



Finland

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Principles and general objectives of education

Education is considered as one of the fundamental rights of all citizens. Traditionally, the main goal of Finland's education policy has been to raise the level of education and to offer equal educational opportunities to all citizens, regardless of their place of residence, wealth, mother tongue, or sex. This goal has largely been attained. Almost 100% of each age group complete the compulsory education stage, and over 90% continue their studies in upper secondary school or a vocational institution. The school and institution network covers the entire country. Sexual equality has been well achieved: women's educational attainments often exceed that of men.

Current educational priorities and concerns

The main goal of educational policy since 1980s has been to increase the autonomy of the municipalities and individual schools. A decisive step was taken in 1993, when the government made its decision in principle concerning the guidelines for revising the Comprehensive School Curriculum. This new framework completely revised curricular guidelines at the national level and significantly enlarged curriculum options and student choice. At the same time, many of the provisions concerning the legal regulations of education were revoked and much of the former powers of the central administration were devolved to the local education authorities and to individual schools.

Once every four years, the Government adopts a new plan for the development of education and university research. The plan for 1999-2004 was adopted at the end of 1999. This plan focused on: (a) implementing an extensive Information Society Programme in all fields of administration, with an emphasis on content production, teacher training and utilization of information networks; (b) developing education in mathematics and natural sciences; (c) strengthening programmes for language teaching and internationalization; and (d) improving the quality of education. One tool for quality assurance is the evaluation of educational outcomes. In accordance with legislation, evaluation duties have been assigned to both education providers and the authorities. The concept of lifelong learning is also declared to be one of the main principles underlying the development of education. The plan included a special section on lifelong learning and, in addition, the principle of lifelong learning is a basis for several actions. As mentioned, equal opportunity for education and training is the right of every person permanently resident in Finland, regardless of their gender, place of residence, age, language, economic standing, state of health, disability or origin.

The two previous plans carried out in the 1990s focused on improving the efficiency of the education system, enhancing its capacity for meeting demand, increasing the number of choices available to students, and transferring to schools the



power to decide on the curriculum and its implementation. Educational institutions were encouraged to cooperate with each other and with the local community. The aim was to produce a simple and clear, internationally compatible education structure, and an educational environment sensitive to the student's individual wishes and to the needs of society.

A comprehensive reform of legislation governing basic education, secondary education and adult education came into force in January 1999. The new legislation has substantially increased the independent decision-making powers of municipalities and institutions. For example, providers of education decide independently on the institutions in which education is provided; they may also, upon their own decision, acquire educational services by purchase.

Pupils also have more freedom of choice with the new legislation. Previously, pupils attended the school nearest to their home; now, they can apply for any school within or outside the home municipality, including private schools. However, the legislation still guarantees the child to have access to the school nearest to his/her domicile, therefore she/he cannot be passed by an applicant from another area.

As regards basic education, the most significant change was the abolishment of the division of the comprehensive school into lower and upper stages. Until 1999, the first six grades formed the lower stage and the Grades 7 to 9 the upper stage of comprehensive school. The division was in conflict with the new legislation that handled basic education as an integrated whole; indeed, it was seen as a potential barrier to the integrated and holistic development of the comprehensive school.

In the 1990s, one of the most important reforms was the establishment of polytechnics, which provide non-university professional higher education in a multi-disciplinary environment. Until the 1990s the concept of higher education was defined narrowly in Finland: the university system based on the combination of science and instruction was synonymous to higher education. The universities could offer a study place to only one fifth of the age group, which was not enough to meet the changing needs of the society and labour market. The purpose of the polytechnic reform was to provide young people with another high-level alternative by creating a more practically and professionally oriented higher education degree system to exist side by side with the traditional university degrees.

The creation of polytechnics was part of a more in-depth restructuring of vocational education. The goal of the 1998 law on vocational training which came into effect on 1 January 1999 has been to raise vocational skills and competences and meet the skill needs at the workplace by improving links between schools and employers, thus promoting employment. The new acts impose obligations with regard to inter-institutional co-operation. For example, institutions providing basic vocational education must cooperate with other educational institutions in their region. Co-operation must be practiced with other vocational and general secondary institutions, but also with universities and polytechnics.

As the decision-making powers and responsibilities of educational institutions increase, their need for self-evaluation is becoming more important. To support the development of education and to improve the conditions for learning, political and



administrative decision-making requires more information about educational outcomes. Under the new educational legislation, educational institutions are obligated to evaluate their own operations and their effects. At the national level, monitoring and evaluation focus on the extent to which the objectives set in statutes, education policy decisions and core curricula are achieved. Authorities are responsible for evaluating the realization of education policy, such as the implementation of structural reforms, and the achievement of equality and basic security in education. A further aim of the national evaluation system is to support educational institutions and teachers in the continuous reform of education, on the one hand, and to produce diverse, up-to-date and reliable information on the education system, on the other. With the exception of higher education, the responsibility for conducting national evaluations rests primarily with the National Board of Education. The evaluations of the National Board of Education primarily concentrate on educational outcomes. The national evaluation system consists of three sections: evaluation of learning outcomes, production of indicators, and situational or thematic evaluations.

Trough recent amendments to the Universities Act which came into force on 1 August 2005 a mandatory three-cycle degree structure (excepting medicine and dentistry) in accordance with the Bologna process has been introduced. The Polytechnic Act has been amended in 2003, and second-cycle degree programmes have been introduced on an experimental basis.

The most recent national policy objectives are defined in the National Development Plan for Education and Research 2003-2008, adopted by the Government on 4 December 2003. The objectives are further elaborated in the performance agreements between the Ministry of Education and school and higher education institutions. Issues of educational equality are among the key topics in the new Plan. Its objectives include raising the proportion of those continuing their studies immediately after basic education to 97% and improving the availability of studies intended for adults. Furthermore, the Plan considers internationalization as being one way to enable the education and research system to respond to the challenges brought about by globalization.

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

According to the Plan, cooperation between general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions is to be increased especially in the planning and realisation of joint provision, joint study programmes and regional education and training supply. The aim of the Ministry of Education is to boost entrepreneurship education and training and entrepreneurship know-how within the programme in order to enhance the skills of those who want to set up businesses of their own. The aim is to make



entrepreneurship more attractive as a career choice. Measures to strengthen the knowledge base in entrepreneurship concern the education system as a whole. (National Board of Education, 2004).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Constitution Act of Finland** (1919 and subsequent amendments, the most recent one in 1999) stipulates that provision must be made for general compulsory education and a folk school free of charge. It also charges the Government with maintaining or subsidizing vocational education, general education, higher education in applied arts and sciences, and university education. The Constitution Act further stipulates that the right to found private schools and reformatories shall be enacted by law, and that home tuition shall not be supervised by the authorities.

The comprehensive school, which provides general compulsory education and is free of charge for all citizens, is governed by the **Comprehensive School Act** of 1983.

The various regulations governing upper secondary schools were thoroughly revised in 1991. The subjects and subject groups in the upper secondary school curriculum are defined in the **Upper Secondary School Act** and Decree.

Legislation governing primary and secondary education, as well as part of the legislation governing adult education, were amended on 1 January 1999. This more uniform legal framework focuses on the objectives, contents and levels of education as well as students' rights and responsibilities. The education system has remained unchanged, but new legislation has substantially increased the independent decision-making powers of the local authorities, other education providers and schools. Education providers are empowered to decide independently on the educational institutions. Working hours in general upper secondary schools and in vocational education and training are no longer submitted to national regulations, and arrangements are decided locally. Similarly, providers of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training may decide to purchase educational services

The comprehensive school was usually divided into the lower stage (Years 1-6) and upper stage (Years 7-9). The **Basic Education Act** of 1999 only states that basic education lasts nine years and that during the first six years instruction is usually given by the class teacher.

The Polytechnics Act was passed by Parliament at the beginning of 1995, and the first polytechnics began operating on a permanent basis in August 1996. Under the Act, it is possible to establish State-run polytechnics (universities are run by the State, while polytechnics are either locally- or privately-run). This sector is now regulated by the new **Polytechnics Act No. 351** of 9 May 2003 and subsequent amendments, and **Government Decree No. 352** of 15 May 2003 and subsequent amendments.

The various acts on each individual university were replaced by a single **Universities Act No. 645** of 1997 and **Government Decree No. 115** of 1998



covering the entire university system. Recent amendments (**Act No. 715/2004** and **Government Decree on University Degrees No. 794** of 2004) came into force on 1 August 2005 and introduced a mandatory three-cycle degree structure (excepting medicine and dentistry) in accordance with the Bologna process.

As far as adult education is concerned, the **Vocational Qualifications Act** came into force in May 1994. The purpose has been to introduce a skill-based examination open to all adults, regardless of how they had acquired their professional skills. At the same time, the aim was to raise the educational level of adults, to narrow the generation gap in educational attainment and to install a national quality assurance system covering the whole field of vocational adult education.

All Finnish citizens are obliged to obtain education for a period of ten years, beginning in the year in which they have their seventh birthday. The obligation expires in the year they are 17 years old, or when they have completed the comprehensive school curriculum, whichever occurs first. Compulsory education does not mean compulsory school attendance; pupils are free to acquire the equivalent skills and knowledge from some other source. In practice, however, nearly all Finns attend the nine-year comprehensive school.

Administration and management of the education system

The Finnish Parliament decides on educational legislation and the general principles of educational 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 **Ministry of Education** (also responsible for science and research) is the highest educational authority. Almost all publicly funded education is subordinate to or supervised by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry prepares the legislation and government resolutions concerning education. The most important sectors of education outside the Ministry's administrative field are day-care (under the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Health**), military training (under the **Ministry of Defence**), police, border guard and fire training (under the **Ministry of the Interior**), and employment training, which is funded by the **Ministry of Labour** but provided by institutions subordinate to the Ministry of Education.

The **National Board of Education** in turn is an expert body responsible for the development of educational objectives, contents and methods in basic, general upper secondary, vocational and adult education and training.

The National Board of Education prepares and adopts the core curricula and is responsible for the evaluation of the education system. The responsibility for the evaluation of polytechnics and universities rests with these institutions themselves, with the support of the **Higher Education Evaluation Council**, an independent expert body established in 1995 and operating under the Ministry of Education. There is no separate inspection department for schools. The steering of the education system is decided by the Government and the Ministry of Education. However, several matters have been entrusted to the providers of education. Their operations are steered



through the core curricula and the objectives laid down in legislation. Feedback concerning the operations of the education system is collected by means of statistics and evaluations.

There are six administrative areas in Finland (provinces), and in each Provincial State Office affairs falling under the administrative field of the Ministry of Education are conducted by the **Education and Culture Department** led by the Provincial Counsellor of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Each local authority is obligated to provide basic education for all children living within the municipality, or to otherwise ensure that school-aged children receive corresponding instruction. The local educational authorities may also provide general upper secondary, vocational, polytechnic and adult education. Local (municipal) authorities have self-government and the right to levy taxes. The municipal power of decision is exercised by the elected municipal council. The council appoints the municipal executive board and the specialized boards. There is at least one education board or equivalent body elected by the municipal council in each municipality (there are 432 municipalities in the country).

Each school can and usually does have a **managing board** where teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils and parents are represented. The main tasks of the managing board are to develop the work of the school and promote co-operation inside the school and between the school, parents and the local community. In each school there is also a pupils'/students' union which, among other things, elects the pupil/student representatives to the managing board. Each municipal authority decides on the distribution of responsibilities between the municipal administration and the managing board of a particular school. Moreover, municipalities can co-operate in school administration, and two or more schools can have a managing board in common.

Day-care centres, comprehensive schools and general upper secondary schools are mostly maintained by local authorities. General and vocational upper secondary education may be provided by municipalities, federations of municipalities, or private organizations and foundations. In 2004 there were 3,720 comprehensive schools in Finland, of which only about 100 maintained by private education providers or by the State; the remaining schools are owned by municipalities or federations of municipalities. Municipalities provide 93% and private organizations 7% of general upper secondary education. Of the institutions of vocational education and training, 72% are maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities, 25% by private organizations and 3% by the State. Polytechnics are either municipal or private. All universities are maintained by the State and enjoy a high degree of autonomy.

Vocational schools and postsecondary vocational education institutions usually have similar managing boards (parents are not represented), but they tend to be more independent and powerful. State- and privately-run vocational schools, in addition to having such managing boards, have, as a rule, one or more **advisory boards** to promote training and co-operation between school and working life. These boards consist of representatives from the school, its teachers, the main social partners in the relevant fields, and other experts. The task of the **Finnish Education Evaluation Council, National Education and Training Committees** and the **National Coordination Group for Education and Training** is to plan and develop



vocationally-oriented education and training and to promote interaction between education and working life in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education.

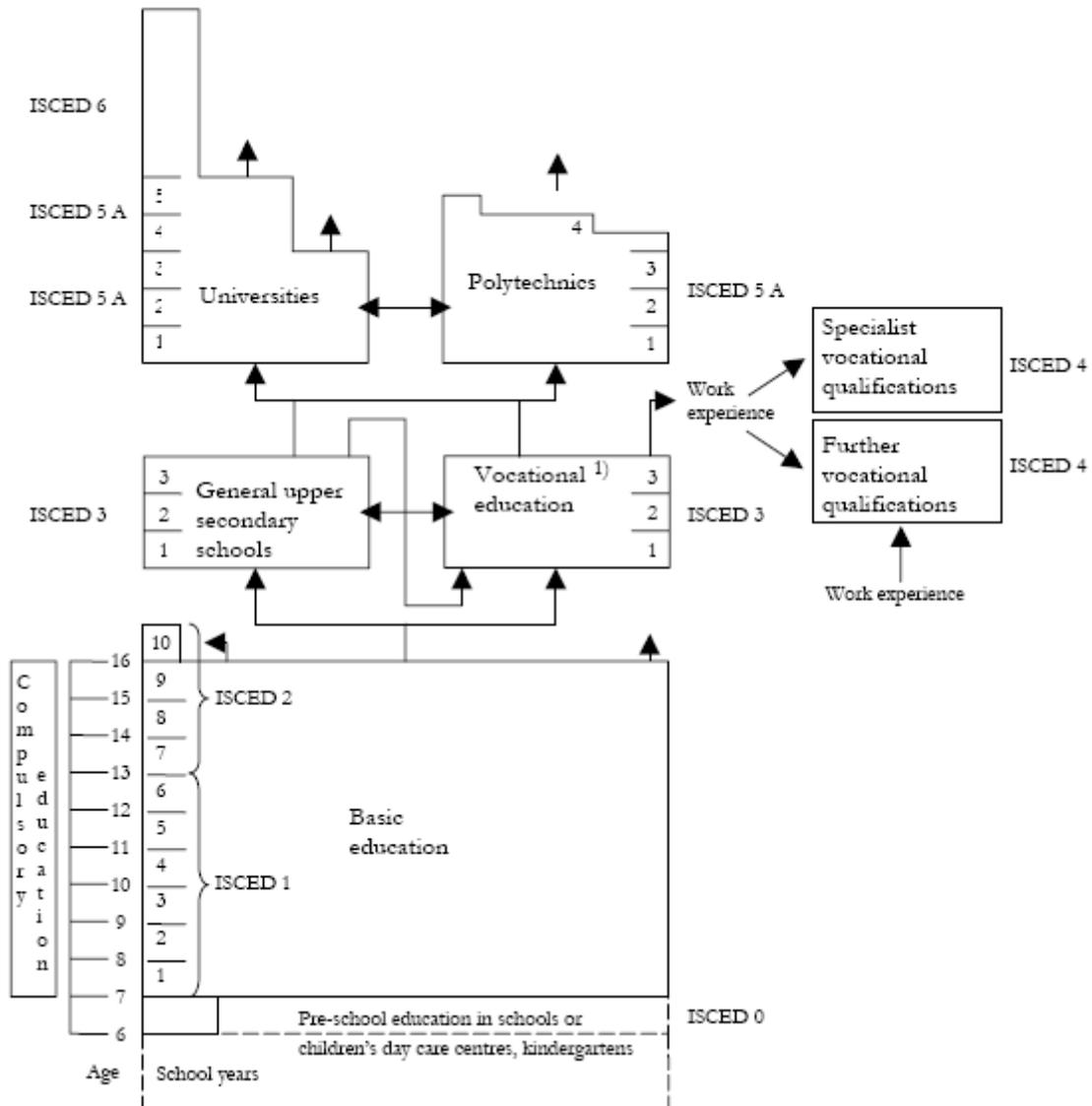
The **Academy of Finland**, the Finnish Research Council organization, also comes under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. Its purpose is to further scientific research and its utilization, promote international co-operation, serve as an advisory body on science policy issues, and allocate funds for research and other scientific purposes. The Academy is the main external funding body of university research and, along with the universities, bears the main responsibility for basic research. Public funding for technology and development is channeled through the **Technology Development Centre** (*Tekes*), which also plays a major role in external funding of the universities.

The **Science and Technology Policy Council** is responsible for promoting major issues related to science, technology and scientific training. The Council advises the government and ministries on the orientation and co-ordination of science and technology policy, the general development of scientific research and training, and Finnish participation in international scientific and technological co-operation.

The **Adult Education Council** gives advice and proposes initiatives to develop adult education and training, and is in charge of regular assessments of the situation of adult education and training in the country.

Structure and organization of the education system

Finland: structure of the education system



Source: National Board of Education, 2004.

Pre-school education

Pre-school education in Finland refers to the education of the 6-year-olds, who in the following year will enter regular school. Pre-school education is provided free of charge, on a voluntary basis at day-care centres and in special school classes annexed to comprehensive schools. In 2000, over 90% of the age group participated in pre-school education.



Primary and lower secondary education

The comprehensive school (*Peruskoulu*) provides general education (primary and lower secondary) for the age group 7-16 and takes nine years to complete. Completion of the comprehensive school syllabus constitutes compulsory education. There are no entrance requirements. The comprehensive school was usually divided into the lower stage (Years I-VI) and upper stage (Years VII-IX). The Basic Education Act of 1999 only states that basic education lasts nine years and that during the first six years instruction is usually given by the class teacher.

Secondary education

The upper secondary school (*Lukio*) provides on average three years of general education, free of charge, to students aged 16-19+ and leads to the national matriculation examination. It gives general access to higher education. The vocational school provides initial vocational training in practically all occupational fields to students aged 16-19+. Basic vocational qualifications require three years to complete (i.e. 120 credits, one credit being equivalent to an average of forty hours of study) and training is given in multidisciplinary or specialized vocational institutions. Initial qualifications confer general eligibility for further studies at post-secondary level.

Polytechnics provide higher non-university vocational education usually in multidisciplinary areas for matriculated students and those with qualifications from secondary vocational education. Polytechnic academic degrees take three and a half to four and a half years to complete (i.e. 140-180 credits).

Universities provide a full range of academic studies and degrees from bachelor's and master's to postgraduate levels. The first university degree, which roughly corresponds to a bachelor's degree, can generally be attained in three years of full-time study, and an additional two years of study lead to the award of a master's degree). There is also an optional, pre-doctoral postgraduate degree of *licentiate*, which can be completed in two years of full-time study after the master's degree. Full-time studies for a doctorate take approximately four years following the master's degree. Multi-faculty universities are called *Yliopisto* and specialized institutions *Korkeakoulu* or *Akatemia*. All the universities are state-run and engage in both education and research. A mandatory three-cycle degree programmes structure in accordance with the Bologna process has been introduced in August 2005.

As far as the comprehensive school is concerned, the school year begins in mid-August and ends at the beginning of June of the following calendar year. It is divided into two terms and consists of 190 working days. The number of lessons for an individual pupil range from 19 to 32 per five-day week, depending on the form and the number of optional subjects. In a three-form upper secondary school the first two years have 190 days of teaching, and the third year at least 120. The end of the spring term is used for final examinations and the oral and written matriculation examination. Schools operate five days per week; opening hours are not regulated and vary from school to school.



The academic year usually begins in September and ends in May. It is divided in two terms. Most universities are active throughout the year and offer different summer courses and extra examinations.

The financing of education

The responsibility for financing education and constructing school buildings is divided between the State and local authorities or other owners of educational institutions. In addition to their own funding, local authorities and other parties maintaining schools and institutions are entitled to Government grants for the founding and operating costs of educational institutions.

The basis of financing is the same regardless of the form of ownership. The unit cost used as the basis for statutory government transfer accounts for 85% of each education provider's unit cost for basic education. In terms of children in extended compulsory education, the basis for statutory government transfers is the same as that applied to pupils in basic education. The main factor affecting Government subsidies is the number of pupils. Government subsidies are not earmarked for any particular costs. From 2001 pre-primary education has been included within the financing system of education and culture irrespective of where it is provided.

Government financing for investments vary from 25% to 50% of the costs determined by calculations. The statutory government transfer percentage depends on the amount of the local authority's tax revenue. Government subsidy may also be granted to privately maintained institutions for investment costs. In order to receive government financing for investments, the project must be approved by the Ministry of Education as part of the national financing plan in accordance with the budget. In terms of funding for primary and secondary education, the average state subsidies and municipal contributions account for 57% and 43% of the costs respectively.

Since 2002 a performance-based funding system of vocational education has gradually been introduced alongside the traditional funding mechanism. The objective is to encourage vocational education providers to promote the employment prospects and further education opportunities of the students, as well as increase the completion rate of degrees.

The universities' expenditure is financed from the State budget. However, the proportion of direct state funding remains at about 70% of the expenditure. In addition, universities provide chargeable services to businesses, industry and public authorities which account for 15% of total university funding. The Academy of Finland finances basic research and researcher training at universities.

Tuition is free at all levels of education. The comprehensive school is completely free for pupils but, starting from the upper secondary level, students may have to pay for teaching materials, meals, and transport.

Students receive financial aid for full-time post-basic studies lasting at least two months. Students financial aid is intended to secure the livelihood of students insofar as either the student's parents are not considered to be responsible for it or



funds are not available under some other provisions. In order to qualify, a student must have gained admission to a school, be studying full time, and be in need of financial assistance. Ordinary financial aid for students consists of a study grant, a housing supplement and government-guaranteed student loans. The amount of the aid depends on the type of school, the age and marital status of the student, and the mode of accommodation. The student's overall financial situation is also taken into account. Student financial aid is payable for studies at upper secondary schools, folk high schools, vocational institutions, polytechnics or universities through to doctorate level. Financial aid is also available for study abroad.

According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education represented 6.43% of GDP in 2004.

The educational process

The Government decides on the allocation of time, defining the minimum number of lessons or courses in each subject. The national core curricula for pre-school education, basic education, general upper secondary education and vocational education are determined by the National Board of Education. The core curricula include the general educational aims, objectives and contents of different subjects, as well as the principles of pupil assessment.

A long and broad consultation process precedes the approval of core curricula. In the preparation of framework curricula, the National Board of Education works in close cooperation with all relevant partners: various expert and interest groups, providers of education, teachers, etc. decide on the details and scope of the educational programmes. For instance, the most recently reformed core curriculum for pre-school education was prepared in extensive co-operation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Trade Union of Education, the Finnish Book Publishers Association, as well as with the local authorities and their day-care centres and schools.

The guidelines issued by the National Board of Education are interpreted and adapted at the local level in order to develop a curriculum which gives practical directives to teachers. Interpretation thus plays a key role in making the curriculum a flexible response to local needs and conditions. Hence, although the curriculum is still confirmed by and for the municipality, each school can be given substantial latitude for local curriculum design. School-based curriculum development is believed to augment and further develop the parents' and pupils' commitment. Indeed, co-operation between home and school is emphasized in the school legislation, and parents may participate in developing the school-specific curricula and their children's personal study plans. In the case of vocational education, providers of education also have tripartite expert bodies, consultative committees, which participate in the planning and development of education at the local level.

The new curricular guidelines are aimed at renewing the content of education and reforming traditional classroom practices. One important aspect of the curriculum



reform was the shift from a teacher-centred philosophy of the previous central curriculum to a more learner-centred approach to teaching. The active role of pupils as organizers of their own knowledge structures is emphasized.

The general upper secondary school curriculum has also been revised. The reform was motivated by socio-economic development, increased tendencies towards self-employment and private enterprise, increasing internationalization and changes in values. In addition to the changes in the surrounding world, ways of thinking about learning and science have also changed. It was also necessary to clarify the objectives and mission of the school, and to define the roles of the teacher and the student in a different way.

Pre-primary education

In Finland, the term pre-school education refers to the systematic education and instruction provided in day-care centres or in comprehensive schools during the year preceding compulsory education. Thus, pre-school education emphasizes the aspect of preparation for school, as opposed to the kindergarten education given at an earlier stage of one's childhood. Participation in pre-school education is voluntary, and there are no specific admission requirements apart from age.

The objectives of pre-school 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. One aim for pre-school education is to create a learning environment which offers inspiring activities and an opportunity for children to grow and to develop together in a holistic way. The curriculum guidelines encourage teachers to focus on the individuality of the child, to use methods for active learning, and to enhance children's ability to interact as part of a group. Problems affecting children's development and learning need to be detected and addressed sufficiently early. Pre-school education also intends to promote children's growth into humane and ethical individuals by guiding them towards responsible action, appreciation of other people, and compliance with generally accepted rules.

Each local authority may decide whether to provide pre-school education at school, in conjunction with day-care or at some other appropriate venue. Regardless of the place of provision, the educational process follows the National Core Curriculum for pre-school, endorsed by the National Board of Education in 2000. The new core curriculum adopts an integrated approach, whereby knowledge is selected and organized according to children's everyday experiences. The essential elements of the learning environment include the varied operating methods and learning assignments, the interaction between the teacher and the child, and the interaction between the children. Co-operation with parents or other guardians and provision of multidisciplinary support are of the utmost importance in the implementation of pre-school education.

Assessment in pre-school education is based both on the achievement of the general objectives of pre-school education and the individual child's objectives. The assessment places more emphasis on the progress of the child's growth and learning process, rather than on the mere achievement of objectives. Assessment is carried out on a continuous basis in interaction between the teacher and the child. Parents or other



guardians are provided with feedback in regular discussions with them and possibly also with their children. Pre-school education promotes children's capabilities for self-assessment, which will support the development of their self-concept and the analysis of their own working methods in particular.

About 95% of the 6-year-olds attended pre-schools in 2004, or a total of 57,000 children. Pre-school education is mainly offered in day-care centres (about 79% of children in 2004). In comprehensive/basic schools, pre-school education can be organized in separate pre-school classes, or in a combined class. Teaching and guidance staff in day-care centres comprise kindergarten teachers (who have educational responsibility), day-care workers, nurses and other childcare professionals.

Comprehensive school (primary and lower secondary education)

The general aim of basic education is to support pupils' growth towards humanity and ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed in life. Education should promote learning and equality throughout society and the country and provide knowledge and skills that the students need later in their life.

The national core curriculum emphasizes the individuality, options and flexibility of instruction. Increasing students' freedom of choice will strengthen pupils' self-confidence and help them to form a clearer picture of their character, personal goals and opportunities. The child is considered as an active agent, and the teacher as facilitator rather than a source of knowledge and provider of information. This makes the curriculum a "learning process which is constantly reacting to the results of evaluation and the changes in the environment."

The Government decides on the overall time allocation by defining the minimum number of weekly lessons per year for common subjects. Within the framework of the national core curriculum the municipalities or the schools themselves are free to decide at which stage the subjects are studied. In Years 1-6, every pupil should basically receive the same education, but schools may focus on different subjects in different ways due to the flexible time allocation. In Years 7-9, both common and elective subjects are included. The curriculum also includes a workplace guidance period. Pupils' parents or other guardians decide which of the elective subjects on offer they will take. In the upper stage, elective subjects are compulsory in the sense that pupils have to take 20 curriculum hours worth of them. The municipality (or the school) decides what optional subjects are offered, and thus the option refers to the students' right to choose the subjects which they prefer to study. Elective subjects in the upper stage may include, for example, advanced courses in the compulsory subjects, or courses where the knowledge acquired in those subjects is applied in a new way, courses in foreign languages, computer skills, or entities formed from various subjects. The local curriculum determines which optional subjects will be offered at each school.

The local authority or the school may decide on the allocation of lessons for each year. Each local authority or individual schools may decide the number and titles of the elective subjects, as well as their allocation to different years when planning

their curricula. In addition to the power to decide how hours are distributed, the municipality or school can also allocate a higher number of hours to compulsory subjects. The timetables specifying the minimum number of lessons are shown below:

Basic education: total minimum number of lessons in Years I–VI

Subject	Minimum number of lessons in Grades I–VI
Mother tongue and literature (Finnish/Swedish)	32
Other national language or foreign language ('A' Language)	8
Mathematics	22
Biology, geography, environmental studies and civics	15
Religion/ethics	8
History	3
Arts and practical subjects	44
– Music	6
– Visual arts	6
– Craft	8
– Physical education	12
Total minimum number of lessons	132
Optional language	4

Source: National Board of Education, 2001. 'The first two grades have on average a minimum of nineteen lessons (instruction and educational guidance); the average minimum figure for the third and fourth grades is twenty-three lessons and for the fifth and sixth, twenty-four lessons. In Grades VII–IX, instruction and educational guidance cover on average a minimum of thirty weekly lessons. In addition, remedial instruction is available. One lesson consists of at least forty-five minutes of instruction.' (Eurydice Eurybase, 1999).

Basic education: total minimum number of lessons in Years VII–IX

Subject	Minimum number of lessons in Grades VII–IX
Mother tongue and literature (Finnish/Swedish)	8
Language started in Grades I–VI ('A' Language)	8
Additional language ('B' Language)	6
Mathematics	9
Biology, geography	7
Physics, chemistry	6
Religion/ethics	3
History, social studies	6
Music	1
Visual arts	2
Home economics	3
Craft	3
Physical education (some lessons used for health education)	6
Pupil counselling	2
Total minimum number of lessons	70
Elective subjects (total maximum)	20

Source: National Board of Education, 2001.



In January 2004, the National Board of Education adopted the new National Core Curriculum for Years 1–9, being implemented from 1 August 2006. The framework timetable is shown in the table below:

Basic education: number of lessons per subjects according to the National Core Curriculum implemented in 2006

Years/subject	1-2	3-5	6-9	Total
Mother tongue and literature	14	14	14	42
Mathematics	6	12	14	32
Years/subject	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
A language	-	8	8	16
B language	-	-	6	6
Years/subject	1-4	5-6	7-9	Total
Biology and geography		3	7	
Physics and chemistry	9*	2	7	31
Health education			3	
History and civics	-	3	7	10
Years/subject	1-5	6-9		Total
Religion/Ethics	6	5		11
Years/subject	1-4		5-9	Total
Music	4		3	
Arts	4	26 30	4	56
Craft	4		7	
Physical education	8		10	
Years/subject	1-6	7-9		Total
Home economics	-	3		3
Student counseling	-	2		2
Elective subjects	-	(13)		13
Years/subject	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
Optional A language	-----	(6)	(6)	(12)

Source: Finland Eurydice Unit, 2005.

Note: The minimum number of lessons is: 19 in years 1-2; 23 in years 3-4; 24 in years 5-6; and 30 in years 7-9. (*) In years 1-4, biology, geography, physics and chemistry as well as health education are integrated into a subject known as environment and nature studies.

Teachers can choose the teaching methods they use in order to achieve the objectives stated in the curriculum. In addition to the traditional and still common method of lectures led by the teacher, there are many teaching methods that focus more on pupils: the teacher may start a discussion in the class, the pupils may acquaint themselves with various topics independently, in pairs or in small groups. In several subjects, pupils prepare presentations, plays or demonstrations individually or as a group, on the basis of their own research. The aim is to approach various topics from the children's point of view, taking into account their own milieu and experiences, for example, by making trips to the surrounding areas and going on excursions to different places of interest. A pupil is free, within certain limits, to choose his/her



comprehensive school within his/her home municipality. If it is impossible for a pupil to attend school, for health or some other reason, the home municipality of the pupil is obliged to provide comparable teaching in some other form.

In the first six years of the comprehensive school, pupil guidance is integrated (no separate hours) and concentrates on learning skills and methods. In Years 7-9, it takes the form of individual guidance, small group or class instruction, or discussions on further studies and careers. There are usually also study visits to work places, upper secondary and vocational schools. Comprehensive school can also provide pre-school education for 6-year-olds and an extra tenth year for those who have completed their compulsory education. By law, the entire nine-year period of school is considered a single entity. Since nearly all comprehensive schools and most upper secondary schools operate under municipal jurisdiction, their administrative organization varies. All schools are coeducational.

According to the Basic Education Act, assessment should encourage students to set their own goals (through self-assessment) guide study. In addition to pupils' learning outcomes, the targets of assessment include their schoolwork and the entire learning process, as well as their conduct. The National Board of Education issues national criteria for pupil assessment.

Pupil assessment has two different roles. The first is the above-mentioned educational guidance and encouragement. This is known as continuous assessment. It is based on each pupil's own learning and growth process, its starting points and objectives. The second task of pupil assessment is the final assessment of basic education, on the basis of which pupils will be selected for further studies when they leave comprehensive school. This assessment must be nationally comparable and it must treat pupils equally. The final assessment is based on the objectives of basic education. For the purposes of the final assessment of basic education, recommended assessment criteria have been prepared for the intermediate grade in all common subjects.

Thus, the purpose of assessment is to encourage the pupil in a positive way to set his/her own goals, plan his/her work and make independent choices. For this reason, assessment is an ongoing part of the daily activities at school. Each pupil is given a report in writing at the end of the school year and at least once during the school year. Upon completing the comprehensive school, the pupil is given a basic education certificate. The reports may be descriptive in the first four years. The numerical grades range from 4 (fail) to 10 (excellent). Assessment is based on continuous achievement (competence) in class work and homework and tests organized by teachers; assessment is relative to the aims of the curriculum. A pupil can be required to repeat a class in comprehensive school, but this is not very common. All the relevant age group attends the comprehensive school. According to Statistics Finland, in 2004 there were 3,720 comprehensive schools with 634,199 pupils enrolled (including 207 basic level special schools with 10,439 pupils). Swedish was the language of instruction in 306 schools with a total enrolment of 35,228 pupils.



Upper secondary education

The objective of general upper secondary education is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for further studies, working life, responsible citizenship, and the development of their personalities. In addition, education must support students' opportunities for lifelong learning and self-development during their lives. The development of young people's study skills is regarded in the core curriculum as the second most important task of general upper secondary education. The task of the school is not so much to distribute knowledge, but rather to teach students to acquire it independently and to tolerate contradictions.

The upper secondary school provides three years of general education for students aged 16-19. It continues the teaching functions of the comprehensive school and qualifies the student for all higher education studies. The upper secondary school leads to the national matriculation examination. Upper secondary education has progressed towards a highly decentralized system. Based on the national core curriculum confirmed by the National Board of Education in 1994, the Government decides on the minimum number of courses in each subject. The National Board of Education decides on the guidelines for drawing up the curriculum at individual schools. Within the national guidelines, schools draw up their own curriculum, or the schools of a municipality may co-operate in drawing up a curriculum. Each provider of education prepares the local curriculum. The curriculum must provide students with individual choices concerning studies. Thus, the responsibility for teaching arrangements, course content and the selection of teaching materials has been passed to the local level, giving upper secondary schools and vocational institutions the opportunity to co-operate with each other, to increase the educational resources needed in their respective areas, and meet the students' individual needs.

Furthermore, an experiment started in 1987 to dispense with form progression in upper secondary schools, leaving the order and placement of courses for the schools and students to decide. As a result, a system dispensing with forms was implemented nationwide as of 1994. This choice, too, can be made by the school: it can opt to continue as a three-form school with students progressing from one form to the next year by year. If the school chooses to dispense with forms, students can opt to extend their studies over three or four years.

Upper secondary school studies consist of compulsory, specialization and applied courses. All students must complete the compulsory courses. The specialization courses are primarily follow-up courses directly connected with the compulsory courses, and the schools must provide them for the students. Each student is responsible for completing a sufficient number of courses. Applied courses may be either further studies in subjects already studied or other subjects. The provision of these courses can be decided independently by each school. They can also be offered in co-operation with other educational institutions, such as vocational or music institutions.

The table below outlines the time allocation at upper secondary school. The average scope of one course is 38 lessons. Consequently, in order to reach the number of lessons, the number of courses on the time allocation table should be multiplied by

38. In general upper secondary education for young people provided in the form of contact instruction, the duration of a lesson must be at least 45 minutes.

Upper secondary school: time allocation framework

Subject or subject group	Number of compulsory courses	Number of advanced courses (minimum) offered by the school
Finnish/Swedish	6	3
Foreign languages		
Language studied in Years 1-6 of comprehensive school (A language)	6	2
Language studied in Years 7-9 of comprehensive school (B language)	5	2
Other languages		16
Mathematics		
Basic course	6	2
Advanced course	10	3
Environment and natural sciences		
Biology	2	3
Geography	2	2
Physics	1	7
Chemistry	1	4
Moral subjects		
Religion/ethics	3	2
Philosophy	1	3
Psychology	1	4
History	4	2
Social Studies	2	2
Arts		3
Music	1-2	3
Visual arts	1-2	3
Physical education	2	3
Health education	1	2
Educational & vocational guidance	1	
Advanced courses, minimum (from those offered)	10	
Compulsory courses	47-51	
Min. total of specialization courses	10	
Applied courses	(to be added to reach the minimum total)	
Minimum total requirement	75	

Source: Finland Eurydice Unit, 2005.



The Finnish National Board of Education adopted the National Core Curriculum for general upper secondary education in August 2003. The local curricula defined in compliance with the new core curriculum came into effect for students starting upper secondary school on 1 August 2005.

Teachers are free to choose the teaching methods they use in order to achieve the objectives set out in the curriculum. In addition to teacher-led lectures, there are many student-centred teaching methods, such as discussions and working independently, in pairs or in groups. In several subjects, students prepare presentations, plays or demonstrations individually or as a group on the basis of their own research. In addition, classes also make excursions and study trips. Various subjects are brought together under thematic subject modules in order to integrate the upper secondary school curriculum. This can be achieved, for example, by joint teaching by several teachers and project work, which make it possible to combine the contents of several subjects.

The curriculum aims to guide and encourage study and to develop students' self-assessment. Assessment has been diversified as far as possible by means of verbal reports, assessment interviews and portfolio assessment, and is based on the objectives defined in the curriculum.

The matriculation examination is set and assessed nationally by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Education. There is a centralized body to mark the tests according to uniform criteria. The examination consists of four compulsory subjects and one or more optional ones. The compulsory tests are in the mother tongue (either Finnish or Swedish, depending on the language of instruction at the school), the second official language, a foreign language, and either mathematics or general studies. In the last-mentioned examination, the student answers questions in one or several subject groups, which are: religion and ethics; psychology and philosophy; history and civics; physics, chemistry, biology and geography. There are two levels of examinations in mathematics, in the second official language and in foreign languages; in at least one of the compulsory examinations the more demanding level must be chosen.

The general studies test (physics, chemistry, history, etc.) as part of the matriculation examination have been revised as from the examination period of spring 2006. The general studies test has been revised by dividing the current multi-subject test into several tests in individual subjects. Candidates may then complete one or several tests in general studies. The mother tongue test as part of the matriculation examination has also been reformed. The new test has two parts. Each candidate is required to participate in both the textual skills test and the essay test during the same examination period. The candidate's mother tongue grade is determined by the weighted total score from the two tests. The new tests are being introduced in 2007.

Of the students graduating from upper secondary school, about one-third go on to university, while two-thirds continue at AMK institutions (polytechnics) or vocational institutions. The gross enrolment ratio for secondary education in 2000/01 was 124.5%. According to Statistics Finland, there were 473 upper secondary schools in 2004.



Vocational education institutions are well-equipped for both theoretical and practical instruction and have access to up-to-date facilities, including laboratories, tools, machinery and other equipment needed for training. Furthermore, periods of on-the-job training are included in all programmes. Apprenticeship training covers only about 7% of the intake for vocational training. According to Statistics Finland, in 2004 there were 18,136 participants in apprenticeship training.

Some 8% of all vocational institutions are maintained by the State, 74% by municipalities (and federations of municipalities), while the remaining 18% are privately-owned. An increasing number of state-owned vocational institutions have been changing hands in recent years, with municipalities and private organizations taking over.

Moreover, vocational schools are being developed into larger, multidisciplinary institutions. Schools are being merged and the number of institutions is decreasing each year. Most vocational institutions, due to the previous parallel structure, operate both at secondary and post-secondary level. In recent years, the trend has been to combine separate schools and to form multi-field institutions.

Vocational training at the upper secondary level aims to provide a wide-ranging vocational education which combines good professional skills and a solid general education. The purpose is to equip young people to rely on their competence in coping with the wide range of tasks in their field, finding a job in the increasingly competitive labour market and qualifying for further studies. A broad vocational education helps people to adapt flexibly to changing circumstances, and to upgrade their skills according to changing job requirements. Education promotes the individual growth and development of young people; therefore, teaching the essential skills of learning, education also promotes independent initiative and entrepreneurship.

The curriculum system of vocational education consists of the core curricula, each institution's individual curriculum, and personal study plans. The core curriculum provides general guidelines and objectives, and the institutions organize the detailed contents and methods of their instruction as they see fit, taking local and changing needs into account. The aim is that the institution designs its education together with other local institutions so that students can also include study modules from other fields and from general upper secondary school in their qualification. The students are provided with personal study plans, on the basis of which they themselves can decide partially as to what, when, how and in which order they study. Creating options and opportunities for individual advancement has been the aim of the development of curricula in recent years.

The scope of an initial vocational qualification is 120 credits, of which: 90 credits are vocational studies and on-the-job training supporting these studies; 20 credits are core subjects common to all; and 10 are credits free-choice studies.

Common compulsory subjects are Finnish and Swedish (one of which is taught as the mother tongue), a foreign language, mathematics, civics and working life orientation, physical education and health studies. In addition to these, the student must select subjects from the following groups: mathematics and sciences; arts and society; culture and philosophy; and ethics. There are certain topical themes that cut



across studies in all fields. These include environmental protection and sustainable development, internationalization and communication skills, information technology, entrepreneurship, consumer issues, occupational health and safety, and equality.

Elective studies are advanced courses in the above-mentioned subjects, or they may be chosen from the following studies: environmental studies, information and communications technology, ethics, other cultures, psychology and entrepreneurship. The education includes a period of on-the-job training with a minimum scope of 20 credits, during which students familiarize themselves in 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.

Teachers choose the methods that they apply in order to achieve the objectives defined in the curriculum. The emphasis is on student-centred working methods, developing students' own initiative and enterprise and sense of responsibility. Key factors include flexible teaching arrangements, a wide range of working methods and teaching not tied to year classes, integration of theory and practice as well as co-operation and interaction between institutions in the planning and implementation of instruction.

On-the-job training is another learning method, which aims to take the needs of both the student and the workplace into account as broadly as possible. The student can establish a personal contact with real work and, correspondingly, the workplace gets the opportunity to influence education and, in due time, gains employees better equipped for practical work than before. The aim is to ensure vocational skills that stem from working life needs and to promote students' employment opportunities, as well as to facilitate the recruitment of skilled labour into enterprises and other workplaces.

The final project may be a set of work assignments, a written paper, report, project assignment, product or equivalent. The final project is focused so as to serve working life needs, provide an opportunity to participate in working life and facilitate transition into the labour market. It may be performed individually, in a group or as a more extensive project. A student's performance is assessed on a scale of 1-5: excellent (5), good (4-3) and fair (2-1). A student must pass all modules in his/her study programme with at least the grade "fair" in order to obtain a certificate attesting to successful completion of the programme. Assessment is conducted by the teachers and (for on-the-job training periods) a representative of the employer.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Guaranteeing the present level of education and translating into action the results of evaluation of functional quality of education and its success, have become the central educational policy issues in Finland. Evaluation has become necessary as a result of deregulation of the educational process, and partial delegation of decision-making powers to organizers of education. Evaluation is considered an essential means for guaranteeing quality and nationwide comparability of educational services.



The principles and targets of the national evaluation of education are as determined by the Ministry of Education. The evaluations conducted by the National Board of Education primarily concentrate on educational outcomes and mainly aim to serve the national education policy decision-making and the development of education at all levels. The evaluation of the education sector is based on follow-up, research and expert information, as well as on international comparisons. The national evaluation system of education consists of three sections: evaluation system of learning outcomes; production of indicators; and evaluation projects on a variety of topics (situational or thematic evaluations). The targets of national evaluation include: demand for and supply of education, access to education and student flows; the structures and operations of the education system and its constituent parts; the connection between the quality and resources of education; education policy development trends and changes in education services; the relations between education and other sectors of society; the curricula and instruction; learning outcomes and effectiveness of education. The Finnish Education Evaluation Council, which closely cooperates with the Ministry of Education, has been acting from August 2003. It is responsible for planning, coordinating, managing and developing the evaluation of education.

The PISA study indicates that 50% of Finnish 15-year-olds are excellent readers, while the average in the OECD countries is 32%. Within the different kinds of reading skills, Finnish children were especially good in acquiring information and understanding and interpreting what has been read. According to the PISA study, only 7% of young people in Finland have poor reading skills, whereas the OECD average was of 18%. The results indicate that in all 32 countries girls have better reading skills than boys. In Finland the difference between the reading skills of girls and boys is the largest in the OECD countries. Finnish boys achieved an average of 520 points in reading skills, which is the highest in the OECD countries and clearly higher than the OECD average for both girls and boys. (National Board of Education, 2004).

At the higher education level, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) organizes evaluations of the quality of education, and also institutional, programme and thematic evaluations. In addition, it provides advisory and consultancy services in the implementation of evaluations, develops evaluation methodology, and disseminates good Finnish and international practices to higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education.

Although the Council's activities are financed by the Ministry of Education, it acts independently from the Ministry and higher education institutions in defining its action plan, and in identifying evaluation projects to be carried out and methods to be used. Generally, evaluations consist of three phases: a self-evaluation, carried out by the higher institution concerned; a visit to the institution by an external evaluation team; and a final report. Evaluations of higher education institutions are usually categorized into: institutional evaluations; programme and thematic evaluations; and accreditation. External evaluations are usually organized by the FINHEEC.

Higher education

Higher education is developed as a system of two parallel sectors: the new non-university sector comprising AMK institutions (polytechnics), and the university sector. Strategies for steering higher education are based on coordination and application of academic, State and market regulation. Steering by budget allocations and legislation will pave the way for steering by objectives. The national framework for higher education management is set in the Government plan for the development of education and research. The setting of objectives and consultations on performance will constitute the principal channel of communication between the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions. Systematic evaluation is introduced in all higher education with a view to improving quality and providing bases for strategic planning.

The vocational higher education reform was launched in 1991 with the enactment of legislation on experimental polytechnics (AMK institutions). A total of 22 temporary polytechnics were given permission to operate, with the aim of gathering experience and developing programmes for a new type of academic degree in vocational higher education. The purpose of the experiment was to build up a store of experience, and offer the temporary polytechnics the opportunity to develop their programmes before the system was made permanent.

Favourable feedback from the experiment, the encouraging findings of international evaluations, and changes in the Finnish economic structure and labour market, prompted rapid action. Parliament approved legislation making the AMK system permanent in March 1995. The reform has been completed, and most of the old postsecondary and higher level vocational education has been upgraded to the non-university sector of higher education. Courses under the old postsecondary system started for the last time in 1998. In autumn 1998, there were 32 polytechnics operating, twenty of which on a permanent basis. In 2004 there were 29 polytechnics, and one additional polytechnic (police) under the Ministry of Interior.

As a rule, polytechnics span several disciplines or fields. As they are regional by nature, their provision is based on the needs of local business and industry, and they therefore seek to offer education in nearly all relevant fields (e.g. from primary production to business and administration, from engineering to social welfare, health and culture). Polytechnics are either publicly- or privately-run. Most of the publicly-owned polytechnics are run by municipal federations. One new feature is that, in some cases, local authorities have founded a private limited company to run a polytechnic. This is done to highlight the institution's independence from the local administration. Polytechnics are licensed by the Government, and their operation is financed partly from State budget funds and partly by the municipalities.

Polytechnic degree programmes require a minimum of three and a maximum of four years of full-time studies; in special cases, the four-year limit can be exceeded. A credit system is applied (the term credit refers to approximately 40 hours of work; the study load for an academic year is 40 credits). Degree programmes range from 120 (in practice non-existent) to 160 credits, with the exception of midwives and sea captain's (180 credits). Each programme is defined as a course of studies which



concentrates on a given area of professional expertise, which may be further divided into specialization lines.

Degree programmes consist of basic studies, professional studies, optional studies, on-the-job training, and diploma work. In basic studies, students learn the elements of their professional field, including communication and language studies. Professional studies go deeper into the main areas, practices and applications in the field, and familiarize the student with theoretical or artistic fundamentals. The compulsory on-the-job training is a minimum of 20 credits and, apart from acquainting students with their professions and future jobs, it offers them an opportunity to combine their degree work with hands-on job experience, to work independently, and to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice.

Applicants for admission to polytechnics are students who have completed upper secondary education, general or vocational. Polytechnics have undergone rapid growth in student numbers. When the experiment started, there were some 6,700 new entrants in the experimental polytechnics; by 1998 there were some 24,000 students. In 2004, the total enrolment in degree programmes amounted to 130,899 students. Teaching staff include two categories of teachers: principal lecturers and lecturers. As a rule, a principal lecturer must have a doctorate or licentiate, and a lecturer a master's degree. Teachers must also have at least three years of work experience in the field they teach, and 35 credits in pedagogical studies.

According to national data, there were twenty universities with a total enrolment of 174,324 students and 7,939 faculty staff (professors, assistant professors, assistants, and lecturers) in 2004. Ten of these institutions are traditional multidisciplinary universities, while ten are specialized institutions. In this latter category are: three schools of economics and business administration, three universities of technology and architecture, a university of industrial arts, an academy of fine arts, one music academy and one theatre academy. In addition, university-level education is provided in one military academy, the National Defense College, under the Ministry of Defense. All universities are publicly financed state bodies enjoying autonomy in their internal affairs. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the general development of the higher education system.

The aims and scope of basic degrees and the structure of advanced degrees are defined by decree. The close connection between research and teaching is a characteristic feature of the Finnish university system. All universities provide both basic and advanced studies up to doctorate level, and are expected to engage in research. The institutions also offer continuing training, vocational courses and open university courses.

Universities decide upon their own entrance requirements. The selection criteria and application deadlines vary between the institutions, the fields of study, and even between the disciplines in the same field of study. Admission is based on an entrance examination or on school certificates, usually on both. *Numerus clausus* is in use in all fields of study. Despite the wide range of education available to matriculated students, competition for university places is fierce. Only those who are formally eligible can apply. Students do not pay tuition or other fees and can also apply for



financial assistance from public funds. The granting of assistance is coordinated by the Social Insurance Institution.

University degrees correspond to bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees. In most fields students also take a licentiate's degree before going on to a doctorate. Between 1994 and 1996, a new two-cycle degree structure has been introduced in most university disciplines, with most fields adapting a new bachelor's degree as well as more broadly based curricula. Previously, most studies led up to a master's degree; bachelor's degrees existed only in a few fields of study.

With the new degree structure introduced in 1996, a clearly subject-based syllabus was adopted in most fields, in contrast to the previous multidisciplinary degree programmes. The new structure usually combines studies in one major subject and in one or more minor subjects. Studies in a subject or a degree programme are usually classified as basic, intermediate, and advanced. A lower bachelor's degree consists of basic and intermediate studies in the major subject, including a thesis, studies in one or more minor subjects, and language studies. For a master's degree, students must complete an advanced study module and prepare a thesis in addition to completing the bachelor's syllabus. Through recent amendments to the Universities Act which came into force on 1 August 2005 a mandatory three-cycle degree structure (excepting medicine and dentistry) in accordance with the Bologna process has been introduced. The Polytechnic Act has been amended in 2003 and with the amendment of 2005 second-cycle degree programmes (master's degrees) have become part of legislation. (*National report of Finland within the framework of the Bologna process, 2007*).

Students are subject to continuous assessment. Student assessment varies between universities and faculties. In most cases, the student's progress is assessed on the basis of written examinations taken at the end of lecture series or courses or larger study units. The examination can be based on lectures the student has attended or books read. In addition, oral examinations can be required. Grades are entered into the university computer register. As part of the advanced studies, students must write a thesis. For students pursuing the Arts, the thesis can take the form of a work of art, such as a concert, a theatre performance or an artistic study.

Separate credits are usually examined by teachers of the course in question, but the final responsibility for assessment remains with the professor of the subject. The final examinations and thesis are usually assessed by two or more impartial examiners appointed by the faculty.

Special education

Special education is provided in all stages of education from pre-school education to upper secondary education. The general objectives and essential content of teaching are the same as in other comprehensive school teaching. The instruction and, if needed, the syllabi must be adjusted to meet the learning abilities of the students. Heed is paid to awakening and supporting students' initiative and self-confidence. If needed, syllabi can be set individually for each student and a personal curriculum can be prepared for him/her.



According to legislation, special education is to be provided primarily in conjunction with mainstream instruction. Pupils with minor learning or adjustment difficulties, such as difficulties with speech, reading or writing, difficulties in a subject or in adjusting to school, are provided with special education in conjunction with mainstream education. In such cases, only some education is provided as special education (part-time special education) by exploiting teaching and support measures.

Basic education is also provided for pupils with severe multiple disabilities by eight special schools maintained by the State. The state-owned special schools provide expert services, temporary education and rehabilitation for pupils and persons of all ages. The tasks of 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. In addition, basic education is provided by seven state-owned reform schools for children and young people, who are placed at these schools and suffer from severe emotional disorders or social maladjustment. Some education at reform schools is provided in the form of special education.

Pupils in need of special support usually complete their compulsory education in nine years, like other pupils. If this is not possible due to disability or illness or for some other similar reason, compulsory education will start one year earlier than for other pupils and it will last eleven years. Within this system of extended compulsory education, pre-school education may take two years.

A personal plan covering the organization of education (HOJKS) must be drawn up for each pupil transferred and admitted to special education. Provision of special education must always ensure that the interpretation and assistant services required for participation in education, as well as teaching and pupil welfare services, rehabilitation needed in connection with special education and the development, guidance and support tasks related to instruction have been organized and that special aids have been acquired.

According to Statistics Finland, in 2004 a total of 40,000 pupils were admitted or transferred to special needs education, which represents 6.7% of all the pupils in basic education. The number of pupils in part-time special needs education was 126,000, or 21% of all the pupils in basic education.

State measures have guaranteed that secondary education, with reference to the quantity, is available to the whole age group. By means of special education arrangements, the aim is to guarantee that all students would have access to vocational education. According to the Vocational Institutions Act, special education is arranged in vocational institutions for the disabled and in other vocational institutions. The objectives of vocational special education are the same as those of other corresponding vocational education. The aim is that the student acquires the kind of vocational qualifications which contribute to employment and to success at work, as well as has the opportunities for improving his/her qualifications through further studies in his/her own field. It is also intended to develop the basic knowledge and



skills which are necessary as a member of society and to improve the skills of life management. Institutions provide the students with a personal study and rehabilitation plan which takes the student's individual needs into account.

According to Statistics Finland, in 2004 there were 12,339 special education students in vocational institutions.

Private education

Most private schools in Finland receive public funding and are under public supervision; they follow the national core curricula and the requirements of the competence-based qualifications set by the Finnish National Board of Education. Publicly supervised private schools generally receive government subsidy according to the same principles as other schools independently on the form of ownership. Education providers are granted state subsidies according to the Act on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision.

Most basic and upper secondary level institutions are maintained by local authorities and joint municipal authorities. Only about 1% of basic level institutions are privately maintained. In 2004, 6.7% of general upper secondary schools and 16% of vocational institutions were privately owned.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

In 1996, one of the key development projects launched under the auspices of the Ministry of Education aimed at increasing the use of information technology for teaching purposes and to link up schools and educational institutions with international information networks. Today all educational institutions are equipped with a sufficient number of computers and have access to Internet.

Adult and non-formal education

Adult education and training, which is designed for the entire working-age population, has expanded rapidly during the past few years. General adult education is provided by independent sponsoring organizations and evening schools. Vocational adult education is given by all vocational institutions and, specifically, by vocational adult education centres. Adult education in universities is comprised of further education and open university courses. All institutions of higher education and most vocational institutions have a centre or department for adult education. Approximately 1,000 different institutions offer adult education.

Both vocational and general education is provided for adults at all levels of the education system. Adults may study for the same qualifications as young people. The qualification requirements are also the same.

The Vocational Qualifications Act enacted in 1994 created a new system of competence-based qualifications, where people may take vocational qualifications by demonstrating their vocational skills in competence tests irrespective of how they



have acquired their skills. At the same time, a uniform quality assurance system was created for vocational adult education and training. According to an adult education survey conducted in 2000 the rate of participation in adult education and training by persons aged 18–64 years was 54%, or 1.8 million people.

Educational institutions and other corresponding education providers involved in adult education and training may be divided into the following groups: (i) general and interest-oriented (including general upper secondary schools for adults; 86 folk high schools; 250 adult education centres; eleven study centres and educational organizations; thirteen physical education centres; 90 music institutions; and twenty summer universities); (ii) vocational (including adult education programmes of vocational institutions; 40 vocational adult education centres; 42 specialized vocational institutions; continuing education centres of universities; home economics counselling organizations; organizations for crafts and design; polytechnics); (iii) commercial organizations.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education launched a programme for raising the level of education and training among the adult population in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and social partners. The aim of the programme, implemented during 2003-2007, is to improve poorly trained adults' career prospects and satisfaction at work, to relieve the labour shortages due to the exit of the large post-war age groups from the labour market and to raise the employment rate. The education and training offered within the scope of the programme are mainly intended for working adults aged 30-59 who have no post-compulsory qualifications.

Teaching staff

All education and training of comprehensive and upper secondary school teachers was transferred to the universities between 1973 and 1975. In 1995, education and training of kindergarten teachers was also transferred to universities. The programme encompasses 120 credits (equivalent to three years of study) leading to a lower university degree (a bachelor's degree). Previously, kindergarten teachers had completed three years of teacher training at a specialized institution of higher vocational education.

Eight universities have a Faculty of Education for pedagogical research and education. Teaching practice takes place partly at university-run training schools (there are 13 training schools), and partly at municipal comprehensive and upper secondary schools. The aim is to raise attainment standards and enable teachers to make use of research findings to serve the school, and to improve their own teaching performance.

In 1998, the educational authorities launched a two-year national project that investigates the needs of teachers at the primary and secondary levels for initial and continuing training by the year 2010. The project consisted of three sub-projects: a survey of the present situation of teachers, scenarios of the future of teaching work until the year 2010, and the anticipation of teacher training needs once the project has run its course. The project also looked at the training needs of linguistic and cultural



minority groups, as well as the content and extent of continuing training completed by and offered to teaching staff.

Teacher training has been renewed according to the principle that teachers should be supporters of individual learning rather than implementers of national curricula. Central areas to be developed in teacher training are community thinking, leadership, how to deal with change and student differences, co-operation skills, changing learning environments, and awareness of social issues. Initial and continuing training also have to be much more closely linked. Academic and vocational teacher training must also be increased and their joint co-operation be deepened.

On average, the competence of teachers in basic education and secondary general education is good. Only 72% of special needs teachers have formal qualifications for their work. There are two main categories of teachers in comprehensive schools. In Years 1-6 teachers are usually class teachers who teach all the subjects; in Years 7-9, they are subject teachers, and teach usually one or two subjects to several classes. Subject teachers can sometimes work also at the lower stage and at the upper secondary school. In addition, in comprehensive schools there may be special teachers who teach children suffering from speech, reading or writing disorders or other problems, and counsellors who provide educational and vocational guidance at the upper stage.

The qualification requirements for teaching posts are stipulated by decree. The traditional class teacher training programme consists of 160 credits (approximately four years of study). The degree programme for prospective teachers differs from others mainly in that 35 of the 160 credits required consist of pedagogical studies offered by the Faculties of Education. This block of 35 credits includes teaching practice, which can be completed after graduation. New school legislation coming into force in 1999 removed the administrative division between the lower and the upper levels of the comprehensive school. Teacher qualifications for general and vocational institutions were harmonized at the beginning of 1999. The same minimum of 35 credits of pedagogical studies is required of teachers for all types of educational institution (basic education, general upper secondary schools, vocational institutions and liberal adult education institutions), including basic and subject studies in education, subject didactics and teaching practice.

A subject teacher must have an academic degree from the faculty to which his/her subject belongs. A subject teacher's degree must include studies in pedagogy and a period of practical teacher training. A subject teacher degree is a master's degree, requiring 160 to 180 credits and five to six years to complete. Most teachers (94%) are employed full-time as municipal civil servants. Comprehensive school teachers must participate in in-service training for a minimum of three days a year.

Upper secondary school teachers usually have the same academic degree as comprehensive school subject teachers. As subject teachers, they usually teach one or two subjects. The majority have full-time posts and are municipal employees. Upper secondary school teachers are obliged to devote three days a year to in-service training.



A teaching post can be shared with another educational institution, such as a comprehensive school or vocational institution. The Nordic countries have entered into an agreement on a common job market in all five Nordic countries for teachers of general, aesthetic and practical subjects in comprehensive school, upper secondary school and vocational institutions.

Vocational education teachers must have a higher vocational qualification or university degree in their field and also appropriate work experience. In addition, they are required to complete pedagogical studies. Teachers at technical institutions, and institutions providing training in the arts and media sectors, are not required to have completed pedagogical training before being appointed to a post; they can follow training over two to three years on the job.

Principal lecturers at polytechnics are expected to have completed an appropriate post-graduate degree, either a licentiate or a doctorate, and lecturers to have an appropriate master's degree. Principal lecturers and lecturers whose teaching duties mostly cover professional studies, are also expected to have a minimum of three years practical experience of work corresponding to their degree. In addition, senior teachers and lecturers must, within three years of their appointment, complete a minimum period of teacher training equivalent to 35 credits, if they have not already done so at the time of their appointment.

Teachers at vocational institutions are required to undergo an average of five days of in-service training annually to improve their professional skills. Teachers are generally employed full-time by the authority that maintains the institution (i.e. the institution hires the teachers and pays their salaries).

Continuing professional education is designed to maintain and develop teacher's professional competence either relating to the subjects they teach or to pedagogical skills. Supplementary training is given after initial training. One important challenge in continuing education for vocational teachers is to schedule initial and further training, so that the different training phases are based on development needs only.

Much of the continuing professional education is in-service training. On the whole, in-service training has focused on updating teachers pedagogical skills and subject-specific knowledge. Teachers also participate in training on their own initiative to renew or expand either their knowledge of the subjects they teach or their teaching skills; they may also study for a postgraduate degree.

In addition to teaching, the tasks of teachers include planning of instruction and pre- and post-class work. Furthermore, the school's internal development tasks and co-operation with colleagues, homes and other partners, such as staff in pupil welfare services, social welfare services, the local family counselling clinic, the police, business life, etc., form an integrated part of teaching work. Most teachers' working hours are based on teaching duties. Teaching duties vary between 15 and 23 weekly lessons according to the type of institution and subject. At vocational institutions, weekly teaching duties amount to between 20 and 25 lessons.



Educational research and information

All university faculties of education carry out research in education. There are two research institutions that specialize in educational research: the Institute for Educational Research (KTL) at the University of Jyväskylä and the University of Turku Research Unit for the Sociology of Education (RUSE). In addition, universities' educational, social science and separate research institutions and their researchers have carried out research related to education. All universities where educational sciences are represented undertake scientific research on education. Educational research is usually characterized by the incoherence of the approaches of research units or groups and the fact that research is supported and promoted in the form of individual projects. Therefore, neither the premises of research policy definitions nor the development and co-operation needs of the research community have resulted in a uniting perspective of the development of educational research.

The Finnish National Board of Education produces information on the anticipation of quantitative educational needs on a regular basis. The anticipation stems from forecasts based on long-term developments and different future scenarios in working life, which are used to calculate the need for new labour, as well as extensive statistical data. The main partners in this work are the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education and Statistics Finland. Quantitative data on educational needs is produced on initial vocational education, polytechnic education and university education. The information is used at different levels of decision-making when planning and dimensioning education and training. Cooperation in anticipation between educational administration and regional councils was started in 2002 in order to produce information on labour and educational needs. At the same time the competence in anticipation and the anticipation system are being developed.

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Web resources

Ministry of Education and Science: <http://www.minedu.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: September 2007.]

National Board of Education: <http://www.oph.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: September 2007.]

EURYBASE, the information database on education systems in Europe:
<http://www.eurydice.org/> [In several languages.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>