



## 1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2001, there were 596 000 young people in compulsory education, and 93% of the population aged 17 were in education. The official languages are Finnish and Swedish, and the public authorities are obligated to take care of the educational needs of the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking population according to the same criteria. There are two networks of educational institutions in bilingual municipalities, one for each language group, covering all levels of education. Municipalities are also required to organise education in Sámi in the Sámi-speaking areas. Care is also taken to secure educational opportunities for the Romany and other minorities as well as for persons using sign language.

## 2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 2000, 92% of students attended publicly-funded schools and approximately 8% attended private grant-aided institutions. Most primary and upper secondary level institutions are maintained by municipalities or federations of municipalities. Private institutions are controlled by non-government bodies but they receive the same level of public funding as the publicly-funded schools. The responsibility for educational funding is divided between the State and the local authorities. Of the funding of primary and secondary education, the state subsidy averages 57% of the calculator costs, while the municipal contributions amount to an average of 43%.

Education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The National Board of Education works with the Ministry to develop educational aims, content and methods for primary, secondary and adult education. It is also responsible for assessing the education system with the exception of higher education. Also, each of the 6 Finnish Provinces has an Education and Culture Department dealing with these issues. Local administration rests with municipalities which have a prominent role as education providers.

Municipalities determine how much autonomy to devolve to schools. The schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements, as long as the basic functions, determined by law, are duly carried out.

There is no separate school inspectorate, and inspection visits to schools conducted by state authorities have been abandoned. The system relies on the proficiency of the teachers in their efforts to carry out the objectives laid down in the curricula. The activities of the education providers are also guided by the core curricula and the objectives laid down in legislation. Both self-evaluation and

external evaluation are strongly emphasised.

## 3. Pre-primary education

From birth to the age of 6, children can attend day care centres (kindergartens) or smaller family day care groups in private homes, all of which charge reasonable fees depending on parental income. At the age of 6, children can attend pre-school classes in school, which are free of charge. All 6-year-olds will have the right to free pre-primary education.

About 90% of 6-year-olds participate in pre-primary teaching either in day care centres (80%) or in schools (about 20%). Apart from the publicly provided services, the church and some voluntary organisations provide various teaching services.

## 4. Compulsory full-time education

The Basic Education Act that came into force on 1 January 1999 does not separate the *peruskoulu* (comprehensive school) into a lower and upper stage. It only states that basic education lasts nine years and that, during the first six, instruction is usually given by the class teacher and, in the last three, by the subject teacher (see class size/ student grouping).

### Admissions criteria

Children must begin compulsory education in the year they reach 7. Approximately 1% start a year earlier but, in that case, a certificate must be obtained to prove the child's readiness to attend school. All compulsory education is free of charge. Municipalities assign a school place to each pupil near their place of residence but, within certain limits, pupils are free to choose the comprehensive school of their preference.

### Length of the school day/ week/ year

The school year comprises of 190 days between mid-August and the beginning of June. Schools open five days a week, and the number of lessons per week varies from 19 to 30, depending on the level and the number of optional subjects taken. The maximum number of hours per day during compulsory education ranges from five at the lowest level to seven in the higher classes where the average number of hours is 30. Each lesson lasts one hour including a 10 to 15-minute break. The weekly minimum number of teaching hours is set at 19 (age 7), 23 (age 10) and 30 in forms 7-9.

### Class size/ student grouping

There are no regulations on class size. Teaching groups normally contain pupils of the same age. However, when appropriate, pupils of different ages can be taught together, particularly in

small schools. Pupils in the first six forms have the same teacher for most of the subjects but subject teachers are also used, particularly in subjects such as visual arts, music and physical education. Pupils in forms 7-9 have separate teachers for each subject.

### Curricular control and content

The national core curriculum is drawn up by the National Board of Education and includes goals and assessment criteria. Within this framework, schools and municipalities then form their own curricular regulations that are sensitive to the local context. Teachers choose their own teaching methods and have freedom to select their own teaching materials. Compulsory core subjects in basic education are the mother tongue (i.e. Finnish or Swedish) and literature, the other national language, foreign languages, environmental studies, civics, religion or ethics, history, social studies, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, geography, physical education, music, visual arts, craft, home economics and pupil counselling.

### Assessment, progression and qualifications

The relevant subject teachers carry out assessment and it is based on goals written into the curriculum. Assessment is an ongoing part of daily school life and a report is written on each student at least once during a school year. In addition, an intermediate report may be given at least once during the school year. Achievement is assessed both continuously and through tests set by teachers. Promotion is based on achievement in each subject; an examination is taken in a subject where a student has not gained a pass grade. The final decision on progression to the next year rests with teaching staff. A certificate is awarded when a student successfully completes the full nine years' comprehensive schooling (the comprehensive school leaving certificate), and an additional certificate is awarded for completion of the optional 10th year.

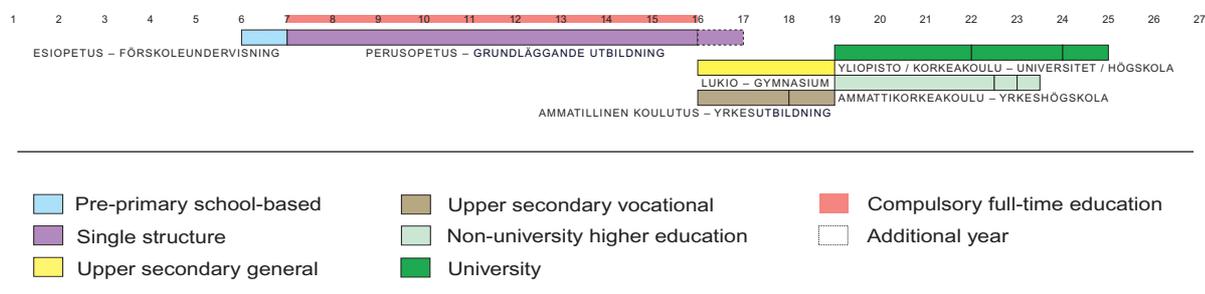
## 5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

### Admissions criteria

Students who have successfully completed compulsory education are eligible for general and vocational upper secondary education. The application procedure takes place mainly through the national joint application system. Students are entitled to apply nationally to any institution offering upper secondary education. The student selection to general upper secondary schools is mainly based on previous study record, whereas in vocational schools the selection criteria also include work experience and other comparable factors and possibly entrance and

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aptitude tests. Although tuition is free, contribution towards teaching material may be required.

#### Curricular control and content

The National Board of Education decides on the general objectives and core contents for both general and vocational upper secondary education. Based on the national core curriculum, each provider of education prepares the local curriculum.

The compulsory subjects in general upper secondary school include mother tongue and literature, the other national language, foreign languages, studies in mathematics and natural sciences, studies in the humanities and social sciences, religion or ethics,

**Lukio / Gymnasium** (general upper secondary school) **Ammatillinen oppilaitos / Yrkesläroanstalt** (vocational upper secondary school) **Age 16-19**

physical and health education, as well as arts and practical subjects. In addition, the syllabus includes specialisation and applied courses, the provisions of which are decided by schools. The students must also be provided with student counselling.

The core curriculum for students attending a vocational institution includes the mother tongue, the other national language, a foreign language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, social studies and working life, physical and health education as well as arts and culture.

#### Assessment, progression and qualifications

In general upper secondary education, the syllabus is designed to last three years but the student may complete it in 2 to 4 years. The teaching is organised in a non-graded form.

Each course is assessed on completion and when a student has completed the required number of courses a leaving certificate is awarded. The general upper secondary schooling ends with a national matriculation examination, comprising four compulsory tests; both national languages, a foreign language, mathematics or general studies (humanities and natural sciences). Students may include optional tests in the examination. A separate certificate is awarded for the successful completion of this examination.

The scope of study programmes in vocational upper secondary education training is 3 years (120 credits). Students who successfully complete upper secondary vocational education receive a diploma. The initial vocational qualifications can be taken

in institutional education or as apprenticeship training. Vocational upper secondary education students put together their own study plans on the basis of which they can partially decide the progress of their studies.

#### 6. Higher education

Higher education is offered in universities or polytechnics (*ammattikorkeakoulu*, or non-university higher education institutions). Both sectors have their own profiles; universities emphasize scientific research and instruction whereas polytechnics have a more practical approach.

#### Access

The Finnish matriculation examination gives general eligibility for university education. In addition, those with a Finnish polytechnic degree, post-secondary level vocational qualification or at least a 3-year vocational qualification also have a general eligibility for university education. Universities may also admit an applicant who has completed the open university studies required by the university in question or who is otherwise considered by the university to have the knowledge and skills necessary for the studies

Universities select their own students on the basis of entrance examinations and previous study record. Numerus clausus is applied in all fields and the competition for study places is hard.

The general requirement for admission to polytechnics is general or vocational upper secondary education. In other words, the following applicants qualify for polytechnic studies: those who have taken the matriculation examination or completed the general upper secondary school, or have a vocational qualification (or a post-secondary qualification), or a corresponding international or foreign qualification.

Student selection to polytechnics is mainly based on school achievement and work experience and, in many cases, entrance examinations.

#### Qualifications

According to the degree system at universities, it is possible to take either a lower or a higher academic degree. The Bachelor's degree (120 credits) can be taken in 3 years and the Master's (160-180 credits) in 5 years. Moreover, universities offer scientific postgraduate degrees that are Licentiates and Doctorates.

Studies leading to a polytechnic degree take 3½-4 years or 140-160 credits,

depending on the field of studies, after which polytechnics grant the student a degree certificate.

#### 7. Special needs

The main principle concerning pupils with special educational needs in Finland is integration into mainstream education. Rather than complete integration or withdrawal, pupils who need educational support receive it and, consequently, may be withdrawn for a few hours a week to get special support. In 2001, approximately 16% of all pupils in basic education received part-time special education in connection with mainstream education, and 5.2% were transferred to special education.

#### 8. Teachers

The teaching and guidance staff in day care centres consists mainly of kindergarten teachers and social-educators. In addition, there are child care workers, paediatric nurses and other child professionals in care and educational tasks.

Teachers are usually generalists in the first six forms of compulsory education, while in the last three forms and the upper secondary stage they are subject specialists. Class teachers are holders of a Master of Education degree and subject teachers have completed Master's degree in the subject they teach and pedagogical studies for teachers, consisting of 35 credits.

Applicants to class teacher education must have successfully completed the matriculation examination. The entrance examination for class teacher education includes a written examination, an aptitude test and interviews. Some universities also include a group situation and an optional demonstration in their entrance examination.

Subject teacher applicants apply to the respective university faculties and departments responsible for their main subject (e. g. mathematics), following the usual procedure. Those aiming to be subject teachers will then separately apply for subject teacher education.

Depending on the institution and subject, vocational and polytechnic teachers are required to have either 1) an appropriate higher academic degree; 2) an appropriate polytechnic degree; or 3) the highest possible qualification in their own vocational field, work experience in the field of at least 3 years, and completed pedagogical studies of at least 35 credits.

Most teachers are full-time municipal civil servants.

**!** For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the Eurydice-database ([www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)).



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