by the education providers in charge of each skill. Helsinki Fair Centre had already started preparations by installing preliminary inlets for heating, water, ventilation and electricity and measuring the workshop locations in the halls and outdoor areas in accordance with plans prepared by Skills Finland. Precise skill-specific schedules had been prepared for the building and dismantling of workshops.

One of the biggest challenges in the whole competition project was the building of 22 complete kitchens in Hall 4, located on the second floor of Helsinki Fair Centre. Building all the necessary water, sewer and electric

connections also required the fair centre to be flexible. Hannu Immonen says that without the expertise and solution-oriented attitude of the fair centre's staff, the whole competition would have been a bust, as they encountered numerous new, unusual situations during the planning and building processes. As an example of this, Immonen mentions the dust extraction system required for Joinery. The problem was eventually solved by dismantling a part of the wall of the hall at the fair centre for dust extraction pipes and then restoring the wall after the competition.

The fair centre upgraded its entire electrical switchboard well before the competition. This

The entire capacity of Helsinki Fair Centre was in use during the competition. More space was obtained by erecting tents in the outdoor areas.

A bomb threatens to cancel the competition

Many surprising situations took place during WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. Hannu Immonen describes one of the most memorable situations:

“In autumn 2004, an object was found deep underground at Käpylä Sports Park, right next to Helsinki Fair Centre. The authorities suspected that it was an unexploded bomb from the Second World War. In spring 2005, when the competition’s preparations were in their final stages, the police announced that they would be digging up the bomb at the end of May, right during our competition week. The entire Helsinki Fair Centre had to be evacuated for the duration of the bomb extraction. This announcement marked the start of long, multi-phase investigations and negotiations between various government agencies. We tried to advocate for the bomb defusal to be rescheduled: if a bomb has laid quietly in the bowels of the earth for almost 50 years, could it not wait there for a few extra weeks? During the couple of nights that I didn’t sleep, I had time to think through all the

worst case scenarios, starting from the cancellation of the competition and ending with the whole venue blowing up. The foreign experts had already arrived at the venue, and the hustle and bustle of training and meetings was at its worst when a decision was finally made regarding the bomb. It was decided that the bomb defusal would be postponed to take place immediately after the end of the competition. Because of this, we had to empty the outdoor areas of Helsinki Fair Centre quicker than planned. The yard area was cordoned off, but we were allowed to continue dismantling the workshops inside the halls according to the original schedule, though the doors on the Käpylä side of the fair centre were not in use.”

The bomb threat caused so much extra work that Pirjo Elo, member of the Executive Committee, still recalls the anger she felt when, a few days after the competition, she heard on her car radio that the suspected bomb was actually an old steel bed frame.

Most significant additional events

- Education fair at Helsinki Fair Centre
- Sponsor Village and Partner Expo at Helsinki Fair Centre
- Study paths at Helsinki Fair Centre (Jyväskylä Vocational Teacher Education College)
- Global Skills Village at Helsinki Fair Centre (Finnish National Agency for Education)
- Leaders' Forum at Helsinki Fair Centre (WorldSkills)
- Youth and Work Culture 2005 conference at Hanasaari (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health)
- Backstage 2005, an event for schoolchildren, at Helsinki Ice Hall (Economic Information Office TAT)
- Final competition of the national Forest Quiz for schoolchildren in the yard area of Helsinki Fair Centre (Finnish Forest Association)
- Work demonstrations by masters at Helsinki Fair Centre (Federation of Finnish Enterprises and Council of Master Guilds)
- Photo exhibition of the best photos from cultural competitions (SAKU)

was necessary because the amount of electricity required for the competition was a record high.

The dismantling of the competition area started on Sunday, immediately after the end of the competitions. Two weeks were reserved for the building process to ensure that the working days were not unreasonably long. Another purpose of this was to avoid accidents resulting from excessive fatigue. In contrast, the dismantling process was carried out quickly, in four days. By agreement, the fair centre had to be empty by 12 midnight on Tuesday, 31 May 2005.

A total of 1,500 vocational college students assisted in the building and dismantling of the workshops. Additionally, 60 students participated in the general building under their teachers' supervision.

In addition to the four-day competition itself and events mandated by the rules of WorldSkills International, the competition event included many other events organised by Skills Finland or its cooperation partners. Official events mandated by the rules included the opening and closing ceremonies held at Helsinki Ice Hall, the welcoming party, excursions for competitors and experts after the competition as well as numerous meetings and training session related to the organisation of the event.

The welcoming party for the competitors was held at Kalastajatorppa in Helsinki, while the corresponding party for the experts was held at Espoo Cultural Centre. The excursions'



destination was Porvoo. In other words, the event was visible around Helsinki and all the way in Tapiola and Porvoo.

ALL VISITOR RECORDS ARE BROKEN AT HELSINKI FAIR CENTRE

WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 attracted a staggering 118,000 visitors, of whom 65,000 were schoolchildren and 8,000 were foreign visitors. In terms of visitor numbers, the event was the largest in the history of Helsinki Fair Centre at the time. On the third day of the competition, the event also broke the fair centre's record for the number of visitors in a single day with 42,559 visitors.

The competition was spectated by a total of 118,000 people at Helsinki Fair Centre. The event was the largest in the fair centre's history, and new day-specific records were set for visitor numbers on two days, with the number of visitors reaching more than 42,000 per day.

The end of May had been chosen as the competition date because it was a good time for schoolchildren's class excursions. A special steering group for education cooperation was set up for planning and implementing the visits by schoolchildren. The steering group included representatives of Skills Finland, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, the Finnish National Agency for Education, Economic

Information Office TAT, the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce.

The event was marketed with the help of a “rucksack package”. Cooperation partners and excursion destinations included the Backstage event held at Helsinki Ice Hall by the Economic Information Office TAT, as well as Korkeasaari Zoo and Linnanmäki. The well-planned rucksack package garnered more interest from schools than expected. Contrary to assumptions, most of the participants in the excursions visited Helsinki for a one-day trip and there was no time left for visiting the other possible destinations.

The goal set for visiting schoolchildren was reached largely thanks to the active efforts of Skills Finland’s cooperation partners. Numerous vocational colleges organised trips to Helsinki Fair Centre. For example, Tavastia Further Education College reserved its own train for this purpose. The train arrived in Helsinki with 900 passengers on board. Among them were first-year students, trustees, civil servants, teachers and cooperation partners. In addition to the train transport, Tavastia organised bus transport for a couple of thousand pupils in Years 7 and 8 from comprehensive schools in the Hämeenlinna region. The purpose of this campaign was to market VET and inspire pupils and students to participate in vocational skills competitions.

Salpaus Further Education also participated actively in organising transport, according to Marita Modenius, the rector of Salpaus:

Salpaus provided all pupils in Years 7–9 at comprehensive schools in Päijät-Häme with the opportunity to go and watch the competition. The journey was made by bus and two trains reserved by Salpaus. One of the trains departed from Lahti Stadium with more than a thousand passengers on board. The passengers comprised pupils in Years 7–9 from the Lahti urban region as well as personnel of numerous partner companies and Salpaus. The train ride was hosted by actors **Eppu Salminen** and **likka Forss**. The second ten-car train picked up pupils in Years 7–9 at Nastola Railway Station and Lahti Railway Station. Some of the pupils were transported by bus from their schools to the railway station. The young people and cooperation partners who did not fit on the trains were transported to Helsinki Fair Centre on board 40 buses. The Salpaus trains operated between Lahti and Helsinki on three of the competition days. The passengers made the journey with 5,000 packed lunches and the official booklet prepared by the Etelä-Suomen Sanomat newspaper. Etelä-Suomen Sanomat was a cooperation partner of Salpaus Further Education, and it released articles about the competition through the competition project.

Skills Finland and the Ministry of Education sent personal invitations to the event to the ministers of education and top VET leaders of the EU Member States, representatives of the European Commission, ministers, members of the Finnish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee as well as the ambassadors in Finland. The Leaders' Forum of WorldSkills International also gathered VIP guests together at the competition venue.

The event was attended by a total of over 200 invited guests and other VIP guests. Finnish President **Tarja Halonen** visited the competition on the final competition day on Saturday.



Eija Alhojärvi and Timo Lankinen showed President Tarja Halonen and her spouse, Pentti Arajärvi, around at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism **Ján Figel** was present on two days at the invitation of President of Skills Finland Timo Lankinen.

The commissioner liked what he saw and eagerly set out to work on a European competition. Tuula Haatainen, who was the Finnish minister of education at the time, later mentioned in a newspaper interview that she had already agreed in Helsinki on Finland's participation in the EuroSkills Competition.

The invited guests had access to VIP guides, and the Finnish National Agency for Education was in charge of the guided tours arranged for them. Preparations had been made to provide these guided tours in Finnish, English, German, French, Russian, Estonian, Spanish and Hungarian as well as all the Nordic languages.

There were foreign guests from 47 countries, with the largest groups coming from Japan, France and South Korea. The competition was attended by observers from 10 countries that were not yet members of WorldSkills International. From the perspective of WorldSkills International, one great achievement of the event in Helsinki was convincing large countries such as China, India and Russia of the importance of these activities.

Within a few years, they all joined the organisation and became active participants of the WorldSkills family.

WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 also had a significant impact on both the launch of EuroSkills Competitions and the expansion of Abilympics activities. At the initiative of Skills Netherlands, a meeting was held between the European member countries/regions of

WorldSkills International during the event. The meeting was attended by representatives from eight countries, and its goal was to map the interest of the member countries/regions in European cooperation and particularly in launching EuroSkills Competitions. A preparatory working group was set up as a result of the meeting, and Finland joined it. The work carried out by the working group led to the organising of a EuroSkills Competition in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, three years later, in September 2008.

Cooperation was launched between Skills Finland and the International Abilympic Federation (IAF) by inviting representatives of the federation to come and familiarise themselves with WorldSkills Competitions. The IAF delegation was led by the organisation's president, **Fumio Kimura**. At its meeting in August, Skills Finland decided to apply for membership in IAF. Many other European countries became interested in these activities as a result of Finland's active participation, and IAF gained several new European members over the next few years.

GOALS ARE ACHIEVED AT BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

In WorldSkills Competitions, the parent organisation is tasked with implementing the competition itself. The member country/region hosting the competition is responsible for the competition's infrastructure, such as building

the competition area and supplying all the necessary machinery and equipment, logistics and, to a great extent, the marketing and communications related to the competition. The transition phase that the parent organisation was going through also led to Finland being assigned more responsibility than usual for organising the competition and the development of additional events in particular.

The competition project had been launched due to a wish to promote excellence in vocational skills, develop VET and improve the appreciation of professional competence. Competition activities were believed in, which was why another purpose of the project was to improve the national competition system and its utilisation.

The goals defined for the project were ambitious. They included not only providing the competition event with a high-quality setting, but also developing the competition itself and implementing permanent changes. Particular areas of development included the watchability and audience-friendliness of the competition, the utilisation of the competition, occupational safety and international cooperation.

WorldSkills International also set ambitious goals for WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. It was supposed to be the best competition of all time from the perspectives of both quality and fair play. Solutions were also sought for more equal treatment of the competitors.

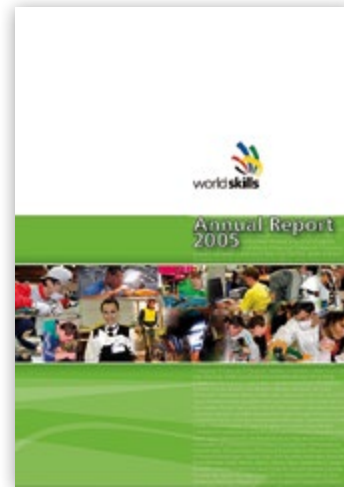
The competition project was a major success: the national and international goals set for it were achieved. The competition's financial result made it possible to implement aftercare measures that strengthened the pursuit of the project's goals.

The organisation's secretary general, David Hoey, assessed the success of the event and Finland's contribution to the competition's development as follows:

WorldSkills 2005 Helsinki was an outstanding success. Competitors were provided with a world-class environment and the Experts and Delegates ensured that this was capitalized on by conducting a world-class Competition. The Helsinki event included many initiatives and improvements from the WorldSkills Organisation and the Finnish Organising Committee. Skills Finland added great value by developing the Global Skills Village and the Competition Information System (CIS).

For his part, President of WorldSkills International Jack Düsseldorf paid attention to Finland's ambitious national goals and the fact that the skills of Finnish youths were visible in many ways at the event:

Our Finnish colleagues and friends very wisely positioned the 2005 WorldSkills event as the culmination of a five-year development plan with the twin goals of renewing the mission of their vocational



"Experts and delegates recognized the Helsinki Competition as 'the best ever', citing improvements in all areas, well beyond normal evolutionary improvements."

education and training sector as well as attracting a larger share of their youth cohort to skills and training. They succeeded in both objectives and, in doing so, provided WorldSkills with a world-class platform to very successfully promote our worldwide vision and mission... The modern requirement for young skilled professionals to have "thinking hands" was evident not only from the 667 competitors in Helsinki, but also the hundreds of young student volunteers who participated in various roles including managing and staffing the onsite media centre which provided a daily stream of video footage and live interviews with many of the international participants and observers.

According to the competition's secretary general, Eija Alhojärvi, the competition arrangements



A press conference for cooperation partners at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

had two key principles from the very start: cooperation and the participation of young people. Conscious effort was made in the project's implementation to create new types of cooperation networks. The goal was to involve education providers, companies and NGOs. It was also considered to be important to display Finnish competence extensively and in many ways. Another goal was to provide as many young people as possible with an opportunity to build up their competence and vocational skills by participating in the competition arrangements.

“We succeeded in developing completely new types of additional events and services. Some of them, such as the Competition Information System (CIS) and the Global Skills Village, have become a permanent part of WorldSkills Competitions. Others, such as study paths, have

evolved into a practice at Taitaja Competitions. In fact, similar guided study paths as those featured in Helsinki are also used in the Dutch national competition,” Alhojärvi says.

“Assessing the achievements of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 now, years later, I still think that, at the national level, the most important achievement was the extensive cooperation and creation of networks. It provided a good basis for continuing to develop VET and build the competition system. In my opinion, the most important thing that we achieved in the world of WorldSkills was to increase openness. We launched open-minded cooperation with WorldSkills International and the open sharing

of knowledge and experiences with previous and future competition organisers. This openness has, for its part, led the way to a completely new type of operating culture that has allowed the competitions to be developed and expanded,” Alhojärvi assesses.

PARTNERS IN A KEY ROLE

Veijo Hintsanen was involved in the WSC2005 project in three different roles: as the competition’s vice president on behalf of WSI, as the member of the Board of Skills Finland and Executive Committee in charge of the competition arrangements and as rector of Häme University of Applied Sciences, in which role he was responsible for skill and event arrangements. He considered it to be a particularly great achievement that the whole nation was involved in the arrangements. Assigning skill-specific responsibilities to large education providers committed a very large number of VET experts to the competition’s preparations. It simultaneously offered them an opportunity to strongly develop their own functions.

Hannu Immonen, who served as the competition’s technical manager, also considers the involvement of education providers to be the project’s most important achievement. “Our implementation model was unique. Through education providers, we managed to link the project directly to the development of VET.”

Skills Finland commissioned a study on the event’s impacts with regard to the regional economy, education providers and corporate partners. The study was conducted by the Urban Research TA Ltd.

According to the study, the event brought a reasonable economic impulse to the regional economy of the Helsinki region. The added value created by the organising of the competition and the cash flows from tourists visiting the competition totalled EUR 28 million at the national level and EUR 16 million in the Helsinki region, taking both direct effects and multiplier effects into account. The effects on employment were roughly 500 person-years at the national level and roughly 290 person-years in the Helsinki region.

The goals of the education providers who served as skill and event organisers were very strongly linked to the development of their own activities. They saw WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 as a tool for keeping up with the times with regard to the development of teaching and staff. The goals mentioned as the most important included developing the vocational skills of the teaching staff, developing and modernising teaching, developing the intellectual capital of society and vocational skills, attracting a larger number of students to VET in their own particular field, improving awareness of the educational institution, also among companies, and developing the cooperation between educational institutions and companies as well as among educational institutions.

The skill and event organisers invested in WSC above all by guiding and training their own staff, and only a small proportion of them hired new staff. Most of the organisers invested in the procurement of machinery and equipment and purchased a variety of goods and services. Three out of four education providers received sponsorship income in the form of money or services and goods.

The skill and event organisers were almost unanimous that vocational skills competitions in themselves increase the appreciation of VET. They also contribute to the development of VET and skills. In the view of the skills and event organisers, vocational skills competitions play a great role in increasing the availability of labour.

The skill and event organisers felt that they had benefited from the competition in the development of educational institutions, bearing of social responsibility and promotion of cooperation, for example. Half of the education providers predicted that the cooperation launched in conjunction with the competition would also continue in the future.

The Oulu Region Joint Authority for Vocational Training (OSAKK) took the responsibility for organising four skills: the Manufacturing Team Challenge (MTC), Plumbing, Car Painting and Carpentry. The person who bore the overall responsibility for the organisation of skills was Project Manager **Sauli Jaara**. In a Skills Finland Newsletter published in 2004,

he described his reasons for participating in the competition project as follows: “Vocational skills competitions are an excellent way to advertise a vocational college and VET in general. Through competitions, vocational colleges can attract not only students but also new employees.”

In Jaara’s opinion, vocational skills competitions also serve as an excellent cooperation channel between vocational colleges, students and companies in the industry. Companies’ involvement has been highlighted in recent years, as vocational colleges could not afford things such as expensive equipment purchases alone. For their part, companies are interested in obtaining new potential employees and gaining visibility. Jaara says that OSAKK has also succeeded in utilising cooperation with businesses in looking for sponsors for competitions. Representatives of major companies have challenged other companies to support competition activities, usually with great success. Trade unions in various industries have also been happy to become sponsors.

In Jaara’s opinion, competitions have also increased networking and communications between vocational colleges. For example, vocational colleges exchange practise assignments and compare teaching methods. “Participating in competitions and organising them require schools to have a volunteer spirit. However, at least at OSAKK, competition activities have been found to be important enough to warrant investing time and effort in,” Jaara summarises.

Most of the participating companies became involved based on previous cooperation with either Skills Finland, education providers or the Taitaja Competition.

According to a study conducted by Urban Research, the majority (2/3) of the participating companies considered it to be important that they take responsibility for developing the intellectual capital of society and vocational skills. According to the companies, the event significantly promoted the achievement of these goals. In their opinion, the event also helped the companies develop their own image and promote the relations between companies and vocational colleges.

Electrolux was one of the event's main cooperation partners, and it participated in three skills: Confectioner/Pastry Cook, Cooking and Restaurant Service. In the book "WorldSkills 2005 Helsinki – ammattitaidon MM-kilpailut" (WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 – World Championships in Vocational Skills, 2005), Director of the Electrolux Professional profit centre **Jarmo Huuhtanen** said that he was very satisfied with the event, as the visitors showed great interest in the skills.

"In my opinion, the best part about the competition was that it improved vocational skills and allowed new innovations to be tested in practice. It also provided an opportunity to deepen the cooperation between educational institutions and



In addition to 21 competition kitchens, Electrolux fitted the competition area with baker's kitchens and auxiliary spaces as well as an institutional kitchen that corresponded to a restaurant with a capacity of 300 people in terms of its equipment. The black footprint sign shown in this photo indicates that the skill is part of the Service Job study path.

importers of equipment for institutional kitchens, which is of utmost importance in the development of the industry's equipment and production processes."

For its part, the Technology Industries of Finland already made the decision to participate in WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 in autumn 2003. **Anneli Manninen**, the head of the Education and Competence group of the Technology Industries of Finland at the time, stated that the investment made was considerable in terms of both human and financial resources. "The experience was worth it. The feedback was good and the business community started discussing more extensive cooperation in the future."

FINNISH INNOVATION: GLOBAL SKILLS VILLAGE

The Global Skills Village concept was refined during the WorldSkills General Assembly meeting held in Hong Kong in spring 2004. The intention was to gather all the additional events held at the location of the competition under the same umbrella. The name of the concept was discussed at the General Assembly. The United Kingdom strongly advocated for the name Skills City, which it was already using. Representatives of UK Skills had visited Helsinki in November 2004 to market their own concept. Ultimately, the word “village” proposed by Finland received more support than the word “city”, and it was decided that the concept would be called Global Skills Village (GSV).

This concept about a shared village served as the basis when Skills Finland set out to plan its functions. The venue itself posed its own challenges: the functions had to be decentralised to meeting and lobby spaces around Helsinki Fair Centre. Particular attention was paid to signage, and guidance still had to be enhanced during the event in order for the visitors to find the village and its events.

The formal opening ceremony of the Global Skills Village featured speeches by Minister of Education Tuula Haatainen, European Commissioner Ján Figel, President of WorldSkills International Jack Düsseldorp and Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Kirsi Lindroos.

The Finnish National Agency for Education took great responsibility for the planning and implementation of the Global Skills Village. In addition to the 40 individuals who participated in the guided tours, the project involved a total of 30 individuals from the agency. The Global Skills Village concept comprised the International Village, seminars, guided tours, the final and award ceremony of the national Forest Quiz, an exhibition of the best works from the cultural competitions of Cultural and Sports Association of Finnish Vocational Education and Training (SAKU) as well as the stage programme.

The International Village was an exhibition area that featured the exhibition booths of 17 member countries/regions of WorldSkills International and 20 Finnish and foreign organisations. At the edge of the exhibition area, there was a stage where everyone who had signed up in advance was allowed to put on events. All in all, the stage programme included 44 events that featured 180 performers. These events included, for example, a circus performance by students of Salpaus Further Education, a robotics demonstration by Festo, music performances by Helsinki Pop & Jazz Conservatory, a fashion show by students of Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty, an information session by Youth Skills Sweden and a Japanese kimono show. The award ceremony for the Demonstration Skills was also hosted with pomp and circumstance on the stage of the Global Skills Village.

The seminar programme was organised partly by Skills Finland and partly by WorldSkills International. Additionally, both Finnish and foreign



The Global Skills Village concept was introduced as a new element at the competition in Helsinki.

parties had been offered an opportunity to hold their own seminars during the event. There were a total of 17 seminars. They featured a total of 60 speakers and attracted an audience of more than 500 people. The seminar that drew the largest audience was the event’s main seminar, “European Union Cooperation in Developing Vocational Education and Training: The Copenhagen Process”, which was held in cooperation by the Ministry of Education and the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO). All the seminar presentations were available on the Global Skills Village website, which also featured discussion forums for further discussion.

Project Manager at Skills Finland **Kati Lundgren**, who was in charge of the Global Skills Village, gathered feedback about the experience

after the event. All in all, the concept worked well, and quite a wide network of Finnish and foreign operators participated in producing the programme, as intended.

EXCURSIONS TO PORVOO DELIGHT COMPETITORS AND EXPERTS

The purpose of the excursions included in the WSC concept was to familiarise the participants with the host country and its culture and offer them opportunities to become acquainted with their fellow competitors and colleagues.

Porvoo Vocational College (Amisto) of the Eastern Uusimaa Municipal Training and

Education Consortium took on the task carrying out the large-scale excursion project. The project built around these arrangements was called Skills-Tours in Porvoo. It was funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education and Skills Finland.

The excursions were organised by 250 students, 100 teachers and staff as well as numerous cooperation partners. **Tarja Hämäläinen**, who worked at Amisto as a project manager, recalls that there were hundreds of cooperation partners and that a total of 1,500 people participated in the implementation.

The whole excursion project, with all the planning, implementation and reporting related to it, was integrated into Amisto's normal teaching activities. At least one credit unit related to the topic was incorporated into all study programmes, and for some of the students the excursion arrangements were part of the teaching of vocational and optional studies as well as free-choice studies. Under their teachers' supervision, the students planned the programme for the excursion days and tested their functionality.

The project was carried out over three years. The years 2003 and 2004 were spent by organising planning, negotiations, testing and rounds of tenders. The largest efforts naturally took place in spring 2005. Tarja Hämäläinen considered the organising of the excursions to be very challenging and educational, but

she also emphasised that they were fun. "It increased our team spirit tremendously. Over those couple of years, we were able to offer a truly wide variety opportunities for learning to our students," Hämäläinen recalls.

The destination of the competitors' excursion was the scenic outdoor recreation area on the shore of the Porvoonjoki River in Kokkonniemi, Porvoo. The competitors travelled there on board five ships and ten buses. Playful activities had been arranged for the young people both on board the ships and in Kokkonniemi. The day culminated in a rock concert performed by a local orchestra. There were a total of 800 guests.

The experts travelled to Porvoo on board six ships and 12 buses. The guests enjoyed lunch at Kiiala Manor, after which they were treated to a tour of Old Porvoo that included entertainment.

The tour's theme was the four seasons of Finland. Spring was represented by a choir of 70 children from the Porvoo Finnish-speaking parish, which performed at Porvoo Cathedral. A summer celebration was held in Maari, on the shore of the Porvoonjoki River, where the guests enjoyed the idyll of Midsummer in Finland. The autumn theme involved artisan demonstrations and a market atmosphere at the Old Town Hall Square, while winter was celebrated at Santa's workshop. For a few spring hours, all of Old Porvoo was filled with a total of 700 international guests.

THE SPIRIT OF HELSINKI AS THE THEME OF THE OPENING AND CLOSING CEREMONIES

In its official application concerning the competition's arrangements, Skills Finland had announced that it would be holding the competition's opening and closing ceremonies at the new and modern Hartwall Arena. However, the association eventually received a significantly more advantageous offer from

On their excursion day, the competitors let loose with the help of a playful competition. The competition skills included e.g. team skiing (in the photo), box climbing and trapeze jumping as well as walking on stilts and in snowshoes.





The Malaysian team at the opening ceremony of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

Helsinki Ice Hall, and it was decided that these events would be held there. Eija Alhojärvi recalls that the association's Board held a long and in-depth discussion about the matter. The ice hall felt small, old-fashioned and slightly shabby compared to Hartwall Arena. However, the Board settled on Helsinki Ice Hall after reflecting on it, which ultimately turned out to be a good solution. Despite the ice hall's rugged appearance, the organisers managed to build a good setting and atmosphere for the events there.

Both the opening and closing ceremonies were attended by more than 6,000 spectators. The audience comprised competitors and experts, other official competition guests, competition

organisations, skill organisers, cooperation partners and other parties interested in the events.

The theme of the opening and closing ceremonies was "the Spirit of Helsinki". This name was a reference to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe that was held in Helsinki in 1975 and the spirit of Helsinki that prevailed there. According to Vesa Ruotonen and **Lassi Ikäheimo**, who were in charge of the script, the theme also symbolised



The opening ceremony's hosts Eeva Vilkkumaa and Axl Smith.



President of WSO Jack Düsseldorpe and European Commissioner Ján Figel' gave a speech at the opening ceremony.

the way in which things are customarily resolved in Finland: together and in cooperation. The four seasons of Finland were strongly present in both the programme and stage decor, which featured lakes and islands that depicted nature in Finland.

Ruotonen and Ikäheimo announced that their motto was “Young talents into the spotlight”. This was visible in the programme of the opening and closing ceremonies and the arrangements across the board. The content

Too many speakers

The competition organiser and President of WorldSkills Jack Düsseldorpe had long and heated discussions about the number of speakers at the opening and closing ceremonies. Eija Alhojärvi recalls the situation as follows: “Jack, as usual, stated his opinion strictly, in a loud voice. He thought that there were all too many speakers and he simply couldn't understand what a European commissioner had to do with the WorldSkills Competition. We stuck to our guns, and the number of speakers remained at six, as originally planned. European Commissioner Ján Figel' also gave a speech at the opening ceremony.”

“I couldn't help being amused at the opening ceremony of the WorldSkills Competition held in Japan two years later,” Alhojärvi says. “When the curtain was raised, there were more than ten older Japanese gentlemen in their black suits sitting on the stage, waiting for their turn to speak. I imagined all the discussions over the number of speakers and concluded that Jack seemed to also have lost those discussions. And it was very soon after the competition in Helsinki that Jack also understood the significance of a European commissioner.”

of the performances was primarily produced by educational institutions, and only the technology was left to professionals in the field. Students were also in charge of props, decorations, floral arrangements, costumes, hairdressing and make-up, staging, television filming and IMAG as well as transport. A total of over 300 people participated in producing the performances.

The opening ceremony was hosted by musical star **Eeva Vilkkumaa** and MTV host **Axl Smith**. The competition was opened officially with a speech by Prime Minister **Matti Vanhanen** that has later been described as the shortest opening speech in world history: "I hereby declare the WorldSkills Competition officially open." The other speakers featured at the opening ceremony were Minister of Education **Tuula Haatainen**, President of WorldSkills International **Jack Düsseldorf**, European Commissioner **Ján Figel**, City Manager of Helsinki **Eva-Riitta Siitonen** and President of Skills Finland **Timo Lankinen**. The opening ceremony was televised by Yleisradio (Yle), which broadcast the programme on its Teema channel on 27 May 2005.

At the end of the closing ceremony, Finland handed the WorldSkills flag over to the next competition organiser, Japan. The handover of the flag was an atmospheric conclusion to the closing ceremony. The ceremony was accompanied by the traditional Finnish hymn *Suivivirsi*, which gradually changed into the melody of the traditional Japanese song *Sakura* as the ceremony progressed.

Next to the prime minister



At the opening ceremony of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, in the front row from the left: Technical Manager Hannu Immonen, Vice Chairman Yoo Bae Kim and Chairman Mari-Thérèse Geffroy of the WSO Strategy Committee, Chairman of the WSO Technical Committee Liam Corcoran, Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen and Vice Chairman of the Technical Committee Veijo Hintsanen with his wife.

The opening and closing ceremonies were emotional occasions in many ways. Veijo Hintsanen vividly recalls how Liam Corcoran, the Irish chairman of the WSI Technical Committee, was actually giddy with excitement over being able to sit next to the Finnish prime minister at the opening ceremony. "It was hard to believe at first, but Liam has brought it up on many occasions since then, while simultaneously praising our prime minister's speech as being one of the best he has ever heard," Hintsanen recalls.



At the closing ceremony, Eija Alhojärvi and Timo Lankinen presented the WorldSkills flag to Japan, the next host country.



FINLAND FINDS SUCCESS IN ITS HOME COMPETITION

WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 included 39 Official Skills and a total of 670 competitors. If you include the competitors who participated in the five Presentation Skills, the total number of competitors was 696. The competition was attended by 39 member countries and regions, in addition to which Estonia and Russia, which were not yet members of WorldSkills International, each participated in one skill with a guest competitor. The competition was attended by 636 experts. The largest teams came from Finland as well as Korea, Switzerland, Japan, the Netherlands and Taiwan.

The Finnish national team, Team Finland 2005, had prepared for the competition carefully, which manifested as Finland's greatest success of all time. Finland won four gold, one silver and three bronze medals and 17 Medallions for Excellence. In the comparison between countries, Finland was fourth, right behind Switzerland, Korea and Germany.

The gold medals were won by Petri Hämäläinen in Industrial Control, Birgitta Kulppi in Floristry, Henri Koskinen in Plumbing and the pair of competitors Pekka Anto and Jouni Ojanperä in Transport Technology. The silver medal was earned by Karoliina Hytönen in



Birgitta Kulppi was invited to Brazil to compete in Floristry, a Demonstration Skill organised in conjunction with the country's national competition. In addition to Birgitta and the Finnish expert Hanne Heikkilä, the competition organiser had also invited the Swiss chief expert in the skill as well as competitors from Austria and Sweden. The international competitors in Floristry had their own workshop in the competition. The Brazilian President Lula and his wife also attended the event.



It is easy for the winners to smile. Jouni Ojanperä from Kittilä (left) and Pekka Antto from Uusikaupunki won gold in Transport Technology.

Finnish plumber wins the World championship in Helsinki

Henri Koskinen, student at North Karelia Vocational College, won in Plumbing at the Taitaja Competition held in Seinäjoki in 2004.

Koskinen was chosen for the national team through a trial competition held at Turku Building Fair. In spring 2005, Koskinen completed a Vocational Qualification in Building Maintenance Technology and found permanent employment in Joensuu immediately after his graduation. "My employer had a positive attitude towards my training. Always gave me time off when I needed it. It helped with my training that I was able to borrow all the necessary tools and gas cylinders from school and take them home," Koskinen says. Koskinen gained competition experience when he attended the Taitaja Competition in Turku in January 2005.

A few months before WSC2005, Koskinen took leave from his job to focus on training full time. Towards the end of April, he participated in the Nordic Championship in Plumbing in Iceland, where he took silver.

Koskinen had difficulties in finding the right attitude during the early stages of training because some of the working methods used in the competition, such as sand bending, felt

outdated; in Finland, they had been in use in the 1950s. Koskinen was about to cancel his participation, but his trainer and teacher, **Veli-Matti Poutanen**, managed to change the young man's mind. "Henri considered the working methods used in the WorldSkills test projects to be outdated. We spent one long evening discussing it. I told him that he'd been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that not many people ever get. Henri considered it overnight. In the morning, he announced that he would be continuing his training," Poutanen says.

In sand bending, the pipe was packed full of sand, after which it was heated with a blowtorch and bent. Koskinen received advice from **Kari Hongisto**, a former competitor and expert in the skill, on how the method worked in practice. In the end, Koskinen thought that he was even able to make more precise bends with sand "than with modern benders".

Henri Koskinen believed that his victory at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 was based on precise work and successful use of his time. He performed the best in large-scale worksites. Koskinen was pleased that the award ceremony was attended not only by the teacher who trained him but also the rector and the department directors of the



vocational college. It also warmed his heart that his employer and supervisor came to watch their employee's success at the competition.

HPAC engineer **Jari Könönen** is the owner of the Joensuu-based Lämpökarelia Oy, Koskinen's employer at the time. "I paid attention to Henri's calmness during the competition. He'd also demonstrated it at worksites. Speed comes from a systematic approach and the employee's ability to understand what they are doing," Könönen says.

"We were able to assign him to contract work immediately after his graduation. Usually, a young mechanic starts from renovations and spends some five years gaining experience in various work situations," Könönen says.

A quick employee is always welcome in a contract team. "In the construction sector, businesses know how to make use of excellence in skills. Fellows like these are assigned to work that allow them to realise themselves. If you don't do this, these skilled fellows often change jobs." ■

Painting and Decorating, while the bronze medals were won by **Saara Hyppänen** in Ladies' and Men's Hairdressing, **Markus Roni** in Electrical Installations and **Tomi Miettunen** in IT PC/Network Support.

WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005 IS A FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Pirjo Elo, member of the Board and Executive Committee of Skills Finland, describes the finances as follows in the post-event report:

The financial goal of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 was for the revenues to cover all the costs. The finances of the event take place in the period 2001–2006. Naturally, the cash flows focus on the period 2004–2005. The costs and revenues presented here have passed through the accounts of Skills Finland. Added to them are the costs and revenues incurred by education providers from the arrangement of skill competitions

and various events. For these costs, education providers had an opportunity to apply to the Finnish National Agency for Education for a discretionary project subsidy for educational development. The subsidy amounted to a total of roughly EUR 4.5 million over three years.

The project finances were characterised by relatively large risks related to the costs, revenues and liquidity until the end. The participation of the Ministry of Education and the decision made by Sitra in 2003 to provide a subsidy worth EUR 1 million laid the groundwork for Skills Finland to carry out its project. However, the funds obtained through these channels alone would not have been enough to cover the whole project, even using as modest a concept as possible. Instead, it was necessary to receive support from companies and education providers as well as for the association to produce its own income.

FINANCES OF WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005

EXPENSES

Personnel expenses	1,678,000
Facility and equipment rents	2,192,000
General administrative expenses	703,000
Marketing and communications	1,795,000
Operating expenses	2,877,000
	9,245,000

REVENUE

Ticket revenue	560,000
Service sales	2,565,000
Business and marketing cooperation	736,000
Partnership compensation from educational institutions	2,063,000
Other revenue	66,000
Public project funding	3,740,000
	9,730,000



Thanks to the active and determined actions by the association's personnel, most of the revenues based on agreements were already known by the end of 2004. The competition days themselves did not produce any more major surprises. The number of visitors, 118,000 people, exceeded the budgeted expectations, and unexpected costs were not incurred to a significant degree during the competition days.

As a result of negotiations held with the main sponsors of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, the project's books were closed for good on 31 December 2005. In actuality, the Helsinki project continued in 2006 in the form post-

The staff of Skills Finland accepting a Special Medal of Merit For Work For the Working Environment at the House of the Estates on 26 September 2006. The medal of merit is being held up in the middle of the photo by Project Manager Riikka Ruotsala and President of the Board Timo Lankinen. The others in attendance are, from the left: Tuija Levo, Sinikka Nieminen, Hannu Pajari, Pekka Matikainen, Immo Pylvänen, Hannu Immonen, Pirjo Elo, Eija Alhojärvi, Laura Laakkonen and Maria Atzmon.

project utilisation. In this regard, however, the costs were covered with funding allocated to the association's normal activities.



WORK CARRIED OUT TO PROMOTE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY IS REWARDED

The promotion of occupational safety was chosen as one of the focus areas of development at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. The Occupational Health and Safety Excellence Project was funded by the Veto programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health as well as the Finnish Work Environment Fund.

The project's goal was to improve occupational safety skills as part of the promotion of excellence in vocational skills and vocational skills competitions, and its main output was the "Passport to health and safety skills". The purpose of the passport was to develop the cooperation between young people, workplaces and educational institutions with regard to occupational health and safety, and it is used to inspire awareness of health and safety among young people as well as make them assess their own skills in practice.

Thanks to the project, all the experts and competitors who participated in the WorldSkills Competition were provided with "Host Country Health and Safety Regulations" for the first time in the competition's history. This practice continued in the next competition, and the regulations prepared by the Finns formed the basis and structure for the regulations prepared by future competition organisers. The practice of carrying out skill-specific safety inspections before the start of the competition was introduced in Helsinki. This custom is still in use.

In 2006, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health awarded Skills Finland with a Special Medal of Merit For Work For the Working Environment for its meritorious and long-term efforts to promote the occupational safety of young people through competition activities. The medal was awarded for the 18th time, and this was the first time that it was presented to an organisation instead of a private individual. The medal was presented by Minister of Social Affairs and Health Tuula Haatainen.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work awarded the association in the Safe Start 2006 competition. The competition looked for good examples of practices that have increased awareness of risks and educational institutions and prevented the risks posed to young employees at workplaces. Finland was represented in the competition by Skills Finland's "Passport to health and safety skills" as well as Seinäjoki Vocational Education Centre's entry "Ensuring occupational safety during vocational training and on-the-job learning", which received an honourable mention.

The award was accepted on Skills Finland's behalf by Vice President of the Board Kirsi Lindroos and Riikka Ruotsala, project manager of the Occupational Health and Safety Project. The award was presented on 23 March 2007, which coincided with the second day of Skills Finland's ship seminar. The seminar audience heard about the attendees' experiences of the award ceremony in Bilbao immediately afterwards over the phone.

The work to increase safety awareness and the appreciation of safe working methods was continued by setting up the Award for Safe Work that is presented at Taitaja Competitions. The award was presented for the first time at the closing ceremony of Taitaja2006.



The responsible persons of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 received certificates of honour as recognition for a well-organised competition. In the photo, from the left: President of WSI Jack Düsseldorp, Timo Lankinen, Veijo Hintsanen, Eija Alhojärvi and Hannu Immonen.

RESPONSIBILITY TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ENDS IN MELBOURNE IN JUNE 2006

Finland reported on the competition's success at the meetings of WorldSkills International that were held in Melbourne in June 2006. Timo Lankinen presented Finland's official competition report at the General Assembly, while Eija Alhojärvi reported on the goals, implementation and results of the Global Skills Village at a meeting of the Strategy Committee. The competition arrangements themselves were addressed at meetings of the Technical Committee, where the Finnish competition organiser was represented by Veijo Hintsanen and Hannu Immonen. Leaders' Forum and Youth Forum were held in conjunction with the

meetings. Timo Lankinen had been invited to Leaders' Forum as one of its main speakers. He spoke on the topic "Attractiveness, working-life approach and quality – solutions and results in Finnish vocational education and training". At Youth Forum, Finland was represented by former competitors Petri Hämäläinen and Katri Pokkinen (née Heikka).

At the General Assembly, all the key responsible persons of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 were presented with a framed certificate of honour as a recognition from WorldSkills International.

Finland pulls strings

– Ladies’ Dressmaking is finally brought to the 21st century

Ladies’ Dressmaking provides an interesting perspective into the WSC competition system. Cultural differences have always come strongly across in this skill.

In Asia, particularly Far Eastern countries, the dressmaking industry was oriented towards manual labour for a long time, and it was slow to introduce modern manufacturing techniques. Asian notions of vocational skills also differed from the notions held by North Americans and Europeans.

According to **Sari Lehtonen**, who served as a skill manager and expert for many years, it has been difficult to develop test projects, as the goals and working life needs of different countries have differed from each other considerably.

In Asian countries, only pattern makers are at the level of a master. In contrast, in countries that provide training at higher education institutions, both pattern makers and designers are at that level. The technical basic training of a seamstress or seamster is at the level of a vocational upper secondary qualification. Lehtonen explains that only an experienced seamstress or seamster

can advance to haute couture techniques. “At that point, seamstresses and seamsters usually demonstrate the level of a master through their extensive work experience.” However, the skills of a seamstress or seamster are underappreciated. Workers in this trade often already start working after completing a vocational upper secondary qualification.

According to Lehtonen, developing test projects has been difficult, as the goals and working life needs of different countries have differed from each other considerably.

Industrial activity in this trade can still be found in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, whereas countries such as Finland and Sweden no longer engage in it. In Finland, the work in this trade involves design, pattern making, sales and expert duties.

However, Lehtonen is of the opinion that cultural differences have lessened over the years. Openness and coherence have also increased in the skill. All of this has improved the capabilities to develop the skill.



Sari Lehtonen, who served as a skill manager and expert in Ladies' Dressmaking, was involved in reforming the skill.

Finland has also sought to promote technical development in Ladies' Dressmaking. The test project prepared by Finland for WorldSkills St Gallen 2003 was produced by utilising information technology. It was prepared by expert **Hanna Säilä** and Skill Manager Annamaija Aro. At WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, Lehtonen served as shop master. It was the first WorldSkills Competition in which information technology was utilised in drawing changes to patterns. Up until 2003, experts drew and measured the adjustments required by changes to the model by hand on each competitor's pattern.

In the launch of the process to renew Ladies' Dressmaking, Finland utilised the positive awareness it had garnered through WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. Finland participated in Ladies'

Dressmaking for the first time at WorldSkills Birmingham 1989. Since Birmingham, the Finns had also criticised the test project for the skill. Despite attempts, not all the changes considered to be important by the Finns had been achieved by WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

Veijo Hintsanen emphasises that Finland's strategy in competition activities has been and will continue to be the development of skill competitions to correspond to the actual needs of working life. "We have a good chance of achieving this, as Finns and Finnish expertise are appreciated in the WorldSkills family. We hold real sway."

It is very likely that the changes would not have been pushed through successfully, even after 2005, simply by invoking facts or common sense. According to Hintsanen, it also required friendly yet determined pressure. Making changes often requires tactical skill. Hintsanen says that Finland had also sometimes resorted to tactical operations in the past in similar situations. In conjunction with the process of changing Ladies' Dressmaking, the presiding officers of the Technical Committee sent their greetings to both the experts in the skill and the technical delegates of member countries and regions, saying that without essential reforms in the skill, many member countries and regions would be withdrawing their competitors from it. "This usually works," Hintsanen says.

A great change was successfully made to the test project used at the WorldSkills Competition held in Japan in 2007. It was the first time that a design

portion was introduced to the test project.

Lehtonen praises the possibilities offered by network connections: “The test projects are chosen based on proposals made by experts, which allows communication to be carried out flexibly through the Discussion Forum. It allows us to reach each other around the globe.”

Changes to Ladies’ Dressmaking were finally agreed upon by a working group of the Technical Committee in Melbourne in 2006, and the decisions were made at meetings of the Technical Committee the following year. At WorldSkills Calgary 2009, the skill had gained a new name: Fashion Technology. Competitors were tasked with designing and making a wedding dress. As a surprise element, the test project included a “black box” that contained a variety of trimmings. The competitors had to use them to design and implement the decorations on the corset section of the dress. The Finnish competitor, **Marianna Luoma**, earned the silver medal with the performance, which was Finland’s best placement in the skill until that point. ■



3

WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
as a wave towards the future

Skills Finland as the builder of the best vocational skills in the world

After the successful WorldSkills Competition, the association was facing new challenges. The latter half of 2005 and the following year were a time for bringing the competition project to a close and taking care of the aftermath. It was also a time for the association's goals and activities to be updated.

The organisation created for the WorldSkills event was dissolved in full at the end of 2005. A new organisation was built for the association and the necessary recruitments were made. At the end of 2006, the association had seven full-time and five part-time employees on its payroll. The previous autumn, the association had moved from the OKKA Foundation's premises in Itä-Pasila to Länsi-Pasila, where it became a tenant of Master Builders and Engineers UAS (RKL). The association settled into the new premises with the new organisation.

In order to maximise the benefits gained from the competition project, the association carried out a TV advertising campaign at the beginning of 2006. The reporting carried out for the project's main sponsors was completed by the end of April, after which the association was able to focus full time on building its future activities.

The association's action plan for 2006 outlined the association's future under the heading "Skills Finland after 2005" as follows:

The association's activities will be developed with the aim of becoming a nationally and internationally respected expert organisation in vocational skills competitions.

The skills and national and international networks produced in the WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 project, as well as the appreciation and awareness increased as a result of successful competition arrangements, will be utilised in full to increase the association's influence and develop all of the association's core functions.

The association considered the greatest challenge in its future to be the dissemination of the good practices and new innovations accumulated through vocational skills competitions and training activities across the entire field of VET.

The association wanted the best practices to be adopted for everyday use in all vocational education and guidance. Vocational skills

competitions were considered to have increased awareness of excellence in skills and its significance. The association thought that it was necessary to focus, above all, on the utilisation of vocational skills competitions in the promotion of excellence in vocational skills in the future. Establishing the association's core functions both functionally and financially was likewise considered to be important.

The year 2006 was, in many ways, a period of strong operational development. Assessments of the WorldSkills Competition were used as a basis for preparing goals for the development of the Taitaja Competition. The year also brought new tasks with it: preparations for the International Abilympics 2007 and EuroSkills Rotterdam 2008.

As a result of the competition project, the number of members in the association had increased and its cooperation network had expanded. The importance of communication in the association's activities was growing, which is why the association decided to continue publishing the electronic newsletter that had been published during the competition. It was decided that the newsletter would be developed into the association's main communication channel. In 2006, the association conducted a survey to map the members' views of the association's future, core functions and services for its members.

Transporting luggage by taxi

Maria Atzmon recalls the cultural challenges on the first Skills Experience trip:

We arrived in Japan on the day of the opening ceremony, and the schedule was, of course, packed. I had reserved bus transport for our group of 50 from the airport via our hotel to the opening ceremony. However, I had not prepared for the buses not having a luggage hold. The bus company was aware that we were coming from Europe, but it had not occurred to them that we might also be bringing luggage. The people boarded the bus, while the luggage followed behind in eight taxis.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the main thing in need of development in services for members was trips to international competitions and the national competitions of other countries. This wish was fulfilled the following year, when the association organised the first Skills Experience trip to WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007 in Japan.

Skills Experience trips have been organised to every WorldSkills Competition since 2007 and to EuroSkills Competitions since 2010.

Every trip has been attended by dozens of representatives of the educational administration

and education providers. Office Manager of Skills Finland Maria Atzmon has been leading the Skills Experience trips since the beginning. “The trips have also been found to be a good way for Finns to network amongst themselves, as representatives of various education providers and occupational groups come together naturally over the course of the trip,” Atzmon says.

The competition project also strengthened the association’s international cooperation networks and increased the appreciation of Finnish expertise around the world. This position was utilised in many different ways. The ministers in charge of VET and European labour market organisations from 32 European countries gathered together in Helsinki on 5 December 2006 under the leadership of Minister of Education **Antti Kalliomäki**. At the meeting, the attendees accepted the Helsinki Communiqué, which summed up the future challenges in VET and outlined the goals and focus areas in European cooperation. At Finland’s initiative, the document incorporated a mention of the utilisation of national and international vocational skills competitions in European cooperation. This was the first time that vocational skills competitions were mentioned in an EU-level document as a form of cooperation and a method of reaching common goals.



Office Manager of Skills Finland Maria Atzmon (in the middle) has been leading the Skills Experience trips since the beginning. This photo is from EuroSkills 2012.

THE ASSOCIATION CELEBRATES ITS 15-YEAR JOURNEY

In 2008, the association celebrated the 15th anniversary of its founding. The gala was held at the Round Room at the Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa hotel in Helsinki on 19 November 2008. The celebration was attended by 233 guests who represented Skills Finland’s governmental contacts, member organisations and individual members as well as other cooperation partners from over the years. Eight founding members of the association were in attendance.

Young experts played a key role in the preparation and implementation of the celebration. The sugar decorations on the dessert cake had been designed and implemented by **Mikko Hietala**, the Finnish competitor in Confectioner/Pastry Cook at WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007. The cake



Mii Sironen, gold medallist in Restaurant Service in Shizuoka, waited on tables at the ceremony. Mikko Hietala's sugar art piece, which depicted a flame, was the celebration's symbol.



The main speaker at the celebration was Minister Christoffer Taxell.



Uniforms from over the years were on display at the gala.

was served to the main table by **Miia Sironen**, the WorldSkills Champion in Restaurant Service from the same year. Students of Keuda Vocational College were responsible for the flower decorations in the function room, while circus students of Salpaus were responsible for the programme and students of Oulunkylä Pop & Jazz Institute were in charge of the music. Dressmaking students from Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty put together an exhibition of the uniforms worn by national teams. Former WorldSkills and EuroSkills competitors served as ushers at the function room.

STRATEGY WORK IS COMMENCED

In 2009, the Board launched strategy work concerning the association's activities in the future. The goals set by the Board included deepening the activities and improving their quality as well as enhancing the utilisation of cooperation and the results achieved. Discussions on strategy were also held at the association's ship seminar together with members and representatives of interest groups.

At an actual meeting held on 30 September 2010, the Board approved the association's motto, mission, vision and values.

Motto:

Skills Finland – In advocacy of vocational skills



Senior Ministerial Adviser Seija Rasku has been a representative of the Ministry of Education and Culture in the Board of Skills Finland since 2009, vice president of the Board from 2009 to 2012 and president since 2012.

Vision:

Builder of the best vocational skills in the world.

Mission:

We promote vocational skills and their appreciation, we challenge you to grow and pursue excellence in skills.

Values:

We challenge ourselves and our interest groups to act openly, honestly, wisely and skilfully, and to celebrate our achievements.

The key principles identified for the development of administration were openness, equality, efficiency, innovativeness, networking and commitment. In January 2011, the Board set up a working group to develop the administration. It was chaired by Timo Lankinen, while Seija Rasku was appointed vice chairman and Johan Hahkala, Mirja Hannula, Päivi Koppanen and Lena Öhman were appointed members. Eija Alhojärvi served as secretary. The working group was tasked with assessing the Board's activities and making proposals for developing them.

In its final report, the working group stated that developing administration requires changes to be made to the association's rules, administrative guidelines and meeting practices. The development measures considered to be the most important were specifying the association's administrative guidelines, particularly with regard to the division of labour and responsibilities, as well as making changes to the rules that specified the Board's composition and defined the Executive Committee's role. The development measures were accepted in an actual meeting of the association in September.

In late 2011, the association's long-standing president, Timo Lankinen, transferred from the Finnish National Agency for Education to the position of permanent state under-secretary at the Prime Minister's Office. Due to the change in his work duties, Lankinen resigned from his positions of trust related to vocational skills

Presidents of Skills Finland

1993	Esko Lankila
1994–2000	Vilho Hirvi
2000–2012	Timo Lankinen
2012–	Seija Rasku

Vice presidents of Skills Finland

1993–1999	Kari Purhonen
2000–2002	Jukka Sarjala
2003–2004	Pekka Ahmavaara
2005–2008	Kirsi Lindroos
2009–2011	Seija Rasku
2012	Markku Aunola
2013–	Aulis Pitkälä

competitions. At the start of 2012, he resigned from both the Board of Skills Finland and the Board of WorldSkills International, which he had been elected to in 2010. Senior Ministerial Adviser Seija Rasku from the Ministry of Education and Culture was elected as the new president of the Board of Skills Finland. Markku Aunola, rector of Kiipula Vocational

College, served as vice president in 2012, and Director General of the Finnish National Agency for Education Aulis Pitkälä took on the position of vice president from 2013 onwards.

The strategy work, which was off to a great start, was continued under the leadership of the new presiding officers. In 2012, the Board accepted Skills Finland's strategic policies to 2020. They defined four strategic focus areas for the association's activities: power from competition activities – developing one's own skills is everyone's right; a sustainable financial base as a requirement for long-term activities; strength and effectiveness through cooperation; and becoming the most skilled nation in the world through quality. In 2013, it was time to define strategic intents for the core functions.

In early 2011, the association started looking for new premises to replace the RKL premises, which had become unsuitable. "We checked out numerous premises of different types, but we simply couldn't seem to find a suitable one. They had either too little or too much space, or the number of rooms was too high or insufficient. Some of the available premises were missing a conference room or a storage room. Some premises were hopeless to access by public transport. When suitable premises were found, the asking price was too high. In some cases, they didn't want to rent to an association

that wasn't liable to pay VAT," Eija Alhojärvi recalls. However, premises that perfectly met all of the association's needs was eventually found, and in July 2011 the association was able to move to Simonkatu as a tenant of Sjuksköterskeföreningen i Finland.

Taitaja grows into a major VET event

Over the years, the Taitaja Competition has been turned into a true major VET event and the flagship of the association's activities. The Taitaja Competition brings positive visibility to VET. It serves as a meeting place for professionals of different trades and as a showcase of trades and training in different sectors for young people and their parents.

The Taitaja Competition's regional effects are also apparent, which is why it interests education providers. "In my time, the right to organise the Taitaja Competition has been applied for by more than one education provider almost every year," Eija Alhojärvi says.

The increasing interest in the Taitaja Competition also poses its own challenges. For many years, the event has been so large that only the largest cities have the facilities and accommodation capacity required to organise it. As the event grows, so do the budgets. One of the greatest challenges is finding a sustainable foundation for the event's finances and growth.

One potential solution is the development of the semi-final system. In 2008, President of the association Timo Lankinen estimated that the Taitaja Competition had already reached

its maximum scale in Espoo. "For this reason, we must focus particularly on developing the semi-final system in the future. This allows an increasing number of vocational colleges to be committed to competition activities and, simultaneously, the development of VET," Lankinen said.

The first Taitaja Competition was organised based on seven regional competitions. Regional trial competitions were replaced by school-specific trial competitions and semi-finals when the association took over the responsibility for organising the Taitaja Competition. The number of semi-finals organised and the number of participants in them have increased year after year. After the competition in Lahti in 2001, the association invested in the development of semi-finals in particular, and two years later in Jyväskylä the association was able to hold semi-finals in 26 skills. In 2013, there were 1,940 semi-finalists.

The association focused on both quantitative and qualitative development of the semi-final system at the same time. Skills Finland continuously engages in dialogue with other operators for the development of the Taitaja Competition. Sauli Jaara, competition manager of Taitaja2010 from

Education providers compete over the right to organise Taitaja

Juhani Honka, who acted as the executive director of Skills Finland from 2000 to 2002, recalls that there was already competition over organisation rights in the early 2000s. "The Imatra Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Education organised the Taitaja Competition in 2002. There was fierce contention over the event organised two years later. The organiser's name was supposed to be announced in Imatra. One of the applicants was Seinäjoki. When we were about to leave for Imatra, the phone rang. The caller was an individual from Seinäjoki who asked how we from Seinäjoki could succeed in this competition. While I was mulling over my response and trying to avoid saying my opinion one way or another, this influencer from Seinäjoki blurted: 'Well, at least tell me whether we'll be going to Imatra with a rose bush or a baseball bat!'"

The Joint Municipal Authority of Seinäjoki Vocational College received the right to organise Taitaja2004, and no baseball was needed.

Oulu Vocational College, prepared a report and compiled needs for development for the expansion, development and utilisation of the Taitaja semi-final system. Jaara submitted his report to Skills Finland in February 2011. The needs for development identified in the report and other contexts included the utilisation of semi-finals in teaching and its development as well as tying the number of finalists to the number of semi-finalists.



Preparation of Meat Products was a competition skill in the Taitaja Competition from 2004 to 2006. This photo was taken in Tampere in 2006.

EXPERIENCES FROM HELSINKI ARE UTILISED IN TAMPERE IN 2006

Tampere received the honour of organising the first Taitaja Competition after the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki. Some of the participants had also been involved in arranging the competition in Helsinki, which allowed the lessons learned there to be immediately utilised in the national competition.

The 2006 Taitaja Competition was held at Tampere Exhibition Centre in January. Tampere College, which is maintained by the City of Tampere, was the organiser with the main responsibility, together with the Crafts and Arts Centre of Pirkanmaa and Tampere Adult Education Centre.

The competition in Tampere particularly took steps forward with regard to the uniformity, clarity and planning of the workshops and the visibility of cooperation partners. A recruitment point intended to bring young job seekers and



*Industrial Maintenance
at Taitaja2013 in Joensuu.*

businesses in different sectors together was implemented for the first time. The Competition Information System that had previously been in



Print Design was featured as a competition skill for the first time in 2000 and it has been included in every Taitaja Competition since 2004. This photo was taken in Joensuu in 2007.

test use was adopted officially, and Abilympics skills were implemented as Demonstration Skills for the first time.

In 2006, the TV morning news programme Ylen aamu-tv broadcast a Taitaja programme that featured 5–8 minute-long profiles of each winner or second-place winner of Taitaja2006. The aim was to showcase various trades and the training leading to them. A total of 40 trades were showcased during that year.

COMPETITIONS IN 2007 AND 2013 MARKET NORTH KARELIAN SKILLS

The Taitaja Competition was held at Joensuu Arena and the ice hall next to it in 2007 and again in 2013. The first of these two events took place during the freezing cold of January, while the second occurred in the middle of a May heat wave. The temperate difference between these two events was over 40 °C! The timing of the competition

in 2013 made it possible for the event to also spread out to the outdoor areas. The North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium (PKKY) was the responsible organiser on both occasions. The target number of visitors in 2013 was 35,000, which corresponded to the number of visitors for the previous competition. The target was exceeded: the event was attended by 37,600 visitors.

Both times, PKKY worked in close cooperation with the local business community, and the goals it has set for the event were largely related to the nationwide marketing of North Karelian skills. Director of PKKY **Iikka Pirskanen** said after the event in 2007 that they wanted to use the project to showcase the region's strengths and the skills of North Karelian businesses. "We also simultaneously marketed local VET skills at the national level throughout the project, before and during the event," he says.

Anne Karppinen served as competition manager at both competitions. In the final report on Taitaja2013, she reflects on the event's meaning as follows.

The Taitaja event is exceptional; it has so many dimensions that it is unparalleled as a product. It is a tool in the development of the quality of teaching as well as a networking opportunity, recruitment event, marketing event, means of communication, discussion

Frightening freezing weather

What posed its own special challenge in Joensuu in 2007 was the -30 °C temperature. The first thing that had to be done was to get knit caps, mittens and warm coats for the foreign guests from around the world. Eija Alhojärvi recalls being bemused about the strange behaviour of a guest from Singapore. "This individual would always run quickly from the car to inside a building and vice versa. The rest of us would follow at a sedate pace. After wondering about it for some time, I ventured to ask for the reason for this running. It turned out that for an individual who came from the warm climate of Singapore, such a low temperature felt truly frightening. Our guest had the notion that bitter cold weather would kill a person in the blink of an eye. I reassured our guest, even though I understood their confusion well. The icy cold weather of North Karelia was too much at times even for people from Helsinki," Alhojärvi recalls.

forum, arena for competitors to give their all and put themselves on the line, enabler of growth and, of course, a competition.

The slogan chosen for the event was The Joy of Skills! During the brainstorming for

the slogan, there were exceptionally many pieces of bad news in the media. News about working life focused on themes such as lay-offs, burnouts, raising of the retirement age in a negative light and bullying at the workplace. It felt like there was hardly anything in the media that would inspire young people. Because of this, just like a counter to all the negative things, we wanted to highlight the theme of the joy of skills. It is a great thing to possess and have a handle on vocational skills. Young people should study, obtain vocational skills and take joy in them.

In 2007, in the aftermath of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, internationality was already strongly present in Joensuu. There were so many foreign visitors that Skills Finland decided to organise a special seminar for them on WorldSkills activities and the utilisation of competition activities. The association also held a CIS training session in Joensuu in cooperation with WorldSkills International. It was attended by ten people from seven countries. Among the trainees were Japanese individuals who represented the next WorldSkills competition organiser. A large delegation from Estonia, which had joined WorldSkills International the previous year, also attended the competition as invited guests of the association.

In 2013, PKKY set the promotion of close cooperation with Russian partner institutions

as its goal in promoting internationality. The competition was attended by several Russian groups, and one seminar section was entirely dedicated to this cooperation.

PKKY has been involved in vocational skills competitions since 2001, when competition activities in their current form were launched. Some 25–30 young people from PKKY's vocational colleges attend the Taitaja finals annually. However, the most significant thing is getting over a hundred students to participate in some type of trial competition each year. According to **Timo Elo**, long-standing chairman of the Council of PKKY, the number of participants has been kept high by a decision of the municipal consortium's Council: "This ensures that the foundation of the activities is sufficiently broad to have a concrete effect on the quality of VET."

PKKY has been highly successful in Taitaja Competitions. Skills Finland has been compiling statistics on the success of education providers in Taitaja Competitions since 2009. With regard to success in competitions, PKKY has been among the top three every year. North Karelia will continue to invest in VET in the future. According to Pirskanen, competition activities are a good tool in these efforts: "We manage education in such a way that the availability of sufficient and high-quality labour remains a competitive advantage for the employers in this area."

Five-star lodging in Joensuu

In 2012, WorldSkills International granted the hosting rights to WSC2017 to the United Arab Emirates. A delegation from the United Arab Emirates, led by Technical Delegate Ali al Marzouq, had decided to visit Taitaja2013 in Joensuu. During the preparations for this trip, questions and wishes were sent from both sides. One of the most memorable – and laborious – ones was the guests' wish to reserve a suite for them at the five-star hotel nearest to the competition venue. It took quite a few messages to explain that the only five-star hotel in Finland was located in Helsinki and that it was nowhere near the competition venue. The problem was finally solved by renting the guest house of North Karelian patriarch Yrjö Laakkonen to the delegates. The guest house was staffed by students of North Karelia Vocational College. The guests were satisfied with the North Karelian hospitality.

An outcomes assessment was conducted in 2007 as part of the HuvaKarjala project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). According to the assessment, it was felt that competition activities had developed basic education, making it more modern and working life oriented. In addition to technical skills related to production, students had been able to learn many other things related to the planning and organisation of work, independent decision-making and social skills. Students' professional self-esteem had become stronger, and they were considered to be more suited than before for job placements and the labour market.

Teachers felt that they had evolved professionally and pedagogically after interacting with representatives of other educational institutions and working life in the sector. They had enthusiastically introduced the influences they had received to teaching contexts. Group and teamwork had become stronger.

UNIQUE COOPERATION BETWEEN THREE EDUCATION PROVIDERS IN ESPOO IN 2008

The year 2008 brought the Taitaja Competition back to the Helsinki Metropolitan Area after an eight-year break. The event spread out to Tapiola and its surroundings and all the way to Helsinki, Narinkka Square and Three Smiths Square. It was organised by three education providers from the Helsinki Metropolitan Area: the Joint Authority of Education in

The wondrous Koskinen brothers

Born in the village of Suhmura in Pyhäselkä, North Karelia, the Koskinen brothers have been incredibly successful in vocational skills competitions both at the national and international levels. Of the family's eleven children, as many as five have participated in competitions in the 2000s.

Henri Koskinen, born in 1985, won the Finnish championship in Plumbing in the Taitaja Competition in 2004. The following year, Henri won the Nordic championship in Iceland. Finally, at the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki, a gold medal was hung around his neck. **Teuvo Koskinen** (b. 1988) competed in Carpentry in the Taitaja Competition in 2006 and placed third.

Kai (b. 1990) and **Samu** (b. 1991) **Koskinen** were both studying to become plater-welders at North Karelia Vocational College in spring 2009. Kai graduated that same spring, but Samu had another year of study left. They both participated in Welding at the Taitaja Competition in Vaasa in 2009 with great results: Kai won gold and Samu grabbed bronze. In 2011, Kai represented Finland in Construction Metal Work at the WorldSkills Competition in London.

Joel Koskinen (b. 1995) is the latest in the family to participate in the Taitaja Competition. He won the Finnish championship in Plumbing in the Taitaja Competition held in Joensuu in 2013.

The brothers' father, **Jari Koskinen**, says that all the siblings in the family to be old enough to attend vocational school have chosen a vocational education, with the exception of the oldest son, who has become a physicist. *"They have not been pressured in any way to make their choices."*

Henri's career choice was influenced by his father's job. Jari worked as a plumber and oil burner mechanic in the same company for almost 30 years. Whenever the father happened to be on duty, the son would follow him to the worksite, even when he was still *"the size of a fire extinguisher"*. *"I decided to study to become a plumber because Dad had never had to spend a day unemployed in his career,"* Henri muses.

Encouraged by a teacher to go into hands-on professions

In comprehensive school, the Koskinen brothers were taught by **Veli-Matti Nuora**, who was able to nourish the boys' imagination and desire to experiment in the right way. Henri says that the teacher's own hobby, competitive boating, made an impression on him. *"In Year 7, he showed us photos of different types of boats that had once been made at the school. And he told us pretty legendary stories about his hobby."*

Henri started building a wooden boat in Year 8 and finished it in Year 9. The same teacher got



Kai (on the right) and Samu Koskinen participated in Welding at the Taitaja Competition held in Vaasa in 2009.

Teuvo Koskinen to build a dinghy. “When Kai got to the same age, he built a go-kart at school. Right now, he and Samu are making a tube-frame go-kart that will be fitted with a Suzuki engine and an all-terrain vehicle’s body,” Jari says.

Kai and Samu admit that their big brothers’ example has encouraged them to engage in competition activities to some degree. Kai says that Henri gave them both advice to help them prepare for competitions, but he also declares that “we won’t lose to our brother”.

Jari Koskinen has encouraged his sons to compete. He believes that it will also benefit them in working life. To provide an example, he

recounts a story about his son, Teuvo, who took third place in Carpentry. Immediately after the Taitaja Competition, Teuvo got offers for six jobs.

The eldest of the brothers, **Tuomas** (b. 1982), had also had the chance to demonstrate his skills in competition. However, the competition in question was not the Taitaja Competition, but the first Mestarikokki (Master Cook) competition held on MTV3 in spring 2008. Tuomas won the competition. At the time of his participation in Mestarikokki, he was close to completing his degree in physics. ■

Espoo Region (Omnia), the Intermunicipal Federation of Vocational Education in Western Uusimaa (Luaky) and the Training Consortium of Central Uusimaa (Keuda).

This major VET event incorporated the Taitaja2008 event as well as the Saku Stars cultural competition held at the same time. The major event was one of the events of the 550th anniversary year of Espoo, which provided it with additional visibility in the joint marketing of the events. The activities included in the major event were attended by a total of almost 100,000 visitors.

The cooperation between the three joint municipal authorities in the Taitaja event's arrangements on this scale and with each organiser making an equal contribution was unique. The responsibilities for organising skills were divided according to each joint municipal authority's strengths. The steering group was formed by the directors of the joint municipal authorities: **Hannu Heikkilä** (Keuda), **Tapio Siukonen** (Luaky) and **Sampo Suihko** (Omnia).

According to Hannu Heikkilä, these three joint municipal authorities had prior experience in cooperating with each other. It was easy to start from there. "We were already creating a cooperation network during the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki. We also cooperated with the organisers of Taitaja2007 and Taitaja2009, namely Joensuu and Vaasa. As for partner companies, we were able to utilise the



Sakari Hartikainen, a competitor in Architectural Stonemasonry, won the title of the Best of Taitaja in 2008 and was granted use of a brand new car for a year.



Taitaja2008 was held in Otaniemi and Tapiola. From the left: Competition Manager Ari Toivonen, Project Manager Heli Stolt, Chairman of the City Council Markku Sistonen as well as the directors of the municipal consortiums in charge of the arrangements: Sampo Suihko (Omnia), Tapio Suihkonen (Luaky) and Hannu Heikkilä (Keuda).

Excerpts from Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's speech at the major event in Espoo

"A competition held at the heart of Finnish high technology proves that the word 'top', when associated with education and training, does not only apply to higher education institutions. Today, it is also increasingly closely associated with vocational skills and the performance of vocational work. Appreciation of one's own skills and work is already important when applying for training. This appreciation and enthusiasm should be at a level at which dropping out is not a (more attractive) option.

It's here, at this major event in Espoo, where people gather together around skills and good motivation. This is the right place for turning all the skills, innovativeness, education and training produced by the high-quality Finnish education system into concrete actions and products."

Major event in Espoo in figures

Personnel training days:

- Taitaja workshop supervisors, 484 days, external trainers
- Management teams, 175 days, external trainers
- Additionally, training days organised by the event organisation

Studies completed by own students:

- Vocational studies 750 cr
- Free-choice studies 200 cr
- Vocational skills demonstrations 30 cr
- On-the-job learning 175 cr
- Finale theses 25 cr

contacts we had made during the competition in Helsinki. Of course, many of these companies were our job placement locations, and they were happy to participate.”

Another goal set by Skills Finland was met in Espoo: for the first time, the event was implemented fully as a bilingual event. The association had started developing Swedish-language services in 2003, when the rules of the Taitaja Competition were published in Swedish, a Swedish-language website was set up and introductory materials were prepared in Swedish. The association received invaluable assistance with this extensive task in Espoo from the Taitaja2009 group in Vaasa as well as Västra Nylands Yrkeskolan. This work paid off: 11 of the finalists were Swedish speakers.

TAITAJA IN THE WEST, NORTH AND EAST – VAASA, OULU AND KUOPIO IN CHARGE OF ARRANGEMENTS

Skills Finland aimed to organise the Taitaja Competition in different places around the country in different years in order for the event and, through it, VET to be made known across Finland. The Taitaja Competition has successfully spread across the country. Between 2009 and 2011, the competition visited the west, north and east, taking place in Vaasa, Oulu and Kuopio.

The event held at Botnia Hall in Vaasa in 2009 was organised in cooperation between the



Cooking competitors in Vaasa in 2009.

City of Vaasa/Vaasa Vocational Institute and the Federation of Swedish Ostrobothnia for Education and Culture/Vocational College of Ostrobothnia.

According to the event’s project manager, Iiro



Landscape Gardening at the Taitaja Competition in Oulu.

Suksi, the competition in Vaasa showed that smaller education providers are also able to take responsibility for organising the Taitaja Competition:



Forestry Machinery in Kuopio in 2011.

Taitaja2009 became a success story. The target number of visitors, 35,000, was greatly exceeded. Vaasa Vocational Institute and the Vocational College of Ostrobothnia together were the smallest organiser of the Taitaja Competition up until that point. This proves not only the strength of these organisations but also that the Taitaja Competition can be organised by smaller organisations with fewer resources. We hope and believe that Taitaja2009 can serve as an inspiration and example of the utilisation of opportunities and meeting challenges for other vocational colleges.

The event's bilingualism, which had been introduced in Espoo the previous year, was

naturally continued. The event was genuinely bilingual, from the arrangements to the implementation.

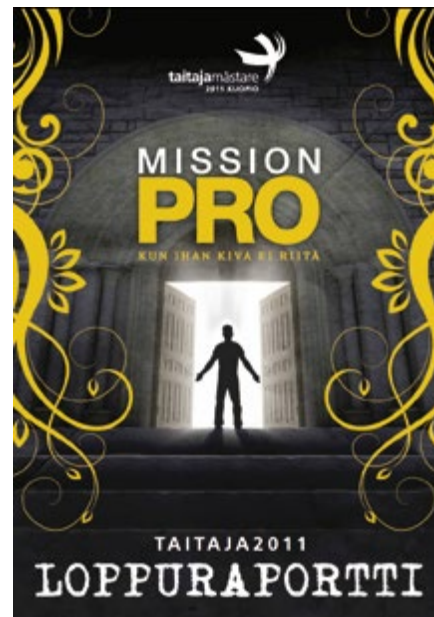
As a result of the *“Promotion of entrepreneurship with the help of vocational skills competitions”* project that was carried out by Skills Finland and funded by the Private Entrepreneurs' Foundation, Entrepreneurship was introduced as a Demonstration Skill in Vaasa for the first time. The finals were attended by five three-person teams. As a result of their ideas, the competitors establish an imaginary company for the duration of the competition. The tasks tested the groups' actual marketing and sales skills. Additionally, the practical tasks tested the

competitors' concentration, working together, trust and presentation skills. Representatives of the business community provided the initial outlines for some of the tasks and served as jury members.

Another significant new element introduced in Vaasa was the See & Experience points. Since spring 2008, workshop supervisors had been urged to organise additional events intended for visitors. The aim was to increase the experiential nature of Taitaja Competitions and ensure that something interesting is always happening at the workshops, even when the competitors are taking a break. Additional events were advertised with See & Experience signs and information sheets. See & Experience points were provided in 26 skills, and the feedback on these activities was very positive. See & Experience activities were continued in Oulu the following year under the name See and Try.

The Taitaja Competition held in Oulu in 2010 once again attracted a large audience: there were more than 51,000 visitors during the three days. Oulu Vocational College was in charge of the arrangements. The event's special themes were entrepreneurship and internationality.

The eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull, which was at its strongest point in April, posed a challenge to the realisation of internationality. Due to the ash cloud caused by the eruption, almost all European countries closed their air space and airports completely



or partly for several days. In Finland, the air space was closed on Thursday, 15 April. The grounding of all aircraft lasted for a week, and even though it was lifted before the start of the Taitaja Competition, the uncertain situation had caused several of the international guests to cancel their visit to Oulu. Despite this, there were a total of 29 guest competitors in Oulu. It was great that there were guest competitors not only in Taitaja skills but also in TaitajaPLUS skills and the Taitaja9 Competition.

Even though the region was not bilingual, the organisers succeeded in implementing a bilingual competition. The extensive work of translating the competition documents was made possible by the TaitajaMästare på svenska project funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education starting in 2006. The semi-finals had 86 Swedish-speaking competitors

who participated in 27 skills. The number of competitors remained almost the same as at the Taitaja Competition in Vaasa in 2009.

Based on the experiences gained when the skill was implemented as a Demonstration Skill the previous year, it was now possible to implement Entrepreneurship as an Official Skill for the first time. Students competed in groups of three and established an imaginary company based on their ideas for the duration of the competition.

In order to promote entrepreneurship, the Entrepreneurship Committee of Skills Finland had created a model that included Entrepreneurship as a competition skill as well as the assessment of entrepreneurship in as many skills as possible. Entrepreneurship was assessed in 38 of the 50 skills included in Taitaja2010. In the skills, the assessment focused either on internal entrepreneurship, economic efficiency or the selling of one's own product or service and the relationship with the customer.

The Taitaja event in Kuopio in 2011 was organised with the theme "Mission pro – when pretty nice is not enough". The event's roots date back to 2005. At the time, the group of guests invited by the Savo Consortium for Education to WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 presented, quite unanimously, the following wish on their way back home from the event: The Taitaja Competition had to be brought to Kuopio. This common will took concrete form when the Savo Consortium for Education and Ylä-Savo

Municipal Federation of Education submitted a joint application for the right to organise Taitaja2011 in spring 2008.

According to Competition Manager Ilkka T. Kemppainen, the three-year-long partnership in organising the competition also deepened the cooperation between the two education consortiums in North Savo significantly in other things and will most likely continue to bring added value to VET in North Savo in the future.

One of the themes of the competition in Kuopio was "Right choices". Even at the pre-events leading up to the competition, the organisers sought to inform pupils in Years 7–9 as extensively as possible about various trades in order to make it easier for them to make the right choice immediately after finishing comprehensive school.

Another purpose of the "Right choice" theme was to meet the challenges that had come up in the results of a staff and training survey published by the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) in spring 2011. According to the survey, one in three businesses had faced difficulties in recruitment. These difficulties were the most prevalent in tasks that required vocational skills. More commonly than before, these difficulties were attributed to the prejudices arising from poor awareness of the sector as well as a lack of knowledge of the jobs offered in the sector.

In his own greeting, the event's patron, Commissioner **Olli Rehn**, emphasised the significance of skills not only to Finland but to all of Europe:

Taitaja2011 reflects the growth potential of Finland and all of Europe. Sustainable economic growth is based on competence. For this reason, Finland will require an increasing number of skilled professionals in various sectors in the future. Competition is a great demonstration of Finnish excellence in vocational skills. Competition helps young people understand the significance of high-quality and skilled work. It is also a good opportunity for people to grow and evolve professionally.

The Taitaja2011 Competition is in line with the goals of the European Union in many ways. I have the great joy and honour of serving as its patron. The EU's goal is to develop European skills, particularly in growing industries. Skilled employees play a key role in the recovery from the economic crisis. Simply investing in skills is not enough. Skills must also be utilised on the job market. The EU seeks to increase the employment rate in Europe to 75 per cent by 2020. This is only possible if training and education are made to correspond to the needs of working life. Taitaja2011 commendably develops the cooperation between education and working life. It also promotes youth employment, which is, of course, another goal of the EU.



Matias Kuortti (left), Ari Lindström and Nico Nurminen, Entrepreneurship team from Keuda Vocational College, at Taitaja2012 in Jyväskylä.

JYVÄSKYLÄ STARTS A SECOND ROUND OF HOSTING COMPETITIONS IN 2012

Jyväskylä Vocational Institute was the first education provider to take on the responsibility for organising the Taitaja Competition in its current form for the second time. In 2012, this responsibility was shared by Jyväskylä Vocational Institute as well as Jämsä Vocational College and Jyväskylä Adult Education Centre.

Taitaja2012 was the largest public event hosted by Paviljonki in Jyväskylä up until that point. According to **Leo Potkonen**, CEO of Jyväskylä Fair Ltd, it was the largest project in the history of Jyväskylä Paviljonki with regard to the building of the technical environment. Never before had so many different types of technical solutions been built in those halls.

In the final report, Competition Manager of Taitaja2012 **Esko Junttila** emphasised

the significance of the event as a learning environment in particular.

Diverse learning was realised extensively at the Taitaja Competition. The competition was an excellent learning environment, a superb place for project-based learning, a great provider of training in public speaking and an efficient networking arena. At the Taitaja Competition, students gave demonstrations, studied and worked openly under thousands of pairs of assessing eyes. The implementation of this major event in between teaching work required flexibility from both staff and students. On the other hand, the event was an uplifting and memorable experience as a balance to every routines.

The seminar programme implemented in Jyväskylä was the most extensive and diverse in the history of the Taitaja Competition up until that point. The seminars varied from all-day seminars to PSA-type project presentations and discussion sessions. Visitors could stop by the seminars at any point during the competition and stay for a long or short period of time, according to their own interest. In total, the seminars attracted a little over 600 participants. Additionally, various NGOs, network groups and development working groups held dozens of events of their own during the Taitaja Competition.

This time, the theme of the traditional international seminar organised in cooperation

between the competition organiser, CIMO and Skills Finland was “Quality and attractiveness of VET”. The keynote speaker at the seminar was **Alison Crabb**, deputy head of unit for DG Education & Culture, Vocational Training and Adult Learning at the European Commission. The seminar was very popular, attracting as many as 200 participants. Both the seminar arrangements and the process of taking care of the international guests were handled in an exemplary manner. The seminar was attended by large groups from countries such as Latvia, China, Saudi Arabia, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia and Poland. A curriculum was prepared for these groups for the whole week. Each group had its own contact person in the Jyväskylä Educational Consortium, and the coordination was handled by International Affairs Manager **Aino Malin**.



Go us! The winning team of Taitaja9 from Sotkamo rejoices in Tampere in 2006.

Taitaja9 continues its successful run

The Taitaja9 Competition was created in 2002 under the name T9 as part of Improvement of the Attractiveness of the Mechanical, Metal and Electrical Industries (Komes) project. The competition was very popular: in the first year, the trial competitions were attended by 2,000 schoolchildren.

After two years, the responsibility for organising the competition was transferred

to Skills Finland. Since then, the day-long finals of the three-stage competition have been implemented as part of the Taitaja Competition. The association set out to develop the competition with the help of the ESF-funded project. Funding was granted for the project from 2003 to 2007. The goal of the project was to introduce comprehensive school pupils to various trades, support their career choices and increase the number of young people who apply

to VET in particularly challenging and the least attractive sectors. Another goal was to promote the cooperation between basic education, VET and working life. Through the project, the competition was expanded beyond the original mechanical, metal and electrical industries to also include other industries.

The Taitaja9 finals in their current form were held for the first time in conjunction with the Taitaja Competition in Seinäjoki in January 2004. Local and regional trial competitions had been held the previous autumn to choose 36 three-person teams for the finals from among almost 1,300 pupils in Year 9. Trial competitions were held in over a hundred vocational colleges—These activities were the most active in Southwest Finland and Pirkanmaa. In terms of its schedule, Taitaja9 followed the progress of the Taitaja Competition. The regional division followed in the competition today was modelled after the Finnish Scout districts.

The visual look of Taitaja9 was created in 2003, and it has been retained, for the most part, to this day. The competition was marketed in 2003 with the help of the “Find Something Better to Do” campaign. The campaign materials included posters, static stickers, screensavers, badges, mobiles, balloons and strings of flags as well as giant air-filled gloves. The marketing efforts yielded results: the next year, the number of participants had increased to 1,800.



At Taitaja2011, the study paths were identified by colourful figures.

The popularity of the Taitaja9 Competition has remained stable over the years. In 2013, there were 3,513 participants.

STUDY PATHS WERE IMPLEMENTED FOR THE FIRST TIME AT WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005

The study paths created for the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki originated in Switzerland. **Jukka Lerkkanen**, long-term developer of the study paths, recalls:

The idea was born at WorldSkills St Gallen 2003. A group of teachers from the Vocational Teacher Education College of JAMK University of Applied Sciences, headed by Teacher Training Manager Ritva Sopenen, were attending the competition when their attention was

drawn to the disorganised way in which the mass of spectators moved about the competition. The organisers of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 wanted to handle it better. This resulted in the project in which the study path concept was developed.

It was decided that a school cooperation project would be launched based on the work carried out by JAMK. Its goal was to provide young people with information on trades and working life, offer stimuli for cooperation between businesses and schools as well as market the WorldSkills Competition.

A steering group was established to support the project. It included representatives of event organisers and JAMK as well as OPH, the Economic Information Office TAT, the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce. This led to the creation of the rucksack concept and the study path project.

The rucksack concept provided groups of schoolchildren with a prepared support package for following the competition and additional events. Cooperation partners in the concept included SEA LIFE Helsinki in Linnanmäki, the Finnish Science Centre Heureka, Korkeasaari Zoo and TAT.

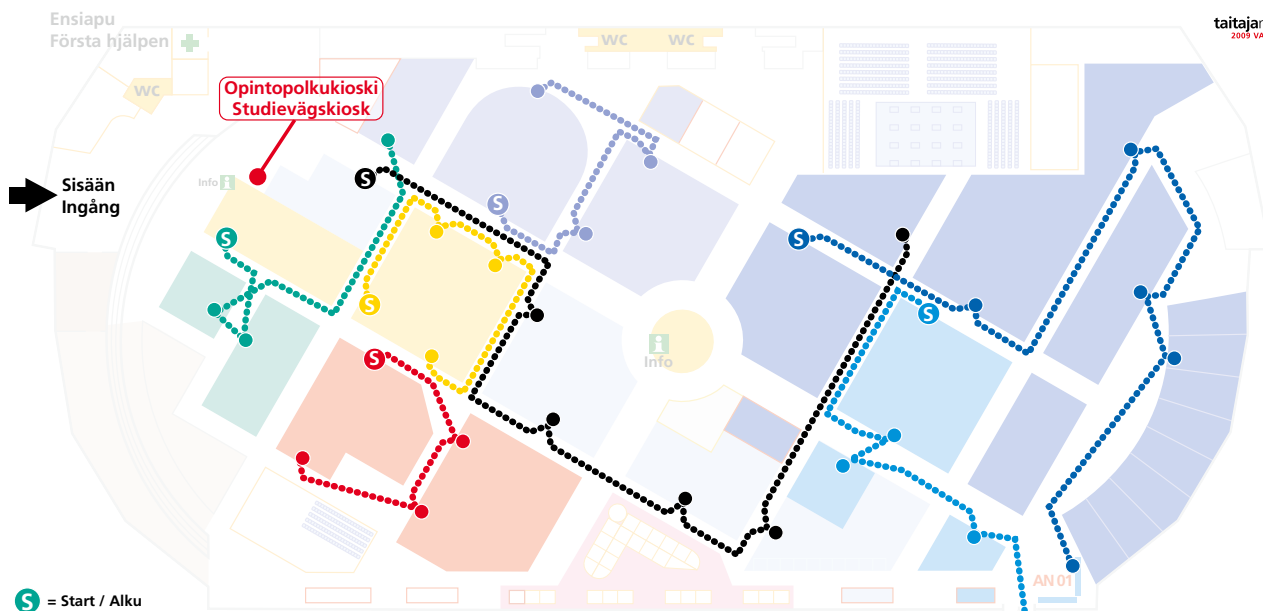
The pedagogical goals of the study path concept developed by Jyväskylä Vocational Teacher Education College included supporting the increasing and deepening of professional knowledge,

developing and diversifying the implementation of career counselling as well as strengthening the consideration of different types of learners in guidance. Advance and stimulating materials were produced for use by students, teachers, guidance counsellors and other interested parties. Among other things, they included exercises related to the professions associated with the Official and Demonstration Skills.



The blue and black rucksacks were a visible part of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

The implementation of the study paths was integrated into the studies of the international teacher training group and students who started studying in Jyväskylä in autumn 2004 to become guidance counsellors and special needs teachers. Five themed study paths were formed from the spectrum of skills, with each of them covering four to six trades. Participants were provided with a map of the study path that showed them where its destinations were. Participants were able to check out preliminary exercises related



S = Start / Alku



Opintopolut
Studievägar

- **Luovapolku:** Painotuotteen suunnittelu, Kukkasideonta, Somistus, Pukuompelu
 - **Formulapolku:** Autonasennus, Autokorinkorjaus, Autonmaalauk, Metsäkoneen käyttö
 - **Datapolku:** Verkkosivujen tuottaminen, Tietojenkäsittely, Tietokoneet ja verkot, CAD-suunnittelu
 - **Hyvinvointipolku:** Puhdistuspalvelu, Hiusmuotoilu, Kauneudenhoito, Lähihoitaja
 - **Ravintolapolku:** Tarjoilija, Suurtaloukokki, Ravintolakokki, Kondiittori
 - **Rakennuspolku:** Putkiasennus, Talonrakennus, Maalaus- ja tapetointiyö, Huonekalupuseppä, Viherrakentaminen, Maanmittaus
 - **Teknopolku:** Elektroniikka, Mekatronikka, Automaatioasennus, Koneistus, Levy- ja hitsaus, Sähköasennus
-
- **Kreativa vägen:** Planering av trycksaker, Blomsterbinderi, Dekoration, Klädsömnad
 - **Formulavägen:** Fordonsmekanik, Bilskadreparation, Billackering, Användning av skogsmaskin
 - **Datavägen:** Produktion av webb-sidor, Databehandling, Datorer och nätverk, CAD-planering
 - **Må Bra vägen:** Rengöringsservice, Frisering, Skönhetsvård, Närvårdare
 - **Restaurangvägen:** Servitör, Kock i storköshäll, Restaurangkock, Konditor
 - **Byggnadsvägen:** Rörläggning, Husbyggnad, Målning och tapetsering, Möbelsnickare, Anläggning av grönområde, Kartläggning
 - **Teknikvägen:** Elektronic, Mekatronik, Automationsteknik, Maskinbearbetning, Plåt och svetsning, Elinstallation

to the paths online in advance. During the competition, training and career counselling services were offered to a total of 40,000 young people. The primary target group was pupils in Year 9.

A school coordinator was needed to guide the groups of pupils who came to the competition. Half a year before the competition, **Matti Kauppinen** from Merikoski Vocational Training Centre was chosen for the position. “Roughly a hundred people who had been studying to become teachers and guidance counsellor had been trained in Jyväskylä to run these activities. It was clear that the guidance counsellors and students who had familiarised themselves with the preliminary materials online got the most out of the event,” Kauppinen says.

Attempts were made to “sell” the well-functioning study path concept to the next WorldSkills Competition held in Shizuoka, Japan. Unfortunately, the Japanese were not interested in the matter.

However, the study paths lived on in the Taitaja Competition and were integrated into comprehensive guidance. JAMK still bears the main responsibility for updating the knowledge base of the study paths and training guides. Skills Finland is tasked with assessing and developing the study path concept, which is applied by each competition organiser according to their needs and goals.

For example, Taitaja2012 in Jyväskylä featured a path targeted at pupils in Year 7 as well as a path for upper secondary school students and a VIP path for personnel of comprehensive schools (upper stage) and upper secondary schools. Students of Jyväskylä Vocational Institute and the upper secondary schools in Jyväskylä acted as guides on the paths. Additionally, each workshop area had a skill guide who was tasked with providing information on professions and training in the sector as well as the test project. A total of 6,000 study path reservations were submitted, and half of the pupils in Year 8 in Central Finland familiarised themselves with the event in advance by completing study path exercises.

Matti Kauppinen, who was involved in implementing the first study paths, considers them to be an excellent tool and is delighted that they have evolved and been received well. However, Kauppinen considers it to be important to also involve pupils in the lower stage of comprehensive school. “In the lower stage of comprehensive school, children are still open to influences, and information is ingrained deeper into their minds.”

Although the study paths were not of interest to the Japanese, some other countries have been interested in them. Eija Alhojärvi says that the Dutch have copied the concept for their own use. “When I visited the Dutch national vocational skills competition Skills Masters in Rotterdam in 2011, I was pleased to notice familiar-looking

guides and their groups in the competition area. The guides wore special T-shirts and held signs attached to broom handles. The idea of using broom handles originated from Helsinki. In Helsinki, the large number of visitors cause an unexpected problem: the signs held by the study path guides were not visible enough in the middle of mass of people. Because of this, Matti Kauppinen was sent to the hardware store in the middle of the event to buy broom handles, to which the signs were then attached. At later Taitaja Competitions, guides have drawn people's attention to them with balloons of various colours and special guide hats, among other things," Alhojärvi says.

Competitions for special needs students – TaitajaPLUS and Abilympics are launched

The first international vocational skills competitions for people with disabilities and special needs were held in Tokyo in 1981 as part of the UN's International Year of Disabled Persons. Since then, the competition has been held a total of seven times. The third competition was held in Hong Kong in 1989. In conjunction with this competition, an organisation called International Abilympic Federation (IAF) was established as the organisation responsible for the competitions. It is domiciled in Tokyo. The goal of these competitions is to improve the vocational skills and position of people with disabilities and special needs on the job market, promote awareness of the abilities of people with disabilities and their participation in socio-economic life, promote international cooperation and draw decision-makers' attention to the significance of the vocational skills of people with disabilities.

Skills Finland entered the goal of launching Abilympics activities in its action plan for 2005: "Skills Finland will become a member of the international organisation that organises Abilympics Competitions and prepare to send competitors to the next Abilympics Competition in 2007." One of the reasons

for launching these activities was the Action Plan for Vocational Special Needs Education prepared by the Ministry of Education in 2004. Another goal set by this action plan was improving the attractiveness and appreciation of education with regard to vocational special needs education.

Cooperation was initiated with the International Abilympic Federation (IAF) by inviting representatives of the federation to WorldSkills Helsinki 2005. The IAF delegation was led by the federation's president, **Fumio Kimura**. In its meeting in August, the Board of Skills Finland decided to apply for membership in IAF. In October, Hannu Immonen, Matti Kauppinen and Eija Alhojärvi visited Japan at the invitation of the WSC2007 and International Abilympics 2007 organisations. During the visit, they familiarised themselves with the Japanese national vocational skills competition and engaged in negotiations with both the WSC2007 competition organisation and the organisers of Abilympics 2007. During the trip, the Finns formally presented their membership application to IAF. Finland's membership was approved on 6 December 2005.

Preparations for the Abilympics were initiated in late 2005 with the aim of sending the first Finnish competitors to the competition that would be held in Japan in 2007.

The preparatory work was carried out in cooperation with vocational special education institutions and the AKVA project of Häme University of Applied Sciences. The project seeks not only to determine the willingness and capability to participate in Abilympics 2007 but also map the general prospects of vocational skills competitions in the development and promotion of vocational special needs education as well as launch national skills competitions for students with special needs.

Matti Kauppinen, who had acted as school coordinator in the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki, started working as Skills Finland's part-time Abilympics coordinator at the beginning of November.

FROM THE NATIONAL ABILYMPICS COMPETITION TO THE TAITAJAPLUS COMPETITION

A committee was established to plan and develop Finnish Abilympics activities. It was chaired by Markku Aunola, while Matti Kauppinen acted as secretary and the members included representatives of vocational colleges and the Finnish government.

The most visible concrete achievement by the



TaitajaPLUS work demonstrations at the Taitaja Competition in Tampere in 2006.

committee was the missive sent by Minister of Education Antti Kalliomäki to VET providers regarding vocational skills competitions for special needs students. The missive was based on preparatory work and a base text written by the committee.

Vocational special education institutions had their own booth at the Taitaja Competition held in Tampere in 2006. Work demonstrations were given by students from Arla Institute and Kuhankoski Special Needs Vocational School. Positive feedback was received from the students who gave work demonstrations as well as the teachers who guided them and the spectators.

At the end of November 2006, planning was initiated in cooperation with HAMK School of Professional Teacher Education and Jyväskylä Vocational Teacher Education College to incorporate Abilympics training into the training of vocational special needs

teachers. The matter of the Abilympics was also addressed at three training sessions held at HAMK during the year.

Work demonstrations were continued at Taitaja2007 in Joensuu. Abilympics skills were organised as Official Skills for the first time in conjunction with the major Taitaja Competition in Espoo in 2008. Omnia was active in Skills Finland's committee and did an excellent job in promoting the matter. Five skills were featured in Espoo: Caring, Customer Service and Sales, IT PC/Network Support, WEB Design and Photography. Additionally, an 8+1 model was tested in Floral Arrangement, Confectioner/Pastry Cook, Painting and Decorating and Cleaning Services. In a competition implemented according to the 8+1 model, special needs students participate in the semi-finals in Taitaja skills in which the Finnish championship is up for grabs, and the special needs student who achieves the best score in each semi-final is able to participate in the Taitaja finals as an "extra" competitor.

Additionally, work demonstrations were given by watchmakers, artisans, musicians and vehicle upholsterers. All in all, there were 28 special needs students from eight different vocational colleges. A seminar was held for representatives of employers with the title "Labour from a new direction".

The contribution made by the Skills Trainers' Academy (STA) of Häme University of Applied



Cleaning Services skill in the TaitajaPLUS Competition at Taitaja2012 in Jyväskylä.

Sciences to the development of competition activities for special needs students was significant from the start. In 2008, the training provided by STA for Abilympics trainers was completed by 16 people. Additionally, teachers who were training in Hämeenlinna and Jyväskylä to become vocational special needs teachers completed theses and study projects related to the Abilympics.

The national Abilympics Competition took another major leap forwards in Vaasa in 2009. The Official Skills were Caring, Cleaning Services and WEB Design, while Landscape Gardening and Building Maintenance were featured as Demonstration Skills. New types of solutions were tested in the use of space for skills: the same space and props were used in both

Caring and Cleaning Services. Cooperation was also carried out in Landscape Gardening and Building Maintenance.

After two pilot years, it could be said that the vocational skills competition for people with special needs had established itself. As a result, the Board of Skills Finland officialised the Competition Rules that had been in test use in Vaasa.

After the competition for people with special needs had become established, a need arose to come up with a Finnish counterpart to the name Abilympics. A naming competition was held in 2009, and it resulted in a new Finnish name for the Abilympics: “TaitajaPLUS”. This



Finland participated in the International Abilympics for the first time in Japan in 2007.

name was officially announced at a ship seminar of Skills Finland in May 2009. The purpose of the new name was to make vocational skills competitions for people with special needs a clear part of Taitaja Competitions.

As a result, they have been an integral part of the Taitaja event since 2009. The development of the competition has focused on improving its quality and increasing the number of competitors.

INTERNATIONAL ABILYMPICS ACTIVITIES ARE LAUNCHED

From the very start, the development of competition activities for people with special needs involved developing the national competition and participation in international competitions side by side. Bringing up the European point of view in international Abilympics activities was set as a goal.

Another goal pursued from the start was to make Abilympics activities known among the WorldSkills and EuroSkills member countries. The Abilympics Competition had already been brought up by the Finns at the General Assembly of WorldSkills International in 2000, when Finland was competing with Japan over the right to organise WSC2005. One of the arguments presented by the Finns was that if Japan was made host of WSC2007, it could host both the WorldSkills Competition and the Abilympics at the same time. Ultimately,



Attendees of an Abilympics seminar held in Oulu in conjunction with Taitaja2010.

that is what happened. It was also largely thanks to the active efforts of the Finns that WorldSkills International and the International Abilympic Federation signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2006.

The international Abilympics held in Japan in 2007 was the first one of its kind that Finland participated in. It featured a total of 30 skills, of which 26 were trade competitions and four were competitions related to leisure and life management. The competition had a total of 29 participating countries. The largest teams came from Japan and Korea. The Finnish team, with its four competitors, was one of the smallest and youngest in terms of average age. All the

Finnish competitors were students in their final year of study towards a vocational upper secondary qualification, whereas most of their fellow competitors were professionals who had been working for years.

According to Markku Aunola, Rector of Kiipula Vocational College, the competition in Japan was primarily meant to be a study trip. “Still, we were pleasantly surprised by the fact that we were able to launch the process within a short amount of time and send four competitors and their trainers to Japan.”

At the organisation's General Assembly, held in conjunction with the competition, Markku Aunola was elected for the Board of the International Abilympic Federation. This was a great token of appreciation for the work carried out by Finland in promotion of competition activities for people with special needs.

European Abilympics cooperation got off to a flying start. In 2009, a French delegation visited Vaasa to learn more about the Abilympics skills. The French were particularly interested in the Finnish model of holding vocational skills competitions for people with special needs as part of national competitions. The name TaitajaPLUS also pleased the French, who were willing to adopt the name PLUS for their own competitions. The following year saw the first guest competitors, who were from Estonia, participating in a TaitajaPLUS skill in Oulu. In 2011, the competitors chosen for the Abilympics gave work demonstrations in the TaitajaPLUS workshop area. This provided the competition days with an impressive functional addition.

In order to increase awareness of the Finnish integrated competition model and speed up European Abilympics cooperation, it was decided that an international seminar, titled "Competitions for All", would be held in conjunction with the Taitaja Competition in Oulu.

The seminar was also related to an investigation launched at the request of IAF to map Finland's capabilities to organise the International Abilympics in 2015.

The possibility of Finland hosting the competition was looked into starting from 2010. This investigative work included a study trip to the Abilympics held in South Korea in 2011. The trip was undertaken by a delegation that comprises a total of 29 people. In addition to competitors, trainers and judges, the delegation included 12 experts who represented education providers, vocational teacher education and educational administration. The group members actively participated in team communications as well as assessing and documenting the competition arrangements. Finnish Ambassador to South Korea **Pekka Wuoristo** visited the competition. The embassy also actively posted information about the event on its website.

Although there was interest in organising the Abilympics 2015 both within Skills Finland and among education providers, the project was ultimately discontinued due to a failure to build a sufficiently extensive network behind it and ensure the support of public funding for it. In August 2012, an official missive was sent from Skills Finland to IAF, announcing that Finland would unfortunately not be applying for the right to organise the International Abilympics 2015.

WorldSkills Competitions as promoters of Finnish excellence in skills

After WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, Finland continued its active participation in WorldSkills activities. There were representatives of Skills Finland in the organisation's Board and working groups, and Finland participated in competitions with large teams.

FROM HELSINKI TOWARDS WSC2007 IN JAPAN

At IVTO's General Assembly in 2000, where Finland was granted the right to host WSC2005, it was also decided that the hosting rights to WSC2007 would be granted to Japan. The competition would be held in Shizuoka, and the International Abilympics would be held simultaneously with the WorldSkills Competition.

Japan had sent its competitors and experts for WSC2005 to visit the competition venue, Helsinki Fair Centre, for the first time in spring 2004. To the actual competition, Japan sent not only competitors and experts but also skill-specific technical observers, who, according to the rules of WorldSkills, had the right to study the competition arrangements not only

during the competition itself but also during the building and dismantling of the workshop areas. The next visit by the Japanese competition organisation to Finland took place immediately in autumn 2005. This marked the start of close Finnish-Japanese cooperation that continued until the implementation of WSC2007.

Despite cultural differences, the cooperation was smooth. It was obvious that understanding the Japanese culture and operating methods was easier for Finns than it was for many other nationalities. Because of this, the Finns often found themselves acting as "interpreters" between the Japanese competition organisation and Secretary General of WorldSkills David Hoey, for example.

Cultural differences could be seen in both big and little things. Eija Alhojärvi shares an illustrative example: "A Japanese delegation visited our office in autumn 2005. We toured Helsinki Fair Centre and spent Saturday at Skills Finland's office. When it was my turn to speak, I started by saying that the point was to discuss the things that our guests were interested in and that they were welcome to interrupt me



with questions whenever they wished. I started my lecture from the frame of reference for the competition in Helsinki, Finnish VET policy and the goals of the event in Helsinki. When I got to the national goals of the competition, the first of our guests wanted to ask a question for clarification: ‘Is it difficult to set up a website?’ I stopped my lecturing on the spot and we continued the session by answering the questions asked by our guests.” Afterwards, the Finns got used to these questions, which were peculiar from the Finnish point of view. Therefore, when the Japanese at some point asked how many Karelian pasties we would be serving at the Farewell Party, we were no longer surprised – we simply answered the question. Still, I was excited to see whether Karelian pasties would be served at the Farewell Party in Shizuoka,” Alhojärvi laughs.

The competition organisation implemented school visits for the national teams of different countries for the first time in conjunction with the competition in Japan. The Finnish team received an enthusiastic welcome. The schoolchildren had prepared for the visit carefully by studying up on Finland in advance.

Timo Lankinen and Hannu Immonen were particularly respected by the Japanese. In September 2006, Immonen visited Japan together with David Hoey to train the Japanese workshop supervisors. This training utilised the training programme prepared for the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki, which had been found to be good. Immonen also had a special role in the competition itself, assisting both the competition’s technical manager and the individuals who were in charge of transport and logistics.



Welding expert Juho Muhonen (left) and competitor Janne Jauhola presenting a pressure vessel, which was the most laborious of the test projects.

The youngest competitor of the Finnish national team was 18.

The youngest competitor in the Finnish national team at WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007 was 18-year-old **Janne Jauhola** from Keminmaa, who participated in Welding. He completed his studies as a plater-welder at Vocational College Lappia the following spring.

Jauhola participated in a trial competition for the Nordic championship in plating and welding in Vaasa in autumn 2006 and came in second. At the actual Nordic championship held in Tampere that same autumn, Jauhola was the best Finn, losing narrowly to the Norwegian winner.

Around the same time, he also participated in a semi-final of the Taitaja Competition, at which his performance was deemed to be the best of the semi-final. Finally, Jauhola participated in the Taitaja Competition held in Joensuu in February of the following year and won the finals. "During my training, I visited **Hannu Saarivirta**, an employee of Kemppi, a long-standing sponsor of the skill, in Lahti. Competitors training for WorldSkills Competitions have been going there since 2001. He taught me in TIG welding in particular," Jauhola says.

Jauhola's performance in Japan earned him a Medallion for Excellence and fifth place. He performed well in all six test projects during those four days, but lost some points in the visual assessment.

According to Janne, the tolerances were extremely strict. "They measured the thinnest and widest sections of the welded seam, and the difference between them was not allowed to exceed two millimetres." The welded seam was also assessed by taking an X-ray of it. This revealed any internal defects in the welding: pores, slag inclusions and cracks.

In working life, welds do not usually have to be completely flawless. The weld quality level required in production is indicated with weld Classes B, C and D. In working life, Class C has become the sufficient weld Class in good workshop practice. "The competition also used Class A, i.e. a 100% clean weld. After the X-ray, my two plate welds were rated Class A, but the pipe seam fell to Class B because of an air bubble less than a millimetre in size." Jauhola considers the dimensional accuracy followed in the test projects to be far-removed from working life. "Good is enough there, but in a competition the seam must be both good and beautiful. You actually play with the seam."

The young man thanks his own trainers at Vocational College Lappia, mechanical and metal engineering teacher **Mikko Lehtilahti** as well as plating and welding teacher **Kari Ruotsalainen**, who all believed in him from the start. ■



Experts in the audience at the opening ceremony of the WorldSkills Competition in Calgary.

It was also gratifying that several of the young people who had worked at the competition in Helsinki had been hired for the competition organisation in Shizuoka. **Joni Aaltonen** acted as an expert in information technology, while **Janne Ostrovski** served as an expert in the CIS system. **Taru Väärtilä**, **Kirsi Ajomo** and **Kati Haahti** also worked at the WSI office.

During the preparatory period preceding WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, many of the skills had been renewed and attention had been focused on developing additional events.

According to **Veijo Hintsanen**, who was serving as vice chairman of the WorldSkills Technical Committee at the time, the main focus at the WorldSkills Competition in Japan was on the building of the competition areas and competition technology. The additional functions, such as the opening and closing ceremonies, seminars, meetings and trade demonstrations, had been invested in less.

The Japanese innovation added to the additional functions was a school visit programme called “One school, one country”. A twin school had been named for each national team in advance, and the teams visited their twin schools before the start of the competition. Team Finland was accompanied on their visit by MP **Leena Rauhala**, who had come along as a guest, as well as Official Delegate Timo Lankinen and Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi. The students of Finland’s twin school, Kaihoku Elementary School, had been carrying out projects related to Finland in various subjects throughout the school year. The programme started with a portion that everyone participated in at the school gym. After this, the Finns were taken to classrooms in smaller groups to enjoy activities planned by the school’s pupils.

“In the classroom that I visited with the competitors, the programme comprised a question time and playing games together,” Eija Alhojärvi says. “The pupils and their teachers had delved into the topics of Finland and entertaining Finns carefully. It was touching to see young Finnish top experts meet small Japanese schoolchildren. At the end, we shook hands with our hosts. I marvelled at the large number of schoolchildren – the line of hands to shake seemed endless. At some point, I realised that the children were circling back to the end of the line through the classroom’s back door. That was how rare it was for them to meet foreigners up close. International education at its best. For both sides.”



Elina Salminen won the gold medal in Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing in the WorldSkills Competition held in Calgary, Canada, in 2009. She was additionally chosen as "Best of Nation" among the Finnish team.

The school visit programme was found to be functional, and all competition organisers have made it a part of their programmes since 2007.

In Shizuoka, Finland participated in 39 skills with a total of 45 competitors. The team achieved a total of eight medals and eleven Medallions for Excellence. In the comparison between countries, Finland took shared seventh place among 46 countries.

Finland earned gold in Restaurant Service thanks to Miia Sironen from Jyväskylä and in Car Painting thanks to Taneli Sarajärvi from Oulu. The team that participated in the Manufacturing Team Challenge comprised brothers **Janne, Jani** and **Jouni Ahola** from the Oulu region. They won bronze.

The team’s award ceremony was held at the House of the Estates. The Finnish Fair Foundation continued the practice it had started two years earlier of presenting one-time

grants to the competitors who had medalled or earned a Medallion for Excellence. The grants were presented by **Pentti Kivinen** at an award ceremony held at the House of the Estates.

ENTHUSIASM FOR COMPETITION CONTINUES IN 2009 AND 2011

Finland also attended the WorldSkills Competitions held in 2009 and 2011 with large teams. Finland has 45 competitors in Calgary in 2009 and 46 competitors two years later

“Are all these people really Finns?”

The competition briefings in London were held in a large hall that was filled to capacity with Finns on both occasions. Eija Alhojärvi says that, to her surprise, Brazilian Technical Delegate and member of the Board of WorldSkills International **Roberto Spada** was sitting in the back row at the start of the second competition briefing. *“I thought that Roberto had gotten lost and wandered into the wrong session, so I rushed to him to tell him that the session was intended for Finns and that, unfortunately, all the speeches would therefore be primarily held in Finnish.”* Roberto smiled happily when answering: *“Yes, I know. I simply came to see whether all these people really are Finns.”*

in London. The Finnish team also performed well. In Calgary, the outcome was a total of five medals, of which two were gold, one was silver and another two were bronze. The gold medals were won by **Ville Rämö** in Bricklaying and **Elina Salminen** in Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing. In London, Finland collected a total of eight medals: five silver and three bronze. The grants distributed by the Finnish Fair Foundation were presented by **Veronika Krabbe** in 2009 and **Pentti Kivinen** in 2011.

Finland also boldly participated in new skills at both competitions. In Calgary, Finland participated in Aircraft Maintenance and Construction Metal Works, while in London it participated in Visual Merchandising and Creative Modelling.



Antti Ukkonen won silver in Aircraft Maintenance in London in 2011.

What added its own special flavour to the competition in Calgary for Finland was the active participation of Finnish Canadians. In the planning and implementation of the Skills Experience programme, the association received significant assistance from members of the Finnish Society of Calgary, particularly from the society's chairman, **Outi McEachern**. Other members of the society also participated in the programme. **Judith M. Romanchuk**, honorary consul for Finland in Canada, likewise participated in the competition events. **Raija Thomson**, a resident of Calgary, acted as the team's local guide.



Finland organised its first ever large joint stand at WorldSkills London 2011. Pictured in the photo is Finland's stand at WorldSkills Leipzig 2013.

AVERAGE MEDAL POINTS

Position	WorldSkills	Average Medal Points	Number of Competitors	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	Medallion For Excellence	Number of Countries
11	Helsinki	1.08	39	4	1	3	17	37
16	Shizuoka	0.82	38	2	0	6	11	46
18	Calgary	0.74	39	2	1	2	14	51
16	London	1.00	39	0	5	3	18	51
18	Leipzig	0.92	38	1	2	3	19	53

AVERAGE SCORE OF ALL COMPETITORS

Position	WorldSkills	Total Medal Points	Average Points	Number of Competitors	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	For Excellence	Number of Countries
11	Helsinki	42	501.77	39	4	1	3	17	37
16	Shizuoka	31	495.76	38	2	0	6	11	46
18	Calgary	29	496.79	39	2	1	2	14	51
16	London	39	502.53	39	0	5	3	18	51
18	Leipzig	35	503.24	38	1	2	3	19	53

The competition in London saw a record number of Finnish guests, almost 500. As the association could not hold traditional guided tours at the competition venue for such a large group of guests, it was decided that two separate info sessions would be held. **Pekka Huhtaniemi**, the Finnish ambassador to the United Kingdom, attended one of them. These sessions were attended by a total of 280 people.

In London, cooperation in communication was launched between Skills Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) and Häme University of Applied Sciences in order to market Finnish vocational skills and VET. Good experiences were gained with the joint exhibition stand. Many foreigners came to the booth to ask for information, which led to many discussions of different types during the competition days. “A good example of this was a representative of the City of Malmö who came to the stand and announced that they wished to discuss the arrangements of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 with me. I was reached and we had a long discussion. I later sent various pieces of detailed information to the individual in question regarding things, including the event’s funding and need for personnel. It turned out that Sweden, which had decided to apply for the right to organise EuroSkills2016, was making two cities, namely Gothenburg and Malmö, compete over the rights. Despite my good advice, this competition was won by Gothenburg,” Eija Alhojärvi says.

From Birmingham to Calgary

– two decades of positive development

Veijo Hintsanen has been involved in the creation of the Finnish system of vocational skills competitions since the very beginning. He served as Finland's technical delegate for 20 years and was vice chairman of the WSI Technical Committee and member of the Board of WSI for a total of eight years. Hintsanen has also had front-row seats to the evolution of WorldSkills Competitions and also the chance to influence it. This is how he recalls Finland's participation in WorldSkills Competitions in 2009.

THROUGH HUMILIATION TOWARDS HOSTING THE COMPETITION

When Finland joined IVTO in 1988, the organisation had a little over 20 members. This number includes members as small and exotic as Bermuda, New Guinea and Malta, which were ultimately only involved for a few years.

Nevertheless, at the time the core of the member countries was already formed by strong industrial countries, including the USA, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, Korea, Australia and Brazil, among others. During Finland's membership, the number of member countries has more than doubled, and there were 50 at the beginning of 2009.

The Finnish team has systematically grown in size over the years, going from eight competitors and four experts in Birmingham in 1989

to being one of the largest teams in Calgary in 2009, with 45 competitors and 39 experts.

Finland set out to attend the competition in Birmingham in 1989 with a very short preparation time, and no one had any idea of the level of the international skills competition and the preparation it required. All the preparations related to the competition were completed by a few individuals on the side without any additional resources.

The team was put together based on the knowledge of a small group of people, and they lacked sufficient knowledge of and competence in the training required for the test projects. Electronic files were not yet available, and even the international organisation did not have any full-time persons replying to the inquiries sent to it. Because of this, Finland did not get to see any test projects from previous competitions, and all preparations relied fully on gut instinct and

guesswork. The result was humiliating, but also very educational.

It was not until Finland entered the competition organisation that doors were opened to files and connections were opened to experts in other countries. Finland won its first medal in Amsterdam in 1991, after receiving guidance in training from all the way in Australia. The first gold medal was earned in the next competition, held in Taipei in 1993. Just like in Amsterdam, the skill in question was Bricklaying.

Until the competition held in Lyon in 1995, the size of the Finnish team remained at around ten. The competition in Lyon doubled the team's size. At the same time, Finland started being successful on a wider front. The number of medals and Medallions for Excellence increased from the two won at the previous competition to as many as seven. This positive trend also continued in the next competition, held in St Gallen in 1997, even though the team did not grow in size. The number of medals and Medallions for Excellence increased to thirteen, which was almost double compared to the previous number.

For the following two competitions, held in Montreal in 1999 and Seoul in 2001, Finland treaded water in terms of success, but was on a path of strong growth in terms of the team's size. Systematic increasing of the team's size had already been set as a goal earlier. One of the important reasons for this was the desire to host the competition in Finland one day. However, hosting the competition required familiarisation with most of the competition skills – only by

participating could one grasp the essence of the skills.

Finland's national team in Montreal in 1999 already comprised 30 competitors. During this competition, we decided amongst the Finnish delegates that we would apply for the right for Finland to host the competition in 2005. A fax regarding the matter was sent from Montreal to the Finnish Ministry of Education as a bulletin distributed to the media. Chief of Staff Vilho Hirvi was Finland's official delegate at the time, so the path to the Ministry of Education was short and direct.

THE WORLDSKILLS COMPETITION IN HELSINKI WAS A SUCCESS STORY

This decision meant the turning of a new page in the promotion of VET and vocational skills. The preparation period for WSC2005, with its many development projects, became a success story beyond compare in Finland. The entire VET sector was pulled into this development process when the responsibilities were divided by using incentives.

This positive trend also included the development of national Taitaja Competitions to a whole new level between 2000 and 2005. A new level was reached in terms of both quality and scope. At the same time, after a long period of trying, the media became involved in disseminating a positive message about professions and vocational skills. Their attractiveness began to improve as expected, and this trend is still continuing.

FINLAND STARTED TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION BETWEEN COMPETITION HOSTS

The decision on WSC2005 required thorough familiarisation with the skills in which Finland had not previously had competitors or experts. Because of this, at WorldSkills St Gallen 2003, Finland had a representative in all the skills that it anticipated would also be included in the competition programme for 2005. The national team comprised 43 competitors and almost as many experts. Additionally, Finland sent technical observers to Switzerland before the competition so that they familiarise themselves with the competition arena's construction phase.

The cooperation between the WorldSkills Helsinki 2005 competition organisation and the St Gallen competition organisation got off to a good start in 2003 and also continued in a very open spirit afterwards. For the first time in the history of the WorldSkills Competition, the organisers of successive competitions worked together and exchanged information actively. Since then, the same practice has also continued among new competition hosts. The expertise gained at the competition in Helsinki has been shared very openly with the competition organisers of WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007, WorldSkills Calgary 2009 and WorldSkills London 2011.

At WorldSkills St Gallen 2003, the Finnish team earned medals and Medallions for Excellence in a total of 23 skills. In other words, more than half of the competitors in the Finnish team achieved a peak performance. The pace picked up further at the home competition in 2005, when Finland

earned medals and Medallions for Excellence in a total of 25 skills. The results achieved at WorldSkills Shizuoka 2007 were not quite as good, even though the team was around the same size as it had been in Helsinki.

INFLUENCE IS USED TO RENEW COMPETITION SKILLS

Based on extensive international feedback, the competition in Helsinki had been the best competition of all time in terms of arrangements. In other words, Finland had achieved what it had sought with regard to expertise. In addition to all other positive things, the appreciation of Finland in WSI rose to the highest level thanks to the competition in Helsinki. We are listened to and appreciated.

As a result of training programmes, experience and demonstrations, there were Finns serving in positions of trust at all levels of WSI. The appreciation of the Finns' expertise is visible in things such as the number of chief experts who are in charge of skills. Finland had four chief experts and three deputy chief experts at WorldSkills Calgary 2009. This is well above our calculated share. Finland is also represented in the organisation's Secretariat and even its small elected Board of Directors.

In other words, Finland holds plenty of sway. It is being and has also previously been used to boost development. The range of skills featured at WorldSkills Competitions has gone through a major change during Finland's membership. Of the 37 skills featured in the competition held in 1989, 12 have been removed completely

and another 10 have been completely renewed. The competition programme in Calgary in 2009 included 24 skills that were not organised in Birmingham in 1989. The renewal efforts have been accelerated with strategic decisions by the organisation. The quality requirements for new skills have also been tightened.

The skills have evolved in accordance with both technological development and the expanded requirements of working life. Development has been particularly strong in skills related to ICT expertise. Another significant development is the expansion outside traditional technology. The increase in the importance of the service sector is also visible in the development of the range of skills.

Finland has strongly influenced the development of several skills: for example, Caring, Landscape Gardening, Beauty Therapy, Fashion Technology, Floristry and Offset Printing have been points of interest to Finns.

What is considered to be important today is developing competition activities and skills to better correspond to VET and the development of vocational skills in member countries and regions. In addition to the development of national competitions, the member countries and regions also benefit from WorldSkills cooperation with regard to skills requirements.

Despite the bleak start, Finland has risen from being a humble novice into being a successful expert and one of the strongest and most influential members of WSI. At the same time, the entire VET sector has been pushed into a positive cycle of development; the attractiveness of education and



Finland has been an active developer in Ladies' Dressmaking, among other things. The skill has been changed to meet modern requirements, and even its name is now Fashion Technology.

One of the culminations of the development of the skill was WSC2013, where Tytti Hongisto, a trained dressmaker and tailor, won gold in the skill. The deputy chief expert in the skill was Sari Karjalainen.

the appreciation of vocational skills are on the rise; and the equality of educational pathways have improved significantly. There are sure to be other explaining factors as well, but WorldSkills activities have, without a doubt, strongly influenced the attractiveness and internationalisation of both national Taitaja Competitions and VET. ■

A demand for EuroSkills Competitions

The roots of the reborn EuroSkills Competition dated back to the 2005 and the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki. Around that time, a meeting led by Skills Netherlands was held between the European member countries of WorldSkills for the purpose of mapping their willingness to deepen their cooperation and, above all, their attitudes towards a new European vocational skills competition. After this meeting, the project started progressing rapidly under the Netherlands' leadership and with the support of European Commissioner Ján Figel'. The first EuroSkills Competition was ready to be held in Rotterdam in the Netherlands after only three years.

Finland participated actively in the work of the working group set up in Helsinki, even though the attitudes towards this new competition were not all positive. Eija Alhojärvi recalls that several events were held in 2006 in which the association and education providers considered the advantages and disadvantages of a EuroSkills Competition. "On the other hand, there was a strong opinion that active participation in the working group's work was necessary, as it was the only way to influence the upcoming competition," Alhojärvi recalls.

In addition to the Netherlands and Finland, the preparatory working group also included Austria, the United Kingdom, Portugal and Ireland from the start. However, the number of participants increased quickly, and by the end of 2006 there were 15 countries involved in the group. The enthusiasm among the group was enormous. "It was great to be involved in brainstorming and building something completely new and meaningful from the start," recalls Eija Alhojärvi, who participated in the group's work from the start. "My colleague, Executive Director of YouthSkills Sweden **Claes Frankhammar**, said upon his retirement that the preparation of EuroSkills was the most fun work that he had been able to participate in during his career. This also reflects well how the rest of us felt," Alhojärvi says.

The preparatory phase involved innovative, deep and partly heated discussions. The group considered the needs of European working life, compared European VET systems and mapped national vocational skills competitions and their goals. The relationship with WorldSkills International and the WorldSkills Competition was also cause for much consideration. Both the rules of the soon-to-be-founded organisation and the competition itself were prepared at the same time.

It was decided that the activities of the European Skills Promotion Organisation would be closely linked to common European goals and the EU's VET policy. After nearly two years of preparations, the organisation's rules were ready to be approved. The organisation was officially founded on 2 January 2007 and registered in the Netherlands. The founders named in the document were Skills Netherlands and UK Skills – the same organisations that, in the 1990s, were also involved in founding the first EuroSkills organisation, which was later disbanded.

The founding document also mentions the first members of the organisation's Board: **Mr. Joannes Wilhelmus Theodorus de Goey, Mr. Kevin Glynn Wood, Mrs Eija Irmeli Alhojärvi, Mr. Stefan Prachl and Mr Antonio Jose Ascensao Caldeira.**

The preparation of the first competition progressed rapidly. In 2006, the organisation completed a tentative list of skills, the competition rules and a model for Technical Descriptions. While the competition was being prepared, it also had to be simultaneously marketed. An example of this work was the seminar intended for new EU Member States in particular that was held in Bolzano, Italy, in November 2006.

The organisation's first General Assembly was held in Budapest in September 2007. In addition to the 17 European countries that had already

joined the organisation, the assembly was also attended by eight observer countries. At the end of 2007, the number of member countries in the organisation was 27.

There was a clear link between the competitions and EU policy. The competitions were based on the needs of European working life, which was visible in both the range of skills and their implementation. It was a conscious decision to build competition skills that, for the most part, deviated from the skills at WorldSkills Competitions. One ambitious goal was to include many team skills that would measure skills required in actual working life and that would be interesting to spectators. The first competition, which was held in Rotterdam, featured a great many team skills. However, many of them were surprisingly expensive to both organise and participate in. Furthermore, assessing team skills proved to be relatively difficult. Because of this, the number of team skills has decreased, competition after competition. Additionally, it turned out that the European needs with regard to competition skills were not as coherent as originally thought. Examples of this include the originally listed skills that are important to some countries but of secondary importance from the point of view of e.g. Finland, such as Bicycle Repair, Horseshoeing and Hairdressing for African Hair. Over the years, the range of competition skills and their implementation have also drawn closer to WorldSkills practices. The Memorandum of Understanding between these two organisations was signed in 2009.



The goals set by different countries for competition activities were clearly visible in the preparatory discussions. The number of medals granted was discussed at length. Some of the countries, with the Netherlands leading the way, supported the idea of granting medals generously based on the principle: “the more medals, the more publicity.” In contrast, other countries, including Finland, were of the opinion that granting medals too generously would lower their value. The Netherlands, which organised the first EuroSkills Competition in 2008, implemented its own medal policy. The Dutch had commissioned a pile of cheap plastic medals that were to be granted to the winner of each skill for each day. The members of the

The Finnish participants in the Robotics competition in Rotterdam were Anniina Peltonen and Kalle Häkkänen from Jyväskylä. The pair took second place in the competition. Anniina was the youngest participant in the EuroSkills Competition and also the only female competitor in her skill.

Board of the EuroSkills organisation had been appointed as medal presenters. “I was supposed to present these day-specific medals in Floristry together with **Simon Bartley** from UK Skills,” Eija Alhojärvi recalls. “In accordance with the instructions we’d received, we arrived outside the barriers of the Floristry workshop with the plastic medals in good time on the morning of the second competition day. However, the chief expert of the skill informed us that they

had no time for medal ceremonies and urged us to come back in the afternoon. When we tried to come and present the medals for the second time, the chief expert told us that they, in fact, didn't want these medals at all. We didn't make a third attempt to present the medals, and they were completely forgotten at the next competition," Alhojärvi says.

EUROSKILLS ROTTERDAM 2008 WAS A MAJOR SUCCESS FOR THE FINNS

The competition held in Rotterdam in the Netherlands in September 2008 was a success. It included 47 Official and 5 Demonstration Skills. Of this number, 21 were implemented as team skills. There were as many as 29 participating countries and 419 competitors. One of the most important goals of EuroSkills Competitions is to attract the European countries that are not yet involved in vocational skills competitions. There were several countries like this in Rotterdam: Turkey, Malta, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania. The participation of this many new countries caused its own challenges to the competition organisers.

The greatest challenge in the organisation of individual skills in Rotterdam was caused by Building Construction, which combined four construction sector skills and involved five-person teams. Finnish Technical Delegate Hannu Immonen acted as jury president of Building Construction. "Teams comprised a bricklayer, wall and floor tiler, carpenter, metal



Caring was introduced as a competition skill at Finland's initiative. Finns organised this skill at EuroSkills Rotterdam 2008. The skill organiser was Oulu Vocational College.

roofer and general foreman. These five-person teams had to agree upon the work, materials and other factors related to the organisation of work amongst themselves. Both individual performances and the work of the team as a whole were assessed in the competition. The skill was won by a team that had competitors from five different countries," Immonen says.

Finland was actively involved in the competition's arrangements. It had put forward an initiative to organise Electronics and Caring and also participated in preparing and implementing these skills. Oulu Vocational College was in charge of Caring, while Turku Vocational Institute took care of Electronics based on the turnkey principle.

The workshop supervisor and chief expert in Electronics was Lecturer and Project Manager **Olavi Lähteinen** from Turku Vocational Institute. For years, the skill had been developed

through the Modern Vocational Training Pilot (ModVoc) coordinated by Turku Vocational Institute. The goal of this three-year-long Leonardo da Vinci Programme was to carry out Europe-led benchmarking of working life and transfer the skills requirements of working life to the curricula of educational institutions. The project was continued during the period 2008–2010 under the name European Electronics



Director General of the Ministry of Education Sakari Karjalainen presented awards to Tomi Leinonen and Antti Rantaeskola, the most successful competitors in Electronics.

Workshop Team (EEWT) / Transfer of Innovation. According to **Matti Haapanen**, who coordinated the projects, the project's biggest success was making Electronics substantially more working life oriented.

Finland attended the competition in Rotterdam with a relatively large team that comprised 29 competitors and 12 experts. Finland had good success in the competition. The outcome was

four gold, one silver and four bronze medals. The gold medals were won by **Mari Lehtonen** and **Tuuli Aho** (Caring), **Olli Janatuinen**, **Matti Neuvonen**, **Niko Ruotsalainen** and **Eljas Alakulppi** (Office ICT Team), **Antti Rantaeskola** and **Tomi Leinonen** (Electronics) as well as **Ville Huusko** (Building Carpenter).

The goal set for Finland's participation in EuroSkills activities was the promotion of European VET cooperation. This goal was advanced at the first competition by having four students of Vaasa Vocational Institute complete their on-the-job learning periods by assisting the responsible Dutch educational institution in the implementation of the Restaurant Service skill. Additionally, four students of Turku Vocational Institute completed an international on-the-job learning period under their teacher's supervision by transporting the luggage of the Finnish competitors to and from Rotterdam. The on-the-job learning periods were funded partly with separate funding from the Finnish National Agency for Education as well as funding from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

The best competitors from the countries that participated in EuroSkills 2008 were awarded in an event held in conjunction with an unofficial meeting of the EU's Education and Youth Council in Bordeaux on 28 November 2008. The awards were presented by the ministers who participated in the meeting. The



Finland's Office ICT Team – Jukka Suhonen (left), Teemu Mikkonen, Daniel Mononen and Markus Lintuola – at EuroSkills Lisbon 2010.

Finnish competitors who were awarded were the pair of competitors in Electronics, namely **Tomi Leinonen** and **Antti Rantaeskola**, and the awards were presented by Director General of the Ministry of Education **Sakari Karjalainen**. Rantaeskola was also one of three competitors who had been chosen to speak at the international seminar held in conjunction with the council.

France also held a second event in 2008 to which EuroSkills competitors were invited. This youth event, which was part of the programme for France's presidency of the Council of the European Union, was held in Paris in October.

The event was attended by the entire Finnish national team. The presidency bore all the costs.

SECOND EUROSILLS COMPETITION IN LISBON IN DECEMBER 2010

Minister for Foreign Affairs **Alexander Stubb** wrote in his blog on 19 November 2010: "Lisbon will host a bunch of summits this weekend. The first will be a NATO summit. It will be followed by a summit of the NATO-Russia Council. Next will be an Afghanistan summit

in which Finland will also participate. Finally, the EU and the USA will convene for their own summit.” What the Finnish minister for foreign affairs forgot to mention was that, immediately after these summits, the Lisbon Exhibition and Congress Centre, Feira Internacional de Lisboa, began preparing for another type of top meeting, i.e. EuroSkills 2010. The event was originally intended to take place from 23 to 26 November 2010, but it had to be postponed at short notice to a later date that did not coincide with the summits mentioned by Stubb.

Portugal prepared for the competition for a couple of years. Many things had changed during these two years, not the least of which was the economic situation in Portugal. However, the competition was seen as an important national project in Portugal and it was successfully organised, partly thanks to funding from the European Social Fund. The economic situation was ultimately hardly visible in the competition itself. The arrangements were excellent and the competition had, under Portugal’s supervision, taken a giant leap forward from the first competition held two years earlier. The competition was organised largely according to the “Helsinki model”, with local vocational colleges bearing the main responsibility for organising the skills. Thanks to the organisation of school visits, the number of visitors at the event increased to 62,000.

Of course, there are always things hidden under the surface at major events that the general

public does not see. In Lisbon, this meant, above all, the arrangements for certain skills, mostly supplies of materials. In some skills, the competitors had to wait for materials in order to be able to continue competing. In Landscape Gardening, the weather conditions further confused the situation. The seedlings brought to the competition venue were pulled apart by a storm, and the competitors were eventually packed into a van in the middle of the competition and taken to a nursery to buy more seedlings. Of course, skill-specific problems also meant more work and long days for the experts. What was particularly gratifying was that the competition organiser and delegates and experts from other countries gave grateful feedback on the work of the Finnish experts throughout the competition.

Finland contribution to the arrangements was also significant at this second EuroSkills Competition. In addition to the skills Electronics and Caring, the Finns were also responsible for implementing Entrepreneurship. The internationalisation of VET was promoted in many ways. There were two Finnish teachers working in the competition office and, through this work, familiarising themselves with the Competition Information System, which was also used in Taitaja Competitions. Finnish logistic students were responsible for transporting the toolboxes of the Finnish competitors to Lisbon under their teachers’ supervision. A total of eight Finnish vocational college students and nine teachers completed an international exchange period in conjunction

with the event. All of this meant that there were almost a hundred Finnish students and teachers learning new things and deepening their own skills by working for the event in one way or another. This figure does not include the roughly 200 Finnish guests at the competition who, during the three competition days, explored the competition, participated in seminars and exchanged knowledge,



Calling cards of the Finnish national team.

experiences and thoughts with their Finnish and European colleagues.

The Finnish team was very successful, earning a total of 23 medals. Gold was won by **Jussi Holsti** and **Ville Viitala** (Electronics), **Jan Kakko** (Metal Roofer), **Eeri Sivonen** (Goldsmith), **Daniel Mononen** (Microsoft Specialist), **Teemu Mikkonen** (Linux Specialist), **Drazen Dodik** (Web Designer) and **Susanna Virtanen** (Print Technician). The Finnish Office ICT Team (**Jukka Suhonen**, **Markus Lintuala**, Daniel

Mononen and **Teemu Mikkonen**) also won gold for their joint performance.

CHALLENGES POSED BY A FORMULA 1 RACE TRACK IN SPA FRANCOCHAMPS, BELGIUM IN 2012

EuroSkills 2012 is remembered, above all, for its interesting yet challenging venue. The worsening economic situation in Europe and the inexperience of the Belgian competition organisation posed their own problems to the arrangements. Belgium had not organised an international vocational skills competition since 1969, and its experiences of national competitions were also inexistent.

The economic situation affected both the organisation of skills and the numbers of participating countries and competitors. Due to the economic situation of the member countries and the expected decrease in the number of participants, the rules were changed at a preparatory meeting held in spring 2012 in such a way that a skill could be organised even with less than six participants. The number of expensive team skills had already been reduced earlier. The economic situation was also visible in the number of the competition organiser's cooperation partners and as difficulties in obtaining all the machinery, equipment and materials required for the skills.

Almost the entire Board of Skills Finland participated in a EuroSkills 2012 study trip

to Spa Francorchamps, Belgium, that was intended for the Board members. The goal of the study trip was to familiarise the Board members with international vocational skills competitions and continue the association's strategy work. A working meeting was held in conjunction with the trip. Its aim was to brainstorm for a strategic intent for the association's core functions in 2020 as well as to consider the association's funding, organisation, partnerships and the launch of quality assurance work, among other things.

“Spectating the EuroSkills 2012 Competition at a Formula 1 track inspired the Board members to engage in a spirited brainstorming session at the working meeting. When discussions progressed to strategic intent for international skills competitions in 2020, Hannu Immonen said that the year 2020 would mark the 15th anniversary of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, which would make it a good time to hold an international skills competition in Finland. The Board members were excited about the idea and concluded that the EuroSkills Competition would have to be brought to Finland in 2020. It would be a superb culmination for Skills Finland's 2020 strategy, give a boost to the development of VET in Finland and provide an excellent opportunity to further EuroSkills Competitions. The spark that ignited at Spa ultimately led to the association writing down the goal of holding a EuroSkills Competition in Finland in 2020 in its strategy,” Seija Rasku recalls.

The Finnish team of 40 competitors achieved a total of 14 medals. Gold medals were won by **Eve Korhonen** and **Juulia Peuhkuri** as a team in Fashion Design and Product Development, **Veera Varpa** in Landscape Garden Design and **Tanja Pöyhönen** in Restaurant Service. Additionally, Pöyhönen won the team competition in the Cook & Serve category together with cook **Niina Jaakkola**.

Training of top experts continues

The ESF-funded training project “Vocational Skills Training of Top Experts at Companies” (HUVA I and II), which was launched in 2000, continued after the home competition, until the end of 2007. The aim was to build an established and evolving training system for excellence in skills in Finland. The project’s outcomes had been tested in earnest in Helsinki. The next legs were the WorldSkills Competition and Abilympics in 2007.

Training relied heavily on good practices created in previous years: utilisation of the extensive training network, a three-stage training model and tried and tested training content areas. The aim was to improve the skills of young people who work at companies in such a way that, through training, they grow into top-level experts for companies in a short period of time. Excellence in skills was pursued by building a training system for use by educational institutions and companies. One of the goals of this system was to increase the motivation of young people for continuous self-development and development of their own work. Sister projects that were similar to HUVA in terms of their principles and goals included HuvaKarjala, HuvaSavo and HuvaOulu. The network also included the AKVA project of Häme University of Applied Sciences. Its special task was to develop excellence in skills by means of education and research.

The project was also utilised in increasing awareness of excellence in skills and Skills activities. In 2006, a new concept was developed for presenting the activities as various public events. In addition to an actual information stand, the concept included work demonstrations and contests held for the public in conjunction with them. The concept was implemented successfully at several different fairs, such as Next Step and the European Mobility Road Show held at Narinkka Square by the Ministry of Labour.

When the HUVA project concluded at the end of 2007, it involved 368 organisations, of which 289 were companies of different sizes, 38 were educational institutions and 41 were other



organisations, such as foundations, unions and associations. There were 45 different trades involved in the project. Of these, 39 aimed for WorldSkills Competitions, while another four aimed for the Abilympics and one aimed for the Nordic Championship in Transport Technology. One of the skills involved in the project did not aim for participation in competitions.

From 2008 to 2010, the project's name was HUKI (Competitiveness with Excellence in Skills Training). It continued the development of the training system with the aim of compiling and further developing the good teaching and learning methods created in training and disseminating them as widely as possible for use by companies and vocational colleges. This was carried out in practice through the preparation of a PSP (personal study plan) model by combining tried and tested training practices developed for various skills. Two publications were completed during the project: The Mental Training Manual and On the Way to the Top – Tools for Excellence in Skills Training. These publications were also translated into English. The former was distributed as a gift to all the official and technical delegates of member countries and regions at WSC2011. Another goal of the project was an international comparison of excellence in skills training, and an expert exchange project called Excellence in Skills was built with funding from the EU's Leonardo da Vinci Programme to complement it. The primary participants in the exchange were the skill managers of Skills Finland, and the locations of the exchanges were South Tyrol in Italy, the United Kingdom and France.



Competitors and experts at a training camp in 2009.

The third and final ESF-funded training project, “KILTA” (Competitiveness and Quality for Vocational Education Through Excellence in Skills) was launched in 2011. This project focused particularly on the promotion of the skills of teachers and workplace instructors as well as their capability to train top experts. Another key goal was increasing the number of companies involved in the activities.

The project activities launched in 2000 have significantly advanced the realisation of the association's goals. The projects have resulted in the building of a skills training system in Finland, practical testing of the system by training more than 200 young people for vocational skills competitions, and dissemination of the proven methods for use by vocational colleges and businesses. The projects have been of paramount importance in the funding of the association's activities, but their influence in building networks and cooperation has perhaps been even greater and farther-reaching. The projects and their outcomes have even garnered interest abroad.

Skills Trainers' Academy is founded

From the start, Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), particularly its School of Professional Teacher Education, has been a strong operator in the networks in which activities related to vocational skills competitions have been developed in Finland.

Hämeenlinna Teacher Training College of Vocational Schools was already involved in the organisation of the first Taitaja Competition, which was held in Hämeenlinna in 1988.

A project called Improvement of Vocational Skills through Coaching and Competition (AKVA), which was administered by HAMK, operated alongside Skills Finland's training development project (HUVA) from 2000 to 2007. It focused on promoting training and competition activities by means of training and research. Another project that was important for Skills activities was the Attractiveness of the Mechanical, Metal and Electrical Industries (KOMES) project carried out from 2000 to 2003. The Taitaja⁹ Competition was created based on its ideas.

Since 2001, HAMK has produced many important publications related to vocational skills competitions. They have been used

to disseminate information on competition activities and their benefits both in Finland and abroad. HAMK has played a particularly significant role in the promotion of competition activities for people with special needs by means of both publications and training.

The founding of HAMK Skills Trainers' Academy in 2008 was a natural continuation to this work. The Academy's fundamental mission is to promote excellence in vocational skills by means of training and research. There were four focus areas in the activities: training of competition and training experts, dissemination and instilling of good practices that promote excellence in skills, internationalisation of competition and training skills through important and export activities as well as research and development activities that support excellence in vocational skills.

Businesses commit to competition activity

Until 2005, the responsibility for building cooperation with businesses was left to vocational colleges, while each competition organiser was responsible for their own official partners. However, strengthening cooperation with businesses was necessary for the implementation of WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

Hannele Kokotti examined the commitment of Finnish businesses to vocational skills competitions in her licentiate thesis, “Excellence in Skills and Attractiveness Through Commitment” (2004). The study focused on the businesses that were involved in the activities aimed at competitions held in 2003, namely the Taitaja Competition and the WorldSkills Competition in St Gallen. Kokotti emphasises that the corporate social responsibility thinking of businesses was a relatively new thing at the time, and only a few businesses sought to determinedly follow it in their operations. All in all, the number of businesses involved was relatively low. They did not yet know how to extensively utilise competition activities.

After WorldSkills Helsinki 2005, many of the official partners also wanted to continue the cooperation in the Taitaja Competition. The Taitaja cooperation concept was revised,



In the photo, from the left: Chairman of the Board of North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium and Rector of Kontiolahti Upper Secondary School Kari Väkeväinen, Director of the municipal consortium Ilkka Pirskanen and Chairman of the Council Timo Elo. Photo: Markku Tasala

starting from the Taitaja Competition in 2006: Skills Finland is responsible for agreements with official partners, while the organisers of the Taitaja Competition is responsible for obtaining partners for each skill and skill category.

SUCCESS IN CREATING PARTNERSHIPS IN NORTH KARELIA

Together with its cooperation partners, the North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium (PKKY) organised

Taitaja Competitions in Joensuu in 2007 and 2013. In 2007, there were a total of 233 corporate partners, of which nine were official partners. For Taitaja2013, the number of corporate partners was 350, of which 24 were official partners. Both Taitaja Competitions in Joensuu brought the entire region together for a joint endeavour in an excellent way.

After the Taitaja2007 event, Chairman of the Board of PKKY and Rector of Kontiolahti Upper Secondary School **Kari Väkeväinen** praised the strong commitment of the corporate partners to the common goals. “It was immediately clear to everyone that we had a very narrow resource base for the organisation of such a massive event here in North Karelia. We’d visited previous Taitaja events, so we knew very well that in order for us to succeed in this project, the participation and contribution of every actor was important.”

In the opinion of Director of PKKY Ilkka Pirskanen, the project was characterised by realism and the trust between cooperation partners from the start. What came as a positive surprise to the organisers was the high demand for cooperation agreements in the most expensive group.

In Pirskanen’s opinion, the lack of problems in obtaining partners was, above all, due to a good product. The organisers also succeeded in choosing the right way to speak to companies. “We never started a discussion by talking about corporate social responsibility. We presented the businesses with an advantageous deal. We



Marja-Terttu Tanttinen from the Technology Industries of Finland has been involved in Taitaja Competitions from the beginning.

stated that by participating in the improvement of the attractiveness of VET, the business would be able to influence the quality and availability of their own labour in the long run.”

Pirskanen points out that the Taitaja Competition is difficult to sell with brochures. “You have to offer people the chance to experience it.” Because of this, the organisers began laying the groundwork years earlier by systematically taking corporate guests to Taitaja Competitions: first to Seinäjoki in 2004, then to Tampere, Turku and finally to the WorldSkills Competition in Helsinki in 2005. Seeing the competition in person made an impression on the corporate leaders. Chairman of the Council of PKKY Timo Elo emphasises that participation in competition activities is part of the municipal consortium’s strategy, which

involves incorporating quality culture into teaching activities.

THE TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRIES OF FINLAND HAVE BEEN INVOLVED FROM THE START

Marja-Terttu Tanttinen, an expert from the Technology Industries of Finland, was already involved in vocational skills competitions during the first Taitaja Competition. At the time, she was working as head of department at the Union of Finnish Metal Industry Employers, where she was in charge of VET for her own union and the Federation of Finnish Metal and Engineering Industries. “We did not participate in the planning of the competition, but we were otherwise actively involved in showcasing the mechanical and metal sector. For a very long time, it has been important to us that we secure the availability of professionals in this sector.”

In Tanttinen’s opinion, many things have remained unchanged with regard to educational needs since the start of the 1980s. Basic skills, manual machining and manual skills remain important. Previously, training for the sector more clearly produced turners, platers and welders. Today, the training has expanded to machining. “A new dimension is created by the rise in the level of automation, the increase in the requirements for measurement technology, and new materials. All of that needs to be incorporated into those three years of training.”

The Technology Industries of Finland have considered the modularity of studies to be important in the structure of studies. “It makes it possible for students to establish their own profile. They can add apprenticeship training on top of that, for example. Or they can consider a further vocational qualification or specialist vocational qualification completed through on-the-job learning. When I talk about intensifying cooperation between businesses and vocational colleges, it is not only limited to the building of basic training. We can also already start building careers during the students’ studies, where possible,” Tanttinen says.

According to Tanttinen, supporting vocational skills competitions allows technology industries to communicate their need for world-class experts. It also makes it possible to strengthen long-term cooperation between vocational colleges and businesses.

The Technology Industries of Finland signed a long-term official partnership agreement with Skills Finland in 2007. Tanttinen assessed this partnership in Skills Finland’s Newsletter after the major event in Espoo by saying that the experience was a positive one, even though the first time was a practice run for everyone involved. Taitaja cooperation was widely visible in the communications of the Technology Industries of Finland, both online and in printed media. According to Tanttinen, the communication about the Taitaja Competition in Vaasa in spring 2009 succeeded well, and

businesses in the industry garnered visibility, particularly in local mainstream newspapers.

Through an official partnership, the partners seek to make their cooperation long term. The key goal of the Technology Industries of Finland is to garner as much visibility in the media as possible.

Precisely for visibility reasons, businesses in the sector are more interested in supporting Taitaja Competitions than WorldSkills Competitions. However, Tanttinen points out that the Technology Industries of Finland Centennial Foundation has supported the Finnish national team with a considerable amount of money



Jarmo Huuhtanen from Electrolux Professional has served as a judge in the Restaurant Cook skill at several Taitaja Competitions and as chief judge at WorldSkills Helsinki 2005.

in several different years. The Technology Industries of Finland has not, for the time being, been interested in sponsoring EuroSkills Competitions, but potential cooperation in the

future is greatly affected by “the direction in which the event evolves and the status which it will gain”.

ELECTROLUX PROFESSIONAL OY – COOPERATION SINCE 2005

Electrolux began cooperating with Skills Finland at the Taitaja Competition held in Turku in spring 2005. **Jarmo Huuhtanen** from Electrolux Professional Oy’s commercial kitchen product line believes that Turku was a good place to learn the role that was implemented on a much larger scale in Helsinki. “The competition in Helsinki was a big investment for us in terms of money. It was also a significant event for the global marketing of Electrolux.”

Even before Turku, Electrolux had experience in competition activities through Chef of the Year competitions and Scandinavian cooking competitions. For Huuhtanen personally, it has been more important to participate in the competition activities organised by Skills Finland because “there we can encourage young people to learn a profession, develop their vocational skills and train young people into top professionals”.

When, after its experiences in Turku and Helsinki, Electrolux learned about the global nature of vocational skills competitions and their close connections with VET providers, the company made the decision to provide

more support to the competitions and use them as an important marketing channel. “Since the competition in Helsinki, we have been supplying competition kitchens to Taitaja Competitions. In cooking skills, we have been involved in two skills: Restaurant Cook and Catering Cook. The kitchen used by waiters has also been supplied by us,” Huuhtanen says.

The Confectioner/Pastry Cook skill does not fall under Electrolux’s line of business in the same way, as the company only markets a small number of products for this area. In the future, the company will seek to focus more on its own strengths. “We have supplied washing machines and dryers for Cleaning Services. We will continue to sponsor this skills in the future.”

As a global company, Electrolux is also interested in competition activities at the world championship level, but in order to participate in them, it must have business activity in the country or continent that is hosting the competition. The company did not have an organisation in Japan that it could have acted through. However, Electrolux has sponsored competitors every year to make it possible for competitors in the company’s “own skills” to make it WorldSkills Competitions.

In Huuhtanen’s opinion, the agreement system between Skills Finland and its official partners is functional, even though visibility may have left something to be desired at times. Nevertheless, the agreement system is flexible and beneficial

to both parties: Electrolux has always gained value for its investment. “As the main sponsor, we sometimes wish that Skills Finland also had a more visible nationwide presence in between competitions in order for the public to become more familiar with the organisation. However, the best marketing for us is that the competition is carried out using our products. We also bring our own customers to competitions in order to tell them that we are involved in supporting young people in a valuable way.”

Huuhtanen says that he gained a good grasp of competition activities and skill requirements after serving as a judge at several Taitaja Competitions. He served as a judge in Tampere in 2006 and then as chief judge already in the next competitions in Joensuu and Espoo. In Huuhtanen’s opinion, vocational skills have evolved in giant leaps in the industry, just as they have in the competition skills related to the industry. “The appreciation of the industry has skyrocketed, particularly with regard to the work of restaurant cooks. This feels good to me, as I personally have a background as a restaurant cook.”

FESTO ENGAGES IN BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The first world championship level competition in Mechatronics was held between two countries at the Youth Skills Olympics in Amsterdam in 1991. Since then, Mechatronics has become one of the largest and most popular skills at WorldSkills



Kim Holm from Festo has been involved in these activities for many years. In 1993, he served as an expert in the WorldSkills Competition in Taiwan, and since then he has represented Festo at several competitions. Holm has been involved in the development of national Mechatronics competitions in different countries and has helped new countries get involved in WorldSkills activities.

Competitions. The international company Festo has been supporting Mechatronics competitions since the beginning. The next competition, held in Taiwan in 1993, featured competitors from seven countries, including Finland. **Kim Holm**, who was working as a training manager at Festo at the time, served as the Finnish expert in the skill for the first time at this competition.

Festo trains industrial professionals around the world, but it also develops training systems

and plans training programmes together with teaching professionals. For the success of the company and its customers, it is important that the professionals in the industry are able to utilise the technology manufactured by the company. Mechatronics combines different areas of cutting-edge technology: mechanicals, electronics and information technology. In addition to technical capabilities, succeeding in this skill requires teamwork and interaction skills.

According to Kim Holm, Festo has benefited from competition activities in many ways. They have supported the company's recruitment process: for example, three competitors were hired by Festo on the spot at the Youth Skills Olympics held in Lyon in 1995. On the other hand, comments received from people who have served as experts at competitions have provided important direction for the development of equipment.

Festo considers cooperation with VET providers around the world to be important. Since 1995, the company has organised trips for its customers to WorldSkills events. In the last few years, these trips have had roughly 80 participants, of whom some 15 have been Finns. According to Holm, the trips take the participants to visit not only the competition but also local schools and industry. "Discussions with representatives of other countries have also been beneficial. A typical participant is a teacher, head of department or education official."



Mikko Kivelä and Esa Hirvonen represented Finland in Mechatronics at WorldSkills St Gallen 2003.

Festo is a company in cutting-edge technology that is in constant need of new experts. For this reason, the company has also set out to organise national competitions in Mechatronics in the Baltic countries. In 2002, 2004 and 2006, Festo organised the Baltic Mechatronic Games, which had participants from all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea, with the exception of Germany and Denmark. After the start of EuroSkills Competitions, it was no longer deemed necessary to hold a separate competition. Holm impresses that these competitions functioned as a good lead-in to EuroSkills and WorldSkills Competitions.

Festo has also been an active cooperation partner in the Taitaja Competition, which was featured Mechatronics as a competition skill since 2001.

ABLOY OY'S JOENSUU FACTORY PARTICIPATES IN THE TAITAJA COMPETITION

The Joensuu factory of ABLOY Oy is one of the largest industrial employers in North Karelia and employs roughly 850 people in the municipality. Vice President of the factory **Jouni Pitko** says that they had strong and current reasons to become an official partner at the first Taitaja event in Joensuu, which took place in 2007.

ABLOY did not become involved in the Taitaja Competition in pursuit of visibility for marketing its products. The primary goal was to

support both an event that was important to the economy of North Karelia and North Karelian youths. Furthermore, the company turned 100 in 2008, so it was natural to celebrate the company's centennial project by participating in the joint regional effort in an impressive way.

ABLOY's agreement with the Taitaja Competition was spread out over a three-year period. Organising the large-scale event required lengthy arrangements, which were completed very successfully in Jouni Pitko's opinion. He chaired the regional steering group, which included representatives of the municipal education and training consortium, university of applied sciences, university and business community. "The North Karelian business community was fully involved. With half a dozen corporate leaders in the steering group, it was difficult to try and claim that anything had been done wrong."

In the early 2000s, when a shortage of labour could already be anticipated, the qualifications that prepared students for professions in the metal industry were still very unpopular among young people. According to Pitko, their industry and the North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium had a common concern: one was not getting enough employees, while the other was not getting enough students. "Our company hasn't had many difficulties in finding labour. But because our vital component suppliers, i.e. subcontractors, have had difficulties with recruiting people, it has also become our problem."



Vice President of Door Closers Jouni Pitko from ABLOY Oy acted as a representative of the official partner at Taitaja2007 in Joensuu.

The company has sought to solve the future shortage in labour that will result from the retirement of the large age groups with measures and programmes that have been targeted at ageing employees on the one hand and at young people completing vocational studies on the other hand. ABLOY decided to participate, with a greater contribution, in improving the image of the industry in the eyes of young people. Since the mid-2000s, the Joensuu factory has had sponsored classes formed of students aiming for a vocational upper secondary qualification in machining at North Karelia Vocational College.

In practice, this sponsorship means that the company organises on-the-job learning periods for North Karelian youths at its Joensuu factory. Staff from the factory have also visited to tell

students about the ground rules of working life. They have also participated in developing the training programme to ensure that the training meets the needs of working life as well as possible. “There will be competition for skilled labour in the next few years. It would be short-sighted of the company not to prepare for a shortage of labour despite the temporary downward trend.”

ABLOY received great visibility at the Taitaja Competition in Joensuu in newspapers as well as on television and radio. In Pitko’s opinion, the positive effects also extended to the company’s own operations. “In addition to our company’s positive image being visible externally, it was also important that we convey the right message in our internal communications. We wanted our staff to understand that we must look at young people in a different way than before. If we invest in young people’s well-being now, we are also strengthening the backbone of our own organisation in the future.”

According to Pitko, working life in Finland will always require top experts, and the evolution into one is always a long process. “Studying provides young people with the basic capabilities that they then set out to refine through on-the-job learning. In working life, they face problems that they must solve in order to further perfect their skills. If a young person has a competitive background, it is a strong merit, as we know that they have made it through tough screening.

We are not only talking about skills but also mental fortitude. We can be sure that someone like this will succeed in anything.”

Research and publication activities garner international attention

The Ministry of Education and Culture had been funding research concerning excellence in skills since 2007. The Research Centre for Vocational and Professional Education (AKTKK) at the University of Tampere has been in charge of the research, with **Petri Nokelainen** as the Principal Investigator. Skills Finland and its experts have provided researchers with support in the implementation of the practical stages of their research, particularly in relation to the gathering of research data in conjunction with national team camps and the presentation of research results in key VET forums.

The target group of the studies comprised competitors who participated in WorldSkills Competitions (Shizuoka 2007, Calgary 2009, London 2011) as well as trainers and working life representatives. The studies have particularly aimed to identify factors that affect exceptional development of manual skills as wisely as possible with regard to the home and educational institution, vocational skills competitions and competitors' personality traits, for example.

The first part of the series of studies, "Modeling Vocational Excellence" (MoVE), was carried out from 2007 to 2008. In addition to Petri

Nokelainen, it involved **Pekka Ruohotie**, Professor in VET and the project's leader, and Special Researcher **Kari Korpelainen** (PhD).

In the study, the researchers interviewed young top experts as well as their trainers, parents and employers. The views of the different groups of respondents did not differ from each other.

The study produced information on factors that affect the development of excellence in vocational skills and the connections of excellence in vocational skills to working life. The study resulted in a model that describes the qualities of a young top professional and the factors that affect the development of excellence in vocational skills as well as an interview framework and questionnaire form that operationalise the model. The study also yielded information on the personality traits of young top experts (strengths, motivation, self-regulation, sociability) and the expectations they have for their future employer.

The young people who were the most successful in competitions believed that their success was explained by their efforts. They considered studying new things to be meaningful, and they had an internal motivation stronger than

an external motivation for studying new things. The competitors who were the least successful believed more in their own abilities as an explanation for their success than in trying hard. They did not consider studying new things to be as meaningful as the young people who were the most successful in competitions. Their external and internal motivation was also lower. Additionally, they were slightly more nervous about competitive situations.

Both top experts and their trainers emphasised the significance of challenging work duties offered by employers. Young top experts expected their employer to encourage them to develop their skills independently and reward them for it. In their interviews, the working life representatives also referred to challenges, customer contacts and learning opportunities.

Factors related to the environment welded the last seam in a top expert's career and affected their decision to enter a certain trade. These factors included family, the parents' educational background, friends, place of residence, educational institution and teacher, among other things. Nokelainen states that the element of coincidence or luck was not forced out of the data; instead, it came up by itself. "Luck can manifest itself as a top expert meeting an encouraging teacher or capable trainer, for example. In further research, attention will be paid to the differences between natural talent and capability. A naturally talented individual may be more gifted than a capable individual,



Petri Nokelainen's study on excellence in skills has also garnered international attention. The research, which was started in Finland, was continued in an international project that interviewed competitors and experts who had participated in WorldSkills London 2011.

but they have not actualised these gifts into capabilities. We're interested in finding out how these differences are visible in working life."

According to Nokelainen, when the MoVE research project was presented at international meetings of researchers, it was welcomed with enthusiasm.

At the annual European Conference on Education, the research design was considered to be innovative. Our presentation also sparked a response in the audience. They clearly understood the subject's importance and considered it to be topical.

Before the MoVE project, AKTKK has primarily studied companies and organisations. Up until now, research has mainly focused on students of universities of applied sciences. Students at vocational schools have been overlooked unnecessarily. In the opinion of Nokelainen's research team, it is contradictory that children are studied in basic education from the time that they are kindergarteners, but hardly any research is conducted in VET. "This has also been cause for a re-examination for us. We believe that significantly more research should be focused on this area."

After MoVE, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded two further studies.

The second part in the series of studies, "Actualizing Vocational Excellence" (AVE), which was carried out from 2009 to 2011, continued the work carried out in the MoVE project by expanding on the mapping of the personality traits (life management, professional ethics, innovativeness and entrepreneurship) of young top experts and by extending the research design to apply to the skills required of young employees in working life. One of the starting points of the study are the key skills in lifelong learning that are mentioned in the requirements of the Finnish National Agency for Education for vocational upper secondary qualifications.

The results backed the results previously gained in the MoVE study. Stress tolerance, perseverance and the ability to evolve were highlighted as

Previous studies

Seppo Seinä (ed.)

Ammattitaitokilpailut ammatitaidon kehittäjänä ja mittaajana.

Publications of Häme University of Applied Sciences, 2000.

Skills publication series

Hannele Kokotti and Pia Ruppenen (eds.):

Valmennuksella kohti huippuammattitaitoa. Häme University of Applied Sciences. Skills publication 1, 2003.

Pekka Ruohotie and Juhani Honka

Ammatillinen huippuosaaminen.

Kompetenssitutkimusten avaama näkökulma huippuosaamiseen, sen kehittämiseen ja johtamiseen. Skills publication 2, 2003.

Kari Kiviniemi

Kansainväliset ammatitaitokilpailut yleisten työelämävalmiuksien kehittäjänä, 2005.

Hannele Kokotti

Huippuosaamista ja vetovoimaa sitoutumalla. Yritysten sitoutuminen ammatitaitokilpailutoimintaan Suomessa.

Licentiate thesis, 2004.

the most important traits in top experts in both studies. AVE also provided new information on the traits of top experts. The results of AVE differed from previous results with regard to motivation, for example. Previous results emphasised the significance of internal goal-orientation (interest in studying) and making an effort, whereas in AVE the meaningfulness of vocational studies and external goal-orientation (competitiveness, ambition) were highlighted as the most important factors that maintain motivation. International goal-orientation fell to third place in the comparison. Additionally, capability was assessed to be a more significant quality in achieving a top performance. According to Nokelainen, this result is based on a previous, larger sampling that represented a larger number of trades, which is why it can be assumed to be more representative of the opinion of the population of young top experts.

The study found that avoidance of performance was more pronounced in young people who were the least successful in vocational skills competitions. This avoidance is often related to a fear of others seeing any difficulties that the individual may have in completing tasks or exercises. Based on the results, mental training plays a significant role. It provides competitors with tools for managing the emotions related to avoidance of performance.

The third part in the series of studies, “*Pathways to Vocational Excellence*” (PaVe), was launched in 2012. The purpose is to produce research data on

the interactive relationship between the young person studying a profession, the vocational upper secondary institution and the working environment. The study examines both young people who participate in excellence in skills training and young people who do not. The study deepens the picture formed in previous studies of the development of excellence in vocational skills while studying and in working life in particular. During the research project, the intention is to create an online adaptivity-innovativeness self-assessment tool adapted to the trades examined in the study. The tool will provide young people with an understanding of the compatibility of their own traits and those related to the trade.

The MoVE study was continued internationally in 2011, when a MoVE International study called “*What Contributes to Vocational Excellence? Characteristics and experiences of competitors and experts in WorldSkills London 2011 A report to the WorldSkills Foundation on the MoVE International research*” was carried out under Petri Nokelainen’s supervision.

Funded by the WorldSkills Foundation, this study interviewed the competitors and experts who participated in WSC2011. In addition to the University of Tampere, the study involved the University of Oxford as well as RMIT University and Deakin University in Australia.

Competition activities benefit everyone

Two decades of work on developing competition activities have yielded results. Finland has become a capable organiser of competitions, and even its success at international competitions has improved. In 2013, Skills Finland made a video for which it interviewed VET actors. This is how the interviewees described skills competitions and their significance to the development of VET.

"Skills was an answer to many of the things that we, in a way, considered to be burning problems. There was no common, functional forum in Finland that would have brought the educational administration, educational institutions and working life organisations together in one forum."

Veijo Hintsanen

Rector
Häme University of Applied Sciences

"I'm sure that, from the perspective of VET, the world is a better and more beautiful place today than it would be without Skills. --- Certainly, competition activities are identified as one of the strategic focus areas here at Jyväskylän Vocational Institute, and we very strongly consider them to be a tool in staff development and a way of ensuring competence, and also, in a way, a partial insurance of the standard quality of teaching across the nation."

Kirsti Kosonen

Rector

Jyväskylän Vocational Institute

"Skills has brought educational institutions and companies closer together. In my opinion, this network is the most important thing that we have formed. --- Employers are very pleased about the fact that we set a project like this rolling back in the day."

Jouko Sohlberg

Representative, Technical Expert
Finnish Central Organisation for Motor Trades and Repairs

"Skills offers a peek into working life in Finland in a fun and current way that appeals to young people. It opens a perspective into the types of career options that young people have, which professions they can choose from and what paths are available to them."

Kirsi Rasinaho

Education and Labour Policy Specialist
SAK



4

Future vision

Power from competition activities for creating a future

The activities of Skills Finland were launched in a financially difficult time, in the middle of the 1990s recession. Vocational education and training was at a low ebb: we ended up there, but did not want to be there. For its part, working life thought that VET had drifted too far away from working life to be able to produce the kind of skills that would be useful in actual work. Vocational colleges that were in a tight spot financially and that partly also suffered from a shortage of students counted each penny carefully and considered how the funds could be used in order to achieve as much as possible. Hot topics among the management and teachers of educational institutions included staff layoffs, the uncertain future that resulted from legislative reforms as well as the social exclusion of young people. In retrospect, we can only admire the ability of the association's founding members to see past the recession and difficult times and look into the future. The association's founding members understood that it is specifically in difficult times that VET must be developed and vocational skills must be invested in to ensure that Finland gets back on its feet.

Today, VET's status is different from what it was a little over twenty years ago. VET is no longer at a low ebb; instead, it is a significant

step on the path of lifelong learning. VET opens the doors both to working life and higher education. For young people, it is an equal alternative to upper secondary school education: it is a place they get into, rather than being forced into. The attractiveness of VET has increased steadily throughout the 2000s in such a way that the number of people who apply to VET as their primary choice immediately after completing their basic education has exceeded the number of applicants to upper secondary school a few times. Over the last few years, VET's popularity has decreased slightly. Even though this decrease is minor, this trend is cause for concern. Numerous foresight reports and recruitment surveys targeted at companies show that half of the experts required by working life graduate from VET. Working life needs and also appreciates professionals who have completed a vocational qualification. This appreciation is visible in the results of image surveys, international comparisons and the high employment rate of people who have completed a vocational qualification.

With the help of vocational skills competitions, Skills Finland has carried out long-term work in order to promote Finnish vocational skills and their appreciation and increase the attractiveness

of VET. Today, the system of vocational skills competitions built and managed by the association, as well as its coaching and training system, are an established, functional and recognised part of VET and its development. The popularity of vocational skills competitions has continued to increase to this day, and visible results have been achieved thanks to them. The annual Taitaja Competition has become a major event of the whole VET sector and the flagship of the association's activities. The fundamental purpose of the Taitaja Competition, i.e. for it to act as a showcase of VET and promote its attractiveness, has been carried out very well, and it will also guide the implementation and development of competitions in the future.

Present day and the time when the association was founded are united by two things: financially tough times and burning topics. After a few years of recession, Finland's national economy has shown a slight upward trend. Despite the nascent economic recovery, Finland's economic situation will remain poor in the next few years and face major challenges. The national economy will remain in deficit, even though the deficit has decreased thanks to economic adjustment measures. The debt ratio will not decrease in the next few years, but its growth will slow down. The government will continue its economic adjustment programme, which will strengthen the national economy. It targets different sections of society very widely and affects all Finns. Difficult budget cuts have also been made in vocational upper secondary

education and training in order to balance the national economy.

The cuts made to appropriations for VET are so large that a minor tweaking of activities is not enough to cope with them; instead, the VET sector must renew itself and change its ways of thinking and operating methods. The sector must achieve more with less, or else VET will regress and wither. The difficult financial situation of VET providers has also reflected in vocational skills competitions. In financially good times in the early 2000s, VET providers competed for the right to organise the Taitaja Competition. During the prolonged economic recession and period of weak economic growth, there has not been competition for the organisation rights. The economic situation has prompted Skills Finland and education providers to also consider alternative ways to organise the Taitaja Competition. For many years, the event has been so large that only the largest cities in Finland have the facilities and accommodation capacity required to organise it. As the event has grown, so has its budget.

Spillover effects and discussions like those mentioned above are understandable and human in a situation in which burning topics in VET include co-determination negotiations, staff layoffs or dismissals, as well as changes caused to the operations of education providers by the VET reform entered in the government programme, and uncertainty about future funding. Over



The attendees of the seminar and gala dinner held in honour of the 20th anniversary of Skills Finland, as well as the 2013 national team, at Vanajanlinna on 6 June 2013.

the next few years, the VET reform will significantly change the legislation, operating models, structures, guidance, regulation and funding related to VET as well as vocational qualifications. These changes will also alter the operating environment of Skills Finland and bring new challenges and opportunities to its activities. In order for the association to be able to carry out its role as a developer of VET, it must develop its own activities in line with the reform policies. On the other hand, the association must find methods that allow it to support education providers through competition activities in the development of digitalisation and learning environments, the promotion of connections with working life and innovation or in internationalisation and education export, for example.

The association has taken the messages from the Skills network seriously and listened with a keen ear to the voices of its members when developing vocational skills competitions. Competition and training activities, as well as the associations' activities, must be built on a sustainable financial foundation at all levels. The activities must be cost-effective, and the financing structure must be versatile and flexible. This is the only way to ensure the continuity of vocational skills competitions in changing economic situations. On the other hand, what we need now more than ever is the courage, ability and strength to look past difficult times and build a better future together, which the association demonstrated around the time of its founding.

Over the course of the history of Skills Finland, the association has, from time to time, stopped to consider its own role and that of competition activities in a changing world. The last time this was done was in 2009, when the association launched its strategy process. The association looked into the future with the united efforts of the entire Skills network, as these strategy discussions, which took place in seminars held by the association, involved the association's members and representatives of interest groups. The association's strategy, "Skills Finland 2020", was approved in full in 2013. In its strategy, the association set a goal for itself that almost seemed unattainable: it wants to be the builder of the best vocational skills in the world.

As stated in its motto, the association advocates vocational skills. The focus of the activities has shifted from building a competition system and implementing competitions to improving the quality of the activities and promoting the quality of VET and innovation. The strategy strongly highlights the significance of vocational skills and their development as the foundation of Finland's competitiveness, the well-being and success of Finns as well as the appreciation of VET and vocational skills. Finland will not get back on its feet by looking in the rear-view mirror and curling up into itself. We, across Finland and within Skills Finland, must look boldly both forwards and outwards if we wish to rise to and stay at the top in vocational skills internationally.

What makes looking forwards difficult is the fact that the world around is changing more rapidly than we can understand. This change is continuous and drastic. The key drivers of change are new technologies. Technological development is exponential, which is why social, cultural and societal change and the changing of working life are only picking up speed. We are talking about a digital revolution that will cause robots, UAVs and other smart machines to replace a third of all existing jobs within 10 years, almost half of all jobs within 20 years and more than two thirds of them within 30 years. The digital revolution will also change the content of the remaining professions and the ways of working and create entirely new businesses and jobs in sectors brought forth by these changes. The merging of people and machines is only just beginning. Our dependency on machines will increase. Mobile devices connected to clothing and the environment or even the nervous system will ensure continuous access to a virtual reality in which we constantly share more and more information both about ourselves and the world around us. Development will take us towards a global village in which thoughts and ideas will be within everyone's reach as soon as they are born.

Skills Finland intends to keep up with the tumult of this digital revolution. The association will develop its activities and, through them, VET across Finland while anticipating the changes in working life. The aim is to develop Taitaja Competitions in such a way that innovativeness and the creation of new things are part of all

competition skills in 2020. This is a way to genuinely develop education and training and bring forth new, viable products and services. The intention is to also examine the range of skills featured at vocational skills competitions and the implementation of skills critically from the perspective of the future skills needs in working life. By renewing skills, we provide those who are looking for a career with a diverse image of the vocational skills of tomorrow. Vocational skills competitions will also be utilised in the future as tools in providing information about professions, making informed choices and providing high-quality guidance and career counselling. Guidance and career counselling are needed in order for those who are looking for their dream career or changing careers to find the path suitable for them. Another goal is getting young people's own hopes for their education to correspond to the skills needs of working life and society better than before.

Vocational skills competitions challenge people to learn new things and test their limits. They provide more energy to VET. The greatest energy boost is provided when the organisation of vocational skills competitions, the preparation for them and the participation in them are made a part of the real everyday life of vocational colleges and businesses. This makes it possible to avoid additional costs and ensure that competition and training activities are available to all education providers, businesses, teachers, workplace instructors and students. At best, participation in these activities is something



The year 2013 marked the 25th anniversary of Finland's membership in WorldSkills International. Technical Delegate Hannu Immonen and Official Delegate Seija Rasku received a certificate of honour from President of WSI Simon Bartley at a General Assembly of the organisation that was held in Leipzig on 7 July 2013.

that is common to the entire vocational college. It is also visible in the education provider's strategy as a strategic choice and in the education implementation plan as one alternative way of reaching excellence in vocational skills.

The knowledge, skills and experience obtained in conjunction with competition and training activities are intended to be shared. Sharing makes high-quality activities, cost-effectiveness and maximum benefit possible. By utilising the knowledge and imagination of networks, i.e. the wisdom of the crowd, we gain access to the latest information and quickly find solutions to problems that we previously spent a long time struggling with. The activities of Skills Finland have been based on network cooperation from the beginning. We will also continue to believe in the power of networks of different types and with different operating methods in the future. Only by cooperating can we reach our vision and achieve the ambitious goals set in the strategy. The aim is to make the association's communication and interaction channels more interactive and participatory in such a way that they support and promote learning from others as well as open sharing and quick utilisation of information. The association aims to be a significant forum for the cooperation carried out to develop VET both in Finland and at the global level now and in the future.

Globalisation will deepen and force us to look outwards. The boundaries between countries

will become blurred, as new businesses are most often supranational and without a motherland, and their employees come from different parts of world. Genuinely Finnish and lifelong jobs will no longer exist, and people will have to get along with representatives of different language and cultural groups and be always ready to learn new things if they want to hold on to a job. A global world will require an increasing amount of international cooperation and an international approach to work as well as continuous maintenance and further development of our own skills.

One of the core functions of Skills Finland is international skills competitions. Through them, we create new networks and new types of cooperation for the development of VET. The young people who participate in competitions, the experts who act as judges and Finnish supporters all learn new things by working with representatives of other countries and by observing their work as well as by participating in seminars and other events held in conjunction with competitions. This develops the intellectual capital and vocational skills of the whole country. By utilising and applying tried and tested operating methods, we are able to develop and modernise vocational teaching and improve the quality of VET in Finland. International competitions can also produce new innovations related to competitions that we can incorporate into the Taitaja Competition and, through this, further increase its effectiveness.



Skills Finland continues to work for VET. In the bottom row, from the left: Competition Manager Pekka Matikainen, Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi and Technical Manager Hannu Immonen. In the top row, from the left: Executive Assistant Emmi-Maria Husu, Office Manager Maria Atzmon, TaitajaPLUS and Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen, Communications Manager Katja Katajamäki and Chief Training Manager Teija Ripattila. Absent from the photo is Communications Assistant Liina Luukkonen. The photo was taken by Liisa Uski, a student of Luovi Vocational College who was completing an on-the-job learning period at Skills Finland.

Success in international skills competitions increases the appreciation of Finland as a VET country. This can be utilised both in the internationalisation of VET and education export. Groundless promises should not be made in international cooperation or education export, as trust once lost is almost impossible to regain. For this reason, we must strictly maintain the quality of the activities. The makers of top experts must be top experts themselves and do the right things in the right way and at the right time. Skills Finland aims to be the builder of the best vocational skills in the world with quality. The association's activities are continuously being developed in such a way that, by 2020, the quality of the activities will meet the criteria of an excellent organisation based on an external assessment.

To get the most out of an international skills competition, you must organise the competition yourself. Organising an international skills competition allows the event to be taken in a direction that is important to the organising country. For this reason, the association applied to bring EuroSkills2020 to Finland and Helsinki. The Ministry of Education and Culture promised to become the financial guarantor for the event.

However, the joint efforts to bring the competition to Finland and the commitment of the entire Skills network to the application process failed to yield the desired result, and Austria was granted the right to host EuroSkills2020. But we will not give up! For Finland, vocational skills competitions are a way to develop VET and increase awareness and appreciation of VET. This is the same direction in which we also want to take international skills competitions. We engage in active development work through the Boards, working groups and networks of international Skills organisations. We also engage in increasingly close cooperation with like-minded countries in order to make our voices be heard.

The theme "Together" of the centenary of Finland's independence also represents Skills Finland and its future well. Working together creates a positive vibe that is needed in VET under the pressure of cuts to appropriations and in the tumult of many changes. Rather than bemoaning our situation, we will get a positive cycle going as a group, concentrate our strength on developing the Taitaja Competition and seek more power from competition activities for VET in Finland and the development of excellence in vocational skills.

Seija Rasku

President, Skills Finland

Senior Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Education and Culture

Members of the Board of Skills Finland –1/4

1993

President Esko Lankila
Finnish Association of Vocational
Colleges

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Arto Saarinen
Union of Vocational College Rectors

Veijo Hintsanen
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Jaana Kuisma
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Reijo Paananen
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Matti Pekko
Vocational Education Foundation

Petri Pohjonen
Union of Vocational Adult
Education Centres

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Pentti Rauhala
Union of Vocational College Rectors

1994

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Pirjo Elo
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Ari Näätäsaari
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Reijo Paananen
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Matti Pekko
Vocational Education Foundation

Petri Pohjonen
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Pentti Rauhala
Union of Vocational College Rectors

1995

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Ari Näätäsaari
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Matti Pekko
Vocational Education Foundation

Petri Pohjonen
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Janne Puumi
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Pentti Rauhala
Union of Vocational College Rectors

1996

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Ari Näätäsaari
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Matti Pekko
Vocational Education Foundation

Petri Pohjonen
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Janne Puumi
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Pentti Rauhala
Union of Vocational College Rectors

Members of the Board of Skills Finland – 2/4

1997

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Ari Näätäsaari
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Matti Pekko
Vocational Education Foundation

Petri Pohjonen
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Pekka Porvali
Metal Workers' Union

Leo Leppänen
Vocational Adult Education Union

Jukka Sarjala
Finnish National Agency for
Education

1998

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Leo Leppänen
Vocational Adult Education Union

Matti Määttä
Vocational Rectors' Union

Pekka Porvali
Metal Workers' Union

Jukka Sarjala
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Kimmo Talkki
Valkeakoski Vocational College

1999

President Vilho Hirvi
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Jani Pentti
Finnish Construction Trade Union

Petri Pohjonen
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Pekka Porvali
Metal Workers' Union

Kimmo Talkki
Valkeakoski Vocational College

Jukka Sarjala
Finnish National Agency for
Education

2000–2001

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Jukka Sarjala
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jarmo Nurmio
Confederation of Unions for
Professional and Managerial Staff in
Finland (Akava)

Jani Pentti
Finnish Construction Trade Union

Pekka Porvali
Metal Workers' Union

Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish
Industry and Employers

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Heikki Sederlöf
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Kimmo Tolkki
Valkeakoski Vocational College

2002

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Jukka Sarjala
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jani Pentti
Finnish Construction Trade Union

Pekka Porvali
Metal Workers' Union

Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industry and
Employers

Jukka Salminen
Vocational Rectors' Union

Heikki Sederlöf
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Liisa Souru
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Members of the Board of Skills Finland – 3/4

2003

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Pekka Ahmavaara
Central Organisation of Finnish Trade
Unions (SAK)

Harri Anttila (until 5/2003)
Service Union United PAM

Hanna Kuntsi (5/2003–)
Service Union United PAM

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Aslak Haarahiltunen
Metal Workers' Union

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Rauno Jarnila
City of Helsinki

Anneli Kangasvieri
Association of Finnish Local and
Regional Authorities

Pentti Leipälä
Education Providers' Association

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish
Industry and Employers

Jukka Salminen
Vocational Rectors' Union

Jukka Sarjala
Professor

Heikki Sederlöf
AIKE Oy

Liisa Souru
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Tarja Tuominen
Service Sector Employers Palta

Ville Wallin
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

2004

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Kirsi Lindroos
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Pekka Ahmavaara
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Marita Aho
Industrial and Business Educational
Institutions

Pekka Aittoniemi
Vocational Rectors' Union

Hanna Kuntsi
Service Union United PAM

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Aslak Haarahiltunen
Metal Workers' Union

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Anneli Kangasvieri
Association of Finnish Local and
Regional Authorities

Pentti Leipälä
Education Providers' Association

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish
Industry and Employers

Heikki Sederlöf
AIKE Oy

Liisa Souru
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Tarja Tuominen
Service Sector Employers Palta

Ville Wallin
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

2005

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Kirsi Lindroos
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Marita Aho
Industrial and Business Educational
Institutions

Pekka Aittoniemi
Vocational Rectors' Union

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Aslak Haarahiltunen
Metal Workers' Union

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Anneli Kangasvieri
Association of Finnish Local and
Regional Authorities

Reetta Kuosmanen
Service Union United (PAM)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Kari Purhonen
Confederation of Finnish Industry and
Employers

Heikki Sederlöf
AIKE Oy

Saana Siekkinen
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Liisa Souru
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Tarja Tuominen
Service Sector Employers Palta

Ville Wallin
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Heikki Yli-Olli
Education Providers' Association

2006

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Kirsi Lindroos
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Marita Aho
Industrial and Business Educational
Institutions

Pekka Aittoniemi
Vocational Rectors' Union

Pirjo Elo
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Aslak Haarahiltunen
Metal Workers' Union

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Ossi Jalonen
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Anneli Kangasvieri
Association of Finnish Local and
Regional Authorities

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Pertti Myllyselkä
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Vocational Training

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Heikki Sederlöf
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Sointu Toivonen
Service Union United (PAM)

Tarja Tuominen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Ville Wallin
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Heikki Yli-Olli
Education Providers' Association

Members of the Board of Skills Finland – 4/4

2007

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Kirsi Lindroos
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Pekka Aittoniemi
Union of Vocational College Rectors

Markku Aunola
Kiipula Vocational College

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Petri Rajaniemi
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi –
OSKU ry

Heikki Sederlöf
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Sointu Toivonen
Service Union United (PAM)

Tarja Tuominen
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Sami Vironen
Metal Workers' Union

Ville Wallin
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Heikki Yli-Olli
Education Providers' Association

2008

President Timo Lankinen
Ministry of Education

Vice President Kirsi Lindroos
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Pekka Aittoniemi
Union of Vocational College Rectors

Markku Aunola
Kiipula Vocational College

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Juhani Nokela
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Petri Rajaniemi
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi –
OSKU ry

Heikki Sederlöf
Union of Vocational Adult Education
Centres

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Sointu Toivonen
Service Union United (PAM)

Sami Vironen
Metal Workers' Union

Heikki Yli-Olli
Education Providers' Association

2009

President Timo Lankinen
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Seija Rasku
Ministry of Education

Markku Aunola
Kiiipula Vocational College

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Juhani Nokela
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland (SAKKI)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Petri Rajaniemi
Education Providers' Association
(KJY)

Pekka Aittoniemi
Union of Vocational College Rectors

Heikki Sederlöf
Vocational Adult Education Union

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Sointu Toivonen
Service Union United (PAM)

Sami Vironen
Metal Workers' Union

Heikki Yli-Olli
Education Providers' Association
(KJY)

2010

President Timo Lankinen Finnish
National Agency for Education

Vice President Seija Rasku
Ministry of Education and Culture

Markku Aunola
Kiiipula Vocational College

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal Development

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education, HAMK

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in Finland
(OAJ)

Petri Lempinen
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Juhani Nokela
National Union of Vocational
Students in Finland

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Arto Pylvänäinen
Vocational Rectors' Union of Finland

Heikki Sederlöf
Vocational Adult Education Union

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Sointu Toivonen
Service Union United (PAM)
(until 8/2010)

Mikko Koskinen
Service Union United (PAM)
(9/2010–)

Urpo Uusitalo
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi
– OSKU ry (until 9/2010)

Vesa Kauppinen
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi
– OSKU ry (9/2010–)

Sami Vironen
Metal Workers' Union

Heikki Yli-Olli
Federation of Education in
Kalajoki Valley

2011

President Timo Lankinen
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Vice President Seija Rasku
Ministry of Education and Culture

Markku Aunola
Kiiipula Vocational College

Johan Hahkala
Finnish Association for the
Development of
Vocational Education and Training
(AMKE)

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Eija Harjula
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Kimmo Harra
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and
Personal Development (until
10/2011)

Tuulikki Similä-Lehtinen
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education
and Personal Development
(10/2011–)

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Vesa Kauppinen
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi –
OSKU ry

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in
Finland (OAJ)

Olli-Pekka Koljonen
National Union of
Vocational Students in Finland
(SAKKI)

Mikko Koskinen
Service Union United (PAM)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Arto Pylvänäinen
Vocational Rectors' Union of
Finland

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Sami Vironen
Metal Workers' Union (until
9/2011)

Juha-Pekka Ahonen
Metal Workers' Union (9/2011–)

Lena Öhman
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

2012

President Timo Lankinen (until
2/2012)
Prime Minister's Office

President Seija Rasku
(2/2012–)
Ministry of Education and Culture

Vice President
Markku Aunola (2/2012–)

Kiiipula Vocational College

Jussi-Pekka Ahonen
Metal Workers' Union

Johan Hahkala
Finnish Association for the
Development of
Vocational Education and Training
(AMKE)

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Vesa Kauppinen
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi –
OSKU ry

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in
Finland (OAJ)

Olli-Pekka Koljonen
National Union of

Vocational Students in Finland
(SAKKI)

Mikko Koskinen
Service Union United (PAM)

Eeva-Maija Mäntynen
Oulu Region Joint Authority for
Education (OSAKK)

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Arto Pylvänäinen
Vocational Rectors' Union of
Finland

Kirsi Rasinaho
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Tuulikki Similä-Lehtinen
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal
Development

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor
Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Lena Öhman
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

2013

President Seija Rasku
Ministry of Education and Culture

Vice President Aulis Pitkälä
Finnish National Agency for
Education

Jussi-Pekka Ahonen
Metal Workers' Union

Johan Hahkala
Finnish Association for the
Development of
Vocational Education and Training
(AMKE)

Mirja Hannula
Confederation of Finnish Industries
(EK)

Mikko Heinikoski
Finnish Confederation of
Professionals (STTK)

Ulla Hiiri
Vocational Education Financial
Directors

Veijo Hintsanen
Häme Joint Municipal Authority for
Vocational Higher Education

Vesa Kauppinen
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi –
OSKU ry

Olli-Pekka Koljonen
National Union of
Vocational Students in Finland
(SAKKI)

Mikko Koskinen
Service Union United (PAM)

Päivi Koppanen
Trade Union of Education in
Finland (OAJ)

Saija Niemelä-Pentti
Oulu Vocational College

Martti Pallari
Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Markku Aunola
Kiipula Vocational College

Kirsi Rasinaho
Central Organisation of Finnish
Trade Unions (SAK)

Tuulikki Similä-Lehtinen
OKKA Foundation for Teaching,
Education and Personal
Development

Jouko Sohlberg
Finnish Central Organisation for
Motor Trades and Repairs (AKL)

Jyrki Turunen
Association of Finnish Vocational
Education Leaders (SAJO)

The association's personnel – 1/2

1993–1996

Executive Director
Pirjo Heikkilä
(held the position alongside her work as Senior Inspector for the Finnish National Agency for Education)

Practical matters related to the association's activities and competition activities: Hannele Marttiini (held the position alongside her work as Department Secretary for the Finnish National Agency for Education)

1996–2000

Executive Director
Timo Sirkkiä

2000

Executive Director
Timo Sirkkiä (until 7/2000)

Executive Director
Juhani Honka (11/2000–)

Liaison Manager
Eeva Laurila

Marketing and
Communications Manager
Jorma Sonninen

2001

Executive Director
Juhani Honka

Marketing Director
Jorma Sonninen

Liaison Manager
Eeva Laurila

Manager in charge of the
HUVA project
Juha Leviäkangas

Project Assistant
Pauliina Jokinen

Project Manager
Jaakko Pekkala

2002

Executive Director
Juhani Honka

Acting Executive Director
Jorma Sonninen

Project Director
Hannele Kokotti

Liaison Manager
Eeva Laurila

Manager in charge of the
HUVA project
Juha Leviäkangas

Project Assistant
Pauliina Jokinen

Project Manager
Jaakko Pekkala

2003

Acting Executive Director,
Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Jorma Sonninen (until 4/2003)

Executive Director,
Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Eija Alhojärvi (5/2003–)

Chief Financial Officer
Henri Nordenswan

Executive Assistant
Maria Atzmon

PC Support Technician
Piia Virtanen

Project Director
Hannele Kokotti

Project Manager of the HUVA project
Juha Leviäkangas

Coordinator of the Taitaja
Competition and Taitaja9
Esa Lähteenaro

Project Worker
Kati Lundgren

Project Worker
Tiina Meklin

Event Manager
Sirpa Nuutinen

Technical Manager,
Vice Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Hannu Immonen

Technical Manager
Jaakko Pekkala

Communications Manager
Markku Lahtinen

2004

Executive Director,
Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Eija Alhojärvi

Chief Financial Officer
Henri Nordenswan

Event Manager
Sirpa Nuutinen

Communications Manager
Markku Lahtinen

Technical Manager
Jaakko Pekkala

Executive Assistant
Maria Atzmon

IT Designer
Piia Virtanen

Project Manager of the HUVA project
Juha Leviäkangas (until 4/2004)

Project Manager of the HUVA project
Kati Lundgren (5/2004–)

Information Officer
Tiina Meklin

Training Manager
Immo Pylvänen

Technical Manager,
Vice Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Hannu Immonen

Project Manager of Taitaja9,
Coordinator of the Taitaja
Competition
Esa Lähteenaro

Security Manager
Jorma Sihvonen
IT Coordinator
Jusa Virtanen

Project Manager
(Occupational Health and Safety
Project, OHSE project)
Riikka Ruotsala

Project Secretary
(HUVA and Taitaja9)
Tua Kauppala

Project Worker
Kalle Vihtari

2005

Executive Director,
Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Eija Alhojärvi

Event Manager
Sirpa Nuutinen

Communications Manager
Markku Lahtinen

Chief Financial Officer
Henri Nordenswan

Project Manager of the HUVA project
Kati Lundgren (until 8/2005)

Project Manager of the HUVA project
Pekka Matikainen (10/2005–)

Project Secretary of the HUVA project
Sinikka Nieminen

Technical Manager
Jaakko Pekkala

Executive Assistant
Maria Atzmon

Information Officer
Tiina Meklin

IT Designer
Piia Virtanen

Technical Manager,
Vice Secretary General of
WorldSkills Helsinki 2005
Hannu Immonen

School Coordinator
Matti Kauppinen

Security Manager
Jorma Sihvonen

Logistics Manager
Jussi Karlsson

IT Coordinator
Jusa Virtanen

Event Assistant
Pipsa Kirjavainen

Training Manager
Immo Pylvänen

Project Manager of Taitaja9,
Coordinator of the Taitaja
Competition
Esa Lähteenaro

Executive Assistant
Taru Väarti

Technical Assistant
Tommi Heikkilä

CAD Coordinator
Heikki Kokkonen

Project Manager
(Occupational Health and Safety
Project, OHSE project)
Riikka Ruotsala

Project Worker
Laura Laakkonen

The association's personnel – 2/2

2006	2007	2008	2009
Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi
Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon
Project Manager Pekka Matikainen	Project Manager Pekka Matikainen	Project Manager Pekka Matikainen	Manager of the Taitaja Competition Pekka Matikainen
Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Manager Leena-Maija Talikka
Project Assistant Tuija Levo	Project Assistant Tuija Levo	Project Manager Tuija Levo	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen
Information Officer Teemu Lindfors	Information Officer Teemu Lindfors	Information Officer Teemu Lindfors	Information Officer Teemu Lindfors
Manager of the Taitaja Competition Hannu Pajari	Manager of the Taitaja Competition Hannu Pajari	Project Assistant Elisabet Saranpää	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen
Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen
Assistant Laura Laakkonen	Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen	Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen	Training Manager Immo Pylvänen
Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen		Training Manager Immo Pylvänen	EuroSkills Coordinator Matti Haapanen
Training Manager Immo Pylvänen		EuroSkills Coordinator Matti Haapanen	
Project Worker in the HUVA project Juhani Ahonen			

2010	2011	2012	2013
Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi	Executive Director Eija Alhojärvi
Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon	Office Manager Maria Atzmon
Manager of the Taitaja Competition Pekka Matikainen	Manager of the Taitaja Competition Pekka Matikainen	Manager of the Taitaja Competition Pekka Matikainen	Manager of the Taitaja Competition Pekka Matikainen
Project Manager Leena-Maija Talikka	Project Manager Leena-Maija Talikka (until 3/2011)	Chief Training Manager Teija Ripattila	Chief Training Manager Teija Ripattila
Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Manager Teija Ripattila (9/2011–)	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen
Project Secretary Elisabet Saranpää (until 3/2010)	Project Secretary Sinikka Nieminen	Project Assistant Annamari Henriksson	Project Assistant Annamari Henriksson
Project Assistant Annamari Henriksson	Project Assistant Annamari Henriksson	Communications Manager Katja Nieminen (on a partial leave of absence)	Communications Manager Katja Nieminen (on a partial leave of absence)
Event Assistant Tuomo Alhojärvi	Communications Manager Katja Nieminen	Communications Manager Pauliina Juhola (3/2012–)	Communications Manager Pauliina Juhola
Communications Manager Katja Nieminen (9/2010–)	Communications Assistant Hanna Lassila (until 1/2011)	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Communications Assistant Liina Luukkonen
Communications Assistant Hanna Lassila	Communications Assistant Kirsti Bergman (2/2011–)	TaitajaPLUS and Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen	Event Assistant Ulla Matikainen
Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen	Training Manager Immo Pylvänen	Technical Manager Hannu Immonen
Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen	Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen	Communications Assistant Liina Luukkonen (1/2012–)	TaitajaPLUS and Abilympics Coordinator Matti Kauppinen
Training Manager Immo Pylvänen	Training Manager Immo Pylvänen		Training Manager Immo Pylvänen

Competitors in WorldSkills and EuroSkills – 1/2

YOUTH SKILLS OLYMPICS BIRMINGHAM 1989

Mika Hokkanen, Turning
Jukka Nivala, Milling
Minna Karevuori, Ladies' Dressmaking
Janne Virtanen, Electric Welding
Harri Nyman, Carpentry
Juha Salminen, Bricklaying
Jari Paulin, CNC Technology

YOUTH SKILLS OLYMPICS AMSTERDAM 1991

Petri Vastamäki, Bricklaying
Arto Saastamoinen, Carpentry
Anne Äikäs, Ladies' Dressmaking
Mikko Olanterä, Restaurant Service
Satu Katoniemi, Cooking
Kari Aalto, CNC Turning
Juhani Johansson, CNC Machining
Teemu Kangas, CNC Milling
Jarkko Mäenpää, Welding
Jari Valo, Painting & Decorating

YOUTH SKILLS OLYMPICS TAIPEI 1993

Satu Kivimäki, Ladies' Dressmaking
Seppo Keinonen, Painting & Decorating
Juhani Lammi, Mechatronics
Harri Silvasti, Mechatronics
Marko Hämäläinen, CNC Machining
Marko Raiden, CNC Milling
Mika Lackman, Carpentry
Janne Rantala, Bricklaying
Kari Laiinen, Industrial Wiring
Mikko Nieminen, Welding

YOUTH SKILLS OLYMPICS LYON 1995

Teemu Autio, Cabinetmaking

Lukas Bäckström, Automobile Technology
Karl Fallenius, Industrial Control
Maria Haanpää, Ladies' Hairdressing
Pauliina Haastola, Painting
Kari Helenius, Demonstration Skill: Global Multimedia Challenge
Jukka Kenttämies, Mechatronics
Pekka Kolehmainen, CNC Milling
Kasimir Kvist, Wall & Floor Tiling
Mikko Levoska, Restaurant Service
Kai Markkanen, Electronics
Teija Mattsson, Ladies' Dressmaking
Sami Ojanen, Bricklaying
Timo Oksanen, Demonstration Skill: Global Multimedia Challenge
Janne Ostrovski, Demonstration Skill: Global Multimedia Challenge
Jarkko Pakaslahti, Carpentry
Eero Piippo, CNC Turning
Anne Saarinen, Floristry
Jukka Sihvonen, Welding
Jussi Tuominen, Demonstration Skill: Global Multimedia Challenge
Jouni Vuorensivu, Mechanical Engineering Drawing and Design CADD
Jarkko Vähä-Tahlo, Mechatronics
Pii Niku, Men's Hairdressing
Mira Halonen, Cooking

WORLDSKILLS ST GALLEN 1997

Janne Forsvik, Autobody Repair
Sanna Furu, Ladies' Hairdressing
Kirsi Kautto, Floristry
Keijo Kivioja, Welding
Toni Koskela, Bricklaying
Matti Kumpulainen, CNC Turning
Toni Kylätasku, Men's Hairdressing
Juha Liitola and Kimmo Puola, Mechatronics
Kimmo Niemi, Industrial Wiring
Tomi-Pekka Nieminen, CNC Milling

Touko Palviainen, Cabinetmaking
Petri Päckilä, Information Technology/Software Applications
Markku Randell, Painting & Decorating
Mikko Salonen, Automobile Technology
Anu Savolainen, Ladies' Dressmaking
Esa Tilli, Wall & Floor Tiling
Timo Toropainen, Mechanical Engineering Drafting CAD
Veli-Pekka Vehmaa, Pattern Making
Jenni Yrjölä, Restaurant Service

ES GRONINGEN 1998

Toni Vehkala, Welding
Merja Sarkkinen, Cabinetmaking
Mikko Smed, Jewellery

WORLDSKILLS MONTREAL 1999

Manu Rekola, Mechatronics
Krister Ekman, Mechatronics
Harri Krook, Mechanical Engineering Drawing and Design CADD
Toni Ruohonen, CNC Turning
Joni Nieminen, CNC Milling
Mikko Halttunen, Construction Steel Work
Vesa Koskinen, Information Technology/Software Applications
Tero Vehkala, Welding
Jussi Nikkilä, Pattern Making
Olli Nissinen, Wall & Floor Tiling
Vesa Pyrhönen, Autobody Repair
Ville Salomaa, Plumbing
Mika Vannas, Industrial Electronics
Arto Hongisto, Industrial Wiring
Markus Rantanen, Bricklaying
Jarno Tanskanen, Painting & Decorating
Samuli Maja, Cabinetmaking
Jani Kellola, Carpentry
Pauli Smeds, Jewellery
Kaisu Mattila, Floristry

Iina Björklöf, Ladies' Hairdressing
Ritva Honkanen, Men's Hairdressing
Hanna Säilä, Ladies' Dressmaking
Timo Välimäki, Automobile Technology
Ville Pyykönen, Cooking
Mari Torsti, Restaurant Service
Jukka Markkanen, Car Painting
Minna Suomela, Beauty Care
Antti Koskinen, Landscape Gardening
Juha Jokinen, Landscape Gardening

WORLDSKILLS SEOUL 2001

Mikko Hanhiala, Mechatronics
Tommi Elonen, Mechatronics
Robert Kiviniemi, Mechanical Engineering Drawing and Design CADD
Harri Hyryläinen, CNC Turning
Veikko Naakka, CNC Milling
Eko Miettinen, Construction Steel Work
Sami Hiltunen, Information Technology/Software Applications
Esa Niemelä, Welding
Alexander Strakh, Pattern Making
Jere Katvala, Wall and Floor Tiling
Heikki Ilomäki, Autobody Repair
Kari Hongisto, Plumbing
Mika Vainiotalo, Industrial Electronics
Teemu Pirttinen, Electrical Installations
Petri Ilves, Industrial Control
Petri Zeus, Painting and Decorating
Jarno Möttönen, Cabinetmaking
Jouni Niemi, Carpentry
Kai Tallberg, Jewellery
Tanja Kokkonen, Floristry
Katri Heikka, Ladies' Hairdressing
Linda Ruotsalainen, Men's Hairdressing
Katja Lindberg, Ladies' Dressmaking
Ella Suontama, Confectioner
Klaus Eerikäinen, Automobile Technology

Markus Lattunen, Cooking
Janne Marin, Restaurant Service
Lauri Linnavuori, Car Painting
Niina Toukola, Landscape Gardening
Pauliina Siltanen, Landscape Gardening
Sampo Ahokas, IT PC/Network Support
Laura Vainio, Graphic Design Technology
Tanja Kokkonen, Floristry
Sampo Ahokas, IT PC/Network Support

WORLDSKILLS ST GALLEN 2003

Esa Hirvonen & Mikko Kivelä, Mechatronics
Rasmus Palosaari, Drawing and Design CADD
Ville-Veikko Romppainen, CNC Turning
Jari Hongisto, CNC Milling
Kalle Hämäläinen, Construction Steel Work
Ville Lehtinen, Information Technology/Software Applications
Sakari Nissinen, Welding
Markus Kallio, Pattern Making
Jussi Haulos, Wall & Floor Tiling
Jani Reunamo, Autobody Repair
Asseri Kyytsönen, Sheet Metal Work
Janne Pajunen, Plumbing
Erno Sundell, Industrial Electronics
Richard Mercer, Commercial Wiring
Pasi Jussila, Industrial Control
Juha Vainikainen, Bricklaying
Mika Rouhiainen, Stonemasonry
Heli Piirainen (née Jokinen), Painting and Decorating
Erkka Pentikäinen, Plastering
Jussi Maja, Cabinetmaking
Eetu Tingander, Joinery
Mika Rautama, Carpentry

Matti Kantola, Jewellery
Johanna Laaksonen, Floristry
Piia Martiskainen, Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing
Christina Haapala, Ladies' Dressmaking
Eero Paulamäki, Confectioner/Pastry Cook
Samu Kuittinen, Automobile Technology
Jesse Söderlund, Cooking
Jens Högberg, Restaurant Service
Jarmo Henttonen, Car Painting
Anu Manninen & Raisa Heino, Landscape Gardening
Mika Parviainen, Refrigeration
Mika Vilpo, IT PC/Network Support
Markus Jauhainen, Graphic Design
Eve Korkala, Beauty Care
Joni Aaltonen, WEB Design
Antti Murto, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Inari Vanhala, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Mikko Huuskonen, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Tommi Elg, Manufacturing Team Challenge

WORLDSKILLS HELSINKI 2005

Juha Kelkka, Polymechanics/Automation
Mika Aarnio, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Riku Lambacka, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Tuomo Fabritius, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Janne Hurme, Mechatronics
Jarkko Kylander, Mechatronics
Ville Kivelä, Mech. Eng. CADD
Mikko Vepsäläinen, CNC Machining
Vesa Rankaviita, IT/Software Applications

Sami Ala-Varvi, Welding
Anssi Lehti, Wall & Floor Tiling
Antti Kankaanpää, Autobody Repair
Henri Koskinen, Plumbing
Toni Harju, Industrial Electronics
Elmo Saukko, WEB Design
Markus Roni, Electrical Installations
Petri Hämäläinen, Industrial Control
Antti Iinatti, Bricklaying
Juha Nieminen, Stonemasonry
Karoliina Hytönen, Painting & Decorating
Seppo Heilimo, Cabinetmaking
Joonas Hänninen, Joinery
Marko Partanen, Carpentry
Päivi Sohkanen, Jewellery
Birgitta Kulppi, Floristry
Saara Hyppänen, Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing
Ilona Väätänen, Beauty Therapy
Ria Tilsala, Ladies' Dressmaking
Aini Kaiikko, Confectioner/Pastry Cook
Juuso Jukkala, Automobile Technology
Erik Mansikka, Cooking
Sina Siltanen, Restaurant Service
Tuomo Tuohino, Car Painting
Tiina Nurmio, Landscape Gardening
Ville Koskinen, Landscape Gardening
Sami Tufan, Refrigeration
Tomi Miettunen, IT PC/Network Support
Petra Niemi, Graphic Design Technology
Olli Laihin, Telecommunication
Distribution Technology
Henna Ahlgren, Printing
Jarno Raitanen, Sheet Construction
Steelwork
Janne Leppänen, Tinsmith (Roofing)
Jouni Ojanperä, Transport Technology
Pekka Anto, Transport Technology

WORLDSKILLS SHIZUOKA 2007

Henri Paukkunen, Polymechanics/Automation
Jouni Ahola, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Janne Ahola, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Jani Ahola, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Jukka-Pekka Muotio, Mechatronics
Joonas Lassila, Mechatronics
Tommi Rautiainen, Mech. Eng. CADD
Heikki Kalpio, CNC Turning
Ville Jalkanen, CNC Milling
Tony Ohls, IT/Software Applications
Janne Jauhola, Welding
Toni Törmä, Printing
Juho Kinnunen, Wall & Floor Tiling
Lauri Mertala, Autobody Repair
Markus Mustikkamaa, Metal Roofing
Niko Peltomäki, Plumbing
Antti Rantaeskola, Industrial Electronics
Mikael Korpela, WEB Design
Matti Kinnunen, Electrical Installations
Antton Stigell, Industrial Control
Jarno Kauppila, Bricklaying
Aaro Mönkkönen, Stonemasonry
Riikka Silvennoinen, Painting & Decorating
Juuso Laurila, Cabinetmaking
Anssi Helén, Joinery
Ville Tuovinen, Jewellery
Jaana Korhonen, Floristry
Jaana Hellstén, Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing
Milla Outila, Beauty Therapy
Johanna Obisike, Ladies' Dressmaking
Mikko Hietala, Confectioner/Pastry Cook
Ville Hietikko, Automobile Technology
Antti Kinnunen, Cooking

Competitors in WorldSkills and EuroSkills – 2/2

Miia Sironen, Restaurant Service
Taneli Sarajärvi, Car Painting
Minna Kääriäinen, Landscape Gardening
Emma-Pirita Purovirta, Landscape Gardening
Olli Saarela, Refrigeration
Olli Janatuinen, IT PC/Network Support
Maiju Vähäkainu, Graphic Design Technology
Laura Ahvenvaara, Caring
Hanna-Mari Haapalahti, Caring
Aki Lempinen, Mobile Robotics
Lari Ernsten, Mobile Robotics
Arto Häkkinen, Pattern Making

ABILYMPICS SHIZUOKA 2007

Laura Halme, Poster Design
Eetu Haurinen, CAD – Architecture
Sanni Tarvainen, Floral Arrangement
Tomas Vaarala, Electronic Assembly and Testing

ES ROTTERDAM 2008

Hanna Tervo, Florist
Elina Laaksonen, Florist
Olli Janatuinen, Office Specialist/Project Manager
Matti Neuvonen, Cisco Specialist
Niko Ruotsalainen, Microsoft Specialist
Eljas Alakulppi, Open Source Specialist
Joni Hasanen, Web Designer
Raisa Huittinen, Graphic Designer
Maria Lyytikä, Print Technician
Anniina Peltonen, Mobile Robotics Technician
Kalle Häkkänen, Mobile Robotics Technician
Antti Rantaeskola, Electronics Technician
Pavel Gavrilov, Electronics Technician

Eero Sarell, Electronics Technician
Tomi Leinonen, Electronics Technician
Pasi Tahkola, Plumber
Taneli Kolppanen, Electrician
Mikko Toivonen, Refrigeration Technician
Ville Huusko, Building Carpenter
Sebastian Kemi, Bricklayer
Ari Ojanen, Wall and Floor Tiler
Toni Gröndahl, Metal Roofer
Markus Mustikkamaa, General Foreman
Janne Seikkala, Truck Driver
Sami Pakkanen, Truck Driver
Juuso Jukkala, Light Vehicles Technician
Tuuli Aho, Nurse
Laura Taavitsainen, Nurse
Mika Hiirikoski, CNC

WORLDSKILLS CALGARY 2009

Ville Laurikainen, Polymechanics/Automation
Antti Autio, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Mika Juntila, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Sami Myllynen, Manufacturing Team Challenge
Ville Arffman, Mechatronics
Jarno Martiskainen, Mechatronics
Alexander Juustovaara, Mechanical Engineering Design - CAD
Joni Lappalainen, CNC Turning
Tuomas Pajuranta, CNC Milling
Juha Lampén, IT/Software Applications
Tino Ojanperä, Welding
Niklas Kivioja, Offset Printing
Timo Huhtasalo, Wall & Floor Tiling
Juhani Raappana, Autobody Repair
Pasi Tahkola, Plumbing and Heating
Tomi Leinonen, Electronics
Sam Stenvall, Web Design

Taneli Kolppanen, Electrical Installations
Mika Tuomala, Industrial Control
Ville Rämö, Bricklaying
Jarkko Kukkonen, Stonemasonry
Katja Jaatinen, Painting & Decorating
Kalle Häkkänen, Mobile Robotics
Anniina Peltonen, Mobile Robotics
Anssi Nikku, Cabinetmaking
Harri Vilokkinen, Joinery
Ville Huusko, Carpentry
Maria Suikkanen, Jewellery
Tuulikki Mattila, Floristry
Elina Salminen, Ladies'/Men's Hairdressing
Heidi Lahti, Beauty Therapy
Marianna Luoma, Fashion Technology
Linda Nummelin, Confectioner/Pastry Cook
Tuomo Pyhälä, Automobile Technology
Eric Rätty, Cooking
Joonas Heino, Restaurant Service
Harri Jalonen, Car Painting
Erno Maja, Landscape Gardening
Katja Pesonen, Landscape Gardening
Matti Neuvonen, IT PC/Network Support
Heli Mikkonen, Graphic Design Technology
Jaana Pakanen, Caring
Tiina Ahola, Caring
Ville Hämäläinen, Aircraft Maintenance
Olli-Pekka Pöllänen, Construction Metal Works

ES LISBON 2010

Heini Aunola, Floristry
Jenniina Tiikkainen, Floristry
Eeri Sivonen, Goldsmith
Jukka Suhonen, Office ICT Team
Markus Lintuola, Office ICT Team

Teemu Mikkonen, Office ICT Team
Daniel Mononen, Office ICT Team
Drazen Dodik, Web Designer
Susanna Virtanen, Print Technician
Lasse Tuominen, CNC Milling
Daniel Salonen, Industrial Control
Jani Sihvola, CAD Technician
Timo Hohkala, Mechatronics
Juha-Matti Rossi, Mechatronics
Jussi Holsti, Electronics
Ville Viitala, Electronics
Katja Pesonen, Landscape Gardening & Design
Reetta Höyhty, Landscape Gardening & Design
Laura Jantunen, Landscape Gardening & Design
Markus Viitala, Plumber
Jarmo Seppä, Electrician
Samu-Pekka Toivanen, Bricklayer
Jan Kakko, Metal Roofer
Mia Päivärinta, Painter
Jesse Einistö, Truck Driver
Satu Haapalahti, Caring
Iida Malinen, Caring
Anni Riikonen, Cleaning Services
Janne Ponnikas, Cleaning Services
Qua Siu, Cleaning Services
Anssi Lindström, Cook
Heidi Tuominen, Waiter

ABILYMPICS SEOUL 2011

Markku Hentonen, CAD – Architecture
Samuli Lappalainen, Computer Assembly
Hans Wendelin, Computer Assembly
Jenna Sipponen, Floral Arrangement
Eero Martikainen, Cabinetmaking
Eino Majamaa, Jewelry Making
Muhammed Alali, Photography – Studio

WORLDSKILLS LONDON 2011

Miika Laari, Polymechanics/
Automation
Juha Peteri, Manufacturing Team
Challenge
Oiva Partanen, Manufacturing Team
Challenge
Kasper Hahtonen, Manufacturing
Team Challenge
Joonas Nuolijoki, Mechatronics
Tomi Summanen, Mechatronics
Jani Sihvola, Mechanical Engineering
Design – CAD
Ossi Lilja, CNC Turning
Lasse Tuominen, CNC Milling
Juha Kiiski, IT Software Solutions for
Business
Riku Lähteenmaa, Welding
Susanna Virtanen, Offset Printing
Toni Erkkilä, Autobody Repair
Antti Ukkonen, Aircraft Maintenance
Markus Viitala, Plumbing and
Heating
Ville Viitala, Electronics
Drazen Dodik, Web Design
Matti Alarautalahti, Electrical
Installations
Tuomas Pirttijoki, Industrial Control
Samu-Pekka Toivanen, Bricklaying
Aku Korhonen, Painting and
Decorating
Aku Ilola, Mobile Robotics
Jasu Romo, Mobile Robotics
Veijo Kauppila, Cabinetmaking
Toni Lehtimäki, Joinery
Joonas Vuokila, Carpentry
Sanni Jakoleff, Jewellery
Jenniina Tiikkainen, Floristry
Kerittu Johansson, Ladies'/Men's
Hairdressing
Heidi Huttunen, Beauty Therapy
Julia Peuhkuri, Fashion Technology
Enni Rantala, Confectioner/Pastry
Cook
Hannu Pöntinen, Automobile
Technology
Toni Toivanen, Cooking

Maria Suihkonen, Restaurant Service
Outi Sallinen, Car Painting
Reetta Höyhtyä, Landscape
Gardening
Laura Jantunen, Landscape
Gardening
Markus Lintuala, IT Network Systems
Administration
Heikki Salo, Graphic Design
Technology
Noora Jänkkälä, Caring
Mari Kurula, Caring
Kai Koskinen, Construction Metal
Work
Mariina Jyläskoski, Visual
Merchandising
Timo Pirilä, Creative Modelling
Kimmo Raatikainen, Stonemasonry

ES SPA FRANCORCHAMPS 2012

Säde Tilsala, Floristry
Heli Haapatalo, Floristry
Pipsa Kokko, Window Display
Suvi Kolehmainen, Window Display
Carolinen Hermunen, Hairdressing
Julia Peuhkuri, Fashion Design and
Product Development
Eve Korhonen, Fashion Design and
Product Development
Jarkko Kukkonen, Stonemasonry
Niko Gröhn, Web Design
Pia Ropo, Graphic Designer
Niko-Ossi Hintsala, Print Technician
Ville Lehtonen, CNC Machining
Jaakko Ekman, CAD
Ville Torvinen, Industrial Control
Ville-Pekka Virtanen, Welding
Aku Ilola, Mobile Robotics
Jasu Romo, Mobile Robotics
Niko Laihinne, Mechatronics
Niklas Harjula, Mechatronics
Topi Lampiranta, Electronics
Niko Kinnunen, Electronics
Ira Luoto, Landscape Gardening

Tero Virtanen, Landscape Gardening
Veera Varpa, Landscape Garden
Design
Joonas Immonen, Plumbing and
Heating
Antti Heikura, Electrical Installations
Juuso Hietamies, Refrigeration
Anneli Pitkänen, Painting
Toni Kettunen, Bricklaying
Joni Koponen, Metal Roofing
Timo Möttönen, Transport Logistics
Anna Blubaum, Caring
Heli Petersohn, Caring
Tiina Lampinen, Cleaning Services,
Maintenance Cleaning
Anni Miettinen, Cleaning Services,
Surface Cleaning
Niina Jaakkola, Cooking
Tanja Pöyhönen, Restaurant Service
Elina Laakko, Entrepreneurship
Virpi Ollila, Entrepreneurship
Saija Vähänen, Entrepreneurship

WORLD SKILLS LEIPZIG 2013

Joska Nylund, Polymechanics/
Automation
Aki Ahola, Manufacturing Team
Challenge
Juho Leskelä, Manufacturing Team
Challenge
Felix Vielma, Manufacturing Team
Challenge
Timo-Pekka Mutanen, Mechatronics
Joonas Väisänen, Mechatronics
Jaakko Ekman, Mechanical
Engineering Design – CAD
Jari Tuhkanen, CNC Turning
Ville Lehtonen, CNC Milling
Eemu Pihlaja, IT Software Solutions
for Business
Ville-Pekka Virtanen, Welding
Pasi Kuusikko, Print Media
Technology
Santeri Vartia, Wall and Floor Tiling
Joni Jussila, Autobody Repair

Pauli Manninen, Plumbing and
Heating
Topi Lampiranta, Electronics
Niko Gröhn, Web Design
Antti Heikura, Electrical Installations
Ville Torvinen, Industrial Control
Toni Kettunen, Bricklaying
Margarita Telegey, Painting and
Decorating
Valteri Makkonen, Mobile Robotics
Veli Tapper, Mobile Robotics
Antrei Hartikainen, Cabinetmaking
Matti Simonen, Carpentry
Pirkka Sivonen, Jewellery
Säde Tilsala, Floristry
Caroline Hermunen, Hairdressing
Anna-Kaisa Lehtonen, Beauty
Therapy
Tytti Hongisto, Fashion Technology
Pauliina Räsänen, Confectioner/
Pastry Cook
Juuso Rämö, Automobile Technology
Roni Toivari, Cooking
Kia-Lisa Vartiainen, Restaurant
Service
Raisa Holopainen, Car Painting
Pia Koskinen, Landscape Gardening
Laura Lempiäinen, Landscape
Gardening
Daniel Mononen, IT Network
Systems Administration
Pia Ropo, Graphic Design
Technology
Anna Blubaum, Health and Social
Care
Joonas Innanen, Jyri Lehtonen,
Construction Metal Work
Matti Haapaniemi, Architectural
Stonemasonry
Soila Korhonen, Aircraft
Maintenance

Organisers and Competition Managers of Taitaja Competitions

1988	Hämeenlinna Vocational College and Teacher Training College's Vocational School	2004	Joint Municipal Authority of Seinäjoki Vocational College, Jorma Sihvonen
1989	Hämeenlinna Vocational College and Teacher Training College's Vocational School	2005	Turku Vocational Institute, Jussi Karlsson
1990	Hämeenlinna Vocational College and Teacher Training College's Vocational School	2006	Tampere College, Hannu Pajari
1991	Rakennustaitaja finals, Pirkanmaa Vocational College	2007	North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium, Anne Karppinen
1992	Hämeenlinna Vocational College and Teacher Training College's Vocational School	2008	Omnia, Keuda and Western Uusimaa Municipal Training and Education Consortium, Heli Stolt
1993–1996	competition skills were implemented disjointedly at different vocational colleges	2009	Vaasa Vocational Institute, Iiro Suksi
1997	Technical Institute of Turku	2010	Oulu Vocational College, Sauli Jaara
1998	Hämeenlinna Vocational College	2011	Savo Consortium for Education, Ilkka Kempainen
1999	Oulu Vocational College, Haukipudas Vocational College, Arts and Crafts School of Oulu, Northern Ostrobothnia Vocational College	2012	Jyväskylä Vocational Institute, Esko Juntila
1999	Helsinki City College of Technology (Heltech) and Helsinki City College of Culinary Art, Fashion and Beauty	2013	North Karelia Municipal Education and Training Consortium, Anne Karppinen
2001	Lahti Region Educational Consortium, Aki Kauranen		
2002	Imatra Joint Municipal Authority for Vocational Education, Vesa Markkanen		
2003	Jyväskylä Educational Consortium, Esko Juntila		

INTERVIEW MATERIALS

The following individuals were interviewed for this history:

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