THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

National report of Finland

by

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1. The Education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century: an overview

1.1. Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century

(a) The legal framework of education

The legislation governing primary and secondary education, as well as part of the legislation governing adult education, was reformed on 1 January 1999. The detailed legislation specific to institutions has thus been replaced with a more uniform legislation concerning the objectives, contents, evaluation and levels of education as well as students’ rights and responsibilities. The education system remains unchanged, but the new legislation has substantially increased the independent decision-making powers of the local authorities, other education providers and schools. For example, education providers decide independently on the institutions providing education. Similarly, providers of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training may decide to purchase educational services. In practice this means that general upper secondary schools, for instance, may purchase their religious instruction from the local parish. In terms of basic education, the most significant change was that comprehensive school is no longer divided into lower and upper stage.

Since January 1999, the school legislation has been amended several times as e.g. pre-school education, evaluation, as well as morning and afternoon activities have been reformed. The school acts have also been complemented by provisions concerning guidance counselling, pupil welfare and discipline. The amendments aim at ensuring a safe and healthy school environment. The focus is on the prevention of difficulties in the development of children and adolescents and the promotion of pupils' prerequisites for learning, their mental and physical health and social wellbeing. The disciplinary powers of principals and teachers have been increased. The amendments came into force as of 1 August 2003.

The reformed legislation governing universities took effect 1 August 1998. The Universities Act and Decree lay down provisions on issues such as the mission of universities, their research and instruction, organisation and administration, staff and official language, students, appeals against decisions made by universities and legal protection for students. The Universities Act is being revised and the new Act is due to come into force in August 2005.

Legislation concerning academic degrees comprises the Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees and 20 educational field-specific decrees governing degrees. These decrees stipulate, for example, the objectives and scope of degrees, their general structure and content, as well as the distribution of educational responsibility between different universities.

The Decree on the System of Higher Degrees also provides for the polytechnic degrees. The degree programmes are confirmed by the Ministry of Education. The new Polytechnics Act and Decree, governing polytechnics, were approved in the spring of 2003.
(b) The organization, structure and management of the education system

The Finnish education system

1) Initial vocational education is arranged in vocational schools (including at least six months of on-the-job learning) and in the form of apprenticeship training. Adults can obtain initial vocational qualifications also in competence-based examinations.
Pre-primary education

All children have the right to early education. From birth to the age of 6, children can attend day-care centres (kindergartens) or smaller family day-care groups in private homes, all of which charge reasonable fees depending on parental income. During the year before compulsory education begins, the child can participate in pre-primary education free of charge. Local authorities may provide pre-primary education in schools, day-care centres, family day-care homes or in other appropriate places. Participation in pre-primary education is voluntary, but nearly all six-year-olds are enrolled (98% in 2002).

The pre-primary reform, which obligates each local authority to provide a pre-primary place free of charge for all children entitled to pre-primary education, came into force as from August 2001.

Basic education

According to the Basic Education Act, children permanently residing in Finland are subject to compulsory education. Compulsory education starts in the year when a child turns seven years of age. The scope of the basic education syllabus is nine years, and nearly all children subject to compulsory education complete this by attending comprehensive school. Additional basic education (“10th year”) is available for those pupils who need an opportunity to improve their grades and clarify their career plans.

Upper secondary education

One of the objectives of education policy is to provide the whole of each age group with upper secondary education – general or vocational - free of charge.

In general upper secondary education, the syllabus is designed to last three years but the student may complete it in 2 to 4 years. The teaching is organised in a non-graded form. At the end of general upper secondary education, students usually participate in the national matriculation examination.

Vocational education and training covers seven sectors of education, 52 vocational qualifications covering altogether 112 different study programmes. The scope of vocational upper secondary qualifications taken after basic education is 3 years (120 credits). Although the education and training mostly takes place in institutions, all qualifications include at least 20 credits (approx. six months) of instruction in the workplace. Vocational qualifications may also be completed as apprenticeship training. Furthermore, vocational upper secondary qualifications may also be obtained through competence tests independent of how the vocational skills have been acquired.

Higher education

Completion of upper secondary education, either general or vocational, makes the students eligible to higher education. Higher education is offered in 20 universities and 31 polytechnics. Both sectors have their own profiles: universities emphasise scientific research and instruction whereas polytechnics as professionally oriented higher education institutions have a more practical approach. Entry to all fields of study is restricted.

At universities, it is possible to obtain lower and higher academic degrees. The Bachelor’s degree (120 credits) can be taken in three years and the Master’s (160-180 credits) in five years. Moreover,
universities offer scientific postgraduate degrees, i.e. Licentiates and Doctorates. Studies leading to a polytechnic degree take 3½ -4 years or 140-180 credits, depending on the field of studies, after which polytechnics grant the student a degree certificate. Some polytechnics offer polytechnic postgraduate degree studies on a trial basis as from 1 August 2002.

Teachers in general education are trained at universities. Pre-primary teachers have a Bachelor’s degree. In the first six years of basic education, instruction is usually provided by class teachers with a Master of Education degree, while in the last three years and the upper secondary level teachers are subject specialists who have completed a Master’s degree in the subject they teach as well as pedagogical studies. Depending on the institution and subject, vocational and polytechnic teachers are required to have either 1) an appropriate higher (or postgraduate) academic degree; 2) an appropriate polytechnic degree; or 3) the highest possible qualification in their own vocational field, work experience in the field for at least 3 years, and completed pedagogical studies.

**Adult education**

Adult education and training offers citizens the opportunity to obtain education and complete qualifications at any stage of life. All education and training, ranging from comprehensive school studies to university studies, intended for young people are also provided for adults. Adults can study either in the same educational institutions as young people, or at institutions and units aimed at adults. Also polytechnics and universities organise adult education. Adult education and training are also provided in the form of in-service training in companies.

A flexible way for adults to study for and gain vocational qualifications is through the system of competence-based qualifications, which is designed particularly for adults. There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: upper secondary vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications.

The state also promotes the principle of lifelong learning by financing the institutes of liberal adult education. These institutes have extensive autonomy as well as the freedom to decide on the objectives, target groups and methods of instruction.

**Administration and funding**

The Finnish Parliament decides on educational legislation and the general principles of education policy. The Government, Ministry of Education and National Board of Education are responsible for the implementation of this policy at the central administration level.

The course of development for the Finnish education system is defined in the Development Plan for Education and University Research confirmed by the Government every four years. The Ministry of Education is the highest educational authority in Finland. It prepares the legislation and Government Resolutions concerning education. The National Board of Education in turn is an expert body responsible for the development of educational objectives, contents and methods in basic, general upper secondary, vocational and adult education and training. Also, each of the six Finnish Provinces has an Education and Culture Department dealing with these issues. Local administration rests with municipalities which have a prominent role as education providers.

Most institutions providing basic and upper secondary level education are maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities. In 2002, only about 1 per cent of basic level institutions, 8 per cent of general upper secondary schools and about 40 per cent of vocational
institutions were privately owned. Municipalities determine how much autonomy is given to schools. The schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements, as long as the basic functions, determined by law, are carried out.

Private institutions are under public supervision: they follow the national core curricula and qualification guidelines. They also receive the same level of public funding as the publicly-funded schools.

The responsibility for educational funding is divided between the State and the local authorities. Of the funding of primary and secondary education, the state subsidy averages 57 per cent of the costs, while the municipal contributions amount to an average of 43 per cent.

Polytechnics are mostly municipal or private. All universities are maintained by the state and enjoy extensive autonomy.

There is no separate school inspectorate, and inspection visits to schools conducted by state authorities have been abandoned. The activities of the education providers are guided by the objectives laid down in legislation and the national core curricula. The system relies on the proficiency of the teachers in their efforts to carry out the objectives laid down in the curricula. Both self-evaluation and external evaluation are strongly emphasised. A separate Education Evaluation Council in connection with the Ministry of Education was established in April 2003. It is responsible for planning, co-ordinating, managing and developing the evaluation of basic and upper secondary education. The Council works as an expert network with a mission to serve the needs of the Ministry of Education, education providers, and schools.

The polytechnics and universities themselves are responsible for evaluating their operations and outcomes. In this, they are supported by the Higher Education Evaluation Council.

(c) Curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning strategies

Pre-primary education

The National Board of Education confirmed the national core curriculum for pre-primary education in December 2000. The pre-primary reform is linked to an extensive development process and a starting point for the curricular reform of basic education. The objective has been to create an integrated continuum of early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education.

General educational and learning objectives have been set out in the national core curriculum for pre-primary education. It does not specify different subjects, but instead the education is based on integration.

Basic education and general upper secondary education

The Government decides on the overall national time allocation. The national core curricula for basic education and upper secondary education are drawn up by the National Board of Education and include general goals, core contents and assessment criteria. Within this framework, schools and municipalities then form their own curricular regulations that are sensitive to the local context.
Teachers choose their own teaching methods and have the freedom to select their own teaching materials.

A new distribution of lesson hours for basic education was confirmed by the Government in December 2001. In November 2002, a Government Decree was issued that defines the new national objectives and time allocation for general upper secondary education. The National Board of Education confirmed the new core curricula for basic education and general upper secondary education in January 2004 and in August 2003 respectively. The new curricula must be in use in comprehensive schools by August 2006. The new upper secondary school curricula will be introduced in August 2005. The previous reform of the core curricula was carried out in 1994.

The core curriculum for basic education is more detailed than before. It defines the aims and key contents of different subjects and thematic entities, and provides guidelines concerning student evaluation. The objective is uniform basic education, i.e. a continuum through years 1-9. For the first time, student welfare and co-operation between home and school have been included in the curriculum. A new school subject is health education, which will be taught as an independent subject from year 7.

The new framework aims at standardising pupil assessment. There are recommended assessment criteria for the grade “good” (8) in all subjects. These, together with the criteria for the final assessment, are meant for teachers as a tool and support.

The curriculum reform for general upper secondary education emphasises student welfare and makes teaching of various subjects more uniform based on a new foundation, thematic entities. Furthermore, the aims and contents of obligatory and advanced courses are defined more closely than before and brought up-to-date. Other features being emphasised are the importance of the student council in helping students grow into active citizens, and the responsibility of all members of the school community within the framework of the operational culture of upper secondary schools.

In both core curricula, the scale of objectives in teaching different languages is defined based on the recommendation issued by the Council of Europe.

The importance of thematic entities is emphasised in both basic and general upper secondary education. Thematic entities are operating principles that help define the operating culture of schools, as well as prioritisations that exceed borders between different subjects and help make teaching more unified. They must be taken into consideration in teaching all subjects.

Vocational upper secondary education and training

In February 1999, the Government decided on the structure of the 120-credit qualifications reformed after 1999 and on the core subjects of upper secondary vocational education and training. The National Board of Education approves the qualification-specific national core curricula and the requirements of each competence-based qualification. Based on these, the education providers draw up their own curricula. The students are provided with personal study plans.

The reformed qualifications include a period of on-the-job learning, during which students familiarise themselves with practical assignments required in the occupation and achieve the core objectives of the occupation as laid down in the curriculum. One of the aims of on-the-job training is to enhance young people’s employment opportunities.
**Higher education**

The degree programmes of polytechnics are designed and organised by the institutions and are oriented towards some field of working life requiring professional expertise and development. The Ministry of Education confirms each degree programme, but the institutions themselves design the curricula. The studies cover eight different study areas: also art and design.

In recent years, polytechnics have strongly developed their teaching methods. The aim has been to increase students’ independent and self-motivated study. There are various forms of project and teamwork and studies have also increasingly been transferred outside the institutions. The role of the teacher has clearly become more instructor-oriented.

Compulsory practical on-the-job learning for at least 20 weeks enables many students to combine their diploma project included in the degree programme with hands-on work experience and to apply their theoretical knowledge in real situations. Topics for diploma projects come primarily from real problems in working life and, in addition, they are often commissioned by representatives of working life.

University degrees are regulated by field-specific decrees. Universities draw up their own curricula and design their instruction within the framework of national statutes and their own degree regulations. The structure of university degrees has been reformed in almost all fields of study. In the new degree system, most fields have adopted the lower academic degree, a Bachelor’s level degree. The decrees give universities more freedom to plan their degree programmes. The decrees also increase students’ options, although the freedom to choose subsidiary subjects and study units varies between different fields. Students may also complete part of their studies in some other Finnish or foreign university.

Universities have recently organised evaluation projects serving the development of their instruction. Alongside the traditional forms of teaching – lectures, demonstrations and examinations based on lectures and literature – instruction makes increasing use of other methods, such as essays, projects, seminar and group work. The use of new information technologies in instruction has also increased.

(d) Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

The central development document in the educational sector is the Development Plan for Education and Research, which the Government approves every four years for the year of its approval and for the following five calendar years. The currently effective development plan for 2003–2008 was approved at the end of 2003. The development plan includes development measures for each field and level of education, as well as the main definitions for education and research policy and the allocation of resources.

In basic education, the new time allocation and core curriculum will be adopted gradually by August 2006. In order to ensure the high quality of the Finnish education system, the Ministry is preparing quality recommendations for good teaching and good school performance. Starting from autumn 2004, the right to free transport will be expanded to children in pre-primary education if the journey is over five kilometres or otherwise difficult, strenuous or dangerous.
Morning and afternoon activities intended for young schoolchildren will be expanded in the autumn of 2004, when the Government starts granting state subsidies to local authorities to organise such activities. The National Board of Education approved the national guidelines for morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren in February 2004. Morning and afternoon activities will be provided for children in year-classes 1–2 of basic education and for children admitted or transferred to special education in all year-classes. The reform does not oblige the local authorities to organise these activities. If a local authority organises morning and afternoon activities, it may provide them itself or may purchase services from other local authorities, joint municipal boards, organisations working with children and young people, associations and parishes, etc.

According to the legislation governing general and vocational upper secondary education and training education providers are expected to co-operate with other educational institutions within their respective regions. The aim is to further promote possibilities to study general and vocational subjects simultaneously through intensified co-operation between institutions providing these forms of secondary education and through the development of funding.

In general upper secondary education, the new national core curriculum will be adopted in August 2005. The national matriculation examination is also being reformed. From 2005 onwards, the only compulsory test for all students is that in mother tongue, the other three compulsory tests, as well as any optional tests can be chosen by the student. The general studies test as part of the matriculation examination will be reformed as from the spring 2006. The general studies test will be reformed by dividing the current multi-subject test into several tests in individual subjects. Candidates may then complete only one test in general studies, or several, if they so wish. The mother tongue test as part of the matriculation examination will also be reformed. The new test will have two parts. Each candidate is required to participate in both the textual skills test and the essay test during the same examination period. The candidate’s mother tongue grade will be determined by the weighted total score from the two tests. The new tests will be introduced in the spring of 2007.

The recently reformed vocational qualifications are developed further. The aim is that by 2006, all qualifications include skills demonstrations to prove that the student has achieved the objectives of vocational studies. There are experimental and development projects to investigate different alternatives for implementing the skills demonstrations and their cost effects as well as the duties and division of work between different parties, and to develop educational arrangements, students’ counselling and guidance services and training for teachers and representatives of working life. In addition, materials are being prepared in a centralised manner for skills demonstrations, and methods are being developed to evaluate these materials and to assure their quality.

The issue of the necessity for polytechnic postgraduate degrees first emerged in 1997 and a related proposal was submitted to the Minister of Education in early 1998. The decision on the postgraduate degrees was taken two years later, at the beginning of 2000. The Ministry of Education granted permission to 24 polytechnics to begin piloting degree programmes in 2002-2003. Polytechnic postgraduate degrees are new higher education degrees intended for people who have completed a polytechnic degree or another applicable higher education degree and have obtained at least three years of work experience in their field after the completion of the degree. These new higher education degrees are determined on the basis of working life needs and implemented in line with the objectives of adult education. According to the Government’s Development Plan for 2003-2008, the system of postgraduate polytechnic degrees will be established on a permanent basis based on the experiences and evaluation of the pilot phase.
Young Finns enter the labour market at a fairly late age owing to delays in entry to education and long study times. In 2002, the average age of polytechnic graduates was 25, Master's graduates 27. Universities’ student selection procedures are developed nationally with the aim of raising the share of students matriculated the same year in admission.

With a view to greater flexibility and international comparability of university education, a new two-cycle degree structure and ECTS-points will be adopted in all fields of study at the beginning of the academic year 2005–2006. In the same context, the extent of studies will be re-determined to correspond to European practices. In this connection, the degree requirements will be reviewed and quantified to correspond to the actual student workload.

Although the Finnish adult education and training system works very well for the most part, there are some problems: polarisation of training and the marginalisation of many people who need education and training most, on the one hand, and large differences in the education of younger and older generations, on the other. Although the overall educational level of the population has increased rapidly, a substantial number of older Finns are untrained. In 2003, the Ministry of Education launched a programme for raising the level of education and training among the adult population in Finland in co-operation with the Ministry of Labour and social partners. The Finnish acronym for the programme is Noste. The aim of the programme, which will be implemented from 2003 to 2007, is to improve poorly trained adults' career prospects and satisfaction at work, to relieve the labour shortages due to the exit of the large post-war age groups from the labour market and to raise the employment rate. The education and training offered within the scope of the Noste programme are mainly intended for working adults aged between 30 and 59 who have no post-compulsory qualifications. The aim is to offer opportunities for untrained adults to study for secondary qualifications. This aim is supported by general education and training in learning-to-learn skills. Adults’ opportunities to take higher education degrees will also be improved by means of educational arrangements especially geared to working adults.

It has been estimated that over one million adult Finns lack ICT skills and access to information technology. Finland is implementing a project called “Information Society Skills for All” as part of the national information society strategy. The aim is to increase the opportunities for citizens to acquire the ICT skills they need in their life situations. One concrete aim is that by the end of 2004 at least half of those currently lacking these skills will have acquired them and that in principle everyone has been offered the chance to acquire the skills they need in all situations in life.

### 1.2. Major achievements, both quantitative and qualitative, and lessons learned

#### (a) Access to education

Local authorities have a duty to arrange basic education free of charge to all school-age children. The network of comprehensive schools covers the entire country. Under law, schoolchildren also have the right to a free daily school meal and free transportation to and from school if the distance is over five kilometres or if the journey is considered dangerous.

The Finnish education system has been systematically developed to eliminate dead-ends, that is, to enable people to continue studying whatever the choices made earlier. Finns participate actively in education and training, and young Finns’ level of education is among the highest in the world. The level of education in Finland has been rising systematically over the past few decades. It begins to be rare for young Finns to leave their education at compulsory schooling. In Finland all school-
leavers are offered an opportunity to continue in general or vocational upper secondary education. In 2002, about 55% of comprehensive school-leavers (61,500) start general and 37% vocational upper secondary studies immediately after basic education. In addition, about 3% continue in voluntary additional education in comprehensive school.

The upper secondary level is considered the minimum requirement for lifelong learning and success in the labour market. More and more young Finns continue in higher education. The Finnish network of universities and polytechnics covers the whole country. In Finland, there are no tuition fees in secondary and tertiary education. In addition, secondary-level students get free meals. The national student financial aid scheme was devised to make it possible for everyone to study. Also adult education has a firmly established place in Finnish society and in Finns’ lives, and participation is extensive.

Changes in the regional demographic structures are a challenge for maintaining the network of upper secondary schools. Providers of general education will be encouraged to increase joint provision with other schools, to plan regional education and training provision with vocational and other schools and to expand virtual teaching and distance learning.

(b) Equity in education

A central objective of the Finnish education policy is that everyone should have an equal right to participate in education according to their abilities and special needs and to develop themselves irrespectively of their financial standing. It is the responsibility of the public authorities to guarantee opportunities for all, irrespective of their age, place of residence, language and economic standing, to participate in high-standard education and training.

Finland has two official languages: 92% of the population speak Finnish and 6% Swedish as their native language. Both language groups have an equal right to education in their own language. The indigenous Sámi minority (0.03% of the population) living in Lapland has the right to education in their own language.

Every pupil in basic education has also the right to special support when needed. In 2003, 20% of all learners in basic education received some form of special support.

In 2002, already 86% of Finns aged 25–29 had a post-compulsory level qualification. In the older age groups, the situation is not as good. In the 55–59 age bracket, 58% had a post-compulsory certificate or qualification. There are also regional differences in the population's level of education, notably as regards higher education degrees. In 2002, the proportion of higher education graduates was the highest (32%) in Uusimaa in the south and the lowest (18%) in Central Ostrobothnia in the west and Kainuu in the east. The corresponding figure for urban and rural municipalities was 28% and 15% respectively. In the younger age groups, the difference in education was in women’s favour, while in the older generations men are better educated than women. The adult education participation rate in Finland is high compared with the EU and OECD averages. Participation is, however, biased towards the highly educated, and women participate more actively than men.

(c) Quality of education

The performance of the education system is monitored through evaluations. In addition to national evaluations, Finland takes part in international evaluations. At the national level, evaluation projects
have mainly been concerned with performance: learning outcomes, various thematic entities, and systemic evaluations. According to legislation, education providers are required to evaluate their own educational supply. The aim of evaluation is to make sure that the intention of educational legislation is realised, to support educational development and to create favourable conditions for learning. Self-evaluation by learners is also emphasised.

According to national and international reviews, learning outcomes in Finland are of a high standard and of a relatively uniform quality. The OECD Pisa review (2002) assessed how pupils aged 15 mastered knowledge and skills of major relevance to future society, work tasks and good quality life. Finnish pupils were found to have a very high level of reading, mathematics and science literacy in comparison to other countries. These findings show that the Finnish education system has achieved good learning outcomes equitably in the age group as a whole. Similarly the international literacy survey SIALS 1997-2000 showed that Finns’ literacy is above the international average and the disparities in literacy are small.

There is no single explanation for the high performance of Finnish students. Rather there seem to be several interrelated factors related to the characteristics of the Finnish education system and cultural heritage that have contributed to the success.

Local governments have strong position and capacities in Finland. Educational decision-making is decentralised, and municipalities as education providers have a far-reaching autonomy. There is a strong belief in school- and teacher-based development and innovation. Teachers are highly educated and the teaching profession highly valued in Finland. Curricular flexibility responsive to the local context and pedagogical freedom of teachers characterise the Finnish education system.

The Finnish comprehensive school system is built on the principle of equity. Finland has also sought to provide all students with equal opportunities for good quality education irrespective of their background or place of residence. The whole age group follows the same syllabus for nine years. Special education plays an important role in Finnish schools in catering for students who have problems following regular teaching. Remedial teaching is provided for those who are lagging behind.

Finns are also active readers, and reading is supported by a comprehensive network of public libraries.

Employment among the newly qualified and graduated has improved at all levels of education since the recession in the 1990s. On the whole, the higher a person's education the more likely he or she is to find a job fairly quickly after graduation, although there are differences between regions and fields.

(d) Major trends and challenges for curriculum development processes

The major aims and challenges for the development of contents of education are defined in the Government’s Development Plan for Education and Research 2003-2008.

Education and the learning environments will be developed to create a solid basis for lifelong learning and personal growth. This entails attention to the development of a positive world view and motivation for learning, as well as sufficient knowledge and learning skills. Further, it requires sufficient and effective support and guidance services. In the development of learning
environments, more attention will be paid to versatile and comprehensive studies. Wider use will be made of learning in non formal environments. Co-operation with libraries will be improved. Putting in place adequate mechanisms for recognising prior learning will help the individual to capitalise on informal learning.

The abolition of the boundary between the lower and upper stage in the comprehensive school has made for unified basic education. Flexible educational solutions are needed and supported to promote genuinely unified basic education from the first to the ninth year class.

The future challenge is to look into the interaction in the school environments and how this affects pupils' learning and growth. Teaching contents and methods and learning materials will be developed to better cater for different ways of learning and to take account of the learning environment. Remedial teaching must be available to pupils who have temporarily fallen behind and others who need special support. The development of educational content will take account of the growing importance of international co-operation and increasing multiculturalism in the Finnish society.

The use of information and communications technology in teaching and learning should be further developed. Moreover, care must be taken that education provides sufficient knowledge and skills for assessing information content on the Internet and for managing information flows. Measures will be taken to utilise new innovative pedagogic solutions and network services. Teaching contents will be developed to respond better to changes in society. Teaching methods will be diversified and learning environments developed by means of the new technologies.

In vocational education and training, the quality of work practice and on-the-job learning will be enhanced. Better opportunities will be provided for a balanced alternation of work and education. The system of skills demonstrations will be made a permanent element of all fields of vocational education and training. Measures will be taken to develop guidance and support systems needed by students. The internationalisation of vocational education and training will be supported through development of the curriculum and teaching and through the promotion of international co-operation.

**(e) Policy dialogues, partnerships and participation by civil society in the process of educational change.**

The Finnish education policy is made by the Ministry of Education under the supervision of the national Government and Parliament. However, various interest organisations can influence policymaking at different stages. For instance, the reform of school acts and the preparation of the Government’s five-year development plan for education include an extensive process of consultation among different expert and stakeholder groups.

**Participation of civil society by level of education**

In pre-school education, co-operation with parents or other guardians is emphasised in a very broad sense. In terms of children’s satisfaction, growth and learning, it is important to create a trusting relationship between pre-primary staff and parents or guardians. An important instrument to implement co-operation is the child’s personal pre-primary plan, which may be drawn up for the child in co-operation with parents or other guardians. Children’s parents or guardians may also be
able to influence the preparation of the institution-specific pre-primary curricula, in terms of the planning of the educational objectives of the curricula in particular.

The Basic Education Act stipulates that instruction must be conducted in co-operation with homes. In practical terms, this is accomplished by parent-teacher meetings, for example, where parents and teachers also have the chance for private discussions. Co-operation between home and school also utilises various notices, etc. Parents may also participate in developing local curricula and planning their children’s studies. The governing bodies of schools may also include representatives of pupils’ parents or other guardians.

The Upper Secondary Schools Act stipulates that general upper secondary education must be conducted in co-operation with students’ homes. In practical terms, general upper secondary schools primarily promote the co-operation between home and school by arranging discussions and information meetings for the students’ parents or other guardians. Parents or guardians have also been able to participate in the development of school curricula. Upper secondary school boards may also include representatives of students’ parents or other guardians.

Although the National Board of Education is responsible for the national core curricula, the curricula reform is carried out in close co-operation with a number of interest groups. The new curriculum for basic education, for instance, was prepared in over 30 working groups looking into subject and student evaluation made up of representatives of various expert organisations. A co-operation network consisting of education providers and schools with their principals and teachers participated in curriculum planning. The co-operation network has been closely involved in the planning throughout the process, and it has provided valuable feedback and suggestions aimed at improving the draft texts.

The draft framework was subjected to an extensive round of statements. Throughout the preparation phase, the draft versions were also available to the public on the National Board of Education website, with an opportunity to provide feedback. Feedback was also given at several education and information events.

The Vocational Education Act provides that special attention should be focused on working life needs in education. Education must be organised in co-operation with representatives of business life and other sectors of working life. The most important channels through which the social partners and representatives of business life can participate in the planning of vocational education and training at a national level are the training committees set up by the Ministry of Education and the governing bodies and consultative committees of educational institutions. Usually, vocational institutions seek to establish local networks to become involved in the regional business life.

The training committees of different fields and the Advisory Board for Educational Co-operation operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and National Board of Education as expert bodies on the development of upper secondary and additional vocational education and training for young people and adults, polytechnic studies and vocationally oriented education provided by universities. The task of the training committees and the Advisory Board is to promote interaction between education and working life in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education.

The board of a vocational institution also include a sufficient number of working life experts from those fields in which the institution provides instruction. At the local level, vocational institutions may have one or more consultative committees, although their establishment is not expressly stipulated by
the Vocational Education Act. The task of consultative committees is to promote the activities of the institutions and their co-operation with local working life. In addition, they may also handle curricula and other issues concerning the internal development of the institution.

Polytechnics have close contacts with regional working life. The co-operation takes various organisational forms, but the aim is always to create a continuous link to working life in order to develop the content of education and to take regional needs into account. Businesses and working life are also represented on the polytechnic boards. Also universities have strengthened their contacts with working life in recent years.

Universities have also always acted in close co-operation with the surrounding society. According to the Universities Act given in 1997, the mission of the university shall be to promote free research and scientific and artistic education, to provide higher education based on research, and to educate young people to serve their country and humanity. The Act was amended on 30 July 2004 so that a so-called third mission was added for the universities. The amendment states that in carrying out their mission, the universities shall co-operate with the society and promote the societal relevance of research findings and artistic activities.

1.3. The main problems and challenges facing the education system at the beginning of twenty-first century.

According to the Government’s Development Plan for Education and Research 2003-2008, the education system faces major challenges. Demographic development, the ageing of the labour force and simultaneous efforts to raise the level of employment entail a flexible education system responsive to change, well educated and trained age groups and the full use of all the talent reserves, and better access to education and training for the adult labour force.

The demographic structure will change radically in the near future. The number of children of compulsory school age will fall by nearly 10% over the period 2000–2010, and the labour force will decrease as the post-war big age groups reach retirement age. From 2003 onwards, the number of young entrants to the labour market is estimated to be smaller than the exit. The shortage of labour will set a ceiling on economic growth. Special efforts have been launched to increase the vocational education and training of adults to keep the aging labour force in pace with the developments of the labour markets. The Government is also concerned about the long study times and late graduation ages of young people.

It is foreseen that the trend towards regional concentration will continue and regional disparities will grow unless means are found for counteracting through knowledge and innovation in all fields. The threats inherent in regional concentration are that remote areas become desolate and growth centres congested and that basic services, including education, deteriorate and service production becomes more difficult both in remote areas and growth centres, that education supply and labour needs do not match either in growth centres or remote areas, and that exclusion escalates. The decrease of the number of pupils and students in sparsely populated regions and municipalities causes problems for preserving the school network dense enough to guarantee equal educational services in all parts of the country. Co-operation over municipal boarders is needed. E-learning can also facilitate the problem to hold on to regional equality.

Finland’s welfare and international competitiveness is based on the vitality and innovativeness of the regions, which is promoted by means of regionally comprehensive education and research.
activities. This entails securing basic resources in all parts of the country, co-ordinating the development aims of national education and science policy and regional policy, stepping up co-operation with local working life and other stakeholders, linking education and research with regional industrial and welfare strategies, intensifying regional foresight, extending the international infrastructure in the regions, and enhancing links between immigration and education policies. These changes will also affect the education system.

Like other countries, Finland is opening up to international influences. Migration to major growth centres diversifies local communities by bringing together people with different backgrounds and circumstances.

The information society development has progressed to a stage in which core services are increasingly offered in information networks. Skill demands relating to the use, content and flows of information in the Internet are growing. The school has an ever growing role in equipping all children and young people with tools for a culturally rich life, whatever their social background. Excessive differentiation in education could aggravate development towards exclusion. The challenge for the education system is to promote and maintain values which favour communality and the acceptance of difference, as well as encouraging active membership of civil society. Inclusion in information society requires that all citizens have access to technical devices and skills in their use.

2. Quality education for all young people: challenges, trends and priorities

2.1. Education and gender equality

(a) What are the main concerns regarding gender and education?

Gender differences in achievements and choices of subjects

Research shows (e.g. Lampela 1995, Lampela & Lahelma 1996) that although in principle basic education is equal, girls and boys are treated differently to some extent in everyday school work. This different treatment is visible in educational choices as early on as in basic education. Girls and boys are taught according to the same curriculum, but different things are expected of them. Studies have revealed that better behaviour and better test results are expected from girls than from boys, for instance. Girls are often rewarded for good behaviour and their success is seen to arise from hard work rather than talent..

There are also differences in learning between girls and boys. Based on evaluations made in the last year of basic education, girls perform clearly better than boys in mother tongue and in A1-level English. Previously, boys have performed better in mathematics, but according to the latest assessments, girls have in practice caught up with boys. As for natural sciences, girls perform slightly better than boys in biology and geography. Boys, on the other hand, perform clearly better in physics. When natural sciences are regarded as a whole, boys perform slightly better than girls. In general, girls are more learning oriented than boys. (See Hautamäki 2000; Lappalainen 2001; Mattila 2002; Rajakorpi 1999; Tuokko 2002.)
According to an evaluation study carried out by the National Board of Education, there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes between girls and boys on the basis of school-specific averages; girls relate in a more positive way to the study of the assessed subjects and to the usefulness of the subjects than boys. In northern Finland and the rest of the Finland apart from the capital city area, the difference between boys’ and girls’ performances is clear: girls perform better than boys. In higher-performing schools differences between boys’ and girls’ performances are smaller or non-existent. Factors related to schools’ operating environments appear to be closely related to the education level of the surrounding community and socio-demographic characteristics. (See Jakku-Sihvonen 2002.)

The PISA study indicates that 50% of Finnish 15-year-olds are excellent readers, while the average in the OECD countries is 32%. Within the different kinds of reading skills, Finnish children were especially good in acquiring information and understanding and interpreting what has been read. According to the PISA study, only 7% of young people in Finland have poor reading skills, whereas the OECD average was of 18%. The results indicate that in all 32 countries girls have better reading skills than boys. In Finland the difference between the reading skills of girls and boys is the largest in the OECD countries. Finnish boys achieved an average of 520 points in reading skills, which is the highest in the OECD countries and clearly higher than the OECD average for both girls and boys. (See Linnakylä & Sulkunen 2002.)

Girls tend to choose less optional courses in mathematics and in natural sciences than boys in basic education. In the year 2002, 45% of pupils choosing mathematics courses and 40% choosing natural sciences courses were girls. In the general upper secondary school, students can choose between basic or advanced syllabus in mathematics. In 2002, 40% of the students who had chosen the advanced syllabus were women. The same year, women formed 60% of students who received general upper secondary school certificate. (See OPH 2003.)

**Differences in educational choices**

The genders differ in their educational choices after compulsory basic education. In 2002, 93% of pupils finishing basic education were accepted to upper secondary education immediately. Of them, 55% started general upper secondary education and 37% vocational upper secondary education. Two percent continued in voluntary additional basic education. Gender differences can already be perceived in this transitional stage between compulsory basic education and post-compulsory secondary education in terms of choice of education level and form. Of girls leaving basic education, 64% started general upper secondary education and 27% vocational upper secondary education. The corresponding share of boys was 46% for both general and vocational upper secondary education.

According to statistics from 2002, women constitute 49% of students in vocational upper secondary education. The proportion of female students is largest in the field of Social Services, Health and Sports (92 %) and lowest in the field of Technology, Communications and Transport (14 %). (Figure 1.)
Figure 1. The share of female and male students in vocational upper secondary education according to sector of education in 2002

Source: Statistics Finland, statistics of educational institutions

In 2002, altogether 36200 students completed the matriculation examination, out of whom 58% were women. The share of women who got a study place immediately after the national matriculation examination was 38% while the corresponding share of men was 41%. The majority of female undergraduates started in vocational upper secondary education or in polytechnic education. The majority of men started in university level education.

The share of female students in polytechnics was 54% in 2002, but the sectors of education very greatly. For instance, in the sector of Social Services, Health and Sports, the share of women was 88% of students, whereas in the sector of Technology, Communications and Transport it was only 16%. (Figure 2.)
Figure 2. The share of female and male students in polytechnic education according to sector of education in 2002

Source: Statistics Finland, statistics of educational institutions

In 2003, women formed the majority in 16 sectors of education whereas men were the majority in only four of the total 20 sectors of education at the university level. The share of female students was largest in health sciences (91 %) and smallest in engineering and architecture (20 %). The overall share of female university students was 53 % and for new students the corresponding figure was 56%. The share of female doctoral students was 50 %, but it should be noted that variation between the sectors of education is high. Most doctorates degrees completed by women are in the sector of health sciences. (Figure 3.)
Figure 3. The share of women and men in university education according to sector of education in 2003

Source: KOTA database

Despite a high level of education, women's average income was 82% of men's income in the second quarter of 2003 according to the Income Level Index of Statistics Finland. However, there are differences between different fields. It has also been studied (Naumanen 2002) to what extent a degree helps men and women succeed in the labour market, when success is measured in terms of the labour market situation and work contents. Naumanen (2002) found that with the same level of education, men are likely to succeed better than women in the labour market.

(b) Is there a gender-based policy in education and training? In what way does this address youth?

The Act on Equality between Women and Men (8.8.1986/609) aims at preventing discrimination on the basis of sex and at promoting equality between women and men, and, for this purpose, at improving the status of women particularly in working life. In addition, the Act is applied to education and training. Authorities, educational institutions and other bodies arranging training and education shall provide opportunities for education and occupational advancement for women and
men, and ensure that instruction, research and instructional material promote the fulfilment of the aim this Act.

According to the Government Programme drafted by Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's Government on 24 June 2003, promotion of gender equality is the responsibility of the entire Government, and it will draw up an action programme for realising such equality. Together with the labour market organisations, the Government will promote equal pay and workplace equality through a long-term programme. The goal is to eliminate unjustified differences in pay between women and men. The Government will reform the Act on Equality between Women and Men and ensure its enforcement. Raising the employment rate will require solutions that help to reconcile work and family life. The Government will enhance the conditions for employment and entrepreneurship with respect to men and women, such as quality day-care and other public services. For example, separate assessment of spouses for tax purposes, work-based social security for employees and entrepreneurs, and loans to female entrepreneurs will encourage women to enter the labour market.

In terms of provision of education, the Development Plan for Education and Research for 2003–2008 sets out the key contents and measures for national development over the coming years. The Development Plan 2003-2008 addresses the problem of balancing the gender structure in vocational and general upper secondary education. The National Core Curricula as well as the Development Plan for 2003-2008 guide nation-wide promotion of democracy, equality between men and women and well-being in all levels of education.

(c) What special measures for youth have been taken to promote gender equality in access and quality of education and training?

Gender equality in the curriculum development

According to the national core curriculum, the underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. Basic education helps to increase both regional equality and equality among individuals. In the instruction, the diversity of learners is taken into consideration, and gender equality is promoted by giving girls and boys the capabilities to act on the basis of equal rights and responsibilities in society, working life, and family life. These values should be reflected in the teaching goals and contents and in everyday activities.

Gender equality is not directly mentioned in the national core curriculum for general upper secondary school. In a section describing value basis for education, it is briefly mentioned that "general upper secondary education shall promote democracy, equality between men and women as well as well-being".

According to the national core curriculum for vocational upper secondary education, in accordance with the provisions of the Vocational Education Act (630/98) and the Government Resolution (213/1999), education and training shall promote democracy, equality between men and women in all sectors of society, as well as general equality in working life and society.
Gender in joint application system

In Finland, pupils in the last year class of basic education apply for upper secondary education through a joint application system. Students are selected on the basis of their scores. In student selection for upper secondary vocational education, points are given, for instance, for previous study record (0-16 points) and work experience (0-5 points). Gender of the applicant can also be relevant in the scoring. The applicant will get two extra points when applying for a sector of education where less than 30% of primary applicants are of the same gender as the applicant.

Programmes/projects aiming for improved equality

Several equality projects have been carried out in Finland in order to advance the access of girls into technological fields and professions. By increasing girls’ interest in studying technology, mathematics and natural sciences, the goal has been to open new work and career opportunities for women in the technological professions and thus to alleviate the division of the labour market into female- and male-dominated fields. In addition to desegregation of working life, the goal of these projects is to find answers for problems with labour force and recruiting in the technology branch by encouraging girls to take vocations in that field.

The projects promoting the recruitment of girls into technological and industrial professions have mainly been educational projects in which girls have been encouraged to make non-traditional choices regarding education and career. Girls in the last year class of basic education and general upper secondary school have been primary target groups for the projects. One concrete goal of these projects has been to get more and more girls studying in the fields of technology and industry. Efforts to affect individual career choices are mainly being made through shaping attitudes and enlightening girls.

Examples of projects promoting the recruitment of girls into the fields of technology and industry include:

- Development programme for Mathematics and Science Education by the National Board of Education (former LUMA Programme of 1996-2002) www.oph.fi/english
- MIRROR (part of the Equal-Community Initiative Programme funded by the European Social Fund ESF)
- TiNA-project (governed and co-ordinated by Department of Electrical and Communications Engineering at the Helsinki University of Technology) tina.tkk.fi
- WomenIT (Development, Training and Research Project planned, governed and co-ordinated by University of Oulu in 2002-2005) www.womenit.info
- Sara – Increasing gender equality in ICT Education and Professions in 2000-2001 (Oulu Polytechnic Institute of Technology) www.tekniikka.oamk.fi
- HiLadies – Girls, Women and Technology in 2000-2001 (University of Oulu, Research and Development Centre of Kajaani)
- Women and Vocational Industrial Training in 1996-1998 (the Economic Information Office) www.tat.fi

Finland has taken initiative for a joint Nordic project called "Different learners - common school", which the National Board of Education launched in 2004. The project lasts until 2005 and aims at
finding ways to diminish the differences in learning results between the genders and to promote actions enabling both genders to utilise their own learning capacities optimally. There are also some Finnish projects with the objective of inspiring boys and men to work into female-dominated fields.

2.2. Education and social inclusion

(a) What are seen as the challenges for ensuring social inclusion?

The globalising economy means an ever more pronounced division of labour at the global level, as well as growing competition. The upshot is changes in the occupational structure, occupations and knowledge needs. Labour mobility is expected to increase with globalisation. These changes will also affect the education system.

Production and services supply is less and less linked with a particular place when the major production factors, labour and capital move freely. This development means threats as well as opportunities for Finland. The danger is intense regional differentiation and clear polarisation into high-achievers and those threatened by marginalisation. As traditional values recede, the risk is that people become marginalised and feel lonely. The vicious circle of exclusion is often difficult to halt. A special risk is intergenerational exclusion, in which exclusion is passed on to the next generation as a result of social and cultural deprivation.

(b) What groups are considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of social exclusion?

Young people who do not continue their studies after the basic education are in great danger of becoming unemployed and excluded from society. Of unemployed young people, 40% are without any vocational qualification and many of them have only completed basic education. Young people who choose not to apply for or are not admitted in vocational or general upper secondary education or who interrupt their studies belong to the group most at risk of exclusion.

According to Statistics Finland, dropping out of school in Finland is most common in vocational upper secondary education. In vocational upper secondary schools, 12% of students left the school during the school year 2001-2002. The corresponding number of general upper secondary school students was 4% during that year.

There are a lot of statistics available concerning students interrupting their studies but not much information about the significance of dropping out to the students themselves or about their experiences related to the phenomenon. According to Komonen’s (2000) doctoral thesis, school leavers are a heterogeneous group. Based on the study, many reasons can be found why students leave the school:

- Change of a study program,
- Studying in a vocational school works as a visit during which a student compares his or her abilities and professional expectations to the contents of study program,
- The contents of a study program do not match the hopes and expectations for future profession,
- Study place is not the student's primary choice,
• Studying in a school of secondary choice is considered to be one way to spend a year.

Pupils in the last year class of basic education who have had trouble attending school and have not done well there are in the greatest risk of not applying for further education or interrupting their studies in upper secondary education.

The global economy means stronger multiculturalism in all societies. The number of foreigners living in Finland is relatively small (approximately 2% of total population) but expected to double within the next ten years. The education system must be ready to give a better response to immigrants’ special educational needs.

(c) What special measures have been taken to adapt education to include members of vulnerable groups

Education and training guarantee

According to the Development Plan 2003-2008, everyone should have an equal right to education and training according to their abilities and special needs and personal development irrespective of their financial means. Realising basic educational security is one element in successful prevention of exclusion. Securing equal opportunity requires that measures geared to support participation are targeted to less active groups. Special attention will be paid to the identification of learning difficulties. Special needs education and remedial teaching will be increased.

With a view to ensuring individual careers, the quality of life and working capacity and preventing exclusion, post-compulsory education or training will be provided for the whole age group. In 2002, around 95% of young people leaving compulsory education continued their studies immediately. The target is that in 2008 at least 96% of comprehensive school-leavers begin in an upper secondary school, in vocational education and training or in voluntary additional basic education. The aim will be that by 2015 the relative share of people with at least secondary qualifications among the 25-29-olds will rise from the present 85% to at least 90%; and that the share of higher education graduates in the population aged 30-34 will rise from the present 40% to at least 50%.

In support of young people’s career planning and educational choices, a project will be undertaken to develop guidance counselling, with a special focus on the last year-classes. The aim is to develop guidance services by means of intensified co-operation between basic education, upper secondary education, vocational education and training, the world of work, the public employment services, the youth service and staff-development training. Procedures will be devised for securing sufficient provision and high quality of guidance counselling in the last year-classes of basic education.

Additional basic education for school-leavers and its financing will be developed to make it available also at vocational institutions as orienting prevocational education geared to prevent dropout.

Some of those who start in general upper secondary education find it difficult to cope with studies. It is vital to support students to find work methods which suit them, to strengthen their self-confidence and help them over obstacles. According to the Development Plan 2003-2008, the quality and availability of guidance counselling will be improved. Student welfare services in upper secondary schools will be enhanced with a view to promoting students' mental and physical health.
An important aim in the development of vocational training is to decrease dropout rates. Key means to this end are to improve the quality of vocational education and training and its relevance to working life, to diversify teaching methods, to take the skills demonstrations in use and to develop student financial aid. Student guidance gains more importance with increased individual choices and more demanding training.

**The Youth Participation Project**

The Youth Participation Project (2003-2007) is targeted at young people in the final stages of comprehensive school and particularly those who are experiencing difficulties during this stage. It aims at flexible and innovative co-operation between different bodies and at responding to local and regional needs, thus developing new opportunities for young people.

The aims of the Youth Participation Project are to:

- make sure that young people take up education or work after comprehensive school,
- reach groups at risk and support them in their choices and,
- offer a broad range of models for problem-solving depending on the individual life situation.

The project operates on the basic value of enabling everyone to lead a full life and to participate in the management of their personal affairs and in joint decision-making.

The project is co-ordinated by the National Board of Education. It consists of 39 local projects and involves a total of 75 municipalities in various parts of the country. Its budget is 2 million euros coming equally from the Ministry of Education and the municipalities. Organisations involved include ministries, actors in the youth sector, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Evangelical-Lutheran parishes and labour market organisations.

The local projects develop:

- methods for an early identification of problems,
- measures of student welfare,
- guidance during the transition stages,
- co-operation between educational institutions and working life and
- co-operation between youth work, social work and education authorities.

The different authorities work with the young person and his or her family in matters concerning the individual. Parents are supported in problematic situations. The young people are offered personal guidance, support and systematic service in organising their lives. The aim is to set up an educational guarantee, whereby every young person leaving comprehensive school is guaranteed a place, either in upper secondary school or vocational or other education. If a suitable place cannot be found, the municipality where the young person lives will take appropriate steps.

A varied range of leisure opportunities for young people is an important element in the services of a municipality. Young people will also be provided with more opportunities of influencing matters and are encouraged to participate in the preparation and making of decisions.

The project aims at flexible, network-based co-operation between both locally and regionally based bodies. The networks provide the authorities with a forum for working with the young people - as opposed to only working on their behalf.
The operating models used are systematically monitored and evaluated throughout the project. The research results, data and experiences will be widely disseminated.

**Youth Workshops**

Youth Workshops have become an important tool for providing training for people at risk of social exclusion as well as their integration into working life and society in general. Workshops offer young people and adults practical work-related training as well as guidance and support for managing their own lives, but they do not have the right to grant vocational qualifications. The workshops' main forms of operation include subsidised employment and practical training, job coaching, training co-operation, individual counselling and apprenticeship training. A long-term aim is to help as many students as possible to complete their studies and to provide new, flexible forms of study for students with different learning styles.

**Immigrant education**

The aims of immigrant education, for both children and adults, include equality, functional bilingualism and multiculturalism. The objective is to prepare immigrants for integration into the Finnish education system and society while also maintaining their own culture.

According to the Development Plan 2003-2008, the public education and research system will be developed to cater for immigrants' special needs in response to growing immigration. The participation of immigrant girls and women in education and training will be encouraged. Education will particularly stress immigrant pupils' and students' proficiency in Finnish or Swedish, which provides a basis for further education and training and facilitates their assimilation into the Finnish society.

The objective is to extend the preparatory vocational education and training intended for immigrants to one school year. Measures will be taken to facilitate young immigrants' entry to upper secondary education. Especially opportunities for apprenticeship training will be improved. Remedial teaching and remedial teaching mentors and teaching by the medium of pupils native languages will be made available with a view to reducing immigrant students' dropout. The relative share of immigrant students in higher education will be raised through the development of student selection, language instruction and information targeted to immigrants and through access courses preparing for polytechnic studies. Measures will be taken to make better use of the education and training completed by immigrants abroad through more flexible recognition of prior learning and by means of necessary supplementary education.

(d) Educational opportunities for children and youth with special educational needs

**Development lines in special needs education**

According to the Development Plan for Education and Research for 2003–2008, special education is being developed as an integral and natural part of mainstream education. Education providers are required to draw up their local development plans on the basis of the national plan in such a way that the development plan for special education is included in the overall plan. The plans may also be regional and sub-regional. The starting points for planning include guaranteeing the achievement of basic educational security, prevention of social exclusion, early intervention and realisation of fundamental educational rights for all people at all levels of the education system.
The aim is to improve the provision and quality of education, promote the creation of sub-regional networks of resource centres, strengthen the realisation of the local school principle and support multidisciplinary co-operation in different branches and at different levels of administration, as well as developing morning and afternoon activities. Educational contents, teaching materials and teaching methods will also be developed with a view to taking different learning methods and operating environments into account. Development of operating methods aims to promote the inclusion of pupils and to enhance close co-operation between home and school. In addition, improvement of co-operation between mainstream and special education in activities within the uniform comprehensive school system will be taken into account in teacher education. State special-needs schools will be developed as expertise and resource centres.

Special-needs education in initial vocational training aims to make employment-promoting vocational training accessible to all students. Vocational education and training will be further developed to make special needs education a natural part of the overall training supply and practical work in the institutions.

Unlike basic education and vocational training, upper secondary schools have no statutory special-needs education. According to the Development Plan 2003-2008, the need for special-needs education will be studied and legislative measures will be taken, if necessary.

**Definition of the Target Groups**

Pupils in special education are divided into teaching groups taking account of their educational needs and on the basis of the curriculum approved by the education provider. Special education is provided both as part-time special education in conjunction with mainstream education and in small groups within full-time special education.

All curricula include two general syllabi; one of these is divided into subjects, while the other is based on functional domains. Instead of following the subject-based curriculum, the most severely disabled and ill pupils may study in accordance with functional domains (motor skills, language and communication, social skills, activities of daily life and cognitive skills).

Pupils studying in accordance with a general syllabus may be provided with a pre-primary education plan and a personal study plan for basic education.

Each pupil admitted into or transferred to special education is to be provided with an individual education plan (IEP), which is based on the curriculum and enables individualisation of the general syllabus.

**Project for the quality development of special education 1997 – 2001 (“LATU”-project)**

The first stage of the project for the development of quality in special education took place in 1997-2001. The second stage continued in 2002-2004.

The aims of the project for developing the quality of special education are to maintain and enhance educational equality and prevent marginalisation.
The project includes all levels of education from pre-school to vocational training. The target group comprises not only all students in special education, but also those students in mainstream general education who need special support.

The project is designed to help find solutions to the practical problems in special education and to develop models for the teaching of children and adolescents in need of special support.

The target area of quality development in the municipalities are the teaching and support systems for those in need of special support as a whole, the aim being to introduce new practices into existing structures and action models. Of pivotal importance is the creation of systems of activity, steering, and evaluation in the municipalities. The point of departure of the whole project is cross-administrative and multi-vocational work.

The objective is

- to harmonise the structures of education, teaching, and support services (specifically to integrate general and special education)
- to develop joint steering of education and the service processes and various action cultures in a way that they will work at the regional and municipal levels, in adherence with the principles of an integrated service system, and
- to ensure that everyone in need of special support is given the possibility to study in accordance with his or her age, potential and needs, and that their growth and development as individuals are being furthered.

2.3 Education and competencies for life

(a) Taking into account the need to redefine the objectives and functions of secondary education

The basis for the latest reforms in the legislation and core curriculum for basic education, general upper secondary education and vocational upper secondary education has been the need to respond to the changing requirements of society and the world of work.

With a view to providing young people with the knowledge and skills they need for varied personal development, further studies and work, the aim is to provide post compulsory education or training for the whole age group.

Continuously changing needs of the world of work require measures to bring general upper secondary education and vocational upper secondary education closer to each other. According to the Development Plan 2003-2008, co-operation between general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions will be increased especially in the planning and realisation of joint provision, joint study programmes and regional education and training supply.

The Development Plan for Education and Research 2003–2008 notes that maintaining the level of welfare society services entails new business. The aim of the Ministry of Education is to boost entrepreneurship education and training and entrepreneurship know-how within the programme in order to enhance the skills of those who want to set up businesses of their own. The aim is to make entrepreneurship more attractive as a career choice. Measures to strengthen the knowledge base in entrepreneurship concern the education system as a whole.
(b) Flexible learning opportunities in upper secondary level

**General upper secondary education**

General upper secondary schools function without division into year-classes, which means that students’ progress in their studies is not tied to year-classes. The syllabus can be completed in 2-4 years. General upper secondary education is general education, where some of the courses offered are compulsory to all students and some are elective. In their general upper secondary studies, students must complete the compulsory courses and, in addition, a set number of specialisation and applied courses. The students may select the specialisation and applied courses from the courses offered by their own school and, within certain limits, by other educational institutions.

Studies completed at another educational institution may be accredited in the upper secondary school syllabus, provided that their objectives and core contents are equivalent to those set out in the upper secondary school curriculum. Instruction at the general upper secondary level may be given particular emphasis by focusing on specialisation and applied courses in the chosen special field.

**Vocational education and training**

In vocational education and training, creating options and opportunities for individual advancement has been the aim of the development of curricula in recent years. The education providers draw up their curricula on the basis of the national core curricula. The aim is that the education provider designs its education and training together with other local institutions so that students can also include study modules from other fields and from general upper secondary school in their qualification.

Teachers work together with the students in order to draw up personal study plans, on the basis of which the students themselves can partially decide when, how and in which order they study. The aim is study without division into year classes, which means that the institution provides students with the opportunity to progress according to their individual abilities.

The organisation method of instruction is not regulated. Teachers themselves may choose the methods that they apply in order to achieve the objectives defined in the curriculum.

There are various ways of promoting students’ opportunities for organising their studies individually. Accreditation of previous studies aims to shorten the duration of education and to avoid unnecessary overlaps in education. The modularity of the vocational qualifications, in turn, increases options; the qualifications consist of large modules, which the students may partially choose themselves and complete in the manner best suited to them.

In apprenticeship training, students proceed according to an individual learning programme drawn up on the basis of the national core curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification. The qualification consists of functional modules relevant to occupational proficiency. The studies for the qualification may either be conducted all at once or in smaller parts. The organisation of instruction is not regulated in apprenticeship training, either.
(c) What measures have been taken in order to ensure that secondary education helps young people acquire a common basis of human value

The central task of basic education is to educate pupils into humane, ethically responsible members of society. According the Development Plan for the Education and Research 2003-2008, tolerance and a positive attitude to different cultures will be stressed in all education and training. Questions relating to minorities and human rights will be systematically integrated into teachers’ initial and further training. Research and development projects promoting good ethnic relations will be supported. Textbooks and teaching materials will be developed with a view to promoting knowledge about minorities.

The underlying basic values of education can be found in the national core curriculum. The underlying values of general upper secondary education are based on Finnish cultural history, which is part of Nordic and European cultural heritage. The ideal educational pursuits of general upper secondary education are striving for truth, humanity and fairness. General upper secondary education shall promote open democracy, equality between men and women and well-being.

Vocational education and training provides capabilities which increase general vocational learning and civic skills required in all fields, and which enable students to follow changes in society and world of work and to function in changing conditions. In order to develop ethical and aesthetic skills, education and training provide students with capabilities enabling them to deal with and resolve ethical problems and to be aware of their own values and of the aesthetic values based on culture, and to take account of these in their actions. They shall be able to function in a responsible and fair manner and in accordance with what has been agreed. They shall be able to adhere to occupational ethics in their work, including confidentiality concerning their customers, data protection and statutes governing consumer protection.

2.4. Quality education and the key role of teachers

After the national project OPEPRO in 1998-2000 to investigate the training needs of teachers by 2010, both a forecast on the number of teachers required by 2020 and teacher education development programme for 2001–2005 have been published by the Ministry of Education.

The quantitative forecast concluded that due to demographic factors and changes in the teacher population, the number of entrants into teacher education must be raised as much as possible up to the year 2010. Similarly to other occupational groups, members of the large post-war generations in the teaching profession are retiring and the wastage rate will reach a peak in 2008–2010. Particular attention should be paid to entrants specialising in guidance counselling, special-needs education, mathematics, foreign languages and VET pedagogy. In order to prevent a teacher shortage in the future, a programme has been set to increase the intake to teacher education in 2001-2006.

In the teacher education development programme, the Ministry of Education proposes development measures in teachers' initial and further training that are based on anticipation and evaluation findings. The implementation of the aims and recommendations will be reviewed in target outcome negotiations and in 2005 by means of a national evaluation.

The first recommendations concern the selection of students into teacher education. Aptitude tests must be part of admission to all teacher education more clearly than now is the case. The universities are urged to develop selection models which take account of prior work experience and thus make it easier for professionals of other fields to become teachers. The polytechnics providing
VET teacher education are encouraged to intensify their co-operation in admission and clarify their division of work in response to various teacher needs.

The second area of the recommendations concerns teachers’ pedagogical training. Important pedagogical contents in all teacher education are the ethical and social basis of teachers' work: interpersonal, interaction and co-operation skills, an understanding of the learning process and the prevention of learning difficulties and exclusion. Other important elements are multiculturalism, guidance skills, ICT skills, skills relating to the work community and conflicts in it, curriculum design, as well as and planning and assessment skills.

The third set of recommendations is about the status of and co-operation in teacher education. Evaluations show that there are clear differences in how the status and value of teacher training are perceived in different universities and polytechnics. Some of them regard teacher training as an important mission, others accord it a secondary status. Such valuations influence not only resource allocation, but also the inclination to develop teacher training.

With a view to qualitative and quantitative development, universities and polytechnics must clarify their objectives in both initial and continuing teacher education. One means to this end is to devise development strategies, which will require active support from university and polytechnic leadership.

Lastly, the development programme addresses the topic of continuing professional education. Development as a teacher must be seen as a gradual process of studies, teaching and continuing professional education. The changes in the teaching profession necessitate up-to-date and constantly developing teaching skills. Teachers themselves must be willing to renew their skills and to assume responsibility for developing their own work. For the educational institution, it is important that staff development is carefully planned and linked to institutional development. This requires individual and institutional training plans and the possibility of requiring that teachers develop their own professional skills. In-service training is considered an important factor in preventing burn-out.

Continuing professional education should take into account the different training needs teachers have at different points of their careers. The guidance of newly graduated teachers will be intensified. Universities and polytechnics will take measures to bring continuing professional education closer to initial training. This will create a training continuum supporting lifelong learning and make it easier to determine which content is best provided during initial training and which in continuing education.

The programme states that focus will be shifted from one-day and short-term training towards work community training and the development of educational institutions.

The responsibility for continuing professional education of teacher trainers rests with the teacher trainers themselves and their work communities. Universities and polytechnics must assume greater responsibility for their continuing professional education. This requires staff development strategies which take account of both individual training needs and those of the work community. One important aim in these strategies is to prevent burn-out. It is also important for teacher trainers to take actively part in the production of new knowledge in R&D projects.

Owing to changes in working life, it is vital that teacher trainers, particularly those involved in VET teacher education, keep in contact with the field. Care must be taken to ensure that teacher trainers have up-to-date information about the everyday operation of educational institutions.
According to the Government’s Development Plan for Education and Research 2003-2008, special attention will be paid in teacher education to knowledge and skills needed in guidance counselling and in teaching different learners, pupils with special educational needs and immigrants, and to the use of information and communications technology in teaching.

The education policy priorities which the plans sets out for teachers’ continuing education are management, evaluation and the development of the work community in educational institutions, management of social problems, health education, the use of information and communications technology in teaching, on-the-job learning and school-industry contacts, as well as education relating to multiculturalism. The goal is that about 22,000 teachers take part in education relating to these education policy priorities.

A project will be undertaken to develop teacher education and school communities in vocational training with the aim of assuring the quality of training and its adequate response to labour market needs and enhancing the appreciation vocational teachers’ work.

2.5. Education for sustainable development

This chapter is based on the report “Education for Sustainable Development in Finland” published by the Ministry of Education in 2002, as well as on the national core curricula.

(a) To what extent is the issue of sustainable development being considered in current curricula and syllabi?

The curricula for basic and upper secondary education will be gradually revised by 2008. The current core curricula adopted in 1994 raise the question of sustainable development as a rationale for curricular reform, and as one of the themes in discussion about values in schools. The largest amount of material relating to sustainable development is included in natural sciences, but it is also treated in connection with home economics, art and crafts, humanities and languages.

The 1994 curriculum for basic education encompasses inter-curricular issues which must be taught in different subjects and which play a role in other school work. International education, which is one of the inter-curricular themes, is defined as follows: education and teaching which aims at increasing the students' knowledge and understanding of different cultures, at guaranteeing human dignity and human rights for all, at establishing peace, at a just distribution of the world's resources, and at furthering sustainable development.

Environmental education is another inter-curricular theme. According to the core curriculum, the purpose of environmental education is to protect biodiversity and further sustainable development. Environmental studies will help the student understand human dependency on natural resources and the renewal of nature and the state of the environment. The studies will also inspire the student to act responsibly and in a just way. The school's own practices and the student's studies prepare him or her for an ecological lifestyle. When studying, it is important to learn to discern the drawbacks and conflicting interests in production, consumption, and people's ways of doing things, and to start discussion on how these could be changed in order to cut down on the strain on nature and to improve the quality of life.
According to the core curriculum, Environmental and Natural Studies guides the student to understand different people and cultures and to assess the effects of people's choices on the globe, and it builds grounds for an ecologically sustainable relationship to the environment. The teaching of Craft aims at a broad, traditional, and modern technological knowledge of materials, tools and working practices. The student learns to appreciate work, to master the lifespan of the product, to adopt the principle of sustainable development by using different planning and problem-solving methods. During the production process, both a student and a teacher are continuously considering environmental, cultural and nature values.

In the new core curriculum for basic education, approved in 2004, cross-curricular themes represent central emphases of the educational and teaching work. In formulating the curriculum, cross-curricular themes are to be included in the core and optional subjects and in joint events such as assemblies, and are to be manifest in the school's operating culture. One of the cross-curricular themes is "Responsibility for the Environment, Well-Being, and a Sustainable Future". The goal of the theme is to augment the pupil's abilities and motivation to act on behalf of the environment and human well-being. It is the objective of basic education to raise environmentally conscious citizens who are committed to a sustainable way of life. The school must teach future-oriented thinking and the building of the future upon ecologically, economically, socially, and culturally sustainable premises. The objectives and core contents are defined as follows:

OBJECTIVES
The pupils will:
- come to understand the prerequisites for human well-being, the necessity of environmental protection, and the relationship between the two
- learn to observe changes taking place in the environment and human well-being, to clarify these changes' causes and consequences, and to act for the good of the living environment and the enhancement of well-being
- learn to evaluate the impacts of their consumption and daily practices, and will adopt the courses of action required for sustainable development
- learn to promote well-being in their own communities and to understand the threats to, and potential for, well-being at the global level
- come to understand that, through their choices, individuals construct both their own futures and our common future; the pupils will learn to act constructively on behalf of a sustainable future.

CORE CONTENTS
- Ecologically, economically, culturally and socially sustainable development in one's own school and living environment
- Individual and community responsibility for the well-being of people and the condition of the living environment
- Environmental values and a sustainable way of life
- Eco-efficiency in production, society, and everyday ways of acting; product life-cycles
- Consumer behaviour, management of one's own household, and the consumer's means of influence
- The hoped-for future and the choices and actions it calls for.

Being a cross-curricular theme, the ideas and principles of sustainable development (or future) can be found in the curricula of different subjects. The perspective is strongly emphasised in the teaching of natural sciences, but it can also be found in the core contents of e.g. religion and foreign language teaching.
According to the general national objectives for upper secondary schools confirmed by the Government in 2002, the student should learn to promote together with others human rights, democracy, equality and sustainable development. In the new Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education, sustainable development is integrated in the teaching of different subjects and presented as one of the cross-curricular themes.

General upper secondary education, on the other hand, shall encourage the students to lead a sustainable lifestyle and to support sustainable development by their actions.

The goal is that a student
- knows the basics of the ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects of sustainable development and understands that only their simultaneous implementation makes development sustainable;
- is able to measure, assess and analyse changes taking place both in the natural and in the cultural and social environment;
- contemplates the characteristics of a sustainable lifestyle, a nature-friendly and ecologically efficient production and community, a community and society strengthening its social capital as well as a culture looking after its natural resources over the generations;
- is able and willing to support sustainable development by his or her actions in every-day life as a student, a consumer and an active citizen; and
- is able to co-operate for a better future on a local, national and international scale.

In order to find encouragement in actively promoting sustainable development, a student needs to experience that his or her own ethical, practical, financial, societal and professional choices matter. In promoting sustainable development, a general picture should be created of how extensive the necessity of change is and of the fact that the required results can be reached only through wide co-operation. In addition to teaching, a sustainable lifestyle may be advanced by the school's own environmental programme or a programme of sustainable development as well as an operational culture demonstrating environmental awareness.

The objective of sustainable development is stressed in the new curricula for vocational education and training, which also include environmental know-how as part of vocational competence. In addition, there are new vocational qualifications in the environmental field: in vocational institutes, and as an option for adults, who can take a competence-based examination in environmental care.

(b) What measures are being envisaged in order to ensure that the content of education reflects and supports sustainable development as one of its central themes?

According to the Finnish constitution, every individual is responsible for nature and its biodiversity, environment and cultural heritage. In the Government’s Development Plan for Education and Research 2003-2008, sustainable development is one of the important principles to be taken into account in the national educational provision.

In 1999, the National Board of Education conducted a national theme evaluation of the state of sustainable development in educational institutions. In most cases, teaching about the principles of sustainable development is integrated into other instruction. The topic of ecological sustainability is mainly associated with the syllabi of the natural sciences. Elements of economic, cultural and social sustainability are to be found in almost all subjects. These types of sustainable development are
central, for example, when dealing with the topics of population growth, urbanisation, internationalisation, and family education, graphic arts, and personal and social education.

According to the evaluation report, 66% of educational institutions have included sustainable development in their values and business idea. Social and cultural sustainability appear in curricula as often as ecological and economic sustainability. However, schools have not defined in clear terms how the instruction on sustainable development is realised. Study methods naturally depend on the topics which are being dealt with. Study projects have increased the use of various kinds of research based working methods. Problem-solving processes, co-operative learning, and participation in decision-making have become more common in environmental projects. Maintaining composts and recycling units, sorting, or gardening has introduced practical activities and the sense of responsibility for one’s everyday actions into schools.

Short- and long-term study units relating to environmental education are organised in all types of educational institutions. Themes for these study units include among other things sorting, recycling and refuse disposal, immediate surroundings, traffic, and endangered species of animals.

Local, regional, national, or international projects and programmes are an increasingly popular way of carrying out projects relating to environmental education and sustainable development. The objective of many projects is to familiarise students with their surroundings, and to take a stand on plans of its development. Some projects include course planning, or revision of an entire curriculum.

Many preschools and comprehensive schools in Finland emphasise sustainable development in their teaching. Some upper secondary schools have been granted a special permission to specialise in environmental education. Many vocational institutions have developed their own environmental programmes as part of their quality standard.

Various organisations co-operate with schools in the area of environmental education. Organisations can participate in planning short courses, projects, special theme days, competitions, work parties, and camps on sustainable development. These can be conducted during a school day or after regular school hours. In Finland, there are various organisations concentrating on environmental issues and nature activities. Many of these organisations have departments for children and young people. Additionally, there are youth councils in many municipalities. In a youth council, young people learn about social participation and decision-making, since the initiatives of youth councils go to municipal councils.

According to the evaluation report, changes in schools depend on the attitudes of the staff. Positive attitudes and the awareness of the necessity of sustainable development are starting points for changes. The official national-level support in the form of core curricula and various action programmes, on the other hand, are important for a change in attitudes. In-service training is needed, and offered in abundance. A small amount of the free in-service training provided by educational authorities has been reserved for training in sustainable development. Most of the other education provided by educational authorities is subject to a charge. It depends on the school providers how finances for personnel training are directed. There is plenty of material available for environmental education. There are text books, exercise books, additional teaching material, bulletins, research reports, databases, study material on the Internet, and information in the media. The National Board of Education has published support material for teachers, and provides information of good practical examples of implementing environmental education.
In the evaluation, schools named the lack of finances and resources as the greatest obstacle for the implementation of sustainable development. A lack of time was said to be the second most common obstacle.

In order to be able to be in the front line of sustainable development, schools need a commonly recognised environmental programme. The aim of the criteria and the environmental programme for schools is to ensure that the principles of sustainable development are included in all school activities, such as instruction, building maintenance, deliveries and transport, material usage, functions of the school kitchen, and administration of safety matters. When schools commit themselves to maintaining the principles of sustainable development in their activities this will gradually start reflecting itself in all sectors of society.

As an encouragement for schools to pay more and more attention to sustainable development an environmental certificate has been prepared. This certificate is granted to a school as a sign of serious and purposeful environmental work.

The virtual school is a part of the Ministry of Education’s information strategy for education and research. In connection with that the National Board of Education developed the internet service on sustainable development jointly with the Ministry of Environment. The virtual sustainable development school opened in May 2001.

The Finnish Oak Project was launched by the National Board of Antiquities and the National Board of Education in 1998, and continued until 2003. It was a project involving 150 schools and gearing to develop education relating to cultural heritage. The main theme in the project was to raise awareness among schoolchildren and young people of historic environments and the conservation of cultural heritage.

On 24 January 2002, the Ministers of Education in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) approved a programme of education for sustainable development entitled "An Agenda 21 for Education in the Baltic Sea Region - Baltic 21E". This programme aims at making sustainable development considerations a natural and permanent part of education systems in the BSR. The programme is not, therefore, a short-term project but a commitment to change education systems permanently. In March 2002 the Finnish Ministry of Education appointed an ESD committee, the main task of which is to carry out the Baltic 21E programme. As its first action, the committee drew up a proposal for a starting-up plan for the programme in order to launch the programme. The starting-up plan is based on the Baltic 21E goals and action programme, as well as studies into the present state and further development of sustainable development within the Finnish education system and research work, made during the preparatory process of the programme. The starting-up plan includes, among other things, proposals for actions concerning development projects in the fields of the National Board of Education and non-formal education, as well as in polytechnics, and examples of how to develop university education and research to be more in tune with Baltic 21E goals and action programmes. On the basis of conclusions emanating from the starting-up plan, the committee will make its final proposal to the Ministry of Education for a national implementation plan for the Baltic 21E programme.

The section in the starting-up-plan concerning schools provides for two development projects in general and vocational education. The first pilot will devise a sustainable development programme for schools and the second one will develop a procedure for collaborating with an external partner as part of teaching. The aim of the pilots is to develop practices and procedures for enlisting the commitment of the whole school community to promoting sustainable development and for
incorporating sustainable development viewpoints into school management, into the organisation and development of activities, and into teaching, learning and everyday practices. Models will be derived from the practical work done in the pilots.

The 10 participating institutions have committed themselves to a two-year development process, and the National Board of Education will support the process with expert help and training. A researcher is involved in the pilots; every project works with a representative of the regional environment centre and many also with representatives of the local environmental, cultural and planning authority. The National Board, working in co-operation with the schools, will write a process description of all the stages, including problems encountered and solutions made. A guidebook will be written based on the experiences. It will crystallise ideas for ways to work for sustainable development, with the aim of enlisting the commitment of the whole school community to the undertaking and ensuring that it is realised in both learning and everyday practices. After the pilot stage, in 2005, the network will be expanded in Finland and in other Baltic Sea countries in accordance with the Baltic 21E programme.
3. Documentary references used for the preparation of the national report


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