

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

**National report of Finland**

**by**

**The Finnish National Board of Education**

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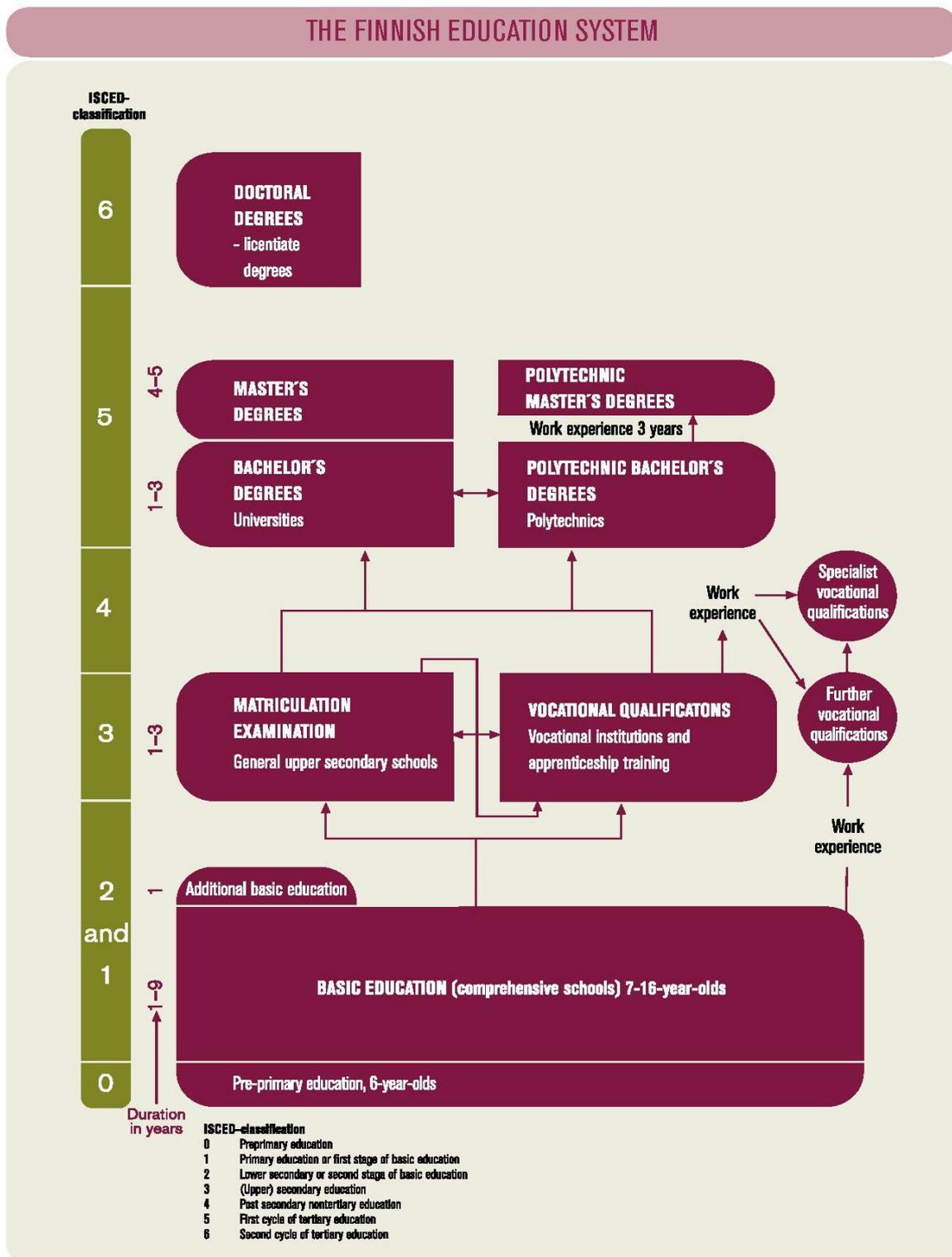
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# 1. The Education system facing the challenges of the twenty-first century: an overview

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

### (a) The organization, structure and management of the education system



### ***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 have the obligation to 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 in practice all six-year-olds are enrolled.

### ***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 (“10<sup>th</sup> 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, 53 vocational qualifications covering altogether 120 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 28 polytechnics. There are on-going processes which aim to merge universities as well as polytechnics to bigger units. 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, studies are quantified as credits (ECTS). One year of full-time study corresponds to 60 credits. The extent of the Bachelor's level degree is 180 credits and takes three years. The Master's degree is 120 credits, which means two years of full-time study on top of the lower degree. In some fields, such as Medicine, the degrees are more extensive and take longer to complete.

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 Finnish 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 2007, 99 per cent of basic level pupils studied in schools maintained by municipalities, 93 per cent of general upper secondary students and about 91 per cent of students in vocational institutions studied in educational institutions maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities. 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 requirements of competence-based qualification. 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 42 per cent of the costs, while the municipal contributions amount to an average of 58 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.

## **(b) The aims and purposes of education at each level**

### ***Pre-primary education***

A central task of pre-primary education is to promote children's favourable growth, development and learning opportunities. Pre-primary education guarantees equal opportunities for children to learn and start school. One of the key objectives of pre-primary education is that problems affecting children's development and learning are detected and addressed sufficiently early.

The objectives of pre-primary education are determined by each child's individual development opportunities and learning potential, on the one hand, and by the needs of society, on the other. General educational and learning objectives have been set out in the national core curriculum for pre-primary education. The objectives primarily include educational objectives related to living and functioning in pluralistic Finnish society and general objectives aiming at providing the capabilities for learning to learn.

Co-operation with parents or other guardians and provision of multidisciplinary support are of the utmost importance in the implementation of pre-primary education.

From the perspective of children's development, early childhood education and care, pre-primary education as part of it and basic education form an integrated whole progressing in terms of content.

### ***Basic education***

The objective of basic education is to support pupils' growth towards humane and ethically responsible membership of society, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills they will

need in life. The instruction is to promote education and equality in society and pupils' opportunities to participate in education and to otherwise develop themselves during their lives.

### *Upper secondary education*

According to the General Upper Secondary Schools Act of 1998, the objective of general upper secondary education is to promote the development of students into good, balanced and civilised individuals and members of society and to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for further studies, working life, their personal interests and the diverse development of their personalities. In addition, the education must support students' opportunities for lifelong learning and self-development during their lives.

The Government Decree on the General National Objectives of General Upper Secondary Education and the Distribution of Lesson Hours (955/2002) further elaborates on the objectives of education, as follows:

- The point of departure in education shall be respect of life and human rights. The aim is that the student learns to respect the diversity of nature and cultures.
- The instruction must support the student's growth into responsibility for his/her own and other people's welfare, the state of the environment and the functioning of civil society. The student shall be acquainted with business and industry and with entrepreneurship. The student's cultural identity and knowledge of cultures shall be enhanced.
- The instruction must encourage the student to operate in the learning community and in society locally, nationally and internationally. The aim is that the student learns to promote human rights, democracy, equality and sustainable development together with others.
- The aim is that the student learns good manners, can express his/her cultural identity and gains awareness of his/her own personal uniqueness.

The purpose of the matriculation examination held at the end of the general upper secondary education is to determine whether students have acquired the knowledge and skills required by the curriculum for the upper secondary school, and whether they have reached an adequate level of maturity in line with the goals of the upper secondary school. Passing the Matriculation Examination entitles the candidate to continue his or her studies at university.

The Vocational Education Act 630/1998 stipulates that the aim of Finnish upper secondary vocational education and training is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain vocational expertise, as well as the capabilities to find employment or to become self-employed. In accordance with the provision of the Vocational Education Act and the Government Resolution 213/1999, upper secondary vocational education and training provide students with extensive basic vocational skills for various assignments in their field and more specialised competence and vocational skills as required by working life in one sector of the qualification. This enables those who are qualified to find placements in working life, to perform various tasks in their field in changing conditions, and so to develop their vocational skills throughout their lives.

The objective of vocational education and training is to encourage students to take up interests and to develop their personalities as well as enhance their capabilities for further education by providing them with diverse elective and free-choice studies. Vocational education and training aim at creating an open and positive learning environment to students with different learning capabilities, and to support the positive individual development and healthy self-esteem of students. Vocational education and training also aim at promoting democracy, equality between men and women as well as general equality in working life and society.

The objective of vocational education and training is also to provide students with capabilities which increase general vocational learning and civic skills required in all occupational fields, and which enable the students to follow the changes in the society and working life and to function in changing conditions. These capabilities are defined in the national core curricula as the common emphases and core skills common to all fields.

### ***Higher education***

According to legislation governing universities, the purpose of universities is to promote independent research and scientific knowledge and to provide the highest education based on this research and knowledge in their particular fields of study. In their activities, universities must also aim to prepare students to be of service to their native country and all humankind.

Universities also organise Open University instruction according to their own degree requirements. There are no age limits or requirements concerning previous education. Degrees cannot be completed in this way, but students may apply for the right to study at the respective university after completing at least one third of the degree. Open University instruction is often organized by universities' continuing education centres or open universities which often operate as distinct departments in several universities.

The equal access to higher education is ensured by the wide institutional network, the free education, student financial aid as well as the flexible pathways to higher education. In addition the student selection is being developed so that a joint application system will be introduced in 2008.

According to the Law on Universities (1997/645) universities must operate in interaction with the rest of the society and promote the effectiveness of research activities. In the Development programme for education and research 2007-2012 universities and polytechnics are further urged to take part in the development of regional innovation systems utilising the possibilities provided by competence centre programmes and structural funds.

Connecting research and societal development as well as the utilisation of research results in university education can also be included as the criteria in the quality assurance systems of universities.

The objective of the studies leading to a polytechnic degree is to provide the necessary knowledge and skills for professional expert functions on the basis of the requirements of working life and its development needs.

Polytechnics carry out research and development, which serve polytechnic education and support working life. They play an important role in regional development as providers of high-quality education and developers of the economic life of the regions, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises. Equal access to higher education, irrespective for example of the students' domicile and economic status, is ensured in many different ways.

### **(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 national core curriculum is determined by the Finnish National Board of Education. It includes the objectives and core contents of different subjects, as well as the principles of pupil assessment, special needs education, pupil welfare and educational guidance. The principles of a good learning environment, working approaches as well as the concept of learning are also addressed in the core curriculum. The present national core curriculum for basic education was confirmed in January 2004 and it was introduced in schools in August 2006. 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.

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 Government decides on the overall national time allocation. The present distribution of lesson hours was confirmed by the Government 20 December 2001 and it was implemented together with the new national core curriculum.

The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools was reformed in 2003 and the local curricula based on the new national core curriculum came into effect on 1 August 2005. The curricula are to be drawn up so as to provide students with an opportunity for individual choices of studies, including instruction given by other education providers, where necessary. In order to arrange the schoolwork in each school year, there is an overall school schedule, which is based on the curriculum. The core curriculum 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 Finnish 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. Vocational skills demonstrations were introduced as a way of assessment as of August 2006 and they will mostly take place during the periods of on-the-job learning.

### ***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) 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 came 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.

### **(e) 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 2007–2012 was approved at the end of 2007. 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.

Pre-primary and basic education will be developed as local services. According to the development plan the availability of voluntary additional basic education is to be secured. The obstacles to attend school over municipal boundaries must be lowered. The development of the time spent on the way to school and back and the travel arrangements are to be monitored. The objective is to have reasonable transportation times for young school children.

The high quality of the teaching, healthcare and guidance counselling services and the availability of professional personnel are to be secured.

The position and tasks of the state's special schools and reform schools are to be identified. The efficiency of the actions to organise teaching for children and young people relocated by virtue of the Child Welfare Act is to be improved as required by the Basic Education Act.

The administration of early childhood education is to be simplified in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The objective is to strengthen the continuity of early childhood education and basic education.

The quality of services of the vocational education providers' network will be strengthened. A vocational institute strategy was launched in 2006, which aims to collect education providers into regional or otherwise strong vocational institutes, the operations of which cover all vocational education services, development operations and teaching units. The education providers and vocational institutes have still the right to form their organisations, regions or sectors according to their requirements and decide upon their institute and other service networks. Vocational institutes must see that the organisation method selected supports the maintenance and continuous development of high-quality services intended for those transferring to working life and those engaged in working life. The organisation and division of the state's vocational special education is to be identified as part of structural development. The solutions will be made by the end of 2008. Special institutions will be developed to resource and competence centres.

In order to strengthen the operational quality and efficiency of higher educational institutions, their national and international strategic alliances will be supported. The grade of alliances varies from mergers between universities to closer cooperation in teaching, research, support services and the user of materials and equipment.

The profiles of universities and polytechnics will be simplified through objective and result negotiations so that the strategic areas of emphasis will be clearly identified providing better requirements for focusing research funding and competing over international research funding. The research qualifications of universities will be strengthened using the selected strategic areas of emphasis within research-intensive universities.

University centres will be developed into regional resource and coordination centres to increase the adult population's competence levels. The centres will be in close cooperation with the region and its companies. Their operational quality and efficiency will be assessed during 2008.

Closer administrative cooperation between universities and polytechnics and common strategic decision-making are to be aimed for regions with unfavourable population development. The cooperation agreements of university centre operators are to be renewed so that polytechnics can also be involved.

The total reform of vocational adult education is being prepared by a wide preparatory organisation led by the Ministry of Education involving the central ministries, central occupational organisations and adult education organisers.

The educational system will be developed to support the upgrading, development and redirection of competence better than before. Different types of continuing education needs of employees, unemployed people and other people outside working life must be identified and the selection developed correspondingly.

The training possibilities of adults are to be improved. Learning and the acquisition of qualifications at work must particularly be advanced. The vocational degree system is to be developed as a work-oriented high-quality channel of qualification education. The position of adult education as part of higher educational institutes must be strengthened and the continuing education possibilities of higher educational institute graduates are to be expanded. The operations of open polytechnics will be expanded. The use of apprenticeship training in continuing education of higher educational institute graduates is to be identified. The funding base of vocational further education and continuing education of higher educational institutes must be simplified.

## ***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. In basic education 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. The proportion of young people who have finished an upper secondary qualification is very high, but also the number of young people taking higher education degrees has increased. More than a fourth of the 25-34 – year-olds have either a polytechnic or university degree. The regional differences are, however, still big, although the school network, including universities and polytechnics, is fairly extensive.

In Finland an effort is being made to offer all school-leavers an opportunity to continue in general or vocational upper secondary education. However, in the last few years the popularity of vocational education and training has grown so much that not all applicants can be offered a study place. In 2006 ca 51 per cent of comprehensive school-leavers started general and 40 per cent

vocational upper secondary studies immediately after basic education. In addition, about 2 per cent continued in voluntary additional education in comprehensive school.

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 in it is extensive. Adult students can also receive financial support for their studies.

### ***Aim to offer high-quality services to all citizens***

Changes in the regional demographic structures are a challenge for maintaining the network of schools. Providers of general education are 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. Recent framework legislation for the reform of Finland's municipal and service structure, known as the PARAS Project, aims to promote improved service delivery nationwide to meet changing needs and priorities. Strong emphasis is on strengthening the organisation of services in terms of cooperation and population coverage.

The ideology is that quality services have to be assured regardless of where people live. The goals will be achieved with the strengthening of the municipal structure and the bases for funding, as well as with closer collaboration between municipalities, the rationalisation of the service structure and by ensuring the comprehensive coverage of the service network.

As part of the PARAS project the Vocational College strategy 2006 aims at renewing vocational education and training structurally by removing any overlaps and supporting the formation of strong, high-quality units. The strategy aims also to strengthen the role of VET in regional development. There are still differences in the effectiveness and efficiency of education services provided by the VET providers. Also the differences in the geographical division of the Finnish population cause some difficulties in developing the VET provider network.

The concrete decisions about merging organisations are made by the VET providers themselves, but the starting point is that there is at least a population of 50 000 in the region of one VET provider. The follow-up is based on regular data collections and decisions on incorporations of VET providers.

### ***Prevention of drop-out***

Drop-out from education is considered a problem in Finland. Interruption of studies is most common in vocational education and training. After some years of slightly growing drop-out rates, in 2006 the trend seems to have started to turn. In the school year 200/2001 ca 13 per cent of the students interrupted their studies, but in 2004/2005 ca. 10 per cent.

In recent years several nationally initiated projects have been carried out to prevent and diminish drop-out and exclusion. Two projects that ended at the end of 2007 were the "Participation of young people" (Nuorten osallisuushanke) and "Development of guidance and counselling" (Oppilaan- ja opinto-ohjauksen kehittämishanke) projects. In the latter the aims were, among others, to improve the relevance and suitability of the choices made at the end of basic education, to reduce the number of youngsters outside education, to reduce drop-out and youth unemployment as well as develop the guidance and counselling of those outside education.

The Participation of young people project enhanced the cross-sector cooperation to prevent exclusion. Some of the concrete results have included the setting up of information services, the development of different types of follow-up and monitoring systems as well as the professional development of those involved in guiding and counselling young people.

### **(b) Early childhood intervention**

Parents of small children have societal supports, including 43 weeks of parental leave and allowance after the child's birth. Once that leave ends, they can get a child home care allowance, until the youngest child turns three or enters municipal day care. This welfare policy is an important factor in the success of inclusion.

Early childhood education and care is provided according to the National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (2003). These services aim to promote children's healthy growth, development and learning. Emphasising early intervention and support, they even out the differences between children created by differences in living conditions, thus offering all children equal opportunities to develop. Whenever possible, special support is provided in regular day-care settings, taking into consideration each child's possible learning or developmental disabilities, different languages and cultural backgrounds, or other needs.

Before beginning compulsory school, each child may attend one year of pre-primary education. More than 96% of all six-year-olds do so. Free pre-primary education is provided in accordance with the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (2000). It can be offered in day-care centres or schools. The national minimum for pre-primary studies is 700 hours per year: about four hours a day. Children also have right to day-care after these hours, if needed. The special goals for pre-primary, set out in a decree (1435/2001), are to improve children's developmental and learning readiness as well as to strengthen their social skills and healthy self-esteem through play and positive learning experiences.

Pre-primary smoothes the transition from day-care to basic education, as it supports and monitors children's physical, psychological, social, cognitive and emotional development and helps prevent difficulties from arising. During the pre-primary year, early intervention helps detect problems in development and learning. If children need help, the support is defined and organised in cooperation with parents and the social and health authorities.

The development plan for education and research for 2007-2012 outlines that pre-primary education is to be provided as a municipal service as near home as possible. The availability of qualified staff, high quality of teaching, student welfare services and guidance counselling is to be secured. The administration of pre-primary education is to be examined in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Education, with an aim to strengthen the continuum between pre-primary education and basic education along with the flexible transition from pre-primary education to school. Measures are targeted to support the early identification of learning and adapting difficulties alongside with developing teaching methods and various learning environments.

As part of a set of measures launched by the Ministry of Education for 2006-2011, in order to improve well-being at schools, the Niilo Mäki Institute (University of Jyväskylä) develops a virtual learning and evaluating environment to support children who find it particularly challenging to achieve the learning preparedness and basic skills required in reading and writing. The target groups are pupils in pre-primary education and forms 1 and 2, their guardians and the teaching and pupil-welfare staff. The project seeks to find a solution that is based on the latest research results and are suitable for a) identifying, b) evaluating risks in the acquisition of basic literacy and mathematical skills as well as c)

training children who have shortcomings as regards these skills. In the project, operations for early recognition and support are being developed to prevent learning difficulties. These models will be available at the national level for all children who need support.

In the spring of 2007 the Ministry of Education granted special state subsidies for the development of the service structure of pre-primary and basic education in municipalities and regions, with an objective to improve the quality of pupil welfare and to develop the supporting network-type pupil welfare work as well as developing and establishing the related service structure. In order to achieve the objective, municipalities will work out a strategy whose measures will be integrated into the service system for children and young people.

The use of different types of learning environments has been identified as a basic means to realise the objectives of the national core curricula. The basic principle behind the concept of the learning environment is to diversify teaching methods and activities to support learning taking place within and outside the school environment. Instead of only the physical learning environment the learners are seen to be in reciprocal contact with a set of versatile teaching and working arrangements and methods around them.

### **(c) Learning outcomes**

A high level of civilisation and high-quality and free of charge education form the cornerstones of Finnish welfare state. The government is to guarantee equal possibilities for high-quality education from early education to university-level education throughout the country. The objective is to increase the population's education and competence levels so that they are close to the highest levels in the world.

The most remarkable reason for Finland's success in the OECD PISA Survey is educational equality: the entire school system is based on it. Equality means that every citizen has an equal possibility to get education regardless of age, domicile, economic status/ wealth, gender or mother tongue. In the PISA 2003 Survey the clearest signs of equality were small-scale variations between schools and a minor impact of socio-economic background on the student's performance.

The educational equality of our basic education can be seen in the relative lack of differences between the different parts of country. The basic education is only controlled by the national core curricula and there are no school inspectors who would supervise the teachers or the headmasters in the Finnish system.

The existing basic education system was created in the 1970's and the result was a nine-year comprehensive school for all. Since the school reform the system has been developed so that it takes into account different challenges of the age groups. Developing the curriculum has been continuous and it has concentrated rather on consolidating basic values than on searching short-term solutions. Politicians from left to right have shared the idea of education as the basic right and a guarantee of success in the global market.

Another important reason for success is the academic training of the Finnish school teachers: a qualified class teacher and subject teacher must have a Master's degree from the University. Class teachers are Masters of education and their main subject is Pedagogics and the subject teachers are Masters of the subject that they teach (for example Math's teachers will read Mathematics as their major subject). Thanks to their education teachers know didactic methods well, they are able to use them variably and they are also prepared to encounter different learners with their different needs.

As a result of the teachers' training and of the whole educational system the learning atmosphere at school is very positive: the focus of the basic education is on deep learning, not on testing which makes the atmosphere fear-free and relieve students from unnecessary stress because they do not have to face externally standardized tests except the matriculation exam. However, students' learning results are controlled by each teacher.

It can also be said that the public atmosphere has had a certain effect: Finns have a positive attitude towards education which shows for example in the educational structure of population. Almost three quarters of people in the age group from 25 to 64 have at least a secondary level qualification and a third have a higher education.

#### **(d) Pre-service teacher training, recruitment, deployment, working conditions and in-service training**

There have been no remarkable changes in teacher education since the latest reform in teacher education in the late 1990s. Further, teacher training institutions decide themselves on the contents of their teacher training programmes, the regulations or lines set in the legislation are on an extremely general level.

The Government's Plan for education and research 2007-2012 underlines the importance of resolving how the commitment and motivation to the teaching profession could be taken into account in the application to vocational teacher education. Further, in the education itself, interaction and communication with the world of work should be stressed, particularly in VET teacher education.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is seen as a right and a duty of every teacher. The main responsibility will be with the employer. The state also funds CPD and this will be strengthened. An evaluation of the quality and effectiveness will be included into the follow-up of CPD.

The Ministry of Education will set off a large network project aiming at a qualitative improvement of the working conditions of teachers and education staff.

#### **Development programme for teacher education 2001-2005**

An evaluation and anticipatory study of teacher education (OPEPRO) indicated that further development is needed in several areas. These concerned student selection, the content and delivery of TE programmes, the status of TE and CPD. Consequently, the Ministry of Education launched the Development programme for teacher education in 2001 to provide guidelines for both initial and continuing teacher education. It focused on the foundations, development goals and recommendations for teachers' work. Also the quantitative needs of teacher education were covered. The recommendations concerned student selection for teacher education, key contents of pedagogical studies, the status of initial and continuing training in general and vocational teacher education.

The programme ran for 4 years and served as a national level recommendation. As teacher training institutions decide themselves on the contents of their teacher training programme this was recommendatory rather than statutory. The key actors involved were the Ministry of Education, teacher education institutions (general and vocational), teacher educators and students.

The aim was to define the key contents and requirements that the different parts of teacher education programmes should respond to. The proposals concerned:

Student selection:

Aptitude and motivation of students must be selection criteria more clearly.

Pedagogical studies:

The important pedagogical contents that were identified were the ethical and social basis of teachers' work, e.g. cooperation skills; understanding of the learning process; and prevention of learning difficulties and exclusion.

The programme further emphasised that TE programmes should prepare teachers to work at different levels of education as well as cooperate across institutional boundaries. Sufficient time for teaching practice was seen to enable teacher students to build up the versatility required in the profession.

Continuing professional development:

The most important need regarding CPD was to develop subject- and domain-specific expertise. Further competences related to ICT, multiculturalism and diversity, special needs education, development of community and counselling. Principals' CPD needs focused on human resource management, pedagogical management and institutional development.

The recommendation emphasised that VET teachers should have more opportunities to on-the-job periods in enterprises. It was also considered crucial that local authorities and education providers develop in-service training and allocate sufficient resources for it.

Further, the recommendation was to shift the focus from short-term training of individual teachers towards a more holistic approach involving the whole working community and institution.

Training needs:

The programme also set out to anticipate teacher needs until 2010. It was foreseen that there will be a need to increase teacher education in some areas. The means to cope with this was to increase the intake into TE, provide for more flexible study paths, ensure regional access to TE, as well as shorten study times.

Follow-up of the Development programme for teacher education 2003-2005

The follow-up and evaluation of the programme regarding initial and continuing teacher education was carried out in 2003-2005. The targets set have realised well. However, there is room for development in the continuing training of teachers and principals.

Some observations regarding initial teacher education were:

The concept of a wide-based expertise of a teacher was generally adopted. However, the often rigid structures of the institutions prevented sufficient individualisation

The recommendations to assess the motivation and aptitude for the profession have not been taken into account sufficiently in student selection.

Cooperation between teacher education institutions, also between general and vocational teacher education, schools and the labour market need more work.

Not all principals have leadership training. Principals still need more training in human resource

management, pedagogical leadership and development of institution.

More cooperation between regional and local education providers needed in continuing training for staff

The organisation of the teacher education, communication and cooperation skills of the teacher educators were assessed as good

More content on supporting learners with special needs and in need of support was called for

The management and development as well as cooperation with the world of work and guidance and counselling were assessed as good in vocational teacher education

Regarding continuing training the results show that efforts had been made to observe the recommendations in the government-funded CPD. However, there is still a lot to be done in the implementation. Also the different actors, principals, providers and teachers had different views on the success of the development. The only thing the teachers found had been successful was the drawing up of personal CPD plans and training related to these. The overall impression was, however, that the provision of CPD was not very systematic. There were also shortcomings regarding the management training of principals in all types of institutions. Vocational teacher educators considered their opportunities to continuing education better than the teacher educators at universities

The biggest progress was made regarding the attitudes. These teachers and principals considered CPD an important goal and saw it as a contributing factor in preventing burn-out and stress. The principals felt that the development efforts with institutional development have succeeded quite well, as well as the shift of emphasis from individual development to community development.

### ***1.3. The role of the education system in combating poverty as well as other forms of social exclusion and cultural marginalisation***

In practice all children complete basic education in Finland. Over 92 per cent of basic education graduates continue to the upper secondary level and more than 85 per cent of the age group 30-34 years-olds have attained at least upper secondary education. In Finnish society, education has been seen as the main tool to combat social exclusion, marginalisation and poverty. See chapter 1.2. (a), 2.1. (b) and 2.2.(c).

## **2. Inclusive education: The way of the future**

### ***2.1. Approaches, scope and content:***

#### **(a) How is inclusive education conceptualized? What is the current vision of inclusive education?**

Finnish basic education system is based on the philosophy of inclusion. During early childhood years, families and children are supported by the state and municipal authorities. Municipalities are responsible for providing early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education to all children. Basic education is the same for all. There is no streaming but children are supported individually so that they can successfully complete their basic education.

Lately, there has been much discussion about how to further improve the legislation, procedures and pedagogy in order to take even better care of all children's learning and development. On 14 March 2006 the Ministry of Education appointed a steering group to prepare a proposal for a long-term strategy for the development of special needs and inclusive education. The strategy for pre-primary and basic education was published in November 2007. The Government has decided that the strategy will be put into practice in autumn 2010. The Ministry of Education is now preparing the changes in the legislation, and the Finnish National Board of Education is preparing the changes in the Core Curriculum for the pre-primary and basic education. The steering group also produced definitions for the key concepts.

The strategy for the development of special needs and inclusive education emphasises the importance of the wide basic education network which supports the right of every child to attend the nearest mainstream school. By *the nearest mainstream school*, the Steering Group refers to a school where a pupil would regularly be assigned. In that school every child should get sufficient and timely support in order to reach the goals of basic education. *Inclusive education* refers to the provision of education in such a manner that successful learning and development of all children can be secured.

Inclusion is a principle that calls for development of both the system and operational structures, while also requiring development of such an operational culture and pedagogical methodology that will promote all pupils' success in their studies and their positive growth and development. When arranging education for a special needs pupil, the local school's possibilities to teach such a pupil will always be explored first. This also involves assessing the resources and support measures required by the school in order to provide education to promote the pupil's learning successfully. If the assessment of the situation indicates that the pupil's support needs are particularly demanding, to an extent that it is impossible to provide education at the nearest school, the education must be provided where it can be done to the benefit of the pupil.

The strategy for the development of special needs and inclusive education proposes that the current practice be changed to focus on support and prevention that is remarkably earlier than today. This intensified support should be adopted as the primary form of support before a decision on special education is made. This would, according to the strategy, be the way to reduce the number of pupils needing special needs education decision. The intensified support would be used to promote learning and growth and prevent the accumulation of problems relating to learning, social interaction or development. When the decision about special needs education is made, it should have stronger status. Further, in addition to medical expertise the role of pedagogical expertise and planning should be strengthened. The strategy suggests that if early childhood education were administratively part of the education system, this would enable special-needs children to proceed more flexibly and safely from early childhood to pre-primary and further to basic education.

The strategy emphasises the challenge related to pupils with emotional or social difficulties and suggests that measures should be taken to ensure the realisation of the existing guarantee of treatment<sup>1</sup> and to shorten the queues to examination and treatment. The strategy also suggests that the state should review the national situation in special needs education every five years, and that more research in this area should be done.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the legislation appropriate treatment and access to treatment must be ensured within a reasonable time period.

The strategy stresses the central role of teachers. To develop inclusive education requires heavy investments in teacher education. In Finland, teachers have been trusted to do their best as true education professionals. From this it has followed that Finnish teachers have been entrusted with considerable pedagogical independence in the classroom and that schools have likewise enjoyed substantial autonomy in organising their work within the limits of the national core curriculum. Recent studies show that the new competence requirements, which arise from the societal change, emphasise teachers' ability to meet children, young people and their parents, as well as colleagues as co-operative partners. Teachers cannot cope on their own under the pressures set by increasing requirements. A well-functioning multicultural school works as a community, whose results depend on its ability to employ the students' individual and special skills to benefit the common good. As a result of the increase in social problems and in the number of students who need special attention, teachers need both pedagogical and social knowledge and skills to work together when solving problems at school. (Luukkainen 2005; Välijärvi 2000). Teachers are also expected to be open at interacting with their environments. The "teachership" of the future means the ability to teach heterogeneous groups, readiness to actively participate in discussions concerning the direction of education and society and the will to work for the development.

**b) What are seen as the most important challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion? How have these challenges changed in recent years?**

Finnish society is changing and becoming more multicultural. This is a challenge for education as well. Ways must be found to support municipalities, schools and teachers to work successfully with this growing diversity.

During the last ten years the number of pupils with a transfer decision into special education has been growing. In 2007 slightly more than a half of them were integrated either totally or partially into mainstream education and others were taught in small teaching groups in regular schools or in special education schools. The important goal expressed in the strategy for special education and inclusion is to reduce the number of special education pupils studying in separate settings. In order to reach this goal we need to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes of all teachers through pre-service and in-service education and through national and local development projects.

Another challenge is the variation between municipalities. Municipal authorities have a lot of autonomy in deciding the use of financial resources and organising education. There can be large differences in how the rights of pupils to get support in their studies are materialised.

The basic education system in Finland is already inclusive and it supports the successful completion of studies of all its pupils. The challenge lies in upper secondary education. The drop-out numbers need to be reduced especially in vocational upper secondary education and training and new ways to encourage all young people to continue their studies after the completion of basic education must be found.

**c) What specific legal or regulatory frameworks refer to inclusive education issues? What groups are considered as excluded in these frameworks and how are they categorized?**

Finnish legislation guarantees all children the right to early childhood education and care and to one year of pre-primary education. It obliges all children to complete the nine-year basic education. It also obliges all municipalities to offer morning and afternoon activities to children in grades 1 and 2 and to children with a decision of transfer to special needs education in basic education. In addition, textbooks and other learning materials, tools and work materials, school transport and daily school

meals, accommodation and full board, as well as treatment of injuries sustained in accidents at school or during travel to school, are also free of charge for all pupils.

The Constitution (731/1999) provides that the support services needed in special needs education are to be available to everyone who cannot obtain the security, indispensable subsistence and care required for a life of dignity. The public authorities must guarantee everyone adequate social, health and medical services and promote the health of the population. In addition, the public authorities are to support families and others responsible for providing care for children so that they can ensure the well-being and personal development of children.

Special needs education is provided at all stages of education from pre-primary education to upper secondary education and training.

According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998) the first alternative for providing special needs education is to include pupils with special education needs into mainstream classes and when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups. Only when this is not feasible the second alternative is considered: the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school. According to the legislation every pupil has the right to receive their education and the interpretation and assistant services, teaching and pupil welfare services (including the services of the school doctor and psychologist, dentist, therapists and social and health care) and any special aid required for participation in education free of charge.

According to the Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998) all students in vocational education and training are entitled to instruction free of charge, free daily meals every school day and free accommodation in a hall of residence assigned by the educational institution. Disabled students are entitled to assistant services, other student welfare services and any special aids required for studying. Some services are offered by the educational institution, whereas others are organised as services provided by the student's municipality of residence in accordance with the Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled (380/1987).

The Upper Secondary Schools Act (629/1998) states that students with disabilities and those in need of special support for some other reason are entitled to assistant services, other teaching and student welfare services and special aids, as required in their studies. Instruction, meals and student welfare support are provided free of charge. Students may be offered teaching in their own mother tongue and remedial teaching in different subjects and they are eligible for student financial aid.

According to the Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004) the objective of special needs education is to help and support pupils in such a way as to give them equal opportunities to complete compulsory schooling in accordance with their abilities and alongside their peers. The starting point is to assess each pupil's strengths and her/his individual learning and development needs. Education is expected to promote the pupils' initiative and self-confidence. Special needs education calls for decisions to be made concerning the study place, time and facilities and different functions as well as the allocation of resources to implement these decisions.

According to the Vocational Qualifications in the School-based System in Finland (National Core Curricula for Different Qualifications in Vocational Education and Training) special instruction within vocational education and training should primarily be provided in conjunction with regular instruction or in separate groups or both. Vocational special institutions, in turn, are responsible for providing education and training for students with the most severe disabilities. Vocational education and training are provided as special needs education and training for students who need special

needs educational and student welfare services due to disability, illness, delayed development, emotional disorder or some other similar reason. It is the task of each education provider to determine how to define which students are in need of special needs education and training and how to draw up individual education plans for them. Special education and training may deviate from the general provisions of vocational education and training as determined in the relevant national core curriculum. The duration of studies and study arrangements may be adjusted where a student's state of health or previous studies determine accordingly.

In 1998 legislative amendments introduced on-the-job learning and the appreciation and priority of learning by doing to the sphere of vocational education and training. These changes have promoted the provision of special needs education and training, as special needs education has traditionally intensified learning by emphasising practical skills and activities.

The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools 2003 emphasises the fact that the purpose of special support is to help and support students so as to guarantee them equal opportunities to complete their upper secondary school studies. Once a student's learning difficulties have been identified, planning and implementation of support measures are started immediately, taking into account the information acquired on the student's study performance and their needs for support during basic education. The local upper secondary school curriculum will determine how instruction and support measures for special needs students are to be organised.

## ***2.2. Public policies:***

### **(a) What are the current dimensions of the phenomenon of exclusion from and within education? What kind of indicators and data are used to inform inclusive education policies?**

Finnish children start school in the year when they turn seven. Prior to this, each local authority (municipality) is obliged to provide 6-year-olds with pre-primary education. Pre-primary education may be provided either in connection with school or as part of day care. Even though pre-primary education is not compulsory for children, the participation rate is about 97 per cent.

Compulsory 9-year basic education is provided at a comprehensive school, which is common for everyone and which is completed by virtually all Finnish children. The drop-out rate is approximately 0.3 per cent. Only a few hundred (352 pupils in 2005) fail to obtain the comprehensive school leaving certificate. All pupils receive support that helps them perform their studies successfully. Only 2 per cent of pupils have to repeat a year. Repeating occurs mainly during the first or second school year.

Upon completion of basic education, upper secondary level provides two main alternatives: general upper secondary school or vocational education and training. Both alternatives last three years and completion of the studies provides eligibility to apply for higher education. Those completing basic education apply for these two types of education through the national joint application system. This centralised application system contributes to ensuring that almost all basic education leavers apply for upper secondary studies and also continue their studies immediately upon completion of basic education.

In 2006, 51 per cent and 40 per cent of basic education leavers continued to upper secondary school and vocational upper secondary education and training, respectively. Another 2 per cent continued their studies in additional education. Circa 7 per cent of basic education leavers did not continue to the next level immediately after finishing comprehensive school.

At tertiary level, a new polytechnic system was created in Finland in the early 1990s to complement traditional university education. Using the OECD indicator covering tertiary graduates, where the number of completed degrees is set in proportion to the size of a typical age group graduating from tertiary education, about 50 per cent of young people complete a tertiary degree.

Statistics Finland compiles statistics on pupils with official decision of transfer to special education in comprehensive schools, part-time special needs education and vocational special needs education. Data are also collected on special education arrangements in general upper secondary education. Data on special needs education are published annually in Statistics Finland's publication Educational Institutions. The grounds or reasons for transfer into special needs education are classified in as agreed with the educational administration. The data are collected from all comprehensive schools in Finland on an Internet form.

In autumn 2006, a total of 44 700 comprehensive school pupils, or eight per cent of all pupils attending comprehensive school, had an official decision of transfer into full-time special education. Although the total number of pupils attending comprehensive school diminished by one per cent, the number of pupils with special needs decisions went up by four per cent from the previous year. The number has now been growing for more than a decade. By contrast, after many years of growth the number of pupils attending part-time special education declined slightly. In the 2005-2006 school year, comprehensive school pupils attending part-time special needs education totalled 128 000, one per cent less than one year previously. However, the share of pupils attending part-time special needs education among all comprehensive school pupils remained at 22 per cent, that is, unchanged from one year earlier. These data derive from Statistics Finland's Education Statistics.

Statistic Finland collects data on the arrangement of teaching in special needs education. In the statistics on special needs education in comprehensive schools the arrangement of teaching pupils with the decision of transfer into special needs education is as follows:

1. Teaching is arranged as general teaching: pupils study courses according to the curriculum of general teaching (2007: 18 092 pupils)
2. Some courses have been individualised: pupils study less extensive, individualised courses in one of more subjects (2007: 15 267 pupils).
3. All courses have been individualised: pupils study less extensive, individualised courses in all subjects (2007: 12 726 pupils).

In the statistics on special needs education in comprehensive schools the places of provision of special needs education are as follows:

1. All teaching is provided in a general education group: pupils are fully integrated into groups attending general education.
2. Teaching is partially provided in a general education group: pupils study partly in special classes or groups and partly in groups attending general education.
3. Special groups, special classes: pupils study in special groups or classes.

Almost half of the pupils with the decision of transfer into special needs education were fully (12 169 pupils, 26.4 per cent) or partly integrated (10 959 pupils, 23.8 per cent) into mainstream

education and just over a half received teaching in special groups (15 214 pupils, 33 per cent) or special comprehensive schools (7 745 pupils, 16.8 per cent) in autumn 2006. Special needs education is increasingly provided in connection with general education. Consequently, the number of pupils attending special schools has been falling throughout the 2000s. The arrangement of teaching in special needs education varies clearly by region. For example, in the Regions of Ostrobothnia and Lapland, less than one in three of these pupils were taught in special groups, whereas in the Regions of Åland and Kymenlaakso more than two-thirds attended special groups.

The development in the number of special schools 1999–2007

Year	Special Schools	New	Closed	Pupils
1999	269	4	18	11 932
2001	244	1	4	11 198
2002	232	0	5	10 921
2003	220	0	6	10 530
2004	207	1	2	10 200
2005	195	0	4	9 800
2006	176	0	3	8 800
2007				7 745

In autumn 2005, a total of 13 900 vocational education students, or six per cent of all vocational education students, received special needs education. One in two of these studied in the fields of technology or transport and one in five in the fields of tourism, catering or economics.

The view today is that statistics on provision, resources and costs of inclusive education should be developed in order to obtain a continuous view on the state of inclusive education nationwide, as well as to acquire comparative data on the effects of regional and municipal differences.

**(b) Which inclusive education issues have been, are, or are going to be relevant for educational policies?**

Inclusion has been promoted in basic education since the 1970s. An important legislative reform was the new Comprehensive Schools Act passed in 1983, which enabled a better starting point for the development of the inclusion process. According to the Act, no child was allowed to be exempt from completing compulsory education any longer. Another important factor for the promotion of inclusion was the new comprehensive school national core curriculum issued in 1985; it raised the issues of differentiation and individualisation of education and, where necessary, the provision of special needs education and the individualisation of education and the syllabus. In terms of promoting inclusion, it was important that education and the syllabus were to be individualised according to individual children's age and learning abilities so as to enable special needs education curricula to also be used in conjunction with mainstream education. Pupils in basic education used to receive different amounts of basic education because of streaming in certain subjects until the educational reform of 1985. Since then, basic education has been the same for all and, furthermore, the aim in the education system is that no one leaves schooling with only basic education.

Education for children with minor intellectual disabilities was initiated within folk schools<sup>2</sup> in the form of special school instruction. In 1985, integrated instruction for children with medium and

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<sup>2</sup> Folk schools provided the first four years of compulsory education before the comprehensive school reform.

severe intellectual disabilities was transferred from social administration to educational administration. The instruction of children with the most severe intellectual disabilities, which had long been organised as part of special care for intellectually disabled people within the social administration, was transferred to be provided by comprehensive schools as from 1 August 1997, as was the instruction provided by reform schools from 1 August 1998.

In the curriculum reform 2004 separate curricula for special needs education were abolished and today all pupils study according to the same curriculum. This curriculum can be individualised by an individual education plan in order to meet the pupil's individual needs. The pupil welfare-services are included in the core curriculum and municipalities and schools are obliged to include the services they offer in their curriculum.

At the moment, the number of municipalities is decreasing and small municipalities are to be merged with other municipalities to form larger units. The challenge for Finnish municipalities is to observe cross-administrative and cross-municipal education and its support measures. At the same time municipalities are reforming the production and implementation of their services. The question is how the services will be located regionally and locally in future, who will produce the services and how they will be targeted effectively.

Municipalities have different strategies in organising education and supporting pupils with special needs. Different municipalities differ a lot in their support measures. There are many good practices of inclusive education that should be used more extensively. Cooperation in schools, between different schools, as well as the cooperation between teaching and support measures requires new operation models. This creates a challenge for municipalities to observe education system multi-professionally. Development of inclusion and production of models regarding municipality, school and pupil-level planning, organisation and implementation of inclusive education in co-operation with various interest groups is important.

In spite of the good learning results of the Finnish education system (see PISA 2000, 2003 and 2006), there are challenges in education and employment of all age groups. According to the health inquiry, 39 per cent of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders of the random sample have some kind difficulties in their studies. Some of them are pupils with special needs and some represent the so called grey area, that is, those who do not get enough support although they do not do that well in school. Support for these children needs to be made more effective. Support is also needed especially during the first two years of upper secondary education, especially vocational education and training, in order to encourage all students to continue their studies and to complete the upper secondary qualifications successfully.

The objective of adult education in Finland is to support lifelong learning among the citizens and to develop coherence and equality in society. Furthermore, the aim is to ensure that workforce is available and skills needed in working life are developed. Adult education also aims to support the improvement of the employment rate and covering of the skills deficit caused by retirement.

Adult education is provided in more than 1 000 educational institutions in Finland. Only some of them are specialised solely on adult education. Much of adult education is provided outside educational institutions, in work places, or is in some other way organised by employers. Not all education is directly connected to work or occupational skills. There is, for instance, liberal adult education that provides the students instruction in civics or social studies. Adult education can be purely based on the students' own interests.

In February 2002 an Adult Education Committee submitted a report containing three main proposals. Firstly, the Committee proposed that those in the active population, who do not have secondary education, should be offered opportunities to study for a qualification within a special programme. The programme was to be implemented as a five-year project, catering for 8 000-12 000 full-time adult students aiming at the secondary qualifications annually. The biggest progress has been made in implementing the Committee's proposal within the Noste programme. This programme was set up to raise the level of education among the adult population in 2003-07.

**(c) What groups are considered to be the most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education? Who are the excluded groups that current policy yet to take into account?**

Empirical research findings implicate the existence of some inequality owing to students' socio-economic background. Also concern over regional inequality is often voiced.

*Immigrants*

There is an Equality Act (L21/2004) in Finland. The purpose of this Act is to foster and safeguard equality in society. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, health, disability and sexual orientation. The Act applies to education as well as to working life.

The number of foreigners living in Finland at the end of 2007 was 13 270, amounting to 2.5 per cent of the resident population. The number of foreigners had remained fairly constant at something over 10 000 for a long time. In 1990s there was an increase in immigration. The foreign population in 2002 included natives of 160 countries, among whom the largest group were Russian citizens, 24 428, and the second largest Estonians, 12 248, followed by Swedish citizens and refugees from Somalia and former Yugoslavia.

The level of education among the refugees in Finland is fairly poor. On the average one in four Somalis and one in five Vietnamese has not completed basic education. Russian and Estonians are well educated: around 90 per cent of them have at least upper secondary level qualifications (general or vocational). Slightly over 70 per cent of the total population have at least upper secondary level qualifications. In addition, nearly 40 per cent of the Russian immigrants have university or polytechnic qualifications.

The aims of immigrant education, for both children and adults, are 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.

The objective of immigrant education is to provide people moving to Finland with opportunities to function as equal members of Finnish society and guarantee immigrants the same educational opportunities as other citizens. A young immigrant of compulsory school age (aged 7–17) permanently residing in Finland has the right to the same basic education as Finns. The objective is to ensure that adult immigrants receive the education needed for working life and that they maintain their existing vocational skills, and for foreign qualifications, studies and work experience to act as the basis of the design and completion of education in Finland.

Instruction in the Finnish or Swedish language is organised for immigrants of all ages. At the same time, they are also encouraged to maintain their own mother tongue and cultural identity.

Immigrants may mean refugees, migrants, re-migrants and other foreigners and, in some cases, asylum seekers as well.

### *Romany education*

Romany people have inhabited Finland since the sixteenth century. Their exact number is not known because Finnish citizens are not registered according to their ethnic origin. According to the latest estimates, there are at least 10 000 Romany people in Finland. In addition, approximately 3 000 Finnish Romany people live in Sweden.

As Finnish citizens, they are entitled to the same education as the majority population. However, in practice, the position of the Romany children as regards education is more difficult than that of the majority. In recent years, the educational level has improved considerably, but, compared to the majority population, it remains low. The problem for Roma children continues to be the failure to complete basic education, which makes it difficult for them to enter further education. On the other hand, it must be recalled that the Roma people's educational tradition is still relatively young. Various reports show that the education received by older people remains inadequate and that they even include illiterates. The legislation on the comprehensive school guarantees certain prerequisites for maintaining and developing Romany language and culture.

The schooling of Romany children involves certain difficulties, which have only now started to be taken seriously. Cultural differences, the teachers' limited knowledge of Romany culture and inadequate co-operation between the home and school mean that Romany children discontinue comprehensive education more often than children from the majority population. Romany children have also been observed to suffer from what is called "semilingualism", which means that they lack strong skills in their mother tongue when they start school. Their motor and mechanical skills are often poorer than those of other children. For these reasons, the children's schooling is hampered from the very outset. Schools have not been able to pay enough attention to these causes, but Romany children have all too readily been placed in special needs classes.

Some projects to support Romany children and their parents in matters relating to schooling have been launched in Finland. These include Romano Missio's "Aina ammattiin asti" (*Right through to a job*) project, which is designed to help Romany youth complete comprehensive school and take up further education, and to determine the difficulties which arise in the schooling of Romany children. A study conducted during the project indicates that, depending on the locality, as many as 10-20 per cent discontinue school. This is considered a disturbingly high figure.

Senior high school and tertiary education still attracts little interest among Romany. The history of Finland's Romany people means that Romany homes lack a history of education and that Romany people have not tended to esteem the education provided on the majority population's terms. Nowadays, attitudes have become more positive. Romany families value education, and seek to support their children's schooling so that they can obtain professional skill.

#### **(d) In what ways do current educational reforms address inclusive education?**

Please see also 2.1. a.

The new Strategy for special needs education and inclusion sets goals for the development of inclusion in all schools providing basic education. The implementation period has already started,

and the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education have allocated financial resources for municipalities in order to encourage and support them in the development. Municipalities are also supported through teachers' in-service training programmes, action research and the extensive development work coordinated by the Finnish National Board of Education. After this implementation period the strategy will have effects on upper secondary education as well.

As a part of implementation of the strategy work, the Ministry of Education has on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2008 appointed a person to clarify the situation of both municipal and state-owned special needs schools as well as hospital schools. The state-owned special schools have worked as national development and service centres, which provide municipal schools with expert services to help them to implement inclusive education. The municipal special needs and hospital schools have developed their work as resource centres to support mainstream schools.

According to the Adult Education Committee the strategy of adult education and training should be built on four principles in the future: self-improvement will form part of the lives of a growing number of citizens, as work communities evolve towards learning organisations. Adult education and training will provide trained work force for all job categories and all vocations and professions. Adult education and training will develop teaching and learning methods and content, providing quality opportunities for people to develop themselves both in qualifying and liberal education. Adult education and training will maintain and strengthen participatory democracy, prevent exclusion and support active citizenship.

### ***2.3 Systems, links and transitions***

#### **(a) What are the main barriers (e.g. economic, political, social) to inclusive education?**

Please see also 2.1. b

One of the societal challenges is the increase in inequality. Polarisation means that certain parts of the population improve their conditions and well-being while for others the development is reverse. This polarisation is also visible as problems of parenthood and families. In schools this is seen as the increase of the pupils' socio-emotional problems. Sometimes the pupils' reactions are very strong, which can be challenging in social situations. It can also be difficult to integrate these pupils into big groups. The resources of the schools are limited when the problems of the families are in question. Thus the problems require multi-professional and cross-administrative cooperation involving the education, social and health services.

In addition to the social problems education is faced with the increasing multiculturalism. Finland has traditionally been very homogeneous, and thus the growing linguistic, cultural and religious diversity poses challenges for education.

The autonomy of the education providers is one of the strengths and also challenges of the Finnish education system. This means that there is variation in the support measures for pupils, the quality and accessibility of education between the municipalities. The education providers, the municipalities, decide themselves how their budget is allocated between the different operations and areas. The size and financial position of the municipalities vary as well as the division of political power. All these influence the provision of education services and how they are prioritised. Even if it is the subjective right of every pupil to receive appropriate support primarily in the nearest mainstream school, in practice the provision is not always equal to all students.

Finland has a relatively large special needs education system. Special needs schools have long traditions. The first schools for people with hearing impairments, visual impairments and motor impairments were established in the 1840s, the 1860s and the 1890s respectively. Traditionally special education was given mostly only in special schools, but today only 16,8 % of all students that have been transferred to special education learn in special schools and the numbers are declining. Today special needs education services are more actively involved in the process of inclusion. Cooperation between special and mainstream education is the key. There are still challenges connected to this. The few special needs schools that still exist feel sometimes that their existence and expertise is threatened by the process of inclusion. At the same time, there is a tendency in mainstream education to solve their “problems” by defining students as having special needs and transferring them in special education rather than developing their own procedures to better meet the needs of all students. Another challenge is the variability in the service provision across municipalities. This kind of tradition can be hard to change, although a strong trend towards more inclusive services during the last 10 years can be observed. Today more than half of students that are officially given special education decision (transfer) are actually learning part-time or full-time in mainstream education settings. Nevertheless, as 1,36 % of all comprehensive school students still learn in special schools, their role is now under scrutiny and it is possible that it will be reformed. At the same time the knowledge-base and skills of mainstream schools should be strengthened. As resource centres, the task of special needs schools would be to support mainstream schools, to develop materials and methods, to gather information and provide it to parents and teachers, to take care of the necessary liaison between educational and non-educational institutions, and to give support when transition from school to work takes place. In some cases special needs educators and special needs schools could provide short-term help for individual pupils or small groups of pupils. A good example of this are the state special schools (e.g. schools for the blind and former school for the deaf) which today work actively as resource centres, giving outreach services for students learning in local communities and providing training for their parents and teachers, while still offering boarding school services for students with multiple disabilities and complex learning and communication difficulties,

**(b) What are the most important facilitators of inclusive education?**

The Finnish comprehensive school is not seen only as part of a system. It is also a matter of pedagogical philosophy and practice at the school and classroom level. Finnish education practice is largely based on the principle of equity.

In the long term, the development of the Finnish basic education has rested on a broad cultural and political consensus about the main lines of national education policy. Throughout the 20th century, educational services were developed evenly and in accordance with the needs of different population groups and regions. Today – largely thanks to high-quality teacher training – education of uniformly high standard is provided in every school and in all regions of the country. This, too, is reflected in Finland’s below-average variation in educational outcomes between schools at both the individual and system levels (PISA) (Välijärvi et. al, 45).

Pupil's family background does not affect the selection of school in basic education because all children go to similar comprehensive schools and, in most cases, to the nearest one although parents have had a free choice of school since the 1990s. Thus, the parents' socio-economic status has little influence on the selection of schools at the basic education level (age 7-16).

Instruction and pedagogy have accordingly been structured so as to fit heterogeneous student groups. Finnish teachers know, for example, that no student can be excluded and sent to another

school. In line with this principle, the students' own interests and choices are taken into account at schools when planning the curriculum and selecting contents, textbooks, learning strategies, methods and assessment devices. All this calls for a flexible, school-based, teacher and student planned curriculum along with student-centred instruction, counselling and remedial teaching (Väljörvi et al. 2002, 40). Teachers' attitudes are mainly positive towards inclusion even though there is healthy criticism of working conditions such as the class size, the support available and the workload of teachers. Subject teachers are less willing than class teachers to include pupils with special needs in their classes, especially when pupils have severe emotional and behavioural problems.

In general, parents have positive attitudes towards inclusion. The same holds for the attitudes in the society. Of course, attitudes of parents are also largely determined by personal experiences. The media can also play an important role. In the case of more severe special needs, parents sometimes prefer special needs education within a segregated setting.

The Finnish education system is financed almost entirely from public funds. No tuition fees are charged for basic and general upper secondary education or education and training leading to a qualification or a degree. At the primary and lower secondary levels, pupils receive free tuition, free learning materials, warm school meals, health and dental care and, if necessary, transport and accommodation. At the higher levels, some of the cost of education is paid by the students themselves, but the government has sought to assure equal access to education for all by means of student grants and housing support. Private funding has been insignificant in Finnish education.

In Finland the overall strategy in the basic education is mainstreaming (inclusion); that is, the education system seeks to respond to pupils' special needs within mainstream school instruction as far as possible. Since the 1990s pupils with profound mental disabilities have been taught in comprehensive schools.

In Finland the communities are involved in education at all levels of the education system. In pre-primary education, cooperation with parents/carers is emphasised. In order to ensure children's satisfaction, growth and learning, it is important for the pre-primary staff to create a trusting relationship with the children's parents/carers.

According to the Basic Education Act, schools must cooperate with homes. In practical terms this means, for example, parent-teacher meetings, where parents and teachers have chances for private discussions. Home-school cooperation is also realised as written messages, etc. Parents may participate in local curriculum design and in planning their children's learning. The school governing bodies often include representatives of pupils' parents/carers.

Under the Upper Secondary Schools Act, general upper secondary education must also be conducted in cooperation with students' families. In practical terms, cooperation at the upper secondary level takes the form of discussions and information meetings for parents/carers. Parents can also participate in the development of the school curriculum. The upper secondary school governing bodies also often include representatives of students' parents/carers.

The Vocational Education Act provides that special attention should be focused on working life needs in education. Vocational education and training must be organised in cooperation with business and industry and other employers.

Previously, equity was looked at in quantitative terms and measured by the network of schools and access to schools. Nowadays, when the goal is education of equally high quality for everyone, individual learning outcomes have become the preferred way of measuring (Jakku-Sihvonon 2002).

International comparisons rank Finnish basic education among the most equal in terms of learning outcome. In the PISA 2000 study, which surveyed over 30 countries, Finnish pupils came first in reading literacy tests, with the smallest variation in the scores. It is noteworthy that the effect of pupils' socio-economic backgrounds on performance was among the smallest in Finland. There is no streaming in basic education and pupils of different skill levels are taught together, which promotes equality in learning outcomes.

**(c) What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more inclusive?**

Inclusive education naturally requires highly professional - both theoretically and pedagogically qualified - teaching staff, as well as appropriate systems for guidance counselling and special needs education. Teachers need to be able to differentiate their classroom teaching in order to cater for a variety of pupils.

It is a challenge to teach the entire age cohort in heterogeneous groups. Comprehensive school pedagogy differs considerably from the pedagogy applied in systems characterised by explicit streaming and ability grouping. Heterogeneous groups necessitate highly educated teachers, genuine pedagogical experts. This is largely because the task of the teacher in comprehensive systems is to take care of every individual pupil. As shown by studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s when the Finnish comprehensive school was being introduced and more recently confirmed by PISA findings, heterogeneous grouping appears to be of the greatest benefit to the weakest pupils. The performance of the best pupils, in contrast, seems to remain virtually the same, irrespective of how the groups are formed (Väljörvi et. al. 2002, 40-41). A heterogeneous learner population further presupposes efficient small teaching groups and readiness on the part of the school to reorganise groups if necessary.

Special needs education has always played an important part in helping pupils who have problems with learning. In Finland, special needs education is usually integrated into mainstream teaching. At the primary level (year-classes 1-6), where children are mainly taught by class teachers, special education mostly centres on reading and writing skills and mathematics. At the secondary level, a pupil who has problems in a given subject or subjects typically studies once or twice a week in a small group of 2-5 pupils or individually with a special needs teacher. The special needs teacher may, alternatively, be present in regular classes. Finnish school legislation provides for the pupil's right to special needs education.

Every pupil is also entitled to guidance counselling. Schools must provide guidance in study skills, in various choices (e.g. the choice of elective courses) and in the planning of post-compulsory studies. In year-classes 7 to 9, every school has access to a counsellor who provides individual guidance to those who need or want it.

The state-owned special needs schools are national development and service centres, which provide expert services for municipal and other schools and temporary education and rehabilitation for pupils of compulsory school age studying at other schools, in order to support their studies. The schools may also provide rehabilitation for disabled people under compulsory school age and those who have completed comprehensive school. The national level tasks of these state-owned special

schools are to develop basic education and the related rehabilitation, curricula, teaching and rehabilitation methods, teaching aids and learning materials; to provide guidance and information services for pupils at other schools, their parents or other guardians, teachers and other staff; to steer the preparation of education and rehabilitation plans; and to promote the transition of pupils into further study, working life and society.

Each local authority is obligated to provide a pupil at a hospital located in the municipality with education as far as possible, bearing in mind his/her health. The Finnish National Board of Education has launched a project SAIREKE (2005 – 2009) to develop hospital teaching to support inclusive education. Hospital schools have developed new working methods especially for transition periods, when pupil is moving to the hospital school or returning to his/her own school. Better ways to change information, to work as service and resource centres etc. have been developed to support pupils own schools.

Special needs education has been 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 needs education is included in the overall plan. The plans may also be regional and sub-regional.

It has been seen important to improve the provision and quality of pre-primary and basic education, promote the creation of sub-regional networks of resource centres, strengthen the realisation of the local school principle and support multidisciplinary co-operation between different branches and at different levels of administration, as well as to develop morning and afternoon activities. Educational objectives and contents, teaching materials and teaching methods should 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 cooperation between home and school.

In 1995 evaluation of the status of special education formed the basis for two projects dealing with qualitative development of special needs education running from 1997 to 2001 and from 2002 to 2004. The national project for 2002–2004 to develop the quality of special needs education integrated the operating systems of education in mainstream and special needs education and in vocational education and training. Its purpose was to reform the operating cultures and joint guidance in education and instruction as well as support services (health care and social administration, day care and youth services) by supporting the integration of the service systems at regional and municipal levels. The activities were based on continuous cooperation, evaluation and steering across administrative boundaries, which took the roles, tasks and operating models of different experts into account. This also involved ensuring that instruction and support services were organised in accordance with pupils' age level and abilities and so as to promote the healthy growth and development of pupils. Pupil welfare services were to be organised in cooperation with the authorities responsible for implementation of social and health care services.

In autumn 2005 a project called the Development of Regional Services in Special Needs Education (Alpo) was started. It was coordinated by the Finnish National Board of Education. The planning and implementation were conducted in cooperation with the University of Jyväskylä - Continuing Education Centre.

The aim of the project was to develop regional solutions for education and support of pupils with special needs. The practical aim was to improve the production of support services and special needs education both regionally and locally; to improve principles and ways of implementation,

common work-related guidelines and contracts as well as work status and roles. In addition, the continuity of services is promoted. The focus was on the comprehensive functioning of services with multi-professional cooperation.

There were 12 core municipalities that coordinated the regional work of their area. The chosen municipalities needed to have experience in regional operation as well as in the development of special needs education. In addition to these core municipalities, neighbouring municipalities were involved. The core municipality and its neighbouring municipalities together formed a regional area that developed common services. Early childhood education and vocational education and training were also important cooperation partners. The project concerned pre-primary education, basic education and upper secondary education.

The project produced regional models for special needs/inclusive education and support measures. These were, for example, service centres, sectorised, cross-administrative and multi-professional operations, virtual models and different service production models. The project also aimed to bring about quality criteria for good practices that can monitor the development of operation models and improve their quality. The project operated in 2005-2007.

**(d) What specific approaches and measures have been adopted to make the education system more flexible in order to offer additional educational opportunities to those who have dropped out or have not attained an appropriate level of qualifications?**

Some features of the social security system in Finland provide strong incentives for school-leavers to continue in further education. Anyone younger than 18 is not eligible for unemployment benefits. Since 1997, entitlement to unemployment benefits for young people aged 18 to 24 has been conditional on their applying to and/or accepting a place in secondary education or training proposed by the job centre. This practice was introduced in the face of growing youth unemployment and the alarmingly high percentage of individuals without further training among the unemployed.

*Voluntary additional basic education*

Young people who have completed the basic education syllabus may be provided with voluntary additional basic education lasting one extra school year in accordance with the Basic Education Act. This additional education is open to young people who have received their basic education leaving certificate in the same or previous year. No national lesson allocation or syllabus has been determined for the additional basic education. The curriculum may include the core subjects common to all pupils as part of the basic education syllabus, elective subjects within basic education, other subjects and subject groups conforming to the role of basic education, vocational orientation studies and periods of workplace guidance.

*JOPO*

JOPO is a national dropout activation programme initiated by the Ministry of Education in 2006. The flexible basic education project, which in Finnish goes under the acronym JOPO (from flexible basic education), is one action in the programme. It seeks to support young people in finishing their basic schooling and applying for further education or training after school. All the JOPO activities are integrated into basic education and conform to its aims and content but apply flexible action models and instruction adjusted to individual needs and situations. At the same time, efforts are made to ensure that school-leavers find a place in post-compulsory education or training. The JOPO

teaching uses action-based forms of work and on-the-job learning at authentic workplaces. It follows the principle of the same school for all.

The JOPO action builds up multi-professional cooperation between organisations, such as comprehensive schools, local youth, social and health services, and vocational institutes, upper secondary schools and possible youth workshops. JOPO includes intensified cooperation with parents and various work forms geared to support them in parenting.

### *The Youth Participation Project*

The Youth Participation Project (2003-2007) was targeted at young people in the final stages of comprehensive school and particularly those who were experiencing difficulties during this stage. It aimed at flexible and innovative cooperation 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 were to:

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

The project operated 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 consisted of 39 local projects and involved a total of 75 municipalities in various parts of the country. Organisations involved included ministries, actors in the youth sector, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Evangelical-Lutheran parishes and labour market organisations.

The local projects developed methods for early identification of problems, measures of student welfare, guidance during the transition stages, cooperation between educational institutions and working life and cooperation between youth work, social work and education authorities.

The project aimed at flexible, network-based cooperation between both locally and regionally based bodies. The networks provided the authorities with a forum for working with the young people - as opposed to only working on their behalf.

### *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-based training as well as guidance and support in 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 cooperation, 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 kind of learning styles.

### *Guidance and counselling*

Guidance and counselling services in basic and in upper secondary education has been developed intensively during last years. Cf. also 1.2. a.

## **2.4. Learners and teachers**

### **(a) What are the new approaches to teaching and learning are being implemented to increase educational opportunities for all, improve student learning outcomes and reduce disparities?**

According to the Basic Education Act students who are temporary lagging behind in their studies have possibility to remedial teaching. In addition, student welfare, educational guidance and cooperation with parents enable studying in mainstream instruction.

Pupils who have minor learning difficulties, specific learning disorders or problems in adjusting to work have the right to receive part-time special needs education. Part-time special needs education within mainstream instruction is provided to a pupil, who has slight difficulties in learning and adjustment or who needs special support to overcome learning difficulties. There are different ways to arrange part-time special needs education. It may be organised in general education (as team teaching), in small groups or individually.

Several projects have developed the virtual school for the needs of special needs education according to the national strategy. The actors of these projects represent the private and public sector, state, municipalities, universities and research centres, both in the humanities and technical areas.

There are several projects for preventing exclusion of pupils by developing productive learning models and models to teach and support pupils with mental illnesses.

In organising the instruction the focus is on early intervention and support as well as preventive actions. The aim is to utilise differentiation, remedial teaching, pupil welfare services and part-time special needs education more and more efficiently before the need for special needs education is considered. Also the flexible adjustment of class size and team teaching are used to decrease the need for special needs education.

Part-time special needs education has been used very successfully in Finland to help pupils with special education needs. The positive influence of these types of support measures can also be seen in the PISA results. According to PISA Finland has succeeded very well in supporting the weakest 25 per cent of the pupils. Part-time special needs education means that a special needs teacher provides individual support to the pupil 2-4 hours a week. The special needs teacher can teach the student individually or in a small group separately from the rest of the class or support another teacher in the classroom. Part-time special needs education is targeted primarily to pupils in the first years of primary education. The aim is to ensure that the pupils possess the basic “academic” skills.

In the case of younger pupils the special support is needed for acquiring the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics as well as the correction of problems with speech. In the case of the older pupils the special needs are related primarily to mathematics and foreign languages.

In inclusive education the central aim is to respond to the individual needs of the pupil. Since inclusion affects every pupil, the gifted pupils should not be forgotten. In practice giftedness is mainly promoted by differentiation of instruction.

Pupils with immigrant backgrounds have their specific needs as they are studying in a foreign cultural and linguistic environment. To support their learning measures such as preparatory

education before they begin basic education, remedial teaching for immigrant pupils who have lived in the country for a maximum of four years, instruction in the pupil's mother tongue and instruction in Finnish or Swedish as a second language. The municipalities provide cultural interpreters, school assistant who speak the pupil's mother tongue, coordinators and special staff, such as school social workers and school psychologists, for the immigrant pupils and their families.

**(b) In what ways is the curriculum being designed and organized to respond to the diversity of learners?**

Early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and basic education form an integrated whole progressing consistently in terms of the children's development. Special needs education in Finland is being developed as an integral and natural part of mainstream education.

The National Core Curricula for pre-primary and basic education forms the basis for local, that is, municipal and/or school-specific curricula, which can include a plan for inclusive education. According to the provisions of the national core curriculum for basic education, education providers are to draw up a curriculum including two general syllabi, one divided into subjects and the other based on functional domains. The curriculum is then used to determine syllabi for each pupil's learning plans. Pupils following the syllabus of mainstream education may be provided with a child's pre-primary education plan and a personal study plan for basic education. Each pupil with the decision of transfer special education must be provided with an individual education plan (IEP).

In ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) the child's need for support is assessed by considering both the parent's and the staff's observations, or based on the child's earlier established need for special support. On assessing the child's need for support, it is important to identify and define the child's individual opportunities to act in different environments and in different educational situations and to also define related need for support and guidance. The aim is to prevent the child's need for support from accumulating and becoming prolonged.

The physical and social learning environment and the necessary support services in pre-primary education shall primarily be organised so as to enable children to participate in group activities as fully as possible. The core role of pre-primary education shall be to promote children's favourable growth, development and learning opportunities. It shall support and monitor physical, psychological, social, cognitive and emotional development and prevent any difficulties that may arise.

A child's pre-primary education plan shall be drawn up for each child in need of special support together with parents or other carers and the relevant experts. The plan shall include the objectives set for the child's growth and development and an assessment of the child's strengths and risk factors and difficulties related to learning. The plans for those children with official decision of transfer into special needs education shall be prepared in the form of individual plans covering the organisation of education (IEP).

If the general support is not enough for the child due to disability, illness, delayed development, emotional disorder or some other similar reason, the child may get the official decision of transfer into special education during pre-primary or basic education. This is not a decision of the place, where the child is studying, but the status.

Each pupil with the official decision of transfer special education must be provided with an individual education plan (IEP). Provision of special education must always ensure that the

interpretation and assistant services required for participation in education, as well as other teaching and pupil welfare services, rehabilitation needed in connection with special education and the development, guidance and support tasks related to instruction have been organised and that special aids have been acquired. Individual education plans are drawn up so as to enable assessment and monitoring of pupils' learning processes, rehabilitation and achievement of their individual educational objectives. Each plan must include the information defined in curriculum as required to individualise instruction provided for the pupil.

Instead of following the subject-based curriculum, the most severely disabled pupils can study according to the curriculum that is divided into functional domains. These domains are motor skills, language and communication, social skills, activities of daily living and cognitive skills. The functional domains are further divided into sub-domains.

Students in need of special support may apply to ordinary vocational institutions within the national joint application system or through the related flexible application procedure. They may also apply to educational institutions with special educational tasks directly or, in some cases, through the joint application system. Guidance counsellors in basic education and upper secondary education and training aim to find a suitable study place for each student according to the student's wishes.

In vocational education and training, students in need of special educational or student welfare services are provided with instruction in the form of special needs education and training. An individual education plan is to be drawn up for each student receiving special education and training. This plan must set out details of the qualification to be completed, the national core curriculum or the requirements of the competence-based qualification observed in education and training, the scope of the qualification, the individual curriculum drawn up for the student, grounds for providing special education and training, special educational and student welfare services required for studying as well as other services and support measures provided for the student. Each education provider is responsible for organising special education and training and services for students in special education and training.

Special needs education is not mentioned in the current regulations of upper secondary education (629/1998, 810/1998). Although The Upper Secondary Schools Act (629/1998) provides that students with disabilities and those in need of special support for some other reason are entitled to assistant services, other teaching and student welfare services and special aids, as required in their studies.

In its Regulation dated 22 September 2000, the Matriculation Examination Board issued instructions for completion of the matriculation examination, including instructions for students with dyslexia or other disabilities or illnesses. Every year, about 1 200 candidates present the Board with a medical certificate, requesting relaxation of the terms of completion of the matriculation examination or exemption from completion of a specific part of the examination, such as deaf students requesting exemption from listening comprehension tests.

Assessment of both the schools' learning outcomes and pupils is encouraging and supportive in nature. The aim is to produce information that will help schools and pupils to develop. There are no national tests of learning outcomes and no ranking lists of schools. Pupils and schools are not compared with each other. National assessments of learning outcomes are based on samples and the key function of assessment is to pinpoint areas requiring further improvement in different subjects and within the entire school system.

**(c) In terms of curricular time, how many instructional hours per year are dedicated to learning reading in early primary grades? During how many years?**

There are 7 weekly lessons per year (altogether 14) which are dedicated to learning mother tongue and literature during grades 1 and 2 in the distribution of lesson hours in basic education. A weekly lesson per year indicates 38 lessons. The time which is dedicated to mother tongue and literature does not include only learning to read but also for example learning to write, listen, talk and master media skills as well. Learning to read and write begins already at pre-primary level. Remedial teaching and part-time special needs education is offered to strengthen these basic skills individually and according to need.

There are seven cross-curricular themes in the national core curriculum 2004. One of these is “Media skills and communication”. Municipalities and schools draw up a plan on how these themes are implemented in different subjects and in other activities of the school and in different grades.

**(d) How can teachers be trained and better equipped to meet the learners` diverse expectations and needs?**

Teaching and guidance staff in the day-care centres have either Bachelor’s degrees from a university or a polytechnic or what used to be known as post-secondary vocational qualifications. Teachers in the first six forms of basic education are usually class teachers, whereas those in the last three forms and at upper secondary level are subject specialists (subject teachers). Class teachers have completed a Master’s degree in Education and subject teachers have a Master’s degree in the subject they teach as well as pedagogical studies.

Special needs education is provided for pre-primary pupils by special kindergarten teachers, part-time special needs education for pupils in mainstream basic education is provided by special needs teachers, while pupils who have an official decision of transfer to special needs education and are studying in segregated groups are taught by special class teachers. Vocational special needs teachers work at both mainstream vocational institutions and vocational special needs institutions. It is possible to study special needs education as a major and take a higher first degree. In addition, mainstream teachers can qualify themselves for the qualification of special kindergarten teachers, special needs teachers or special needs class teachers.

In addition to special needs teachers, educational services also employ special needs assistants, educational guidance and school welfare officers, psychologists, doctors, guidance counsellors and various therapists. State-owned special needs schools and vocational special needs institutions also have social workers, nursing and accommodation staff and other staff to cover school transport, for example.

Finnish teachers are independent education experts who leave an impression on their pupils. The appreciation of teachers and their social influence is high in Finland compared with other countries. Learning results are also excellent (Nummenmaa and Välijärvi, 2006). In many other EU countries the teaching profession is compared to technical professions, whereas in Finland it is on a par with doctors and lawyers. Appreciation for the teaching profession is also evident in that it is one of the most popular career choices among young people.

Finnish teachers have a strong role in decisions concerning the running of a school. The PISA survey shows that Finnish teachers are responsible in many more instances than the OECD average for teaching content, choice of textbooks, discipline and assessment policies, and school budgets

and the distribution of resources. The unusually great potential for Finnish teachers to wield influence is a reflection of their university-level training and their substantial social status.

The 1990s saw the start of a considerable increase in the openness of teaching. Whereas previously each teacher worked in a classroom in isolation, these days teaching requires them to collaborate with an increasingly diverse range of individuals, parents and organisations. At the same time, the operating environment at schools is changing constantly.

Educational institutions must respond to new expectations as specialist organisations in pedagogy, and not as a collection of individual experts. Collegiality is a sign of a successful school capable of development. As financial resources decline in the future, schools will be able to achieve better results only by increasing the use of teachers' expertise flexibly and appropriately. Teachers will increasingly find themselves working in online environments. Teachers will no longer be chosen for a post but as experts for a local "education team", Välijärvi predicts. (Nummenmaa & Välijärvi, 2006)

The steering group proposes that universities should review the structures and content of teacher training to provide varied opportunities for students to gain wide-ranging knowledge of and get practical training in, the differentiation of education and special needs education. The annual intake to special-needs teacher training should be at least 500 and to special-needs kindergarten teacher training at least 100. The annual cost of these increases would come up to 400 000 Euros for the next five years, when estimated on the basis of the annual cost of an education science student. To back up these reforms around 1 million euro annually would be allocated from the appropriation earmarked for the continuing professional education of general education teachers for the following five years.

The departments of teacher education and continuing education centres of universities and the Finnish National Board of Education provide teachers with further and continuing education and training.

The in-service training of teachers should be carefully planned on all levels from national to individual. All teachers need information on how to teach heterogeneous groups, on how to differentiate teaching and how to cooperate. They need new pedagogical skills and information about special needs education. Special needs teachers should develop their role as consultants.

**(e) How can the formal and non-formal learning environments be more effectively organized in order to ensure the inclusion of all the learners?**

In recent years, learning environments have been a focus of development, aiming at the utilisation of versatile learning environments outside of school and the recognition and validation of non-formal learning in formal education. In the last couple of years, education providers have had the possibility to apply for additional state subsidy to develop learning environments.

One of the aims of the government is the development of morning and afternoon activities and club activities. Morning and afternoon activities are provided for children in forms 1–2 of basic education and for children admitted or transferred to special needs education in all forms. In the spring of 2008, the Finnish National Board of Education granted education providers six million Euros for the development and increasing of club activities. These activities are part of non-formal learning environments and participating in them enhances formal learning and supports well-being and overall development of the pupil.

Morning and afternoon activities and club activities are seen as a significant tool for leveling pupils' socio-economic differences and strengthening social cohesion.

*The development of instructional practices; some examples*

*Luku-Suomi* is one of the foremost projects of the Finnish National Board of Education for enhancing mother tongue teaching in 2001-2004. The project was targeted at comprehensive and upper secondary school students and aims to improve their literacy skills and knowledge of literature. The professional organisations of mother tongue and classroom teachers supported the project. In practice, it was a network of schools and libraries, which organised training and provided information both on a national and regional basis. The *Luku-Suomi* network comprised schools and libraries in over 100 municipalities.

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