

Key competences for lifelong learning in Finland

Education 2010 – interim report

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1 Key competences for lifelong learning

Introduction: Finnish lifelong learning strategy

Finland's objectives for lifelong learning are set in the development plan for education and research 2007–2012¹ adopted by the Government in 2007 and in the strategic policy lines set out in the Government Programme. The whole education system, including vocational education and training and self-motivated adult education, belongs to the Ministry of Education sector. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy is responsible for labour market training. The Government prepares for the whole electoral period a Government programme that deals with the development of education issues also for the parts beyond the Ministry of Education's sector. In addition the Government adopts a development plan for the whole education system every four years. It has not been seen necessary to devise a separate lifelong learning strategy.

According to the development plan, special priorities between 2007 and 2012 will be to effect equal access to education and training, to assure a high quality of education and training and the availability of competent work force, to develop higher education institutions and to invest in teachers' competencies. The aims of the development programme support the implementation of the Government's policy programmes for the well-being of children, youth and families, for health promotion and for employment, entrepreneurship and working life; and the Child and Youth Policy Programme.

1.1 Development of key competencies

1.1.1 General education

Key competencies for lifelong learning are included in the national core curricula governing basic and upper secondary education. Lifelong learning is defined as a point of view guiding education policy and other policies relating to learning. The aim is to guarantee basic educational rights for every pupil and student according to their abilities and special needs.

¹Ministry of Education: *Education and Research 2007–2012. A development plan*. Ministry of Education publications 2008:10. University Print, Helsinki 2008.

During the current government term, the Ministry of Education is carrying out a "better basic education programme" (known as the POP programme), thereby allocating resources to quality enhancement. The priorities in POP are to reduce the size of teaching groups, to increase guidance counselling, to develop teaching and guidance of pupils with special educational needs, to promote school club activities and home-school cooperation, and to diversify the selection of foreign languages. The focus in the development of special-needs teaching is on teaching methods, on unified administrative practices at the local level, and on closer cooperation between different school districts. Intensified guidance counselling will be given at transition points in young people's educational pathways, with special emphasis on careers counselling. In 2009 quality criteria will be devised for basic education with a view to quality enhancement. These support the implementation of statutes governing basic education, quality enhancement in teaching and the improvement of pupils' learning capacity.

The Ministry of Education has set up a committee to prepare proposals for the development of general upper secondary education, to be submitted by October 2010. The aim is to assure the supply and accessibility of upper secondary education and to develop financing and support services, and to promote the internationalisation of education.

1.1.2 Vocational education and training

In vocational education and training (VET), key competencies mean knowledge and skills student need for learning throughout the lifespan, coping with new situations, managing one's future and operating in a world of work in flux. These are an important part of vocational competence; they reflect the individual's ability to deal with different situations and add to the vocational knowledge and citizenship skills needed in all walks of life. The key competencies in Finnish vocational qualifications are: learning to learn and problem-solving, interaction and cooperation, aesthetics, communications and media skills, technology and IT, vocational ethic, health, safety and operational capacity, initiative and entrepreneurship, sustainable development, mathematics and natural sciences, and active citizenship and knowledge of cultures.

The key competencies form part of the general studies supplementing vocational competence (core subjects), the vocational skill requirements and assessment criteria of the revised vocational core curricula (2009).

The core curricula were prepared by working groups specifically appointed for each of the 52 vocational qualifications in cooperation with business and industry, educational experts and students, with an active contribution from the national education and training committee for the field concerned. The core curricula are binding to all providers of initial VET leading to vocational qualifications and the basis on which they build their own local curricula, which must implement the nationally set aims.

1.1.3 Adult education and training

With a view to expanding the participation base in liberal adult education, the Ministry of Education adopted steering by guidelines in 2005. Under the legislation governing liberal education, the institutions are free to determine the content of their education provision. Within the scope of guideline steering, the Ministry has agreed with

organisations representing liberal education providers that the institutions will increase training in certain priority areas determined in education policy.

These priorities are

- 1 Language and cultural education and other integration-promoting studies for immigrants
- 2 Studies enhancing citizenship skills and civil society skills
- 3 Information society skills
- 4 Health-promoting studies
- 5 Education preparing for open university studies.

At present these priority themes represent some 10% of the classroom hours in the institutions.

In 2007 the Ministry of Education introduced a study voucher scheme. The liberal education institutions receive study voucher subsidies to enable them to significantly lower or totally compensate tuition fees for students belonging to specified target groups: immigrants, the unemployed, pensioners and senior citizens, persons with special educational needs, and persons with no post-compulsory training. In summer universities, the voucher subsidy is used to support persons who have dropped out of university. In addition, the institutions can apply for subsidy from the National Board of Education for the development of suitable education provision. Together, the study voucher and development subsidy amount to around five per cent of public funding allocated to liberal adult education.

Since 2006 the Ministry of Education has granted state subsidy to the tune of 1.5 million euros a year to organisations running study centres (11 in all) for the development of activities and education for civic influence.

Within the Noste programme for raising the level of education among the adult population (2003–2009), adults aged between 30 and 59 were offered opportunities to study free of charge for a vocational qualification or for a computer driving licence, or parts thereof. By March 2009, around 9,300 persons had participated in training for the computer driving licence.

1.2 Key competencies within curricula

1.2.1 Key competencies in basic and upper secondary curricula

The national objectives for basic and upper secondary education are set in a Government Decree². They emphasise all the eight key competencies. The basic education (2004) and upper secondary core curriculum (2003) determine how these objectives are translated into practice in school. The core curricula also set out the aims and core content of subjects and cross-curricular themes.

The key competencies have been taken into account in the aims and content of both subjects and cross-curricular themes, which in basic education are growth as a person, cultural identity and internationalisation, media skills and communications, participatory

² See Appendices 2 and 3.

citizenship and entrepreneurship, responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future, safety and traffic, and technology and the individual; and in general upper secondary education: active citizenship and entrepreneurship, well-being and safety, sustainable development, cultural identity and knowledge of cultures, technology and society, and media skills and communication.

These themes are addressed both in connection with subjects and in other school activities, such as study visits, excursions and school camps, school fetes and other joint events, pupil/student association activities and school clubs.

In basic and upper secondary education, the key competencies relating to **Communication in the mother tongue, Communication in foreign languages and Mathematical competence and basic competence in science** are included in the aims and content of mother tongue and literature, foreign languages, and mathematics, environmental and natural science, biology, geography, physics, chemistry, respectively.

Key competencies relating to **technology** are included in mathematics, natural sciences and, in basic education, in crafts (technical and textile work) and home economics.

Social and civic competencies are primarily included in history, social science and health education and, in basic education, home economics.

Cultural awareness and expression is particularly included in mother tongue and literature, art, music, physical education, crafts and home economics. **Digital competence, learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** belong to the aims of all subjects and cross-curricular themes.

In Finland general education is mostly provided by local authorities. The education provider has a statutory duty to draw up a local curriculum, which translates the aims and contents nationally set in the Government Decree and core curricula into local practice. In its curriculum, the provider decides what elective subjects will be on offer in addition to the core subjects. These elective subjects supplement the teaching of art and skill subjects (KC: Cultural awareness and expression), foreign languages (KC: Communication in foreign languages) and IT (KC: Technology, digital competence).

The pre-primary core curriculum (2000) is designed for six-year-olds. The instruction is not divided into subjects but into content areas realised through children's play and activities. These lay the foundation for subsequent key competencies. The content areas are language and interaction, mathematics, ethics and world-view, the environment and nature, health, physical and motor development, and art and culture.

1.2.2 Key competencies in vocational education and training

The vocational qualification comprises vocational subjects (90 credits) and core subjects (20 credits) and elective studies (10 credits).³ The key competencies are included in it as follows:

Communication in the mother tongue (4 credits) is compulsory for all qualification students. The aims and assessment criteria are defined for three levels (satisfactory, good, excellent). The students can study the following as mother tongue: Finnish, Swedish, Saami, sign language. Speakers of other languages can study their native language as part of other studies and Finnish or Swedish as their second language.

³ See Appendix 4.

One **foreign language** is compulsory (2 credits). Students can continue studying the language they had in basic education and also take other languages as elective subjects.

Mathematics and natural sciences are studied as compulsory subjects (maths 3 credits and physics and chemistry 2 credits).

Technology and IT are assessed according to a three-level criteria. Information and communications technology (4 credits) is an elective subject and has its own aims and assessment criteria.

Learning and problem-solving skills are assessed according to the criteria included in the different modules of the qualification.

Interaction and cooperation skills are included in both core and vocational studies.

A sense of initiative and entrepreneurship is included in entrepreneurship education, 5 credits of which is compulsory for all. Its aims and criteria are included in the different modules of the qualification. In addition, entrepreneurship is on offer as an elective component both in vocational and general studies.

Active citizenship and different cultures is particularly realised through mother tongue, foreign languages, and the components called "social, business and labour market subjects" and "art and culture".

1.3 Equal opportunities for acquiring key competencies

1.3.1 General education

Finland has been developing basic education to better cater for young people's individual needs, so that the learning methods and the forms of support help students to complete their studies and move on to the upper secondary level. The aim of the Ministry of Education is to introduce *the piloted flexible basic education procedures* as a permanent part of lower secondary level education.

Flexible education is provided in groups of some 10 pupils. The instruction follows the core curriculum, but the teaching arrangements differ from the traditional. The teaching takes place both at school and at a workplace or in some other out-of-school learning environment, such as a school camp and a study or work visit.

The aim in this form is to keep up school motivation and prevent dropout and to intervene in problems at an early stage. It provides individual support designed to help students to continue in upper secondary education or training. For schools, the aim is to develop action-based forms of study and to use hands-on and work-based learning environments. Measures are also taken to promote school-home cooperation. The aim for the teaching staff is to develop capacity for early intervention and skills in multi-professional cooperation. The education providers, mostly local authorities, seek to promote cooperation between education authorities, the youth work system and the social and health sector.

The objective of *special education* is to provide help and support for pupils in order to ensure that they have equal opportunities to complete compulsory schooling alongside their peers. The starting point is to assess each pupil's abilities and individual learning and development needs. The first alternative is to integrate pupils with special educational needs into mainstream classes and provide special needs education in small groups according to need. Only when this is not feasible is the second alternative – special needs education in a special group, class or school – considered.

In addition, the Ministry of Education, together with research institutes, has developed methods for assessing children's capability to learn basic literacy and mathematics and for teaching children with special educational needs⁴.

Immigrants are taught in mainstream education and given support according to need. Alternatively, they are given separate preparatory education, where they get the necessary knowledge and skills for starting in basic education and are helped to integrate into Finnish society. In 2009, the extent of this preparatory education was doubled from half a year to a full school year. Immigrant pupils whose proficiency in Finnish or Swedish is not equal to native language in all respects are taught Finnish as second language and not as mother tongue. Education providers who give immigrants instruction in their own native language get government subsidy towards its cost.

1.3.2 Vocational education and training

In Finland some 94% of school-leavers move on to the upper secondary level the same year or continue in additional basic education (known as the 10th year).

Vocational education and training has been gaining in popularity among school-leavers in recent years. Placement in post-compulsory education and training has become more efficient with the introduction of an electronic joint application system. Nearly 99% of applications are now submitted electronically. The reform has clearly increased young people's activity in applying for further education and training. It also gives careers counsellors tools for supporting young people in finding a place to study and for monitoring placement in education and training.

In autumn 2006 the Ministry of Education launched a pilot in education preparing for further studies. The aim is to lower the threshold to vocational education and training by means of improved learning-to-learn and study skills. This form of education is intended for young people about to leave school who have not yet developed a clear picture of what they want to do or who lack the necessary knowledge and skills for applying for and coping with vocational education and training. This trial system is projected to be introduced on a permanent basis in 2010.

Immigrants are given education preparing for initial vocational education and training. It provides the language proficiency, cultural knowledge and other skills needed in vocational studies. This education is 20–40 credits in extent, half of which is dedicated to language studies. Immigrants may also apply for vocational education and training given in a foreign language, mostly English.

1.4 Key competencies in adult education and training

According to a study (2006)⁵, 52% of Finns aged between 18 and 64 had participated in some formal or non-formal education or training during the preceding year. Most of it related to their work or profession. A substantial part of it had been provided by the employer as staff development training.

About half of adult education takes place in liberal education institutions, which arrange a great deal of language instruction and ICT training. Upper secondary schools

⁴ For additional information: www.lukimat.fi/english.

⁵ Kirsti Pohjanpää - Helena Niemi - Timo Ruuskanen: *Adult Education Survey 2006. Participation in adult education and training*. Statistics Finland 2008. www.tilastokeskus.fi/til/aku/2006/01/aku_2006_01_2008-12-31_en.pdf.

for adults are also important providers of education for people in working age. The financing was reformed in 2009 to cater for more flexible teaching arrangements and to respond to the needs of a growing number of immigrants. Subject instruction in these institutions is especially targeted to immigrants, catering for their language and other knowledge needs and providing education necessary for further education and training.

Although in international terms the adult participation rate is high in Finland, it cannot be considered a sufficient response to changes in working life and the knowledge needs arising from the ageing of the population. Not all population groups participate equally, which is why measures are being taken to widen the participation base. The lowest participation rate is found among the poorly educated, personnel in small companies and business owners, the unemployed, the rural population, men and people aged over 55. The Government has set an aim to raise the participation rate to 60% and to extend it to the under-represented groups. Section 1.1.3. above describes the measures to widen the base in regard of liberal adult education institutions.

The Programme of Vanhanen II Government includes an overall reform of vocationally oriented adult education. Measures are being prepared to this end. According to a committee report (2009)⁶, the participation base needs to be widened especially in on-the-job learning, staff development training, training preparing for competence-based qualifications, and web-based and open university/polytechnic education. Achieving the aims requires training that meets the demand, feasible and effective arrangements for recognising prior learning, advisory and guidance services improving the matching of training, student benefits that given incentive for studies, and stronger education-work cooperation at all levels.

Those planning adult education and training cooperate with other administrative sectors, representatives of employers and other stakeholders. According to an established practice, the Ministry of Education invites representatives of labour market organisations, other ministries concerned with education and training, local authority organisations and different educational institutions, where appropriate, as members on committees preparing reforms.

1.5 Development of teacher training

1.5.1 Initial teacher training

a) Degree reform

In August 2005 the Finnish universities adopted a new degree structure conforming to the Bologna process. The Ministry of Education supported this transition by allocating funds to cooperation projects within different disciplines. One of these was a project developing degrees in educational science and teacher training (2003–2006). All universities providing teacher education participated in the project, which provided training relating to the degree reform, organised and coordinated networks analysing and developing core contents in education, issued recommendations concerning the structure and content of education, participated in international degree reform work, and produced

⁶ Ministry of Education: *Ammatillisesti suuntautuneen aikuiskoulutuksen kokonaisuudistus. AKKU-johdoryhmän toimenpide-ehdotukset (toinen väliraportti)*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:11. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2009.

a large number of publications in support of development within individual universities. The project dealt with all education and training relating to teachers (kindergarten, class and subject teachers, special education teachers, and guidance counsellors). A strategy for teachers' further training was also drawn up with a view to stressing the importance of a continuum of training for teachers. The project also included recommendations for post-graduate education in the field.

Finnish universities are autonomous and decide independently on the content of their curricula in all fields of education. The degree reform project produced a number of recommendations concerning teacher training, on the basis of which universities reformed their curricula, which were adopted in the academic year 2005–2006. The degree reform will be evaluated in 2010 to assess the effects of the reform, for example, on curriculum work.

In the light of recommendations issued within the project, Finnish teacher training has four main content areas and relevant aims: versatile expertise on learning and teaching; knowledge of the substance of the subject or cross-curricular theme taught and relevant didactic skills; social, ethical and cultural knowledge and skills; and comprehensive knowledge of practical school work. The overarching component in these is research orientation, which gives teachers strong competence for reflecting on and developing their work.

b) Quantitative needs

A sufficient number of competent teachers is a precondition for safeguarding children's and young people's right and opportunities to study different subjects and integrated themes. During the past decade, the national teacher situation has been reviewed and anticipated every three years. Based on this, the provision of teacher training has been substantially increased with a view to anticipating future teacher needs and preventing shortage of competent teachers. Another reason has been problems with teaching qualifications in certain teacher groups. The expansion programmes carried out in ten universities with Ministry of Education funding have produced results. Recent survey data show that the situation is very good in basic and upper secondary education as regards class teachers (the first six school years) and teachers of mother tongue, foreign languages, mathematics, physics and chemistry, biology, geography and civics.

c) Development projects

The Ministry of Education has allocated separate funding for R&D projects in teacher training and the training of teacher educators in the following areas: entrepreneurship education, gender and equality awareness, multiculturalism and immigrant education, active citizenship and social empowerment, the use of ICT in education, and instruction of special-needs pupils. These have mostly been joint projects of universities providing teacher training. They have produced publications and web materials for teachers, provided support and consultancy for schools and teachers, and built international networks in their fields.

1.5.2 Training of vocational teachers

The aim of vocational teacher training is to provide knowledge and skills needed to guide different learners and to develop the field in question in response to changes in the world

of work and occupations. The development plan for education and research 2007–2012 determines interaction and cooperation with the world of work as a priority. Vocational teacher education colleges are responsible for developing their provision to match the demands of the teaching profession. The studies include lesson planning and assessment and teaching practice in educational institutions and practice at a workplace.

The secondment of vocational education teachers was reviewed in 2008 on a national scale. During the preceding year, 7% of them had been on secondment, the mean duration of which was 31 work days. Measures have also been taken to develop and increase on-the-job learning to improve the matching of vocational education and training with working life. Extensive training has been provided for on-the-job instructors and teachers in order to enhance the quality of work-based learning and guidance. The training of on-the-job instructors has been a key development target since 2000 and has been provided for nearly 30 000 instructors. At the same time, over 5 300 teachers have received training in guidance relating to on-the-job learning.

1.5.3 Staff development training

According to the development plan for education and research 2007–2012, teachers have the right and obligation to maintain and develop their professional skills. Employers are primarily responsible for providing teachers with continuing education.

The purpose of staff development is to improve the functional capacity, performance and well-being of the individual, work community or organisation. The government finances training that improves the performance of the education system, supports the implementation of national education policy and increases knowledge needed to implement educational reforms and enhance the quality of education. The publicly funded provision complements staff-development training provided by the employer. The aim is a provision of continuing education for teachers accessible all over the country.

Flexible work-oriented methods have been developed for government-financed in-service training. Employers are encouraged to draw up training and development plans as part of their human resources development.

A Ministry of Education committee proposed in April 2009 that education and training providers be given a statutory duty to take care of the in-service training of their teaching staff. This duty would take effect in 2011. Further, the committee proposed a programme for the training of educational and teaching personnel. The target group would be school leadership and teachers who have had no or little training in recent years.

1.6 Transversal key competencies

The promotion of key competencies was described in 1.1. and 1.2. as regards general and vocational education, in 1.1.3. as regards adult education and in 1.5. as regards teacher training. This section deals with entrepreneurship education and the Citizen Participation Policy Programme, which promoted key competencies relating to social interaction and citizenship.

1.6.1 Entrepreneurship education

In Finland the education system makes a strong contribution to the promotion of entrepreneurship. According to the Government Programme, measures for diversifying

and expanding entrepreneurship education will be carried on at all levels of education, including higher education. As a concept, entrepreneurship education mainly means wide-scale work done in educational administration in order to boost entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education is also provided and supported by many labour market parties and organisations. The aim of practical measures is to inculcate positive attitudes, develop knowledge and skills relating to entrepreneurship, to generate new business, to develop the competencies of entrepreneurs and their staff, and introduce an entrepreneurial mode of operation at the workplace and in other activities. Lifelong learning and networked procedures are the cornerstones of entrepreneurship education.

In the basic education and upper secondary core curriculum, entrepreneurship is linked to participatory, active citizenship and constitutes a cross-curricular theme, not a subject per se. In vocational education and training, the vocational qualification curricula include at least five credits of entrepreneurship education and business studies. Students learn about entrepreneurship in businesses and also develop entrepreneurial skills in practice on the job. All vocational qualifications include at least 20 credits of on-the-job learning in a genuine business environment.

The polytechnics adopted a joint entrepreneurship strategy in 2006. According to the vision in it, one in seven polytechnic graduates will have started a business within ten years of their graduation in 2010. Some universities also have entrepreneurship strategies. The Further Qualification and Specialist Qualification for Entrepreneurs and apprenticeship training for entrepreneurs developed by the National Board of Education are unique in the world; a total of 8800 qualifications have been awarded during ten years. The Ministry has appointed a national training committee for entrepreneurship for a term up to January 2010. In addition, the National Board of Education has appointed a qualification committee for entrepreneurship up to July 2010. Regional action models, e.g., YES entrepreneurship education centres⁷, the Junior Achievement – Young Enterprise Finland⁸ concept and mock enterprise activities are expanding. Teacher development training has included entrepreneurship education for some years now, and it is a compulsory or elective part of the initial training. Studies have shown that teachers', entrepreneurs' and local authorities' knowledge of entrepreneurship education has grown.

An entrepreneurship steering group was appointed by the Ministry of Education for the third term in autumn 2007. The group has a wide representation of different stakeholders from the education system and organisations promoting entrepreneurship. The group diffuses information among experts and steps up information exchange within the education system in order to promote entrepreneurship. In 2004 it played a key part in the drafting of the Ministry's Policy lines and action programme for entrepreneurship education⁹.

The Ministry recently published its Guidelines for Entrepreneurship Education¹⁰, which constitutes a national strategy for entrepreneurship education. It defines the concept, explains the nature of entrepreneurial learning environments and outlines a vision for 2015. Further, it describes priorities in entrepreneurship education in different forms of education and training. This publication has a strong interface with the work

⁷ YES-Center. www.yes-keskus.fi.

⁸ Junior Achievement – Young Enterprise Finland. www.nuoriyrittajyys.fi.

⁹ Ministry of Education: *Yrittäjyyskasvatuksen linjaukset ja toimenpideohjelma*. Opetusministeriön julkaisu 2004:18. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2004.

¹⁰ Ministry of Education: *Yrittäjyyskasvatuksen suuntaviivat*. Opetusministeriön julkaisu 2009:7. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2009.

of a joint committee of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment and the Economy looking into the promotion of entrepreneurship among higher education graduates¹¹. The future vision is that every higher education institution has in place a procedure for encouraging and providing competencies for a career in business, for generating innovations and for creating a basis for the growth of business.

1.6.2 Citizen Participation Policy Programme

The Programme of the first Vanhanen Government included a Citizen Participation Policy Programme¹², which ended in 2007. Its main purpose was to promote active citizenship, civil society, social influence and the performance of representational democracy. The role of the Ministry of Education was to promote active and democratic citizenship in education, to support the activities of civic organisations and develop administration towards greater openness to citizens' and organisations' influence. A key aim was to develop student association activities, arrange national and regional training, build action and cooperation networks and develop cross-sectoral cooperation, support the development of channels of influence for young people at the local level, and produce support material.

The project sought to establish pupil/student participation as a permanent part of school culture and the planning, implementation and evaluation of school activities. In the project, local education authorities, together with youth authorities, developed student association activities at all levels of education. A provision pertaining to student associations was added to the Basic Education Act. The role of the association is to promote cooperation among pupils/students, their influence and participation in matters relating to them. Several schools may have a joint association. If there is no student association, it is for the education provider to arrange some other channel or opportunity for pupils/students to express their opinion about matters concerning them.

1.7 Pupil and student assessment

1.7.1 Assessment in general education

In basic education, pupils are assessed continuously and at the end of a course. Continuing, learning-oriented assessment is primarily intended to guide and encourage learning and help pupils become aware of the learning process and take responsibility for it. Pupils are not compared to each other. Assessment gives information to pupils and their parents about progress in relation to curricular objectives and the pupils' own ability and aims.

For the purposes of assessment, the core curriculum contains descriptions of good knowledge, i.e. what is required for 'good', expressed as the mark 8 (on a scale of 4 to 10). The description focuses on broad knowledge, not detailed rote learning. These broad skills include the key competencies 'learning to learn' (setting goals for, planning and assessing one's own learning), digital skills, social skills, initiative and entrepreneurship.

11 Ministry of Education: *Korkeakoulupohjaisen yrittäjyyden edistäminen*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2009:10. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2009.

12 Citizen Participation Policy Programme. www.om.fi/en/Etusivu/Ajankohtaista/Arkistoidutisallot/Kansalaisvaikuttamisenpolitiikkaohjelma

In the end-of-course assessment, the pupil's knowledge and skills is assessed according to nationally set criteria against objectives set nationally for the syllabus. The criteria focus on the same broad competencies as the ongoing assessment.

In upper secondary education the students' learning is assessed both on an ongoing basis and at the end of course. The school-leaving certificate shows the courses taken and the marks given. These are largely based on marks given for end-of-course tests. The assessment is made against objectives set nationally for the subjects and designed to encourage studies and develop the students' skills in self-assessment.

In addition, upper secondary students take a national matriculation examination at the end of their secondary studies. This battery of tests measures how students have mastered the knowledge and skills determined in the curriculum and syllabi. Tests can be taken in mother tongue and literature, the second national language, foreign languages, mathematics and modern knowledge subjects. The grades given are nationally comparable.

1.7.2 Assessment in vocational education and training

In initial vocational education and training (VET), student assessment is based on set criteria. Students' learning and knowledge are compared to vocational skills requirements nationally set for the qualification in question or to the aims set for general core subjects and criteria based on them.

The purpose of assessment is to give students feedback on what they know and what they still need to learn. In assessment the teacher and the on-the-job instructor must use activating methods which motivate students to achieve set aims or fulfil the vocational skills requirements and develop their self-assessment skills. Assessment is ongoing; the student is constantly given oral or written feedback on progress. The feedback supports and guides students to achieve good results by highlighting their strengths. Assessment also shows the changes needed in teaching and guidance, which are recorded in the student's individual learning plan.

Students are given final grades, which are recorded in the diploma. Students are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills on a wide scale and also to assess themselves. The vocational skills required for the qualification are tested in vocational skills demonstrations and in other, supplementary assessment.

The key competencies are assessed according to national assessment criteria, which are adapted separately to the specific needs of each vocational qualification. The criteria are summative, that is, expressed as learning outcome at the end of training. The training provider and teachers must use these criteria, which also help to set intermediary goals for learning and teaching and give feedback during studies.

1.8 Evaluation of the education system

The Ministry of Education decides on the principles underlying evaluation and its financing in a regularly devised plan, the current one being for 2009–2011¹³. Evaluation findings are used, for example, in the development of curricula and the qualification structure.

¹³ Ministry of Education: Koulutuksen arviointisuunnitelma vuosille 2009–2011. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2008:38. Yliopistopaino, Helsinki 2008.

Evaluation of the basic education, upper secondary education, vocational education and training, liberal adult education and basic education in the arts is governed by legislation. According to it, the education provider must evaluate its own provision and its impact and participate in external evaluation of its operations and provision. External evaluations are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Education Evaluation Council¹⁴ subordinate to it.

National evaluation of educational outcomes, including key competencies, is the responsibility of the National Board of Education. This evaluation is based on samples, but the National Board also carries out longitudinal monitoring, utilising findings of previous evaluations. Evaluations produce (1) basic indicators, which describe pupils' and students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in the content areas of the curriculum; (2) contextual indicators, which describe how pupils' and students' knowledge and skills relate to demographic, social, economic and educational factors; and (3) trend indicators, which describe changes in the basic and contextual indicators. Local evaluation is mainly the responsibility of education and training providers.

In addition, Finland participates in international evaluations of key competencies, such as the OECD PISA review and the ICCS, TIMMS and PIRLS reviews of the IEA.

Higher education evaluation is governed by the Universities and Polytechnics Acts. Universities and polytechnics must evaluate their provision, research and artistic activities and the impact of these operations. The institutions must also participate in external evaluations of their operation and quality assurance systems on a regular basis and publish the evaluation findings. Attached to the Ministry of Education is an independent Higher Education Evaluation Council¹⁵.

14 The Education Evaluation Council. www.edev.fi/portal/english

15 The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. www.kka.fi

2 Transversal lifelong learning issues

The Finnish lifelong learning strategy was discussed in the introduction to Section 1. This section describes the preparation of the national qualifications framework and measures taken to develop the recognition of prior learning.

2.1 National qualifications framework

The national qualifications framework (NQF) is projected to be ready by 2010. The preparation is based on the recommendation concerning the European Qualifications Framework. In August 2008, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to prepare the NQF. It will put forward its proposal for the NQF and the knowledge required for each level by 30 June 2009. In addition the committee will describe the principles for the placement of qualifications in the NQF and EQF levels, outline quality assurance arrangements and give its opinion as to the possibility of expanding the NQF from a qualifications framework into a knowledge framework. One aim of the NQF is to strengthen knowledge-orientation and an approach based on learning outcomes in all education and unify and improve the recognition of learning in order to promote lifelong learning.

2.2 Recognition of prior learning

The recognition of prior learning has been developed in the higher education sector in several projects. A Ministry of Education committee reviewed practices in recognition of prior studies and learning in 2007 and put forward recommendations for common national principles¹⁶. Several polytechnics and universities have undertaken reviews and projects with a view to putting a recognition scheme in place.

In March 2009 the Finnish Council of University Rectors and the Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences issued recommendations¹⁷ prepared in cooperation with universities, polytechnics and labour market parties. The recommendations are based on knowledge-oriented thinking. In addition there is an ESF

¹⁶ Ministry of Education: *Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:4. Helsinki, Yliopistopaino 2007.

¹⁷ Finnish Council of University Rectors – Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences: *Oppimisesta osaamiseen: Aiemmin hankitun osaamisen tunnistaminen ja tunnustaminen*. Committee report 2009.

project for training higher education personnel in recognition procedures and to develop and systemise practices suitable for assessing and demonstrating knowledge. The project will be carried out from 2009 to 2011. The government proposal for a new Universities Act and the proposed amendments to the Polytechnics Act also provide for the changes needed for the recognition of prior learning.

Similarly, the reform of vocationally oriented adult education includes measures for developing a system for recognising prior learning. This is particularly important in terms of the projected special post-graduation qualifications, which are described in section 4.2.

In initial vocational education and training the student can count towards the qualification prior studies which have similar aims and content as the curricular requirements. The institutional curriculum must define the principles underlying the recognition of prior learning. Recognition practices in vocational education and training have been reviewed in different connections during the past ten years. The most common practice is that prior general or vocational upper secondary studies are counted towards the qualification. The recognised learning is recorded in the student's individual study plan. The recognition of work-based learning needs further development.

3 Vocational education and training

3.1 Attractiveness and matching of VET

In Finland vocational education and training has grown in popularity and the applicant numbers have been steadily increasing in recent years. However, there are differences in popularity between regions, fields of education and providers.

Measures have been taken to enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training. These measures concern dissemination of information and the extent and relevance of the qualifications to working life demands, and on-the-job learning and vocational skills demonstrations. Similarly long-term development of national skills competitions and their visibility have increased the popularity of VET.

Information about and marketing of vocational education and training have been stepped up nationally, regionally and locally. In addition to web sites maintained by authorities, the Ministry of Education, training providers, student organisations and labour market parties publish various magazines describing vocational education and training and different career paths in it. In the field of technology and transport, education providers and business and industry have had information campaigns designed to increase the attractiveness of the field. At the local and regional levels, training providers have targeted direct information and marketing measures to young people and those having the most influence on their career choices (parents and careers counsellors).

One important information channel is the electronic joint application system in upper secondary education and training, which was adopted in 2008. It has improved information about training provision, admission principles and application procedures, as well as placement and careers counselling. The Ministry of Education is launching the second phase of the project, in which centralised collection of data on education and training supply and the e-application system will be extended to other forms of education, e.g. adults' vocational education and training.

4 Higher education

4.1 Diversification of higher education financing

In February 2009, the Government submitted a proposal to Parliament for a new Universities Act¹⁸. The new Act is projected to take force on 1 January 2010. According to the Bill, universities would become independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law. As independent legal personages, the universities would be outside the government budgeting system. They would, however, receive annual budgetary appropriations for executing the tasks assigned to them in the Universities Act, under which they continue to perform their public mission. The real level of public funding is to be kept at the present level and universities would also receive additional discretionary funds for specified tasks.

As independent legal person, the universities would be able to make commitments and possess movable and immovable property. They can engage in business relating to and supporting their educational and research missions. The new legal status will substantially increase their financial and administrative autonomy and diversify their funding base. Universities can flexibly acquire external funding, direct their investments to areas of strategic importance, acquire shares and other property, as well as pursue business ventures and allocate possible surplus to strategically important activities and operations. The new legal personality gives universities more flexible scope for cooperating with the world of work, businesses and other operators in research and innovation.

Measures have been taken to enable universities and polytechnics to arrange and sell made-to-order education. In addition the proposed Universities Act and the proposed amendments to the Polytechnics Act include provide for a pilot project allowing universities and polytechnics to charge fees to non-EU/EEA students attending second cycle programmes.

4.2 Lifelong learning in higher education

The proposed Universities Act will add lifelong learning to the university missions. The reform of vocationally oriented adult education also includes proposals for developing

¹⁸ University Reform. www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/Hankkeet/Yliopistolaitoksen_uudistaminen/index.html?lang=en.

further training of higher education graduates. Some proposals still need further elaboration but others will be gradually adopted from 2009 onwards.

The aim is to improve graduates' opportunities to study parts of degree programmes, which would enable employed people to study alongside work without applying for admission to higher education institutions. In a proposal put forward by the Ministry of Education in March 2009 for a new higher education funding model, these non-degree studies are suggested to be financed from appropriations based on overall student numbers. In addition, non-degree studies will continue to be on offer in open university and polytechnic instruction. The higher education institutions may also sell degree modules to employers as staff-development training.

The committee preparing the vocationally oriented adult education reform proposes specialised qualifications and apprenticeship-type training as a response to post-graduation training needs. The specialised qualifications will be based on competencies needed by graduates in working life and descriptions of learning outcomes, which will be tested in competence demonstrations. The student can acquire the required knowledge and skills in many different ways: in staff-development training, self-motivated and self-guided studies and studies provided by the employer. These specialised qualifications facilitate the recognition of prior learning, improve the relevance of adult higher education to labour market demands and clarify the status of post-graduation training in the education system. The system still needs further preparation, but the aim is to define the specialised qualifications in connection with the NQF.

There are also plans for introducing training of apprenticeship type as a form of graduates' further training. The Government has proposed funds for the purpose in its supplementary budget 2009 and the first postgraduate apprenticeship training will start during 2009. This model will add to educational opportunities and step up cooperation between higher education institutions and the world of work, as well as making it possible for adults to study while employed.

Additional information

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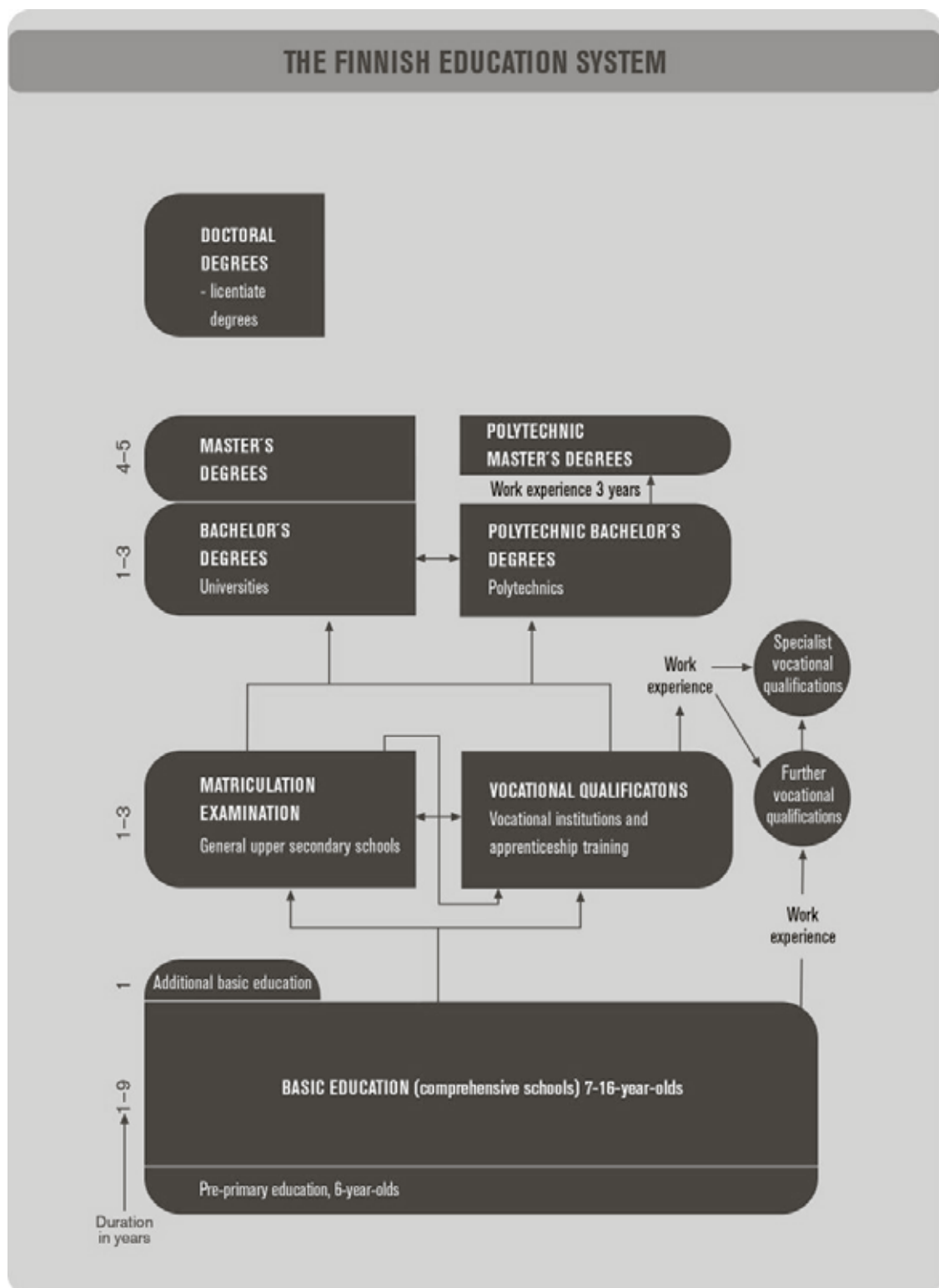
Appendices

Appendix 1. Finnish education system

Appendix 2. Government Decree on the General National Objectives and Allocation of Lesson Hours in Basic Education (Sections 2, 3, 4)

Appendix 3. Government decree on the general national objectives of general upper secondary education and the allocation of lesson hours (Sections 3, 4, 5)

Appendix 4. Government Resolution on the qualification structure and core studies in initial vocational education and training



Government decree on the general national objectives and allocation of lesson hours in basic education referred to in the basic education act¹⁹

National educational objectives

Section 2. Growth as a human being and a member of society

- 1 The objective of teaching and education is to support the growth of pupils into balanced individuals with healthy self-esteem and into members of society who appraise their environment critically. The points of departure are respect for life, nature and human rights and appreciation of one's own learning and work and the learning and work of others. The objective is to foster physical, psychological and social health and well-being and to educate the pupils in good manners.
- 2 The pupils shall be educated to be responsible and cooperative persons who by their action strive to promote tolerance and trust among human groups, peoples and cultures. The instruction shall also support pupils' growth into active members of society and provide knowledge and skills they need to function in a democratic, egalitarian society and to promote sustainable development.

Section 3. Necessary knowledge and skills

- 1 The instruction shall give the pupils a grounding for a broad general education and ingredients and stimuli for broadening and deepening their world-views. This requires knowledge of human emotions and needs, religions and different views of life, history, culture and literature, nature and health, and economics and technology. The instruction shall offer aesthetic experiences in different aspects of culture and opportunities to develop manual skills, creativity and sportive skills.
- 2 The instruction shall support the development of the pupils' cognitive and communication skills. The aim is a versatile command of the mother tongue and an ability to interact in the second national language and other languages. The aim is that the pupils learn the fundamentals of mathematical thinking and the application of mathematics, and have a command of information and communications technology.

¹⁹ Unofficial ad-hoc translation.

- 3 In addition, instruction to be given by the medium of a language other than the mother tongue shall give the pupils special knowledge, skills and capabilities relating to the language of instruction and relevant culture. Instruction based on a special pedagogical or philosophical system determined in the authorisation to provide education shall also provide the pupils with knowledge, skills and capabilities based on the special world-view or pedagogical system underpinning the instruction.

Section 4. Lifelong learning and promotion of educational equality

- 1 Instruction and education shall be provided in cooperation with parents and carers, so that each pupil receives instruction, guidance and support according to his or her own needs and developmental level. The instruction shall give special consideration to the different needs of boys and girls and to differences in growth and development. Pupil welfare services shall promote the pupil's health and social well-being and thereby ensure prerequisites for sound growth and learning.
- 2 The learning environment shall give the pupil opportunities for growth and learning as an individual and as a member of a group. Special attention shall be devoted to the early identification and resolution of learning difficulties, to the prevention of social exclusion and to the learning of social skills.
- 3 The pupils shall be guided and encouraged in independent, critical acquisition of knowledge and in diverse cooperation skills. The development of learning skills shall aim at providing capabilities and engendering desire for further studies and for learning throughout life. The aim is that the pupil develops a positive self-image. The pupils shall be assisted in analysing and utilizing what they learn.

Government decree on the general national objectives of general upper secondary education and the allocation of lesson hours²⁰

Section 3. The objectives of learning

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

Section 4. Necessary knowledge and skills

- 1 The student shall be provided a good general education for further education, for citizenship and for quality life. The student's knowledge and skills shall be deepened and the student shall be provided with good general knowledge about the human being, society, cultures and nature. The aim is that the student gains good information society skills. The student shall be trained to use them for the acquisition of information and for communication, to master basic media skills and to weigh information critically. The student shall be taught cooperation skills which enable him/her to operate independently and in groups.
- 2 The instruction shall train the student in versatile self-expression and interaction skills and to express himself/herself orally and in writing in both national languages and at least in one foreign language. The instruction shall offer aesthetic experiences and experiences in different art forms.

²⁰ Unofficial ad-hoc translation.

Section 5. Lifelong learning and self-development

- 1 The instruction shall develop the student's study skills and ability to assess his or her own study skills. The student shall be supported in identifying his or her strengths and development needs as a learner and in using study methods best suited for him or her. The student shall be trained in planning and making his or her own choices and take responsibility for his or her own choices.
- 2 The aim is that the student internalises the significance of lifelong learning. The student shall be encouraged to have confidence in his or her study skills and make plans for further education. The instruction shall prepare the student to find his or her own place in society and in working life.

Government Resolution on the qualification structure and core subjects in initial vocational education and training²¹

Section 1.

- 1 The vocational qualification, which comprises 120 credits, shall include:
 - a 90 credits of vocational studies and relevant on-the-job learning, of which at most 10 credits can be designed as elective studies in the core curriculum, provided that the qualification otherwise fulfils the aims referred to in Section 1(3);
 - b 20 credits of core subjects necessary for and supplementing vocational knowledge and skills; and
 - c 10 credits of elective studies.
- 2 The vocational studies referred to in Section 1(1) shall include at least 1.5 credits of guidance counselling.
- 3 The core curriculum shall ensure that the qualification produces broadly based basic vocational competencies for different tasks in the field and more specialised competencies in one section of the qualification.
- 4 If parts of studies referred to in Section 1(1) have been designed as elective studies, these studies may be studies deepening or expanding vocational knowledge, core subjects or general upper secondary courses.

²¹ Unofficial ad-hoc translation.

Section 2. The core subjects shall comprise 16 credits of compulsory studies and 4 credits of elective studies.

The core study subjects are:

mother tongue	4 credits;
second national language	1 credit;
foreign language	2 credits;
<i>mathematical and science subjects</i>	
mathematics	3 credits;
physics and chemistry	2 credits;
<i>humanities and social sciences</i>	
social, business and labour market subjects	1 credit;
health education	1 credit;
<i>and skill and art subjects</i>	
physical education	1 credit;
art and culture	1 credit.

In vocational education and training given in the Swedish language, core subjects shall be 17 credits and elective studies 3 credits in extent. The second national language studies shall be 2 credits in extent.

The elective studies are chosen among studies referred to in Section 2 and the following mathematical-science and humanities-social sciences subjects: environmental education, information and communications technology, ethics, cultural knowledge, psychology, business.

If the student's mother tongue is not Finnish or Swedish, the training provider may decide to divide studies in mother tongue and the second national language in a way deviating from the provisions of Section 2, provided that in Finnish-language instruction the total extent of these studies is five credits and in Swedish-language instruction six credits.

The training provider may decide to divide studies in health education and physical education in a way deviating from the provisions of Section 2, provided that the total extent of these studies is two credits.