



# Structures of Education and Training Systems in Europe

Finland

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European Commission





# STRUCTURES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

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If you wish to obtain more details on education systems in Europe, please consult the EURYBASE database (<http://www.eurydice.org>), the Cedefop database ([http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information\\_resources/NationalVet/Thematic/](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/etv/Information_resources/NationalVet/Thematic/)) and the website of the European Training Foundation (<http://www.etf.europa.eu/>)



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## INTRODUCTION: GENERAL POLICY CONTEXT

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Finland is a parliamentary republic. The highest legislative power rests with Parliament. The Finnish people elect 200 representatives to Parliament every four years. In addition to legislative functions, Parliament decides on the State budget, supervises Government actions and controls administration.

General executive powers in administration are vested in the Government, which is responsible for preparation of legislation. In addition, the Government can also make decisions specifying statutes. The Government must enjoy the confidence of Parliament.

The President of the Republic has a fairly independent status with respect to Parliament. The people elect the President by direct vote for a term of six years. The President introduces Government bills to Parliament and ratifies laws. The President may choose not to ratify an act passed by Parliament and the law is thus deferred. In addition, the President issues decrees.

The administrative system functioning under the executive and legislative bodies consists of central administrative units, as well as intermediate level authorities and local level administration operating under the former. In 2009, the State Provincial Offices still act as regional authorities for administration of education. At the beginning of 2010, the State Provincial Offices, employment and economic centres, regional environmental centres, environmental permit agencies, road agencies and occupational health and safety departments will be phased out and their functions and tasks will be reorganised and streamlined into two new regional state administrative bodies: the Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI) and the Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY).

There are about 5.3 million people in Finland. About 2.9 million of these people are aged between 25 and 64. Of these, 78 per cent have completed at least upper secondary education. 35 per cent have completed higher education (ISCED 5A, 5B and 6).

There are two official languages in Finland, Finnish and Swedish. Since 1992, the Sámi language has also been an official language in the Sámi-speaking area. Approximately 5.5 per cent of the population speak Swedish as their mother tongue. The Sámi-speaking minority is very small, about 3 000 – 4 000 people speak Sámi.

Both language groups have the right to receive education in their own mother tongue. Regulations on the language of instruction are stipulated in legislation concerning different levels of education. The entirely Swedish-speaking Province of Åland has its own educational legislation.

The Constitution Act of Finland (1919) stipulates that general compulsory education which is provided free of charge must be enacted by law. It also charges the Government with maintaining or subsidising 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 new Constitution came into force on 1st March 2000 with similar guarantees in terms of education.

Legislation governing primary and secondary level education as well as some legislation governing adult education was reformed on 1st January 1999. The detailed legislation based on institutions has thus been replaced with more uniform legislation concerning the objectives, contents, evaluation and levels of education as well as students' rights and responsibilities. The new legislation substantially increased the independent decision-making powers of local authorities, other education providers and schools. There is no regulation of working hours in general upper secondary schools and in vocational education and training, and arrangements for working hours are decided locally. Similarly, providers of general upper secondary education and vocational education and training may decide to purchase

educational services which means, in practical terms, that general upper secondary schools, for instance, may purchase religious instruction from the local parish. In terms of basic education, the most significant change is the abolishment of the division of comprehensive school into lower and upper stages. However, a comprehensive school place will still be guaranteed to everyone, in accordance with the 'local school principle'. This local school principle means that every child has a right to go to the school nearest to his or her place of residence.

Legislation governing universities came into effect on 1st August 1998. The Universities Act (645/1997) and Decree (115/1998) lay down provisions on issues such as the mission of universities, their research and instruction, organisation and administration, staff and official language, students, appeals against decisions made by universities and legal protection for students. Amendments to the Universities Act concerning, among other things, the two-tier degree structure, came into force on 1st August 2005.

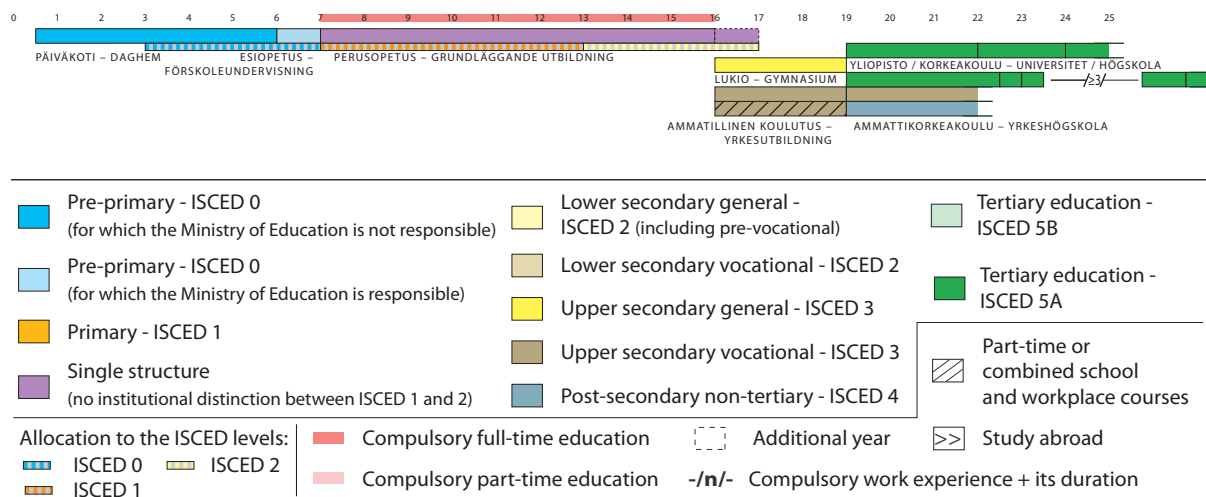
Legislation concerning academic degrees comprises the Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees (464/1998) and one national decree covering all educational fields. The decree stipulates, for example, the objectives and scope of degrees, their general structure and content, as well as the distribution of educational responsibility between different universities.

The Decree on the System of Higher Degrees also covers polytechnic degrees. The degree programmes are confirmed by the Ministry of Education. The new Polytechnics Act (351/2003) and Decree (352/2003), governing polytechnics, were approved in the spring of 2003. The legislation on polytechnics defines the status, mission and administration of polytechnics, for example. In addition, the Ministry of Education reformed the degree structure of polytechnics. Changes to the Polytechnics Act and Decree came into force in August 2005.



# 1. INITIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ORGANISATION, FUNDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

## 1.1 Organisation of the initial education and training system



In Finland, pre-primary education is considered to include systematic education and instruction provided at a day care centre (kindergarten) or, for six-year-olds, at a comprehensive school in the year preceding the beginning of school.

As from 1st August 2001, the local authorities have been obligated to assign a pre-school place to all children entitled to pre-school education (i.e. for six-year-olds), if their parents or other guardians so choose. Pre-primary education can be organised either in day care or at comprehensive schools. The decision regarding children's participation in pre-primary education is made by their parents or other guardians. Pre-primary education is organised as coeducational and is provided free of charge.

All children permanently resident in Finland are obliged to obtain basic education for a period of nine years, beginning in the year of their seventh birthday. The obligation expires once they have completed the nine-year comprehensive school curriculum (*perusopetus/grundläggande utbildning*). Compulsory education does not mean compulsory school attendance; pupils are free to acquire the equivalent skills and knowledge from some other source. In practical terms, virtually one hundred per cent of all Finns attend the nine-year single-structure comprehensive school.

Post-compulsory education in Finland is divided into general and vocational upper secondary education. The former is provided by general upper secondary schools (*lukio/gymnasium*) and the latter by vocational institutions (*ammattillinen oppilaitos/yrkesläroanstalt*). Approximately 92 % of each age group start general (51 %) or vocational (41 %) upper secondary studies immediately after they leave comprehensive school.

Post-secondary non-tertiary education in Finland encompasses specialist vocational qualifications. These are competence-based qualifications and based on the demonstration of acquired skills.

Tertiary education in Finland has a dual structure: there is a university sector and a polytechnic sector. Both sectors are governed by separate legislation.

## 1.2 Distribution of responsibilities

In Finland, the decentralisation and deregulation of the education and training system was mostly carried out in the 1990's. Education and training providers have the right within the nationally decided framework to direct and focus education for local special needs. The legislation aims not to steer

organisation of education and training in detail. Every fifth year, the Government approves the guidelines for education and research policy in Finland. The national core curricula decided by the Finnish National Board of Education comprise the norm for the local or school curricula.

*Opetusministeriö/Undervisningsministeriet* (Ministry of Education) is the highest education authority in Finland. Nearly all publicly subsidised education is subordinate to or supervised by the Ministry.

The Government, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education are responsible for implementing education policy at the central administration level.

The remit of the Ministry of Education includes education and research: comprehensive school, upper secondary school, vocational schools, polytechnics, and universities. The Ministry is also responsible for culture, church, youth and sports affairs. The Ministry of Education is divided into a Department for Education and Science Policy and a Department for Cultural Policy, and the Ministry has two ministers: the Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture.

*Opetushallitus/Utbildningsstyrelsen* (Finnish National Board of Education) works in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education. It is a development body responsible for primary and secondary education as well as for adult education and training (not for institutions of higher education, however). The Finnish National Board of Education controls development of educational objectives, content and methods according to the target outcome agreement with the Ministry of Education. It draws up and approves the national core curricula for basic, general upper secondary and vocational education and training and carries out evaluations of learning results, with the exception of institutions of higher education. It also assists the Ministry of Education in preparing decisions on educational policy. The Finnish National Board of Education is managed by the Managing Board, the members of which represent experts in education, local authorities, teachers and social partners.

For the purposes of regional administration, Finland is divided into six provinces. Each province has a general administrative body called *lääninhallitus/länsstyrelse* (provincial state office) under which the education and culture department is in charge of matters concerning educational and cultural aspects. The provincial state offices will be replaced as of 1st January 2010 by six Regional State Administrative Agencies. In terms of other regional bodies, there are also 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment.

Local administration is managed by the municipalities, which are self-governing and have the right to levy taxes. There are 348 municipalities in Finland. Decision-making power within a municipality rests with the elected municipal council. The Council appoints the municipal executive board and several advisory boards. Each municipality has at least one board looking after education. Most upper secondary schools and comprehensive schools are maintained by the municipalities. The municipal school authority can also be responsible for adult training centres and vocational institutions. State-owned and privately owned schools do not come within the sphere of the municipal authority, but are directly subordinate to the central administration.

About 80 % of all vocational institutions are maintained by municipalities (often by two or more municipalities jointly), 19 % are private and 1 % are State-owned. In Finland, a municipality is obliged to organise comprehensive school education for all children living within its borders or to ensure that children of school age can receive comparable teaching in some other manner. Schools can be maintained by municipalities, inter-municipal authorities (cooperation between municipalities for certain schools), or private organisations or foundations, subject to government approval.

Each school can and usually does have a managing board where teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils/students and parents are represented. The main tasks of the managing board are developing the work of the school and promoting cooperation inside the school and between the school, parents and the local community. Some schools also have a pupil/student association which, among other

things, elects pupil/student representatives to the managing board. Each municipal authority decides on distribution of responsibilities between the municipal administration and the managing board of a particular school. Moreover, municipalities can cooperate in school administration and two or more schools can share a managing board.

Vocational schools usually have similar managing boards (parents are not represented), but they tend to be more independent and powerful. State-run and privately run vocational schools always have one. In addition to managing boards, vocational institutions generally have one or more advisory boards to promote training and cooperation 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.

Curricula for comprehensive school, upper secondary school and vocational institutions are drawn up locally. Every school must have a curriculum decided upon by those maintaining the school or a body appointed by them, usually the municipality or the School Board. Curricula are based on national core curricula issued by the Finnish National Board of Education. Teaching materials are not inspected or defined in advance in Finland. Decisions on choosing teaching material are usually made by individual teachers. The teachers and the institutions themselves are responsible for assessing student performance and for issuing reports. Only the matriculation examination, which concludes general upper secondary school, is organised and marked by the *Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta/Studentexamensnämnden* (Matriculation Examination Board) appointed by the Ministry of Education.

Polytechnics are municipal or private institutions, which are authorised by the government. The authorisation determines their educational mission, fields of education, student numbers and location. Polytechnics have autonomy in terms of their internal affairs.

Under the new Universities Act, which was passed by Parliament in June 2009, Finnish universities will become independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law (Foundations Act). The universities will operate in their new form from 1st January 2010 onwards. Their operations are built on the freedom of education and research and university autonomy.

### 1.3 Financing

Responsibility for educational funding and construction of schools is divided between the State and local authorities or other education providers. A separate act stipulates distribution of financial responsibility for comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational education.

The local authorities, municipalities, joint municipal authorities and private organisations receive state funding for setting up schools and operating costs to cover pre-primary and basic education. The criteria for funding are usually uniform irrespective of ownership. The State grants and pays statutory government transfers to education providers, which are responsible for the practical operations of their institutions. The local authorities can autonomously decide whether they delegate budgetary responsibilities to the schools or not and to what extent.

From 1st January 2010, the Ministry of Finance will be responsible for financing for comprehensive schools. It will be included in overall state financing which municipalities receive for all services. Financing is based on the number of 6-15 year-old inhabitants of the municipality. The basic funding amount is scaled according to certain factors like the number of Swedish-speaking inhabitants, the number of inhabitants speaking another language, the population density, bilingualism or the area of the archipelago. State financing will cover about 34 per cent of operating costs. Teachers' salaries are paid by the education provider.

In terms of funding operating costs for upper secondary education, the average State subsidies and municipal contributions account for 41.9 % and 58.1 % of the calculated costs respectively. Funding

criteria are defined according to student quantities or some other performance indicator and according to the unit price per relevant indicator as confirmed by the Ministry of Education.

In 2006, performance-based financing was used for vocational upper secondary education and training as an integrated part of the financing system for VET alongside the funding system based on unit prices. Part of the funding (2 per cent of the total amount) is allocated on the basis of performance. The idea behind performance-based funding is to encourage vocational education providers to promote students' employment prospects and further education opportunities, as well as to increase the completion rate of degrees, i.e. decreasing the number of dropouts. The indicators are employment, transition to further studies at a higher level, reduction in the number of drop-outs, rate of completion of education and training, competencies and personnel development.

In terms of the apprenticeship system, the State is responsible for fully covering funding: the *statutory government transfer* accounts for 100 per cent of the unit cost confirmed by the Ministry of Education. The funding is confirmed separately for upper secondary and additional vocational training. Each year, the Ministry of Education confirms quotas for additional training within the framework of apprenticeship training.

Polytechnics are financed both by the State and the local authorities. The average contributions of the State and the local authorities accounted for 42 per cent and 58 per cent of their operating costs respectively. Funding is determined according to the number of students and the Ministry of Education confirms the unit cost per student for different degrees. Polytechnics also have significant sources of external funding.

The State may also grant extra government subsidies to polytechnics. These are awarded to various development projects and on the basis of polytechnics' educational results.

The polytechnics' system of funding was reformed with the reforms coming into effect at the beginning of 2006. In addition to the number of students, allocation of funding will subsequently be determined by the number of degrees completed. This aims to develop funding so as to make it more incentive-based.

Under the new Universities Act, which was passed by Parliament in June 2009, Finnish universities will become independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law (Foundations Act). The universities will operate in their new form from 1st January 2010 onwards. Their operations are built on the freedom of education and research and university autonomy.

Appropriations granted by the Ministry of Education for university activities consist of core funding, performance-based funding and project funding. Core-funding is intended for instruction and research. Direct government funding covers about 64 % of university budgets.

In addition to the Ministry of Education, important sources of financing are the Academy of Finland, the Technology Development Centre Tekes, business enterprises, the EU and other public bodies. Most external funding goes towards research. The Academy is responsible for evaluation of research. Universities also receive income from commercial services, such as continuing professional education.

## **1.4 Quality assurance**

In Finland, centralised steering of education was drastically reduced in the 1990's and local administration's decision-making powers were increased instead. Education providers and educational institutions have been able to decide on their activities based on national targets more and more independently. This development has led to a situation where the position and importance of evaluation has become stronger.

The Finnish National Board of Education published a Quality Management Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training in 2008. It is designed to help VET providers to develop quality management and to encourage them to continuously improve the quality of their operations and results in pursuit of excellence.

The document is intended for all VET providers and their different units and forms of operation as a strategic development tool for quality management. It caters for senior civil servants and elected officials and other staff working for VET providers and units within them.

Preparation of quality criteria for the comprehensive education is ongoing. The criteria are a tool especially designed for supporting local decision-makers in their work for development of the quality of education. The criteria focus on ten areas which all have their own quality criteria.

Evaluation in its present form started at the beginning of the 1990's with reform of the steering system. The evaluation of education is compulsory by law and covers all areas of education. Under the educational legislation, effective as from 1st January 1999, educational institutions are obligated to evaluate their own operations and their effects. The national evaluation of educational results will also be partially carried out on the basis of the institutions' self-evaluation.

The aims of evaluation of education are to ensure that objectives set in legislation are achieved and to support development of education as well as to improve opportunities to learn. The education provider should monitor the education that it provides and its effectiveness through self-evaluation and should also participate in external evaluations. Both external evaluation and self-evaluation aim to intensify educational results, which are measured based on efficiency, effectiveness and financial accountability.

### **Evaluation at local level**

At a local level, providers of education and the educational institutions that they maintain are responsible for developing the education they provide according to local conditions. Evaluation primarily stems from the educational objectives of the municipal educational administration, which must be based on national objectives.

At a local/municipal level, evaluation may focus on the accessibility of education, the financial accountability of educational institutions and achievement of the objectives of municipal policies on education and culture, as well as on the differences between various educational institutions. At an institutional level, evaluation targets include achievement of objectives, completion of pedagogic and curricular reforms and use of resources.

### **Evaluation at national level**

Responsibility for external evaluation and its development rests with the Ministry of Education and the Evaluation Council acting in connection with the Ministry. The Finnish National Board of Education takes part in evaluation of educational results and curricula as a member of the expert network.

The Evaluation Council is nominated for four years at a time. It assists the Ministry of Education and supports providers of education with evaluation, organises external evaluations related to educational policies and promotes research into evaluation.

Evaluations conducted by the Finnish National Board of Education primarily concentrate on educational results and mainly aim to serve national education policy decision-making and development of education at all levels. The Finnish National Board of Education produces indicators for education and evaluation of the education sector is based on follow-up, research and expert information, as well as on international comparisons.

According to legislation, responsibility for evaluation of institutions of higher education rests with the polytechnics and universities. Institutions of higher education are assisted in their evaluation work by the Higher Education Evaluation Council. An expert body organising and conducting evaluations, the

Evaluation Council is independent of both the educational administration and institutions of higher education; establishment of the Evaluation Council and separation of evaluation activities from the direct operations of the Ministry of Education have included the idea of safeguarding the independence of evaluations. Similarly, it has been regarded as being appropriate to consider evaluation of all institutions of higher education, i.e. polytechnics and universities, as an integrated whole.

## 2. PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

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In accordance with the Basic Education Act (628/1998), as from 1st August 2001 each child has the right to pre-primary education, which generally starts one year prior to the commencement of compulsory education, i.e. in the year that the child celebrates his/her sixth birthday. Participation in pre-primary education is voluntary but each local authority is obligated to provide pre-primary education for children within extended compulsory education and for children, who start basic education one year later than stipulated. In terms of reform of pre-primary education, use of the term 'pre-primary education' refers exclusively to such education provided for the above-mentioned children.

The municipality may decide where pre-primary education takes place; either at a school, day care centre, family day care place or another appropriate place. In 2007, almost 80 % of children received pre-primary education at a day care centre. When organising pre-primary education, the possibility to use day care services must be ensured and children using day care services must then be guaranteed a place in pre-primary education. This is in addition to the subjective right to day care, in which appropriate fees are applied.

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC 2003) the aim of ECEC is to improve the child's overall wellbeing, thus providing the best possible circumstances for the child to grow, develop and learn. The value and nature of childhood is emphasised while the child is guided in developing as a human being. In addition, the aim is for the child to develop learning to learn skills and positive self-image, acquire basic skills, knowledge and capabilities from different areas of learning in accordance with their age and abilities. Girls and boys are in the same groups.

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

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

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

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

Provisions for pre-primary education are included in the Basic Education Act (amend. 1288/1999) and Decree (852/1998) and the financial provisions are included in the Act (635/1998) and Decree (806/1998) on the Financing of Educational and Cultural Provision. The qualifications required of staff are governed by the Decree on the Qualifications of Educational Staff (986/1998). These statutes are applicable to pre-primary education irrespective of where pre-primary education takes place. Each local authority is obligated to provide compulsory basic education for children of compulsory school age residing within its area and pre-primary education in the year preceding the start of compulsory education.

Local authorities may organise the services referred to in the Basic Education Act independently or together with other local authorities, or they may purchase services from other providers of basic education. Local authorities may also purchase pre-primary education services from some other public or private service provider. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the services they have purchased are organised in compliance with the Act.

### **Early childhood education and care**

Children who have not yet reached school age have a legal right to day care organised by the municipality. The day care centres provide both care and early childhood education. The municipality has the right to decide which body is responsible for the tasks handed over to the municipality in the Act on Children's Day Care (36/1973) and in the Act on Children's Care at Home and Private Day care (1128/1996). The national steering of day care is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Care.

The Finnish model of ECEC (early childhood education and care) is described as 'educare' because the basic elements of it are care, education and teaching. The goals of learning are not set in stone and there is no formal assessment. The focus is on the child and the child is conceived as being an independent learner. The child learns through relationships and interaction and the ECEC place is conceived as being a community where parents, children and pedagogues work together. ECEC is perceived as being a possibility of reducing the effects of the social background and circumstances and of providing children with equitable opportunities to develop to fulfil their potential. Comprehensive support for development of the child and care and education stems from the child's individual needs. The core principles of ECEC are based on children's right to warm personal relationships; secure growth, development and learning; secure, healthy environments that allow play and a wide range of activities; understanding and input in accordance with their age and maturity; receipt of the special support that they need; their own culture, language, religion and beliefs.

Pre-primary education is always provided free of charge regardless of where it is being provided by the municipality. Pupils in pre-primary education have the same rights to the same social benefits as pupils in basic education. Textbooks and other materials are provided free of charge. Pupils are offered a free daily meal.

### **Historical overview**

The first pre-primary education experiments started in Finland towards the end of the 1960's. Between 1971 and 1985, a national pre-primary education experiment was carried out, involving experimental teaching activities and development of experimental curricula. In 1984, a pre-primary curriculum for six-year-olds was drawn up to provide a guideline for pre-primary education both within the day care system and within comprehensive schools. At the beginning of the 1990's, issues relating to pre-primary education and reduction of the compulsory school age were topical. The Government expressed its opinion on the school-starting age and pre-primary education in the Development Plan for Education and University Research prepared for the period 1995–2000. This stated that the general school-starting age was to remain at seven years of age, but that entry to school was to be made more flexible, so as to allow more variation in the school-starting age according to pupils' readiness for school attendance and the wishes of parents or other guardians. In terms of pre-primary education, the objective of the plan was to provide all six-year-olds with pre-primary education either in conjunction with comprehensive school, or within the day care system by the end of the millennium.

The pre-primary reform, which obligates each local authority to provide a pre-primary place for all children entitled to pre-primary education, came into force gradually as from 1st August 2000. During the first year of operation, provision of pre-primary education was voluntary for the local authorities, with the exception of children within extended compulsory education. Since 1st August 2001, local



authorities have been obligated to assign a pre-primary place to all children entitled to pre-primary education, if their parents or other guardians so choose.

## **2.1 Admission**

Participation in pre-primary education is voluntary for children. There are no special admission requirements for pre-primary education organised either in day care or at comprehensive schools. The decision regarding children's participation in pre-primary education is made by their parents or other guardians.

As from the beginning of August 2001, local authorities have been required to assign a pre-primary place to each child entitled to pre-primary education. Nevertheless, pre-primary education provided for children within extended compulsory education in the year when they begin their compulsory education is decided by the education providers.

Pre-primary education is to be organised so as to ensure that pupils' travel to school is as safe and short as possible, bearing in mind the settlement structure, the location of schools and other locations for pre-primary education and transport connections.

Families will continue to enjoy the subjective right to day care as provided for in the Act on Children's Day Care.

Each pre-primary education provider decides on application procedures for its pre-primary education prior to the commencement of instruction. The education provider is to issue advance notice of places providing pre-primary education, the start and end dates of instruction as well as dates for application for pre-primary education that it has organised or purchased. In specific cases, it is also possible to apply for pre-primary education at a later date, for example, when a child's domicile or the parents' or guardians' employment or study situation change.

Parents or guardians may also apply for a pre-primary place for their children in pre-primary places other than those assigned by their local authority. Equal selection criteria are to be applied to selection of these pupils. Nevertheless, the local authority may decide that applicants living within its area be given priority in pre-primary education it has organised or purchased.

According to legislation, every child is to receive pre-primary education provided by the municipality. If a child is not granted a pre-primary education place, his/her guardians can make a complaint to the State provincial offices.

## **2.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue**

The minimum requirements for organisation of time spent in pre-primary education are provided by the Basic Education Decree 852/1998.

The time used for meals is also part of pre-primary education. The maximum length of teaching in pre-primary education is five hours per day. The education provider decides on organisation of instruction.

The premise of the activities is the curricular framework of pre-primary education and the activities are to be planned and implemented accordingly.

Provision of pre-primary education must aim to take the special needs of children and their families into account. In particular with children, whose parents or guardians have exceptional working hours, such as shift-workers, the aim must be to find solutions, which will not result in unreasonably long hours spent in pre-primary education and care.

The way in which weekly and daily timetables are organised depends solely on the education provider. The education provider outlines these decisions in the local curriculum or the annual plan for

organisation of the school year. In pre-primary education, the need for day care is also taken into account when organising pre-primary education.

The minimum scope of pre-primary education is 700 hours per year. Each pre-primary education provider decides on the timetables of pre-primary education, such as the number of working days, the start and end dates of instruction and other practical arrangements. In municipalities, pre-primary education roughly follows the same schedule as the school year.

The Act states that the size of the pre-primary teaching group may be enacted by decree, but this authorisation has not been used as yet. Instead, on 16th June 2000, the Ministry of Education issued a recommendation that pre-primary teaching groups should include no more than 13 pupils. The recommendation covers all pre-primary education under the Basic Education Act irrespective of where it is provided. Nevertheless, if there is a special needs assistant, children's nurse or some other person with appropriate vocational education participating in group work for most of the time, in addition to the pre-primary teacher, the maximum size of the teaching group may be no more than 20 pupils. The total number of pupils will also include those in basic education and children in day care belonging to the same group.

Activities at day care centres are usually organised by age group (for example, children under 3 years, children between 3 and 6). At larger day care centres, pre-primary education for six-year-olds takes place in separate groups. A group with children in pre-primary education may also include children in day care. Pre-primary education for six-year-olds at comprehensive schools can be provided either in a separate pre-primary group or integrated into the first grade or into a combined first and second grade of comprehensive school.

## 2.3 Curriculum

The pre-primary core curriculum came into force in August 2002. It does not specify different subjects, but the education is based on integration. Integrative education is composed of themes related to children's sphere of life, on the one hand, and to contents expanding and analysing children's views of the world, on the other. Different branches of knowledge are taken into account in planning and implementation and examined as part of the theme chosen each time. With the aid of the contents of the branches of knowledge, children will expand their views of the world and learn about themselves as learners.

The key subject fields in pre-primary education include language and interaction, mathematics, ethics and philosophy, nature and the environment, health, physical and motor development as well as art and culture.

The national core curriculum is designed jointly by the Finnish National Board of Education and the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health. It is a norm which obliges the municipalities to design their own curricula for pre-primary education both at day-care centres and schools. The basic principle in defining local or school-based curricula is that as many people involved in the education of children, in the school or day-care setting, such as class teachers and kindergarten teachers, special needs teachers, multi-professional partners and guardians in the home environment, should take part in the process of defining the curriculum. Furthermore, the municipal officials responsible for social and welfare services are to be involved in the curriculum work.

Working methods in pre-primary education are based on playful group and individual guidance stemming from each child's development level. The activities take children's needs to learn through imagination and play into account. For the children, the activities should be purposeful and challenging. The methods should be diverse.

Pre-primary education is to provide a learning environment, which will guide children's curiosity, interest and learning motivation and provide them with opportunities for play, other activities and peace and quiet. The essential factors of the learning environment include interaction between the teacher and each child and interaction between the children, different operating methods and learning assignments.

Teachers may freely choose teaching methods and materials as long as they support learning and facilitate children's awareness of learning and their effect on their own learning processes. The teacher guides learning, experimentation, examination, active participation, and other information processing and problem solving in interaction with adults and peers.

According to the Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (2000), it is possible to organise pre-primary education based on different pedagogic methods that emphasise language or the growth of the human being through art and activity. These forms of pre-primary education include, for example, pre-primary education carried out in a foreign language or CLIL-type provision, or Steiner and Montessori pedagogies. Regarding these methodologies, it is essential that the guardian is sufficiently informed about the underlying principles and specific objectives.

## **2.4 Assessment**

In pre-primary education, evaluation places emphasis on the progress of the child's general growth and learning process. Evaluation is carried out on a continuous basis in interaction between the teacher and the child. Parents or other guardians are provided with feedback as part of regular discussions with them and possibly also with their children. Pre-primary education promotes children's capabilities for self-evaluation, which will support development of their self-concept and learning potential. A certificate of attendance may be awarded at the end of pre-primary education. Such a certificate may be supplemented with a description of the pre-school education provided.

## **2.5 Teachers**

Teachers in pre-primary education are required to hold either a class teacher's degree or a kindergarten teacher's degree. The qualification requirements are the same for pre-primary education organised both within day care and schools. In addition, people with degrees within social services were able to acquire the qualifications after completing studies in pre-primary education before 2004.

Class teachers are required to have a master's degree (300 ECTS) in education and kindergarten teachers a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS) in education. Both qualifications are taken at universities. There is no separate accreditation process in Finland, instead the compulsory modules that qualify graduates to work as class teachers or kindergarten teachers are defined in legislation.

There is no specific legislation governing continuing teacher education and training. The obligation to participate in in-service training is partly defined in various statutes and partly in collective agreements. Generally, teachers are obligated to participate in in-service training for three to five days a year.

In Finland, continuing education and training for teaching staff is considered the responsibility of education providers and the individual teachers themselves. The government funds in-service training related to reforms or priorities within education.

Continuing education is organised by a State-owned training centre, university continuing education units, polytechnics with teacher training units, university departments of teacher education, summer universities and various private organisations.

### 3. SINGLE STRUCTURE EDUCATION

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All children permanently resident in Finland are obliged to obtain basic education for a period of nine years, beginning in the year of their seventh birthday. The obligation expires once they have completed the nine-year comprehensive school curriculum (*perusopetus/grundläggande utbildning*). Compulsory education does not mean compulsory school attendance; pupils are free to acquire the equivalent skills and knowledge from some other source. In practical terms, almost one hundred per cent of all Finns attend the nine-year single-structure comprehensive school.

The aims of basic education are to support pupils' growth towards humane and ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with the knowledge and skills that they will need in life. The instruction is to promote equality in society as well as pupils' opportunities to participate in education and to develop themselves during their lives in other ways.

The comprehensive school provides general education for the whole age group, from 7- to 16 year-olds, and is provided free of charge including textbooks, other learning material and a warm meal each day. As a rule, transportation is arranged by the education provider for distances of 5 km and over. It is governed by the Basic Education Act and Decree (both from 1998). There are no entrance requirements. If it is impossible for a pupil to attend school, due to ill health or some other reason, the pupil's municipality of residence is obliged to provide comparable teaching in some other form. Comprehensive schools can also provide pre-primary education for six-year-olds and an extra tenth year for those who have completed their compulsory education but wish to improve their grades.

The school network covers the whole country. Comprehensive schools are primarily run by local authorities, with the exception of a few private schools. The school buildings may house all forms of basic education (1–9), the first six, the last three or sometimes the last three forms (7-9) co-exist with the general upper secondary school. There is a great variation in sizes of comprehensive schools: the smallest schools have fewer than ten pupils and the largest ones nearly 1,000.

Basic education is governed by the Basic Education Act (628/1998), the Basic Education Decree (852/1998) and the Government Decree on the objectives and distribution of lesson hours in basic education (1435/2001). The national core curriculum prepared by the Finnish National Board of Education is based on these. The latest National Core Curriculum for grades 1–9 was taken into use by 1st August 2006.

#### 3.1 Admission

Compulsory education starts in the year when a child celebrates his/her seventh birthday, unless the child needs special education. A child has the right to start primary education one year earlier, if his/her readiness to attend school has been proved in psychological tests (and medical tests if necessary). Based on these tests, the education provider can also grant permission to start basic education one year later.

According to the Basic Education Act, a child is enrolled by the municipality into the school that enables as short and safe a school journey as possible. The parents may apply for their child to attend the school of their choice and they are then expected to arrange school transport themselves (as a rule, transportation is arranged by the education provider for distances of 5 km and over).

#### 3.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue

The school year begins in mid-August and ends in the 22nd week of the following calendar year and is divided into two terms. The school year consists of 190 working days; the number of hours of lessons

for an individual pupil ranges from a minimum of 19 to 30 per 5-day week, depending on the grade and the number of optional subjects.

The classes are made up of pupils of the same age. Smaller schools may have combined classes with pupils from different age groups. During the first six years, instruction is usually given by the class teacher (*luokanopettaja/klasslärare*), who teaches all or most subjects. Instruction in the three highest forms is usually in the form of subject teaching, where different subjects are taught by subject teachers (*aineenopettajat/ämneslärare*).

With the exception of special needs education, there are no provisions governing the size of teaching groups.

### 3.3 Curriculum

Teaching in comprehensive schools is provided according to the school curriculum, which is drawn up by local education providers and schools on the basis of the core curriculum drawn up by *Opetushallitus/Utbildningsstyrelsen* (Finnish National Board of Education). Municipalities and schools have significant powers in deciding on the curriculum to ensure that teaching meets local needs. The guidelines essentially contain the general aims of the comprehensive school and the aims and central content of the various subjects. The subjects included in the curriculum are stipulated in the Basic Education Act and Decree. The distribution of hours is decided by the Council of State. In forms 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 forms 7–9, both common and elective subjects are included in the curriculum, as well as practical work experience. In addition to subjects, the curriculum also includes so-called cross-curricular themes which must be taught via different subjects.

The current national core curriculum was confirmed in 2004. According to the curriculum, basic education must provide an opportunity for diversified growth, learning and development of a healthy sense of self-esteem, so that pupils can obtain the knowledge and skills they need in life, become capable of further study and, as involved citizens, help to develop a democratic society. Basic education must also support each pupil's linguistic and cultural identity and development of his or her mother tongue. A further objective is to spark an interest in lifelong learning.

The national core curriculum has been formulated on the basis of a conception of learning as an individual and communal process of building knowledge and skills. Through this process, cultural involvement is created. Learning takes place as purposeful study in a variety of situations: independently, under a teacher's guidance and in interaction with the teacher and peer group. In addition to new knowledge and skills, both learning and work habits are to be learned in such a way as to serve as tools of lifelong learning

Subject or subject groups in basic education have been grouped in sections combining several forms. Each section includes the minimum total number of lessons for these forms in terms of weekly lessons per year. Each local authority or school may decide how to allocate lessons to different forms.

#### Weekly lessons in basic education

Grades	1 – 2	3 – 5	6 – 9
Mother tongue and literature	14	14	14
Mathematics	6	12	14
Grades	1 – 2	3 – 6	7 – 9
A language <sup>1)</sup>	----	8	8
B language <sup>2)</sup>	----	----	6

<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-4</b>	<b>5-6</b>	<b>7-9</b>
Biology and geography	9*	3	7
Physics and chemistry		2	7
Health education			3
History and civics	----	3	7
<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-5</b>		<b>6-9</b>
Religion/Ethics	6		5
<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-4</b>		<b>5-9</b>
Music	4 -		3 -
Arts	4 -		4 -
Craft	4 -		7 -
Physical education	8 -		10 -
<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-6</b>		<b>7-9</b>
Home economics	----		3
Student counselling	----		2
Elective subjects	----		(13)
<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>4-6</b>	<b>7-9</b>
Minimum number of lessons	19 19 23	23 24 24	30 30 30
<b>Grades</b>	<b>1-2</b>	<b>3-6</b>	<b>7-9</b>
Optional A language	----	(6)	(6)

<sup>1)</sup> Language begun at primary level

<sup>2)</sup> Language begun at lower secondary level

\* In forms 1–4, biology, geography, physics and chemistry as well as health education are integrated into a subject known as environment and nature studies.

--- = subject is not taught in forms unless otherwise stated in the curriculum.

() = taught as an elective subject.

### 3.4 Assessment, progression and certification

According to the Basic Education Act, pupil assessment aims at guiding and encouraging studies and developing pupils' self-assessment skills. Pupil's progress, work skills and behaviour are assessed in relation to the objectives of the curriculum.

National guidelines and principles for pupil assessment are outlined in the core curriculum. In the core curriculum, pupil assessment is divided into assessment during the course of studies and final assessment. The core curriculum includes pupil assessment criteria for good performance. The criteria have been created to make the work of teachers easier. He\she can compare the performance of the pupil with the national average level of performance.

A pupil whose performance has been acceptable in all assessed subjects moves up to the next form, otherwise he\she has to repeat the year. Repeating a year occurs very rarely. Promotion and, finally,

the award of the school-leaving certificate are decided by the rector in co-operation with the pupil's teachers.

There may be special classes at comprehensive schools. They are remedial classes for children with learning difficulties. Special classes may also form a special school. Basic education is also provided for children of compulsory school age in hospitals. The municipality where the hospital is situated is responsible for arranging the instruction.

Furthermore, pupils who are lagging behind in their lessons due to illness, absence for other reasons or temporary learning problems have the right to receive remedial instruction. Local authorities may provide those who have completed the basic education syllabus with additional instruction with a scope of 1 100 hours. This '10th form' is voluntary for pupils and the local authorities decide whether the form is organised.

### **3.5 Guidance and counselling**

In grades 1-6 of basic education, pupil guidance is integrated (no separate hours) and concentrates on learning skills and methods. In grades 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.

### **3.6 Teachers**

There are four types of teachers in basic education, namely class teachers, subject teachers, special needs teachers and guidance counsellors. The qualification requirements for these are stipulated in legislation.

Class teachers teach most or all subjects in grades 1–6. Class teachers are required to hold a Master's of Education degree with a scope of 300 ECTS credits. The studies comprise basic studies in several subjects, specialisation in one or two teaching subjects, subsidiary subject studies and a period of practical teacher training. Class teacher education is organised by universities.

Subject teachers are subject specialists who teach one or two subjects mainly in grades 7–9. Some schools also use subject teachers in year classes 1–6. Subject teachers must have a university master's degree with a scope of 300 ECTS credits in relevant subjects. The degree includes studies in pedagogy as well as periods of practical teacher training.

Special needs teachers teach children suffering from speaking, reading or writing disorders or other problems in mainstream education, in special classes within mainstream education or at special schools for severely disabled pupils. Special needs teachers must hold special needs teacher education with a scope of 300 ECTS credits or class teacher or subject teacher qualifications complemented by studies in special needs education (60 ECTS credits). The education is provided by universities.

Guidance counsellors provide educational and vocational guidance. Guidance counsellors are required to hold either a master's degree in education including studies in guidance counselling with a scope of 60 ECTS credits or a master's degree plus the 60-ECTS-credit studies in guidance counselling. The education is provided by universities.

There is no separate accreditation system in Finland (see also 2.5).

In-service training is compulsory for teachers in basic education. The number of days is confirmed on the collective agreement on salaries.

Continuing education and training for teaching staff is considered the responsibility of education providers and the teachers themselves. Continuing education is organised by a number of different institutions and organisations (see also 2.5).



## 4. UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Upper secondary education in Finland is divided into general and vocational upper secondary education. The former is provided by general upper secondary schools (*lukio/gymnasium*) and the latter by vocational institutions (*ammattillinen oppilaitos/yrkesläroanstalt*). Both forms of upper secondary education are three-year programmes which provide eligibility for higher education. Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) is part of single structure education and is described in chapter 3.

One of the main principles of Finnish education policy is to make post-compulsory education available to the entire age group and completion of upper secondary education is regarded as being the minimum requirement in terms of performance in working life and lifelong learning. Upper secondary education is progressing towards a highly decentralised system.

Since 1999, both general upper secondary education and vocational upper secondary education have each been governed by one single act. The acts aim in particular to steer educational results and the rights and responsibilities of students and local education providers.

The scope of the general upper secondary school syllabus is three years. The teaching is not tied to year classes. At the end of general upper secondary schooling, the students take a national matriculation examination (*ylioppilastutkinto/studentexamen*).

The scope of vocational upper secondary education and training is three years. Students are awarded the qualification certificate upon completion of all studies included in their personal study plan. A student resigning without completing the vocational qualification is granted a certificate of resignation, which includes details of the completed studies and relevant grades. All vocational upper secondary schools are coeducational. All programmes include on-the-job-learning of at least ½ year.

Students apply for upper secondary education through the national joint application system. The main selection criteria are success in previous studies, work experience (when applying for vocational studies) and other similar factors. Various entrance and aptitude tests are often organised for applicants.

### 4.1 General upper secondary education

The general upper secondary school (*lukio/gymnasium*) provides general education for students aged 16 to 19. It continues the teaching functions of basic education and provides students with qualifications to participate in university or polytechnic studies as well as for vocational education and training based on the upper secondary school syllabus.

The objective of general upper secondary education is to provide students with capabilities to meet the challenges presented by society and their environment and the ability to assess matters from different points of view. Students must be guided to act as responsible and dutiful citizens in society and future working life. Upper secondary school instruction must support development of students' self-knowledge and their positive growth towards adulthood and must encourage students towards lifelong learning and continuous self-development. It must provide sufficient capabilities for further study based on the general upper secondary school syllabus.

Issues related to employment and business life are mainly treated in connection with instruction. Concrete contacts with working life are included in student counselling and occasionally in special projects for different subjects, which include co-operation with enterprises.

Providers of general upper secondary education must function in co-operation with other education providers within its area. Those wishing to enter an upper secondary school must have completed the

basic education syllabus or otherwise be deemed to have the necessary capabilities to perform at general upper secondary school.

Upper secondary schools mainly select their students on the basis of their previous study records. The language of instruction of an institution providing general upper secondary education is either Finnish or Swedish. Other possible languages of instruction are the Sámi language, the Romany language or sign language. Moreover, it is also possible to provide instruction primarily or entirely in a language other than those mentioned above (foreign-language instruction) in separate teaching groups or institutions.

Maintenance of an upper secondary school is subject to approval by *Opetusministeriö/Undervisningsministeriet* (Ministry of Education). The maintaining body can be a municipality, a federation of municipalities, the State or a private body. A large majority of schools are maintained by the municipalities.

General upper secondary education is primarily provided free of charge for students; small student fees may be charged for a specific reason with permission from the Ministry of Education. Students are offered a free daily meal but they have to pay for their own textbooks.

All upper secondary schools are coeducational.

#### **4.1.1 Admission to general education**

The general educational requirement for acceptance is completion of compulsory basic education, or corresponding education completed abroad. The criteria and regulations concerning student selection are determined by the Ministry of Education. Student selection is based on the marks received in their basic education achievement assessment. The education providers decide on student selection and any possible entrance tests.

The selection procedure is done through a national joint application system. Students can apply in a similar way for general and vocational education.

#### **4.1.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue in general education**

Since 1982, teaching at upper secondary schools has been organised into courses, each course consisting of 38 lessons of 45 minutes (in practical terms, the duration of the lessons varies, the total amount of instruction nevertheless being 38 x 45 minutes). The norm is to divide the school year into five or six periods.

It is up to the individual school to decide what courses are offered in each period. This has to be planned in such a way that it is possible for the student to choose courses in an appropriate way and to be able to complete his/her upper secondary school studies in three years.

Legislation does not contain any specific provisions on the number of working days, the school year or holidays.

The term *aikuislukio/vuxengymnasium* (general upper secondary school for adult students) refers to institutions providing basic education and general upper secondary education for adults. While upper secondary schools providing education for young people operate during the daytime, teaching at these schools generally takes place in the evenings, because they were initially intended for adults studying while at work.

Schools are free to choose textbooks and teaching materials.

The virtual general upper secondary school provides students with an independent study track, where students may complete the entire general upper secondary school syllabus or individual courses, regardless of their domicile. There are 10 regional networks, which are covered by 85 institutions. These include institutions providing general upper secondary education, general upper secondary education for adults and some providing vocational upper secondary education and training. The Finnish National Board of Education maintains the national portal, on which learning material is offered. Students can register at one of the institutions involved in the project, which will also register the studies and tests completed.

### **4.1.3 Curriculum in general education**

The syllabus of the general upper secondary education includes mother tongue and literature, the other national language and foreign languages, studies in mathematics and natural sciences, studies in the humanities and social sciences, religion or ethics, physical and health education, as well as arts and practical subjects. In addition, the syllabus may include vocational studies, as either partially or entirely voluntary, optional subjects and other studies relevant to the general upper secondary education's task in accordance with the curriculum. Students must also be provided with educational and vocational guidance.

The Government decides on allocation of the time to instruction in different subjects and subject groups and for student counselling ('allocation of classroom hours').

The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the objectives and core contents of the different subjects, subject groups and thematic subject modules and on those for student counselling (national core curriculum).

The latest national core curriculum for general upper secondary schools was issued by the Finnish National Board of Education in 2003 and education providers have prepared their current curricula on the basis of this core curriculum. These curricula must be drawn up by taking into account the school's operating environment, local sets of values and competence strengths as well as special resources. The local or regional environment, linguistic conditions, history and the economic and cultural life surrounding the school will add local colour to the curriculum. Practical co-operation with experts from different fields will increase the depth and authenticity of studies.

In the Government Decision on Time Allocation at General Upper Secondary School (2002), general upper secondary school studies are divided into compulsory, specialisation and applied courses.

Each student must complete the compulsory courses and a certain number of specialisation courses. The specialisation courses are primarily follow-up courses directly connected with compulsory courses and schools must provide them for students to choose from. The applied courses are integrating courses, including elements from various subjects, methodological courses, other school-specific courses or those provided by other educational institutions. The maintaining body of the school decides on inclusion of applied courses in the curriculum and they are optional for students.

The time allocation for general upper secondary school is shown in the following table. The average scope of one course is 38 lessons. Consequently, in order to get the number of lessons for each subject, the number of courses in the time allocation table will have to 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.

The distribution of hours in upper secondary school is as follows:

Subject or subject group	Compulsory studies	Advanced courses – minimum offered by the school
Finnish/Swedish	6	3 -
Language begun in grades 1-6 of comprehensive school (A- language)	6	2 -
Language begun in grades 7-9 of comprehensive school (B- language)	5	2 -
Other languages		16 -
Mathematics, Basic syllabus	6	2 -
Mathematics, Advanced syllabus	10	3 -
Biology	2	3 -
Geography	2	2 -
Physics	1	7 -
Chemistry	1	4 -
Religion or ethics	3	2 -
Philosophy	1	3 -
Psychology	1	4 -
History	4	2 -
Social studies	2	2 -
Physical education	2	3 -
Music	1 – 2	3 -
Visual arts	1 – 2	3 -
Health education	1	2 -
Educational and vocational guidance	1	1 -
Compulsory courses	47 – 51	
Minimum total of specialisation courses	10	
Applied courses (to make up the minimum total)		
Minimum total number of courses	75	

Teachers are free to choose the teaching methods that they use in order to achieve the objectives set out in the curriculum.

The national core curriculum also includes cross-curricular themes that shall be taken into account in instruction in all subjects as appropriate, as well as in the upper secondary school's operational culture. These themes are active citizenship and entrepreneurship, safety and well-being, sustainable development, cultural identity and knowledge of cultures, technology and society and communication and media competence. The cross-curricular themes will be complemented and elaborated within the local curricula.

#### 4.1.4 Assessment, progression and certification in general education

According to the Upper Secondary Schools Decree, students and their guardians shall be provided with information concerning the individual students' schoolwork and progress of studies on a sufficiently frequent basis. This provision of information is determined in more detail in the curriculum.

Assessment is based on the objectives defined in the curriculum. A course is assessed, or graded, after it has been completed. The purpose of assessment is to give students feedback on how they have attained the objectives of the course and on the progress of studies in that subject.

According to the General Upper Secondary School Decree, the student's knowledge and skills in each subject or subject group are assessed by the student's teacher or, where there are several teachers, jointly by the teachers concerned. The final assessment is decided by the head together with the student's teachers.

The scale of grades used in numerical assessment is 4–10. Grade 5 indicates pass, 6 fair, 7 satisfactory, 8 good, 9 very good and 10 excellent knowledge and skills. Grade 4 is reserved for a failed performance. Some courses are assessed as passed/failed.

If a student gets a fail grade or his/her course performance is otherwise failed, the student must be given an opportunity to retake an exam to complete the course.

When a student has completed the required number of courses, a leaving certificate is awarded. In addition, students take a national matriculation examination (*ylioppilastutkinto/studentexamen*) at the end of general upper secondary schooling after which, if they complete it successfully, a separate certificate, the matriculation examination certificate (*ylioppilastutkintotodistus/studentexamensbetyg*), is awarded. The matriculation examination is held in the spring and in the autumn and a student may complete the examination either in parts within a maximum of three successive examination periods or entirely within one examination period.

The examination consists of at least four tests; one of them, the test in the candidate's mother tongue, is compulsory for all candidates. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from the following four tests: the test in the second national language, a foreign language test, the mathematics test and one test in the general studies battery of tests (sciences and humanities). As part of his or her examination, the candidate may additionally include one or more optional tests.

The matriculation examination uses a separate assessment system. The examinations are initially checked and assessed by the school's teacher of the subject in question and then by the National Matriculation Examination Board (*Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta/Studentexamensnämnden*). The Latin grades and the corresponding points awarded for examinations are: *laudatur* (Latin for 'praised', 7), *eximia cum laude approbatur* ('passed with exceptional praise', 6), *magna cum laude approbatur* ('passed with much praise', 5), *cum laude approbatur* ('passed with praise', 4), *lubenter approbatur* ('readily passed', 3), *approbatur* ('passed', 2), and *improbatur* ('failed', 0).

#### 4.1.5 Guidance and counselling in general education

Educational guidance is provided both in groups and on an individual basis. The independence of education from year classes, the wide range of options as well as modernised teaching arrangements require effective educational guidance. Within the framework of the time allocation for general upper secondary schools, the student must be provided with the option of choosing at least one advanced course in addition to the one compulsory course. Educational and vocational guidance aims to assist students in designing their personal study plans, to support them at different stages of their studies and to develop their abilities to make plans and choices concerning education and careers.

#### 4.1.6 Teachers in general education

General upper secondary education teachers are subject specialists with similar qualifications to basic education subject teachers. Guidance counsellors in general upper secondary education have similar qualifications to guidance counsellors in basic education (see 3.6).

There is no separate accreditation system for teachers in Finland (see also 2.5).

In-service training is compulsory. The number of days is defined either in the collective agreement on salaries or within local agreements. The training can be organised by different types of institutions (see 2.5).

## **4.2 Vocational upper secondary education**

According to the act governing vocational education and training, vocational institutions are not divided into forms of institution according to the field of education that they provide. Most institutions provide instruction in several different fields of vocational education. Responsibility for providing vocational education and training has almost entirely been transferred from the State to municipalities and federations of municipalities.

The objective of vocational upper secondary education and training is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for acquiring vocational skills and with the capabilities to find employment or to become self-employed. Further objectives are to promote students' development into good and balanced human beings and members of society, to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for further studies, personal interests and for the diverse development of personality, and to promote lifelong learning.

Besides education and training at vocational institutions, the initial vocational qualifications can be received through apprenticeship training or through the competence-based qualification system (see also 7.4).

Educational institutions providing vocational upper secondary education and training are owned by municipalities, federations of municipalities or by private organisations and foundations. Just over one fifth of institutions are private.

Vocational education and training has been grouped into sectors of education, which are divided into fields of study and then into qualifications and study programmes. The sectors of education are as follows: humanities and teaching sector, natural resources and environment sector, natural sciences sector, technology and transportation sector, social sciences, business and administration sector, tourism, catering and home economics, social and health care services and physical education sector and culture sector. Education in leisure time activities, physical education, some dance education and music education are also provided at institutions which are part of the adult education system in Finland.

Students in vocational upper secondary education and training are mainly aged 16-25 years. The three-year vocational qualifications give general eligibility for both polytechnics and universities.

Vocational upper secondary education and training is primarily provided free of charge for students; small student fees may be charged for a specific reason (e.g. for personal equipment) with permission from the Ministry of Education. Students are offered a free daily meal but they have to pay for their own textbooks.

All vocational upper secondary schools are coeducational. The sizes of schools vary, the largest having over 4 000 students. The institutions may form local or regional co-operation networks, where instruction is organised jointly by local vocational institutions and general upper secondary schools. As a result, students have more options to include studies from different institutions in their study plans.

### **4.2.1 Admission to vocational education**

The general educational requirement for acceptance into vocational upper secondary education and training is completion of compulsory basic education, or corresponding education achieved abroad. However, those who have not completed their compulsory education but are at least 17 years of age may be approved for special reasons (very rarely).

A requirement of all forms of education is that the student's state of health is such that it does not form an obstacle to his/her participation in the education concerned. The criteria and regulations concerning student selection are determined by the Ministry of Education. The education providers decide on student selection and any possible entrance tests. Students predominantly apply for vocational education through the national joint application system (see 4.1.1). The main selection criteria for vocational education are success in previous studies, work experience and other similar factors. Various entrance and aptitude tests are often organised for applicants.

### **4.2.2 Organisation of time, groups and venue in vocational education**

There are no specific provisions on the number of working days, the school year and holidays in legislation; instead, the start and end dates of schoolwork and holidays are established by the education provider.

Studies are organised in a periodic way, each period having a different daily and weekly timetable.

The education provider decides on provision of study units and students proceed with their compulsory studies mainly as a group (proceeding individually is also possible, especially with elective studies).

### **4.2.3 Curriculum in vocational education**

The vocational education curriculum system consists of the national core curricula, the education provider's curricula and personal study plans. The Finnish National Board of Education approves the qualification-specific core curricula and the requirements of each competence-based qualification.

These are drawn up in co-operation with employers and employees in different fields, other representatives and experts of economic life as well as teachers and students. The core curricula define the basic competences and the vocational skills required by the labour market in the relevant sector of the qualification.

The national core curricula constitute a legal norm for institutions. Their purpose is to reflect the objectives of education policy, to determine the requirements for nationally uniform vocational competence and the capabilities for learning to learn and functioning as a citizen. Moreover, the core curricula must also function as the basis for evaluation of national learning results.

The national core curricula for upper secondary vocational qualifications and the requirements for competence-based qualifications are common to education and training for young and adult students.

The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the objectives and core contents of studies for each qualification. In addition, the national core curricula determine the assessment criteria for study performance in order to demonstrate a uniform vocational competence and to form a basis for student assessment, as well as for planning demonstrations to prove vocational skills.

Each national core curriculum is drawn up in such a manner that the qualification will provide extensive basic vocational skills for the various assignments in the field and more specialised

competence and the vocational skills required by working life in one sector of the qualification. The vocational skills are defined as functional modules in working life.

Education providers draw up their curricula on the basis of the national core curricula. The detailed contents and methods of studies are not defined in the national core curricula. They are defined in each institution's local curriculum, which is drawn up by the education provider on the basis of the relevant core curricula. The institutions themselves decide how to organise instruction and they can take local and changing needs in working life and society into account. The aim is for the education provider to design its education and training together with other local institutions so that students can also include study modules from other fields and from the general upper secondary school in their qualification.

Students are provided with personal study plans, i.e. an individual plan on what, when, how and in which order they study. Creating options and opportunities for individual advancement has been the aim of curricular development in recent years.

Since 1st August 2001, all programmes leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications take three years to complete and comprise 120 credits. One year of study consists of 40 credits, whereas one credit is equivalent to 40 hours of work.

The study programmes leading to vocational qualifications include:

- vocational studies including on-the-job learning supporting these studies (90 credits);
- core subjects (20 credits);
- free-choice studies (10 credits).

These studies include student counselling (minimum 1.5 credits) and a final project (minimum 2 credits). All three-year qualifications include an on-the-job training period of at least 20 credits and practical training at workshops run by the vocational institutions.

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.

Students may freely choose free-choice studies from among those on offer either at their own institution or at any other upper secondary level institution and include them in their qualification according to their own interests or vocational orientation; these may also include appropriate work experience.

The scope of the core subjects common to all fields is 20 credits (21 for instruction given in Swedish). The core subjects include 16 credits of compulsory studies and four credits of elective studies.

Native language (e.g. Finnish, Swedish, Sámi)	4 credits
Other national language (Finnish, Swedish)	1 credit
Foreign language	2 credits
Mathematics	3 credits
Social, business and labour-market subjects	1 credit
Physics and chemistry	2 credits
Physical education	1 credit
Health education	1 credit
Arts and culture	1 credit



At different points during their initial VET training, students demonstrate the skills they have learned in tests arranged either as practical work situations or as practical assignments. These skills demonstrations assess how well the student has achieved the competencies needed in the labour market.

The aims and assessment criteria of the skills demonstrations are determined in the core curricula issued by the Finnish National Board of Education. The tests are devised and implemented in cooperation with business and industry and other employers. VET providers appoint special bodies to plan and set the tests and also appoint examiners.

Where Swedish is the language of instruction, the scope of compulsory studies is 17 credits and the scope of elective studies is three credits, whereas studies in the other national language (Finnish) comprise two credits.

Elective studies are advanced studies 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.

Instruction methods are not regulated. Teachers themselves may choose the methods that they apply in order to achieve the objectives defined in the curriculum. At present, the emphasis is on student-centred working methods, development of students' own initiative and enterprise, their sense of responsibility and the importance of learning to learn. 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. In order to integrate instruction into larger modules, it is possible to use methods of joint teaching and project work, which bring together the objectives of several study modules.

#### **4.2.4 Assessment, progression and certification in vocational education**

The Finnish National Board of Education also issues regulations concerning student assessment and qualification certificates.

Students' knowledge and skills and their progress are assessed at sufficiently regular intervals both during and after studies. Students' acceptable performances are graded according to the following scale: excellent (5), good (4–3) and satisfactory (2–1). Free-choice studies may, with the consent of the student, be given a pass mark without indicating a grade. Assessment is conducted by the teachers and, for on-the-job learning periods, the teacher in charge of the period together with the on-the-job instructor appointed by the employer. The assessment must guide and motivate the students and also develop their self-assessment abilities.

As of 2006, a vocational skills demonstration (see 4.2.3) in the form of a competence test has been included in vocational qualifications as proof of having reached the goals set for vocational studies. Students are awarded the qualification certificate upon completion of all studies included in their personal study plan. A student resigning without completing the vocational qualification is granted a certificate of resignation, which includes details of the completed studies and their grades. On request, students may also be granted a certificate for studies completed while still continuing on the programme and studies yet to be completed are also mentioned on this certificate.

#### **4.2.5 Guidance and counselling in vocational education**

In vocational education and training, educational guidance aims to provide students with support for drawing up their personal study plan and making the related choices. Students also receive

information on the effects of their choices on vocational competence, further studies and job placements. Educational institutions organise counselling and guidance services for students to support their entry into working life and promote and follow job placement. Students can also receive special support when they apply for education.

#### **4.2.6 Teachers and trainers in vocational education**

Teaching staff at vocational institutions include teachers of core subjects, teachers of vocational studies, teachers providing special education and guidance counsellors for vocational institutions.

Teachers of common core subjects have the same qualification requirements as subject teachers in basic and general upper secondary education. Teachers of vocational studies are required to have at least three years of work experience in the field, completed pedagogical studies of at least 60 ECTS credits and an appropriate academic degree. This degree can be a master's or bachelor's degree or the highest possible qualification in their own occupational field. Pedagogical studies for vocational teachers are organised by vocational teacher education units operating in conjunction with polytechnics.

Trainers or workplace instructors at enterprises do not have any qualification requirements. They are generally skilled and experienced staff.

(see also 4.1.6)

## 5. POST-SECONDARY NON-TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Post-secondary non-tertiary VET in Finland is available for specialist vocational qualifications, which are considered competence-based qualifications. Specialist vocational qualifications are primarily intended for adults – mainly for people skilled in different fields to demonstrate their practical competence and vocational skills through competence tests. Adults can improve their position in the labour market through specialist vocational qualifications.

The majority of students participate in preliminary training in order to complete the competence tests. Preliminary training is organised at adult education centres and VET institutions, for example.

For more information on competence-based qualifications, see chapter 7.

Most students taking special vocational qualifications complete their theoretical studies at vocational institutions where the qualification requirements of teachers are regulated. Qualifications of trainers or workplace instructors at enterprises are not regulated (see 4.6).

## 6. TERTIARY EDUCATION

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Tertiary education in Finland has a dual structure. As a result, there is a university sector and a polytechnic sector. The latter was established in the 1990's. Both sectors are governed by separate legislation.

University legislation was amended on 1st August 2005 to establish a two-cycle degree structure and clarify the responsibilities and functions of the universities. The most current reform was introduced with the Finnish Universities Act 558/2009 that came into force on 1st August 2009. The most remarkable change in the new act is the further extension of the autonomy of universities by giving them independent legal status, either as public corporations or as foundations under private law. Another historical amendment is that a university may charge fees to a student from outside the EU and EEA countries admitted to a degree programme taught in a foreign language.

Legislation on higher education degrees comprises the Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees (464/1998) and the Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004). This decree stipulates, for example, the objectives and scope of university degrees, their general structure and content, as well as the distribution of educational responsibility between different universities.

Current legislation governing polytechnics involves the Polytechnics Act (351/2003) and Polytechnics Decree (351/2003). The Decree on the System of Higher Education Degrees also covers polytechnic degrees. Legislation concerning polytechnics is being renewed to converge with new university legislation. Possible amendments concern the possibility of charging tuition fees to students from countries outside the EU and EEA who come to take the polytechnic Master's degree. Polytechnics might also be entitled to organise preparatory training for immigrant students.

University level degrees may also be completed at the National Defence University. The National Defence College Decree (668/1992) includes provisions, for example, on administration and organisation, degrees, teachers and students. The Decree is based on legislation governing the Defence Forces.

In addition to changes in legislation, a process of restructuring the higher education network is underway. The network of universities and polytechnics will be developed so as to reduce overlaps in programmes. In addition, increased effectiveness is being sought by bringing administrative and support services together. This will be done through merging universities and polytechnics, intensifying cooperation in teaching, research and shared equipment. Some mergers have already been carried out. The Ministry of Education will prepare a detailed action plan for the structural development of higher education by 2010.

There were 20 universities excluding the National Defence University at the beginning of 2009. At the beginning of 2010, there will be 16 universities. Ten of these universities are multidisciplinary universities and the remaining six are specialised institutions, such as schools of economics and business administration, universities of technology and art academies. Most polytechnics are also multi-field institutions. The polytechnic network has been reduced from over 30 institutions to 26 during 2009.

A two-tier degree structure was introduced in Finnish universities in August 2005. It divided the former Master's level degree programmes into separate Bachelor's and Master's degrees. The national credit allocation and accumulation systems of universities were replaced by a system based on the principles of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) on 1st August 2005. Bachelor's degrees are first cycle degrees with a scope of 180 ECTS credits, corresponding to approximately 3 years' study. Master's degrees are second cycle degrees with a scope of 120 ECTS

credits, corresponding to approximately 2 years' study. Postgraduate degrees awarded by universities are Licentiate (2 years) and Doctor's (4 years) degrees.

Similarly to universities, polytechnics replaced their credit allocation and accumulation systems with a system compatible with the ECTS system on 1st August 2005. Students can take a polytechnic Bachelor's degree at polytechnics. Polytechnic degrees have a scope of 210-240 ECTS credits and usually take 3.5-4 years to complete. Polytechnic degree studies lead to a higher education qualification and practical professional skills. All polytechnic degree studies include practical on-the-job learning.

After three years' work experience, polytechnic graduates can apply for a polytechnic Master's programme. Polytechnic Master's degrees take 1.5-2 years to complete. Their total scope is 60-90 ECTS credits.

Both universities and polytechnics offer adult education and continuing education. The adult and continuing education provided by higher education institutions is being reformed to better correspond to the needs of the adult population and the labour market. The provision will be made more accessible to those in employment, by increasing the flexibility and apprenticeship-type of provision, for example.

## **6.1 Admission**

The admission requirements and organisation differs slightly between the two higher education sectors in Finland. These have therefore been described separately in the following subsections.

### **6.1.1 Universities**

The Finnish matriculation examination and some international examinations provide general eligibility for university education. In addition, those with a Finnish polytechnic degree, post-secondary level vocational qualification or at least a three-year vocational qualification are eligible. Universities may also admit applicants, who are otherwise considered by the university to have the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the studies. People who received their schooling in another country may be admitted if their qualification gives eligibility for corresponding university studies in that country.

Universities select their students independently and decide on the field-specific student intake according to the agreed target number of degrees. There is restricted entry to all fields of study. As there are many more applicants than there are places available, universities use different student admission criteria.

Student admission is generally based on grades attained in the matriculation examination and on the general upper secondary school leaving certificate together with the results of an entrance examination. In addition, some fields may place additional emphasis on work experience, studies, practical training, etc. Entrance examinations are designed by the university, faculty or department in question to assess the applicants' motivation, suitability and aptitude in the field concerned.

Universities co-operate to varying degrees in terms of organising student admissions. These universities can use the same selection criteria and the same application form.

The present legislation allows for flexible pathways leading to university education. As a result, a student is eligible for university studies if the university acknowledges that he/she has sufficient knowledge and competences irrespective of his/her previous education.

### **6.1.2 Polytechnics**

The general requirement for admission to polytechnics is general or vocational upper secondary education and training. In other words, applicants eligible for polytechnic studies include those who have completed the matriculation examination, general upper secondary school or an upper secondary vocational qualification, or those with a corresponding international or foreign qualification. Legislation confirms that polytechnics can also accept students with sufficient knowledge and skills for polytechnic studies. The eligibility must be assessed before the selection procedure. The requirement for Master's programmes at polytechnics is a polytechnic degree or other Bachelors' level degree and at least three years of work experience.

Students apply to polytechnics through a joint national application system. The polytechnics determine the principles of student admission independently. Student admission is based on previous study record and work experience and, in many cases, entrance examinations are also arranged.

### **6.2 Students' contributions and financial support**

The basic principle in Finland that all education and training is provided free of charge also applies to higher education. At the moment, this is also true for all foreign students. The new Universities Act, however, makes it possible that future students from outside the EU and EEA area can be charged tuition fees for programmes provided in a foreign language.

Financial aid is provided in the form of a study grant, housing supplement and a government guarantee for student loans. In order to qualify for student financial aid, the applicant must have gained admission to post-comprehensive studies, be a full-time student, make satisfactory academic progress and be in need of financial assistance.

For those enrolled on a programme leading to a Master's level degree comprising 300 credits, the maximum period of eligibility for aid is 55 months. For those studying for a polytechnic degree, the maximum eligibility period is 42 months. In 2009, the maximum study grant per month is 298 Euros and the maximum housing supplement 202 Euros. The maximum student loan guaranteed is 300 Euros per month.

Financial aid for students is available for Finnish citizens and, in some cases, for citizens of other countries. Non-Finnish citizens are eligible for financial aid if they live in Finland on a permanent basis for a purpose other than studying. Financial aid is also granted for studies abroad.

An adult education subsidy is available to employees and self-employed people who have been working for at least five years and who wish to go on study leave. Mature students who receive adult education subsidy can also get a government guarantee for their student loan.

### **6.3 Organisation of the academic year**

The academic year for both universities and polytechnics begins on 1st August and ends on 31st July. The timing of the instruction is determined by the higher education institutions. Instruction is offered in two terms, usually between August/September and May.

### **6.4 Assessment, progression and certification**

Student assessment at both universities and polytechnics is based on continuous assessment. In most cases, students are assessed on the basis of written examinations at the end of lecture series or larger study units, but there are also oral examinations. In addition, students write papers for seminars as well as other papers. For Bachelor's and Master's degrees, students write final theses.

Legislation allows for flexibility in recognising and validating prior learning. Students can, as decided by the university or polytechnic, be accredited for studies at a higher or other education institution in Finland or abroad. This also applies to learning acquired outside the formal education system.

Students are eligible for Master's level programmes if they have an appropriate lower university degree (Bachelor's degree) or an appropriate polytechnic degree. Those students who have completed appropriate education abroad entitling them to corresponding higher education are also eligible. After completion of a polytechnic or another appropriate higher education degree and at least three years of work experience in their field, students may apply for the right to complete a polytechnic Master's degree.

Postgraduate programmes, which lead to Licentiate and Doctor's degrees, are available for students with a higher academic degree (Master's degree) or a corresponding foreign degree. The university may also accept a degree taken in another field if the person is found to have the knowledge and ability required for doctoral studies.

University and polytechnic students progress in their studies by completing individual courses and study modules. After completion of all the studies required for a degree, the student may apply to receive a degree certificate. The certificate is awarded by the university, polytechnic or faculty and the form of the certificate is decided by the institution. The university or polytechnic must, on request, also provide students with a certificate for the studies they have completed while still continuing on the degree programme. Students also receive a Diploma Supplement.

Separate accreditation or authorisation is only required in some professions. In other cases, the qualification requirements are fulfilled by including the required studies as part of a degree. Authorisation to practise the profession is required for pharmacy, medicine, veterinary medicine, dentistry and psychology, among others.

## **6.5 Guidance and counselling**

Guidance and counselling in higher education is an area that has been in the spotlight in the last few years. Measures such as individual study plans, tutoring and mentoring as well as follow-up systems have been taken into use. Individual study plans are drawn up by the students with support from staff at their institution. The plan functions as a tool supporting reflection on study skills, aims and objectives.

At several universities, students have been assigned a teacher tutor. In the early stages of their studies, students quite often belong to a mentoring group with a senior student of the main subject acting as a 'mentor'. In addition, higher education institutions have student affairs offices and other services, such as student mobility services, student psychologists, career guidance etc. For the guidance of disabled students and foreign students, additional services are generally also available. Student organisations have also developed student tutoring activities.

It is common at both universities and polytechnics to have an orientation period at the beginning of studies. During these periods, students receive information on practical issues, the field of study and drawing up the individual study plan, for example.

## **6.6 Academic staff**

Legislation defines academic staff of universities to include professors and other research and teaching staff. The requirements for most positions are defined in university regulations. Commonly, the research and teaching staff comprise assistants, amanuenses, adjunct professors, post-doctoral researchers and university teachers and lecturers.

Generally, professors are required to have a Doctor's degree, scientific competence, experience in leading scientific work, the ability to give instruction based on research, supervise theses and have experience of international research cooperation. University lecturers are required to have a Doctor's degree, the ability to give instruction based on research and supervise theses. University teachers must have a Master's degree and proven teaching ability. Researchers are required to have a Doctor's degree and evidence of scientific research as well as teaching skills.

At polytechnics, there are lecturers and principal lecturers. The qualification requirement for principal lecturers is either a Licentiate's or Doctor's degree. Lecturers are required to have a Master's degree. If a person is particularly competent in the required field, he or she can be nominated to hold a post with lower qualifications. Principal lecturers and lecturers who mainly teach vocational or professional studies are further required to have at least three years' work experience in the relevant field.

Academic staff at polytechnics and universities are expected to participate regularly in in-service training. The number of hours or days is not, however, defined in regulations or legislation.



## 7. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Adult education policy is designed to provide a wide range of study opportunities for the adult population. Different institutions arrange a great variety of courses and programmes for adults at all levels of formal education and provision of liberal adult education is extensive.

With the exception of further and specialist vocational qualifications, adult education and training leading to qualifications is provided free of charge. The government also subsidises other forms of education and training intended for adults in order to keep student fees at a reasonable level.

The annual number of participants in adult education and training is 1.7 million, which equates to half of the working age population. This is a very high figure in international terms. The aim is to raise the participation rate in adult education and training to 60 per cent by 2012.

The future challenges facing adult education will be to respond to the ageing of the population and to increasing multiculturalism, to motivate adults to study, to improve learning-to-learn skills among the poorly educated and trained, and to ensure equity and equality in particular.

### 7.1 Policy and legislative framework

The Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998), effective as from the beginning of 1999, controls organisation of curriculum-based upper secondary vocational education and training for both young and adult students.

The Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998) stipulates upper secondary vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications taken as competence tests irrespective of the method of acquiring the vocational skills, as well as preparatory training for these tests. In 2006, changes were made to this Act in respect of preparatory training for competence-based qualification, individual student plans, completion of qualifications and contracts for arranging competence tests.

The latest legislation on education also includes the Liberal Adult Education Act (632/1998). The Act determines that the purpose of liberal adult education is to support development of individuals and achievement of democracy and equality on the basis of the principle of lifelong learning.

The 2004 Act on National Certificates of Language Proficiency (964/2004) and the Decree on National Certificates of Language Proficiency (1163/2004) provide citizens with the opportunity to test their language skills through language proficiency tests.

Adult education is also provided by universities, polytechnics and continuing professional development centres. Universities are governed by the Universities Act (645/1997) and the Universities Decree (115/1998) while Polytechnics are governed by the Polytechnics Act (351/2003) and the Polytechnics Decree (352/2003). Universities, polytechnics and institutions providing liberal adult education have the freedom, within the framework of legislation, to autonomously decide the manner of organising adult education.

Continuing education centres at universities are usually separate institutes, which have their own regulations.

## **7.2 Distribution of responsibilities**

### **Role of Central Government**

Parliament passes laws concerning adult education and training and decides on appropriations for adult education and training within the framework of the State budget. The Government defines the general principles of educational planning and development.

Overall responsibility for development of adult education and training rests with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry is assisted by the Council of Lifelong Learning consisting of representatives from different interest groups. The Finnish National Board of Education, an expert body subordinate to the Ministry of Education, assists the Ministry in preparing decisions on education policy. The Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education regulate education leading to qualifications. The Ministry of Education confirms the qualifications structure including titles of qualifications. The Finnish National Board of Education is in turn responsible for drawing up national core curricula and guidelines for vocational qualifications.

Labour market training is purchased by the employment authorities and financing is channelled through the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. Adult employment training falls within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

### **Role of Local Government**

Adult education organisations are owned by the State, local authorities, joint municipal boards, as well as private organisations, such as associations, foundations and companies. Local authorities maintain the majority of general upper secondary schools for adult students, adult education centres, vocational adult education centres and other vocational institutions.

### **Role of Social Partners**

Central labour market organisations have the following roles as partners and supporters of adult education and training. The social partners participate in the planning and development of education through representation in committees such as the Council of Lifelong Learning with overall responsibility for adult education, the National Education and Training Committees that develop contacts between vocational education and training and working life and the Qualification Committees operating under the Finnish National Board of Education, which organise and supervise competence tests in vocational adult education and training.

The central labour market organisations also have so-called training agreements in the main sectors. These are part of the field-specific collective agreements, regulating the terms of in-service training.

### **Enterprises**

Enterprises support and organise adult education and training by, for example, funding in-service training and organising company-specific training for personnel, maintaining specialised vocational institutions, organising training for students and apprentices and financing part of their personnel's self-motivated training by granting paid leave and by paying some training costs.

### **Role of CVET Providers**

Institutions with licences to provide education may provide upper secondary and additional vocational education and training for adults. Vocational institutions have established special adult education programmes or units. The vocational qualifications provided by these are the same in adult education and training as for young people.

Vocational adult education centres provide adult employment training (labour market training), upper secondary vocational education and training leading to qualifications, as well as additional training and in-service training. The theoretical studies in apprenticeship training may also be organised at vocational adult education centres.

Polytechnics also provide professional specialisation studies. These are extensive continuing education programmes supplementing the degree system, which are provided for people with a university degree, a vocational post-secondary qualification or a vocational higher education degree, or for others with sufficient aptitude for study. In recent years, polytechnics have developed their provision of open education. Open polytechnics offer the opportunity to study individual study units included within polytechnic degrees.

All universities have their own continuing education centres. Commercial services provide most of the financing for these. In addition, these centres may have several affiliates operating outside the university town. Continuing education centres organise vocational continuing education for individuals already holding an academic degree and provide and co-ordinate open university education in co-operation with university departments and different adult education organisations.

### **7.3 Financing**

The Parliament decides on the resources allocated to adult education and training in the State budget. The Ministry of Education steers activities in its sector.

Education and training leading to qualifications is financed by the national and local administration, except university degree education, which is totally government-financed. Training leading to further and specialist qualifications is mostly publicly funded but may result in moderate fees.

About half of liberal adult education costs are covered by the government and the rest mostly comes from student fees and from maintaining organisations. The purpose of State funding is to guarantee the largest possible provision without burdening students with high fees. Adult education and training receives 12-13 per cent of the appropriations allocated in the State budget. Almost half of this funding is channelled to vocational training and one fifth to liberal education.

### **7.4 Programmes and providers**

Adult education and training is provided by ca. 800 institutions in Finland, some of which are specialised adult education providers. Adult education is available within the official education system and in liberal adult education at adult education centres, folk high schools and summer universities. Liberal adult education does not lead to a qualification but the studies completed in liberal adult education may be taken into account in preparatory training for competence-based qualifications and when making an individual plan for completing competence-based qualifications. Educational establishments arrange education and training intended for adults at all levels of the education system. It may lead to qualifications or relate to general self-development.

Adult education also includes staff-development and other training provided or purchased by employers. Labour market training is financed by the labour administration and mainly intended for unemployed people and those aged 20 or over who are at risk of unemployment.

Finnish adult education and training has traditionally been divided into two main areas: general adult education and vocational adult education and training. General adult education comprises general upper secondary schools for adults and liberal adult education. General adult education responds to adults' self-development needs, offers learning opportunities catering for mature learners' own interests and preferences and develops citizenship skills.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education for Adults and the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools for Adult were issued in 2004. The former also includes recommendations for the curriculum for the teaching of mother tongue to immigrants studying in Basic Education for Adults.

The purpose of liberal adult education is to support development of individuals and achievement of democracy and equality on the basis of the principle of lifelong learning. Liberal adult education offers non-formal (non-certificate-oriented) studies, which provide adults with opportunities to develop themselves without qualification- or occupation-specific aims. Courses are available in subjects relating to citizenship skills and society and in different crafts and subjects on a recreational basis.

Vocational adult education and training can be divided into upper secondary and further vocational education and training. The education or training may be either certificate-oriented or non-formal. Upper secondary vocational education and training is certificate-oriented, whereas further vocational training may be either certificate-oriented or non-formal.

Adults can maintain and enhance their competences and study for qualifications or parts of qualifications through different types of training and approaches such as in-service training, apprenticeship training, the competence-based qualification system and employment training.

Integration training is arranged for adult immigrants who are subject to the Integration Act (493/98). Training usually lasts one year and consists of many courses. Most integration training is labour market education (see above). Labour market training may also include preparatory training which may, for instance, orientate students to specific fields or develop their computer skills or skills as job seekers. Preparatory training may also be in the form of language training for immigrants.

There are about one thousand private commercial training organisations in Finland. They are relatively small, specialised businesses based on the expertise of a few employees, such as driving schools, language schools and companies providing training in information and communication technology. Private businesses also organise barber, hairdresser and beautician training as well as masseur training, for example. In addition, there are private art, music and dance institutions.

Private commercial organisations do not fall within the public system of funding; they are also not permitted to use the titles of qualifications reserved by the formal education system. Students at these organisations may, however, take part in tests where they can demonstrate their vocational skills and receive the right to use the relevant qualification title. The activities of commercial organisations are controlled by consumer protection authorities.

Adult education is also provided by universities, polytechnics and continuing professional development centres. Adult education is provided on the same degree programmes as education for young people and it leads to the same higher education degrees. In addition, polytechnics and universities offer professional specialisation studies as a form of continuing education as well as open polytechnic and open university education. Polytechnics also offer postgraduate degrees aimed at mature students. These polytechnic master's degree programmes provide practically oriented education and training.

No specific admission requirements have been set for adult education. In general, adult learners are required to have the same competences or prior studies as young learners. In terms of competence tests, no formal admission requirements can be set since completion of the competence-based qualification is independent of the way that the competence has been acquired.

## **7.5 Quality assurance**

In certificate-oriented further vocational training and in initial training preparing for competence-based qualifications, the key quality assurance mechanism comprises the respective qualification

requirements and their follow-up. Responsibility for organising and supervising competence tests rests with qualification committees that ensure that qualifications are designed in accordance with the requirements of working life.

The Vocational Education Act and the Vocational Adult Education Act oblige education providers to evaluate their educational provision and its effectiveness and to participate in external evaluations of their operations. Responsibility for external evaluations rests with the Evaluation Council for Education and Training. Similar provisions apply to polytechnics and universities.

The Quality Management Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training was adopted in 2008 by the Ministry of Education to support and encourage VET providers to pursue excellence when improving the quality of their operations. The recommendation is based on the Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) in vocational education and training. The recommendation was prepared by the Finnish National Board of Education in co-operation with VET providers, representatives of the world of work and enterprises as well as students.

The purpose of the Quality Management Recommendation is to provide a framework for long-term development of quality management in all types of vocational education and training. The recommendation has been prepared so that it can be applied at both VET provider and institutional levels and used at different stages of the quality improvement process.

## **7.6 Guidance and counselling**

One of the recent priorities for adult education has been guidance and counselling. Effective guidance and counselling services are a prerequisite for increasing participation rates in adult education and training. Specific development targets are the flexible transition from one stage of education to the next, recognition of prior learning, and electronic counselling and information services. Counselling and information services also contribute to improving the relevance and effectiveness of adult education and training and encouraging population groups less inclined to participate to take up studies.

The Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998), was amended to include individualisation and came into force at the beginning of 2006. The regulation on individualisation outlined by the Finnish National Board of Education in 2007 requires VET providers to begin measures for providing individualisation.

The basic principle of individualisation is client-centred in terms of students applying to take competence tests, preparatory training and acquisition of professional competence. The education provider is responsible for ensuring that students receive appropriate training and guidance. Different methods of guidance may be used.

Immigrants receive guidance on education from authorities on immigration and student exchanges and from information services at employment offices. An international labour force counsellor is based in the employment offices in the largest cities. The Directorate of Immigration offers guidance to immigrants on issues related to residence permits and citizenship. The Social Insurance Institution (KELA) and its Centre for Student Financial Aid provide information on student financial aid.

The Finnish National Board of Education has trained regional support staff with experience and knowledge of immigrant education and training. Support staff mainly provide services for teachers of immigrants. Many municipalities also have their own contact person for immigrant education.

The Employment and Economic Development Offices offer services to the unemployed, those who are currently working or entering working life as well as employers. Individual clients are offered services in areas such as job seeking, career planning, occupational rehabilitation and entrepreneurship. The

Employment and Economic Development Office also gives advice on applying for unemployment benefits and supports access to employment in different ways.

Similar services are provided by labour force service centres, the labour administration's national Job Line service centre and the educational and vocational information service of the employment offices.

## **7.7 Teachers and trainers**

The qualification requirements for all adult education and training institutions are the same as the corresponding levels in youth education. There are no qualification requirements in Finland for in-company trainers.

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### Useful websites

Finnish National Board of Education <http://www.oph.fi/english>

Ministry of Education <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/?lang=en>

On-line application to polytechnics in Finland. <https://www.admissions.fi/>

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