

# Nordic Webinar: Education at a Glance 2025 Nordic Perspectives 22.9.2025

Questions on Nordic completion rates – some remarks

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# Questions on Nordic completion rates – some remarks

- **The Nordic countries show relatively high completion rates for students with an upper secondary vocational background compared to other OECD countries**
  - Nordic countries have tertiary programmes which cater to students with vocational background, e.g. DK: Academy educations, FI: Universities of applied sciences. Often tertiary studies happen in the same field as previous vocational studies (e.g. in health field). Vocational studies include also general studies which improve possibilities to continue studies in higher education (e.g. FI). NO: Vocational graduates have access to higher vocational education and qualify for bachelor programmes after completing higher vocational education thus needing a gap year (in higher vocational education) before they can enter a bachelor programme. SWE: 2023 reform reinstated automatic access for vocational graduates to higher education (basic eligibility for HE). There are no programmes in HE specifically designed for vocational background.
- **Regarding dropout in the first year and number of students still in tertiary education one year after the end of theoretical duration**
  - Structural differences in the organization of tertiary studies, e.g. DK: changes to other educations in the first year which results in lower completion by theoretical duration but higher by theoretical duration plus 3 years. FI: Restricted access but drop-out at the beginning of studies is low and the completion rate is above the OECD average. SWE: Students with lower grades in upper secondary education enroll in shorter tertiary programmes and have higher risk for drop-out. Students with better grades tend to enroll in longer programmes. NO: Similar situation as in DK and SWE: Students may change programme and students with lower grades have higher drop out rates.

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- **Active policies to make tertiary students finish within theoretical duration**
  - Policies exist, e.g. institutions' financing may be partially contingent on students finishing on time and if they get jobs afterwards (DK, FI). Policies to improve graduation rates and financing in STEM (SWE). Incentives to finish within theoretical duration because student loan will be changed to grant, institutions have incentives within the finance system (NO).
- **In Finland, there is a significant gap between women's and men's completion rates**
  - FI: Women's entry rate to tertiary education is higher, tertiary completion rate is higher and women's educational attainment amongst young adults is higher than men's. This is the situation in many OECD countries. Completion rate is higher for women than for men in all OECD countries. Specific educational policies in order to increase men's completion rates do not exist in Finland.

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- **In some Nordic countries (notably Sweden), completion rates are below the OECD average**
  - SWE:
    - Flexible module-based system. Possibility to take free-standing courses without enrolling in a full programme (c. 30 % of enrolled students study free-standing courses). These students may not have intent to graduate but want to study only certain courses which affects completion rate.
    - Degrees are not automatically awarded, students must apply for their degree. Some students may choose not to apply if they are already in working life. National student record system makes possible for employers to have documentation on a candidate's studies which makes the actual degree less needed.
    - Sweden do regard the low completion rate as a problem for specific programmes, like engineering, but not as an overall problem. Nationally e.g. graduation rates for specific professional programmes are used to monitor these.