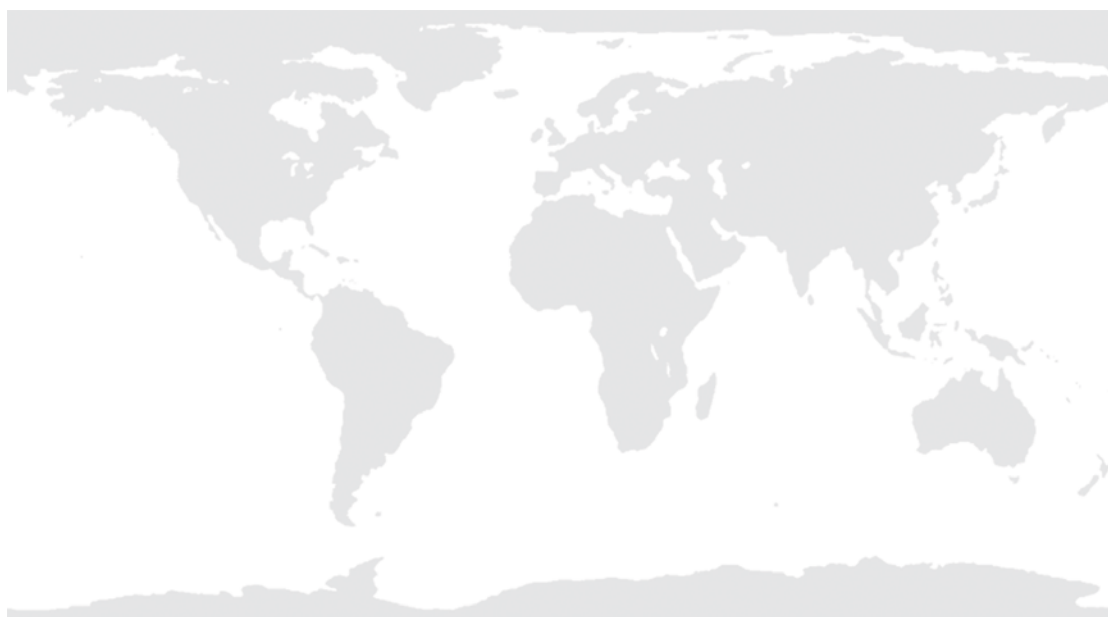




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Principles and general objectives of education

Education is considered as one of the fundamental rights of all citizens. Traditionally, the main goal of Finland's education policy has been to raise the level of education and to offer equal educational opportunities to all citizens, regardless of their place of residence, wealth, mother tongue or sex.

According to Section 2 of the Basic Education Act of 1998, last amended in 2010, the purpose of education is to support pupils' growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life. Furthermore, the aim of pre-primary education, as part of early childhood education, is to improve children's capacity for learning. Education shall promote civilization and equality in society and pupils' prerequisites for participating in education and otherwise developing themselves during their lives. The aim of education shall further be to secure adequate equity in education throughout the country. Section 3 stipulates that education shall be governed by a unified national core curriculum and shall be provided according to the pupil's age and capabilities and so as to promote healthy growth and development in the pupil.

The strategic programmes proposed in the Ministry of Education and Culture's *Strategy 2020* are based on the vision of a country in the vanguard of knowledge, inclusion and creativity. Creativity as a resource for societies and individuals makes for new thinking and action and enables individuals to realize themselves. Membership in communities, participation and active social engagement consolidate the knowledge and creativity base. A strong basis of knowledge, creativity and inclusion is a warranty for Finland's success. Future general education will highlight global and environmental responsibility; an understanding of culture and related knowledge, values and ethic; life management skills; individual health and welfare behaviour; social and communication skills; management of the information glut and learning skills; media literacy; and technological competencies. (MEC, 2010).

According to the strategy of the National Board of Education *Learning and competence 2020*, the education system will support the development of learners' thinking skills, work and interaction skills, crafts and expressive skills, participation and skills to influence, as well as self-knowledge and responsibility. Development of these citizenship skills will start as early as during early childhood education and care. Assessment of learners' knowledge and skills will be in focus. Everyone will be guaranteed a flexible and encouraging learning pathway and opportunities for lifelong learning. Learners' different talents and strengths will be identified earlier and more effectively in order to raise the overall standard of education, support learning and foster excellence. Everyone will have the opportunity to develop in line with their abilities, to build their future and succeed in their studies, work and private lives. Provision of high-quality education and training and a comprehensive network of educational institutions will guarantee nationwide equity for citizens as learners. (NBE, 2011b).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

A comprehensive reform of legislation governing basic education, secondary education and adult education came into force in January 1999. This more uniform legal framework focuses on the objectives, contents and levels of education as well as students' rights and responsibilities. The new legislation has substantially increased the independent decision-making powers of local authorities, other education providers and schools, as well as the pupils' freedom of choice. The most significant change was the abolishment of the division of the comprehensive school into a lower (grades/years 1-6) and an upper stage (grades 7-9). The division was in conflict with the new legislation that considered basic education as an integrated whole and was seen as a potential barrier to the integrated and holistic development of the comprehensive school. Until the 1990s the concept of higher education was defined narrowly in Finland. The establishment of polytechnics (often referred to as universities of applied sciences) created a more practically and professionally oriented higher education degree system side by side with the traditional university degrees. This was also part of a more in-depth restructuring of vocational education and training. Under the new educational legislation, educational institutions are obligated to evaluate their own operations and their outcomes.

Early childhood education and care (day-care centres) is regulated by the **Act on Children's Day-care No. 36/1973** and the **Act on Children's Care at Home and Private Day-care No. 1128/1996**. The national steering of day-care centres is under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Provisions concerning pre-primary education for 6-year-olds are included in the Basic Education Act.

Basic education provided in the compulsory comprehensive school is regulated by the **Basic Education Act No. 628/1998**, last amended in 2010, the **Basic Education Decree No. 852/1998** and the **Government Decree No. 1435/2001** on the general national objectives and distribution of lesson hours in basic education. The Act 1999 only states that basic education lasts nine years and that during the first six years the educational process is usually organized by the class teacher.

Upper secondary education is regulated by the **General Upper Secondary Schools Act No. 629/1998**, the **Government Decree No. 810/1998**, and the **Decree No. 955/2002** (entered into force in August 2003) on the general objectives and distribution of lesson hours in upper secondary education.

Vocational education and training (VET) is regulated by the **Vocational Education and Training Act No. 630/1998**, which came into effect on 1 January 1999, and the **Government Decree No. 811/1998**. The Act concerns initial VET for both young and adult students and other available qualifications. The purpose of this legislation was to raise vocational skills and competences and meet the skill needs at the workplace by improving links between schools and employers. Institutions providing basic vocational education must cooperate with other educational institutions in their region. Cooperation must be practiced with other vocational and general secondary institutions, and also with universities and polytechnics. The new **Government Decree No. 488/2008** came into effect in August 2008 and has been applied from the beginning of August 2009.



The **Government Decree on Evaluation of Education No. 150/2003** changed the evaluation function of the National Board of Education and led to the establishment of the Education Evaluation Council, an independent body attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Decree stipulated that the evaluation of education shall be organized by the Council through a network of universities, the National Board of Education and other expert bodies. According to amendments introduced in 2009, since 2010 the Education Evaluation Council is responsible for external evaluation and the National Board of Education is in charge of national assessments of learning outcomes.

The objective of the **Child Welfare Act No. 417/2007**, last amended in 2011, is to protect children's rights to a safe growth environment, to balanced and well-rounded development, and to special protection. According to the Act, the municipalities must ensure that schools are provided with psychologist and social worker services that give sufficient support and guidance to pupils receiving pre-primary, basic and voluntary additional basic education and preparatory instruction, with the aim of preventing and eliminating social and psychological difficulties affecting the pupils' development. These services must also further the development of cooperation between home and the school. The provision of before- and after-school activities, e.g. supervised activities provided for pupils in basic education according to the Basic Education Act, is organized according to the National Framework for Before- and After-School Activities in Basic Education, issued by the NBE and effective 1 August 2011.

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

During the second half of the 1990s, the various acts on each individual university were replaced by a single Universities Act (No. 645 of 1997) and a Government Decree (No. 115 of 1998) covering the entire university system. Amendments introduced by Act No. 715/2004 and the **Government Decree on University Degrees No. 794 of 2004**, came into force on 1 August 2005 and established a mandatory three-cycle degree structure (excepting medicine and dentistry) in accordance with the Bologna process. The new **University Act No. 558/2009**, entered into force on 1 January 2010 and last amended in 2011, applies to universities which belong to the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture. This Act further extended the autonomy of universities by establishing them as independent legal entities, either as public corporations or as foundations under private law. The **Government Decree No. 794/2009** provides for the mission and composition of the Higher Education Evaluation Council, an independent expert body attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The **Vocational Adult Education Act No. 631/1998** and subsequent amendments provide for the 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 for the preparatory training for these tests. An amendment introduced in 2006 provides for the preparatory training for competence-based qualification, individual plans of students, completing qualifications and contracts for arranging competence tests. The **Liberal Adult Education Act No. 632/1998** regulates institutions of liberal adult education encompassing adult education centres, folk high schools, study centres, physical education centres, and summer universities. The Act determines that the purpose of liberal adult education is to support the development of individuals and the realization of democracy and equality on the basis of the principle of lifelong learning. The **Act on National Certificates of Language Proficiency No. 964/2004** and the **Government Decree on National Certificates of Language Proficiency No. 1163/2004** provide citizens with the opportunity to test their language skills through language proficiency tests.

The **Decree on the Qualifications of Educational Staff No. 986/1998**, entered into force on 1 January 1999, determines the qualifications requirements for principals and teachers in basic and pre-primary education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, as well as in liberal adult education and basic art education. The Decree applies to class, subject and special needs teachers as well as to pupil/student's counsellors and pre-primary teachers. The initial education of comprehensive and general upper secondary school teachers is regulated by the Decree on University Degrees of 2004. The teacher training schools responsible for the practical part of the teacher training programme operate under university faculties of education and are governed by the Universities Act and Decree. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

The purpose of the **Equality Act L21/2004** is to foster and safeguard equality in society. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, health, disability and sexual orientation. The Act applies to education as well as to working life. (NBE, 2008).

According to the new **Constitution**, entered into force on 1 March 2000 and last amended in 2011, everyone has the right to basic education free of charge. Provisions on the duty to receive education are laid down by an Act. The public authorities shall, as provided in more detail by an Act, guarantee for everyone equal opportunity to receive other educational services in accordance with their ability and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship (Section 16). The national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture (Section 17).

Section 25 of the Education Act of 1998, last amended in 2010, stipulates that children permanently residing in Finland shall attend compulsory schooling. Compulsory schooling shall start in the year during which the child turns 7. Compulsory schooling shall end when the basic education syllabus has been completed or ten years after the beginning of compulsory schooling. If, due to the child's disability or illness, the objectives set for basic education cannot be achieved in nine years, compulsory schooling shall begin one year earlier and be eleven years

in duration. Section 26a, introduced by the Amendment 1288/1999, indicates that a child shall be entitled to pre-primary education during the year preceding the beginning of compulsory schooling. Participation in pre-primary education shall be decided by the child's parent/guardian. Teaching, the necessary textbooks and other learning materials, and school equipment and materials shall be free of charge for the pupil (Section 31).

Administration and management of the education system

The Finnish Parliament decides on educational legislation and the general principles of educational policy. The government, the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education and other executive bodies are responsible for the implementation of this policy at the central administration level.

The **Ministry of Education and Culture** (since May 2010, previously the Ministry of Education) is the highest educational authority, also responsible for science, research, culture, sports and youth policies. Almost all publicly funded education is subordinate to or supervised by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC). The Ministry prepares the legislation and government resolutions concerning education. In 2012 the MEC is headed by two Ministers, one responsible for matters relating to education and research, and the other for matters relating to culture, sports, youth, copyright and student financial aid. The MEC comprises: the department for education policy; the department for higher education and science policy; the division for adult education and training; the department for cultural, sport and youth policy; and the administration department.

The most important sectors of education outside the Ministry's administrative field are day-care, under the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Health**; military training, under the **Ministry of Defence**; and police, border guard and fire and rescue training, under the **Ministry of the Interior**.

The **National Board of Education** (NBE), established in 1991 through the merging of the National Board of General Education and the National Board of Vocational Education, is a national agency subordinated to the MEC. The Board has a wide range of tasks related to the development of pre-primary and basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training (VET), formal adult education and training, liberal adult education and basic education in the arts. The NBE is responsible for designing the national core curricula for basic and general upper secondary education and the framework for vocational qualifications and competence-based qualifications; it is also in charge of national assessments of learning outcomes. It functions as an information centre for the education and training sector, offering high-quality information and expert services. The NBE also provides a range of support services, including the maintenance of the student selection register for upper secondary VET and polytechnics, the organization of language examinations, the organization and funding of further studies for teachers and other teaching staff, and the recognition of foreign qualifications. In 2012, the NBE operations are organized into five units: general education (comprising four expert units, including curriculum development for basic education and for upper secondary education); VET; information and evaluation services; services for the education sector and administration; and education in Swedish.



The **Education Evaluation Council**, and independent expert body established in 2003 and attached to the MEC, is responsible for its responsible for external evaluation and its development in the areas of basic education, upper secondary, vocational education and vocational adult education as well as independent civic education.

The task of the **National Education and Training Committees** for different fields and the **National Coordination Group for Education and Training** is to plan and develop vocationally-oriented education and training and to promote interaction between education and working life in cooperation with the MEC and the National Board of Education. The Training Committees are in charge of: monitoring and anticipating the development of VET and competences required in working life in their own field; making proposals to develop education and training in their field in terms of both quantity and quality; deal with the national core curricula and requirements of competence-based qualifications to be confirmed by the NBE and also issue opinions concerning their fields of competence. The **Adult Education Council** gives advice and proposes initiatives to develop adult education and training, and is in charge of regular assessments of the situation of adult education and training in the country.

The responsibility for the evaluation of polytechnics and universities rests with these institutions themselves, with the support of the **Higher Education Evaluation Council**, an independent expert body established in 1995 and operating under the MEC. According to the Decree of 2009, the mission of the Council consists in: assisting higher education institutions and the MEC in matters pertaining to evaluation; conducting evaluations relating to the activities and quality assurance systems of higher education institutions; supporting quality assurance and enhancement in higher education institutions; and participating in international evaluation activities and cooperation concerning evaluation.

In the six administrative areas in Finland (provinces) there were State Provincial Offices, normally with an Education and Culture Department led by a Provincial Counsellor. The new **Regional State Administrative Agencies** started their operations on 1 January 2010. The Agencies' tasks correspond to those of the former provincial offices, the occupational health and safety districts, environmental permit agencies and regional environmental centres. The Agencies work in close collaboration with local authorities. There are also 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment that started operating in January 2010. The tasks of the Centres comprise those of the former employment and economic centres, road districts, regional environmental centres and state provincial offices. The Centres operate in close collaboration with the Regional Councils. The latter draw up regional development plans in cooperation with the local authorities within their respective regions and the state authorities as well as representatives of economic life and non-governmental organizations. Regional development work also involves the 15 Employment and Economic Development Centres. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

Local administration is mainly managed by the local authorities (municipalities), which have self-government and the right to impose taxes. The highest power of decision is vested in the municipal council, and other bodies include the municipal board, several committees and management boards, their divisions as



well as commissions. There is at least one **education board** or equivalent body elected by the municipal council in each municipality (there were 336 municipalities in 2011).

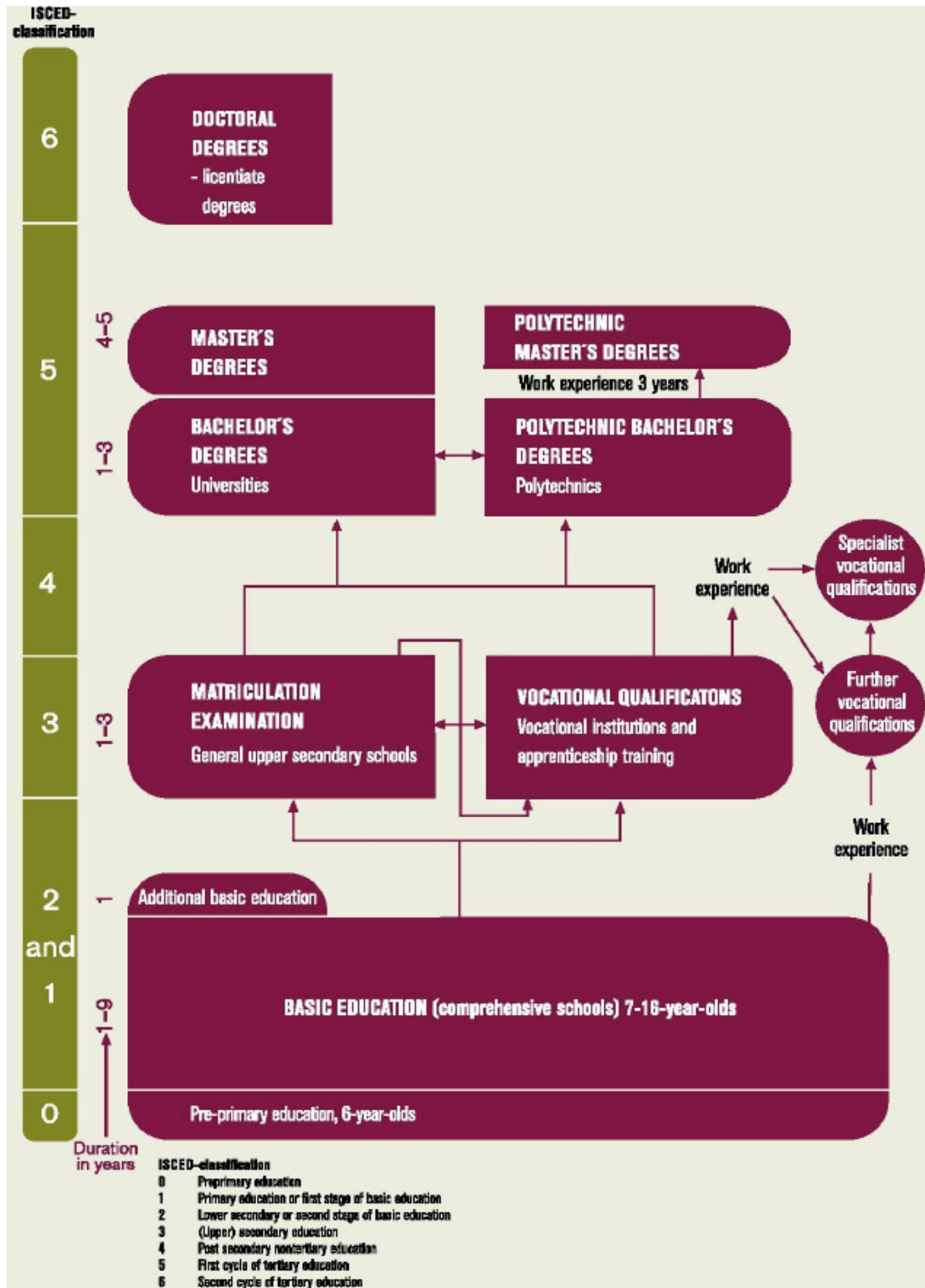
The local authorities are responsible for organizing and partly financing basic education at a local level. Each local authority may decide whether to provide pre-primary education in schools, in a day-care centre or in family day-care. The local authorities also provide general upper secondary, vocational, polytechnic and adult education. Almost all schools providing basic education are maintained by local authorities, which are generally responsible also for social welfare services for pupils and students. General upper secondary schools are mostly municipal institutions. VET institutions are maintained by the local authorities, federations of municipalities, the state and private organizations. In recent years, almost all state-owned vocational education institutions have been municipalized or privatized. The local authorities and the joint municipal authorities also maintain the majority of vocational education institutions. Providers of apprenticeship training (local authorities, joint municipal authorities, registered associations or foundations) are also responsible for supervising the apprenticeship contracts.

The administrative bodies of comprehensive schools and general upper secondary schools (normally boards) are determined by the administrative regulations and standing orders issued by the local authority in question. Each comprehensive and upper secondary school is required to have a **principal**, who is responsible for its operation. In addition, each institution providing general upper secondary education must have a student body composed of students, with the task of promoting student cooperation and schoolwork. The administration of vocational institutions is arranged according to the same principles applicable to general upper secondary schools. The board of a vocational institution may, in addition to the teaching staff, students and other staff, also include a sufficient number of working life experts from those fields in which the institution provides instruction. At the local level, vocational institutions may have one or more field-specific advisory councils.

Adult education and training may be provided by local authorities, joint municipal authorities, registered associations or foundations. The administration of educational institutions is mainly ensured by the institutional board appointed by the education provider. Continuing education centres of universities are subordinate to the universities. The majority of adult education centres and vocational adult education centres are owned by local authorities or joint municipal authorities. Folk high schools, physical education centres, summer universities, and study centres are private institutions under public supervision and they receive public support. The most important group of municipal adult education institutions is formed by adult education centres providing general education; the local authorities decide on their administration independently. Vocational adult education and training includes a system of qualification committees. These are appointed by the NBE and organized according to what is known as the tripartite principle. Their tasks include supervising and steering the organization of competence tests and giving out qualification certificates. (*Ibid.*).

Structure and organization of the education system

Finland: structure of the education system



Source: National Board of Education, 2008.

Pre-school education

Pre-primary education provided in conjunction with day-care is usually organized at day-care centres. These are institutions responsible for providing day-care and early childhood education for children aged from 0 to 6 years. Pre-primary education for 6-year-olds (comprising at least 700 hours per year) is provided in connection with basic education either in a separate pre-primary group or by teaching pre-primary children together with those in the first years of basic education. Participation in the pre-primary year is voluntary; since 2001 local authorities have to provide pre-primary education to all children one year prior to the start of compulsory education.

Primary and lower secondary education (comprehensive school)

The comprehensive school provides nine years of compulsory general education (primary and lower secondary) free of charge for the age group 7-16. There are no entrance requirements. 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). The comprehensive school was divided into the lower stage (years 1 to 6) and upper stage (years 7 to 9), but the Basic Education Act of 1998 only states that basic education lasts nine years and that during the first six years instruction is usually given by the class teacher. Local authorities may provide those who have completed the basic education programme with additional instruction comprising 1,100 hours. This 'tenth year' is voluntary and the local authorities decide whether the additional year is organized. Pupils having completed the nine-year comprehensive school receive the basic education certificate. A certificate on completing the additional syllabus is given to a pupil who has successfully completed the entire syllabus of additional education (i.e. the tenth year). National assessments of learning outcomes are mostly conducted in years 6 and 9 on a regular basis in mathematics and mother tongue and literature.

Secondary education

Post-compulsory upper secondary education is provided in general upper secondary schools and vocational education institutions, and is co-educational. 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. Entrance and aptitude tests are often organized for applicants. Upper secondary education is provided free of charge; some small fees may be charged for specific purposes (e.g. materials, examinations). The general upper secondary school syllabus normally takes three years to complete, but rather than being tied to years/forms it is organized into a minimum of 75 courses (compulsory, specialization and applied courses), each consisting of 38 lessons lasting an average of 45 minutes. At the end of general upper secondary schooling, students take a national matriculation examination comprising at least four tests; the test in the candidate's mother tongue is compulsory for all students. The general upper secondary school leaving certificate is awarded to a student who has completed the entire general upper secondary school syllabus and gives eligibility for higher education studies. Initial vocational qualifications require three years to complete (i.e. 120 credits, one credit being equivalent to an average of 40 hours of study). A qualification certificate is awarded upon completion of all compulsory, elective and

free-choice study modules included in the students' personal study plans. Since 2006, a vocational skills demonstration in the form of a competence test has been included in vocational qualifications. The three-year vocational qualifications give general eligibility for both polytechnics and universities. Initial vocational qualifications can also be received through apprenticeship training or through the competence-based qualification system. All upper secondary level vocational qualifications available at educational institutions may also be obtained through apprenticeship training. The practical training periods take place at the workplace in connection with ordinary work assignments; this is complemented by theoretical studies which may be arranged at VET institutions, vocational adult education centres, or other educational institutions.

Higher education

Higher education is offered by universities and professionally-oriented higher education institutions (i.e. polytechnics or universities of applied sciences–AMK) providing vocational programmes usually in multidisciplinary areas for matriculated students and those with vocational qualifications. The reform of higher education degrees in line with the Bologna process was introduced in 2005. First-cycle polytechnic programmes leading to a bachelor's degree normally take three to three and a half years to complete, equivalent to 180-240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits. Eligibility for second-cycle polytechnic degrees requires a relevant bachelor's degree and at least three years of relevant work or artistic experience. Programmes take one to one and a half years of full-time study to complete (60-90 ECTS). Universities provide a full range of academic studies and degrees. The duration of programmes leading to a bachelor's degree is normally three years on a full-time basis (180 ECTS; three and a half years in the case of the bachelor's in fine arts), and an additional two years of study (120 ECTS) lead to the award of a master's degree (two and a half years in the case of master's of music and of psychology). At the postgraduate level, the degree of *licentiate* can be completed in two years of full-time study after the master's degree (three years in the case of licentiate of veterinary medicine, taken after a three-year bachelor's degree in the same field), and requires the submission of a thesis. Programmes leading to a doctoral degree take approximately four years to complete on a full-time basis and require the submission of a dissertation. The duration of long first-cycle programmes is six years in the case of medicine (360 ECTS, leading to the degree of licentiate in medicine) and five and a half years (330 ECTS) in the case of dentistry. A specialist degree programme in dentistry can be pursued by holders of a licentiate degree in dentistry who have been licensed and have worked two years as a full-time dentist. A specialist degree programme in medicine is open to holders of a licentiate degree who have been granted a right or license to engage in the profession of medical doctor. It takes five to six years to complete, including theoretical courses, training in health care centres and special training in a university hospital.

Section 23 of the Basic Education Act, last amended in 2010, stipulates that the school year shall comprise 190 school days (normally divided into two terms). The Basic Education Decree of 1998 stipulates that the minimum number of lessons per week shall be 19 in the first and second years/classes, 23 on average in the third and fourth years, 24 on average in the fifth and sixth years, and at least 30 lessons a week in years 7 to 9 (or 222 lessons per 38 weeks distributed over nine years, for a



total of at least 8,436 lessons during the nine-year programme). A lesson is defined as a 60-minute period of which instruction must account for at least 45 minutes. In years 1 and 2, a school day may consist of no more than five lessons; in years 3 to 9, the maximum number is seven lessons per day. According to a proposal made in 2010 by the expert group on the basic education reform, the minimum number of lessons (not including optional classes) should be increased to 226 and distributed as follows: 20 in grades 1-2; 23 in grades 3-4; 25 in grades 5-6; and 30 in grades 7-9. This would increase to 8,588 the minimum number of lessons over nine years. In upper secondary education and training there are no specific provisions on the number of working days. The end of the spring term is used for final examinations and the oral and written matriculation examination. Schools operate five days per week; opening hours are not regulated and vary from school to school. The academic year usually begins in September and ends in May. It is divided in two terms. Most universities are active throughout the year and offer different summer courses and extra examinations.

The educational process

The main goal of educational policy since 1980s has been to increase the autonomy of the municipalities and individual schools. A decisive step was taken in 1993, when the government made its decision in principle concerning the guidelines for revising the comprehensive school curriculum. This new framework completely revised curricular guidelines at the national level and significantly enlarged curriculum options and student choice. At the same time, many of the provisions concerning the legal regulations of education were repealed and much of the former powers of the central administration were devolved to the local education authorities (municipalities) and to individual schools. One important aspect of the curriculum reform was the shift from a teacher-centred philosophy of the previous central curriculum to a more learner-centred approach to teaching. The active role of pupils as organizers of their own learning is also emphasized.

The Basic Education Act of 1998, last amended in 2010, sets the different responsibilities concerning the curriculum and includes provisions relating the content of education. Section 14 stipulates that the government shall determine the general national objectives of education and the allocation of lesson hours to the teaching of different subjects and subject groups and to guidance counselling (distribution of lesson hours). The National Board of Education (NBE) shall determine the objectives and core contents of different subjects and cross-curricular themes, guidance counselling and other education, as well as the basic principles of home-school cooperation and pupil welfare under the purview of the local education authority (core curriculum). As concerns pre-primary education, the decision on the allocation of lesson hours shall be prepared by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. As concerns pre-primary education, pupil welfare and home-school cooperation, the decision on the core curriculum shall be prepared by the National Board of Education in cooperation with the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health.

Section 15 of the Act indicates that the education provider shall adopt a curriculum for education. The curriculum shall be adopted separately for education given in the Finnish, Swedish and Sami languages and in other languages, where needed. The curriculum shall be drawn up, to the extent provided in the core



curriculum, in cooperation with the local executive social and health authorities. The education provider shall also determine the organization of home-school cooperation and of pupil welfare laid down in the core curriculum. When authorized by the competent Ministry, a common curriculum may be adopted for basic education and upper secondary education or a basic education curriculum may contain vocational studies. Section 11 states that the basic education syllabus shall contain the following core subjects: mother tongue and literature (i.e. Finnish or Swedish); the second national language (i.e. Swedish or Finnish); foreign languages; environmental and natural studies; health education; religious education or ethics; history; social studies; mathematics; physics; chemistry; biology; geography; physical education; music; visual arts; crafts; and home economics. Education may be based on syllabi of different extent. A pupil may be taught subjects suited for basic education other than those referred above, as determined in the curriculum. These subjects may be partially or completely optional or elective for pupils.

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

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

The national core curriculum for basic education was confirmed in January 2004 and introduced in schools in August 2006. It is the national framework on the basis of which the local curriculum is formulated. In designing a curriculum for basic education, attention is to be given to the pre-primary curriculum, the coherence of basic education, and other decisions made by the local authority in respect of children, young people and schooling. The core curriculum includes the underlying values and mission of basic education and addresses the principles of a good learning environment, operational culture, working approaches as well as the concept of learning. It also addresses aspects related to cooperation between home and school, pupils' learning plans, provision of educational and vocational guidance, remedial teaching, pupil welfare, pupils needing special support, and pupils from specific



cultural and language groups. In the 2010 revision of the core curriculum, it is stated that methods and working approaches should be chosen so as to create situations for interactive learning and working together and individually allowing pupils to develop skills that are important in terms of learning and their own future (competencies also defined as 'citizenship skills'). These include thinking and problem-solving, working and interaction, self-knowledge and responsibility, participation and influencing, as well as expression and manual skills. Work must diversely promote information and communication technology and online working skills. Methods and working approaches must also provide opportunities for the creative activity, experiences, and play characteristic of each age group. (NBE, 2011).

For each of the core subjects, the national core curriculum includes: the learning objectives and core contents, grouped into sections combining several grades/years (e.g. years 1-2, 3-5, 6-9, and also years 1-4 and 5-9 and other combinations, depending on the subject and the year in which it is introduced); and descriptions of pupils' good performance at the end of a specific section as well as final assessment criteria (normally in years 8 and 9) for a numerical grade of 8 or 'good' (when it is used), which specify on a national basis the knowledge and skills levels that constitute the basis of pupil assessment. Provisions are also included concerning optional subjects, which are intended to deepen and broaden knowledge and skills in core subjects, especially home economics and other artistic and skill subjects, and in cross-curricular themes, in accordance with the pupil's choice. Optional subjects are also intended to give pupils a chance to deepen their personal interests and find new objects of interest.

Cross-curricular themes represent central emphases of the educational and teaching work. Their objectives and contents are incorporated into numerous subjects; they integrate education and instruction. In defining the curriculum, cross-curricular themes are to be included in the core and optional subjects and in joint events as assemblies, and are to be manifest in the school's operational culture. There are seven cross-curricular themes, e.g. growth as a person; cultural identity and internationalism; media skills and communication; participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship; responsibility for the environment, well-being, and a sustainable future; safety and traffic; technology and the individual.

The tasks of assessment are to guide and encourage studying and to depict how well the pupil has met the objectives established for growth and learning. Assessment must be truthful and based on a diversity of evidence; it has to address the pupil's learning and progress in the different areas in relation to the curriculum objectives and descriptions of good performance. In addition to the school years reports, the pupil and his or her parents/guardians are to be given assessment feedback adequately and in a diverse manner. Information should focus on pupil's progress and strengths as well as those areas of learning that need improvement. The final assessment must be nationally comparable and treat the pupils equally. In the final phase of basic education (e.g. years 8 and 9), assessment of pupil's learning in core subjects is graded numerically. (NBE, 2004b).

The national core curriculum for general upper secondary education was revised in 2003 and local curricula based on this national framework were gradually implemented starting from August 2005. The local curriculum must be drawn up in

such a way as to take account of the upper secondary school's operating environment, local value choices and competence strengths as well as special resources. The education provider may approve the curriculum for an individual municipality or upper secondary school. It may contain regional, municipal and school-specific sections. General upper secondary school studies consist of compulsory, specialization and applied courses. Specialization courses are elective courses relating to compulsory courses in the same subject and students must include at least ten such courses as part of their individual study plan. Students must complete the compulsory courses and, in addition, a number of specialization courses determined in the national distribution of lesson hours. Students may select other specialization courses from either national or school-specific courses. Schools can also offer applied courses. Students may also select courses from other institutions within certain limitations. Instruction may be given particular emphasis by focusing on specialization and applied courses in the chosen special field. The curriculum must include descriptions of all courses; the objectives and core contents of applied courses must also be determined within the local curriculum.

As in the case of basic education, the core curriculum of 2003 includes the basic values and role of general upper secondary education and addresses the concept of learning (which emphasizes students' own active knowledge construction), principles of a good learning environment, working methods and operational culture. It also addresses aspects related to cooperation between home and school, provision of counselling and guidance, student welfare services, students needing special support, and students from specific cultural and language groups (i.e. Sami, Roma, sign language students, immigrant and other foreign-language students).

For each of the compulsory and nationally-determined specialization courses in different subjects, the national core curriculum includes the key learning objectives and core contents as well as general criteria for assessment. Most of the compulsory subject areas are similar to those of basic education, e.g.: mother tongue and literature; the second national language; foreign languages; mathematics; biology; geography; physics; chemistry; religious education; ethics; history; social studies; health education; physical education; music; and visual arts. In addition, there are philosophy and psychology. A subject syllabus consists of the compulsory and specialization courses according to each student's individual study plan, as well as of applied courses closely linked to these courses. The inclusion of applied courses in different subject syllabi is determined within the local curriculum.

Cross-curricular themes in general upper secondary education are policies that structure the upper secondary school's operational culture and priority areas that cross subject boundaries and integrate education. They deal with issues concerning the way of life as a whole. The objectives uniting all cross-curricular themes are for students to be able to: observe and analyze contemporary phenomena and operating environments; express justified ideas of a desirable future; assess their own lifestyle and prevailing trends from a future perspective; and make choices and take action for the future that they consider as being desirable. The cross-curricular themes common to all upper secondary schools are the following: active citizenship and entrepreneurship; safety and well-being; sustainable development; cultural identity and knowledge of cultures; technology and society; and communication and media competence. In addition to these, education providers may also introduce other cross-



curricular themes in their own curricula. The cross-curricular themes are to be taken into account in instruction in all subjects as appropriate for each particular subject, as well as in the upper secondary school's operational culture. The main points of the cross-curricular themes are included in the subject-specific sections of the national core curriculum.

The role of assessment of student learning is to provide students with feedback on their progress and learning results both during and upon completion of upper secondary school studies. The purpose of such feedback is to encourage and guide students in their studies. Each course shall be assessed upon completion. Each student's progress in studies must be monitored. Course assessment must be diverse and based not only on possible written tests, but also on continuous observation of students' progress in their studies and assessment of their skills and knowledge. Students' own self-assessment may also be taken into account, making use of methods such as course assessment discussions. (NBE, 2003).

Pre-primary education

As mentioned, pre-primary education provided in conjunction with day-care is usually organized at day-care centres. These are institutions responsible for providing day-care and early childhood education for children aged from 0 to 6 years and are under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Pre-primary education for 6-year-olds comprises at least 700 hours a year, and is provided in connection with basic education either in a separate pre-primary group or by teaching pre-primary children together with those in the first years of basic education.

Since August 2001 each child 6 years old has the right to pre-primary education, which generally starts one year prior to the commencement of compulsory education. Participation in pre-primary education is voluntary but local authorities have to provide pre-primary education for children within extended compulsory education and for children who start basic education one year later than stipulated. 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. Pre-primary education, meals, health care and travel (if the distance exceeds five kilometers), are provided free of charge. Children are also entitled to a day-care place. In day-care, parents/guardians pay an income-based fee. In 2007 almost 80% of children received pre-primary education in a day-care centre. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

The model of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is described as 'education-care' (*educare*) because the basic elements of it are care, education and teaching. The goals of learning are not prescribed and there is no formal assessment. The focus is child-centred and the ECEC place is conceived as a community where parents, children and pedagogues are working together. ECEC is perceived as a possibility to reduce the effect of the social background and circumstances and provide children with equitable opportunities to develop to fulfil their potential. According to the national curriculum guidelines on ECEC of 2003, the purpose of ECEC is to improve the child's overall well-being, thus providing the best possible circumstances for the child to grow, develop and learn. The value and nature of childhood is emphasized 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. (Eurydice 2009/10; Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10).

The national core curriculum for preschool education was confirmed on 19 December 2000 and came into force in August 2002. On the basis of the core curriculum municipalities design their own curricula for pre-primary education both in the day-care centres and the schools. The Basic Education Act and the corresponding Decree determine the general objectives of basic education, which also apply to pre-primary education. A central task of pre-primary education is to promote children's favourable growth, development and learning opportunities. The general principles set forth in the core curriculum emphasize the child's individuality, the significance of active learning and the importance of acting as a group member. Pre-primary education is based on the child's own knowledge, skills and experiences. Its focus is on play and a positive outlook on life. Another central consideration is to promote the child's own initiative and to emphasize its significance as the foundation for all activities. The core curriculum does not specify different subjects as the educational process is based on integration, which means that it is composed of themes related to children's sphere of life, on the one hand, and to contents expanding and analyzing children's views of the world, on the other. The key learning areas/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 core curriculum was revised in 2010.

Special support in pre-primary education includes the necessary methods related to early identification, prevention and rehabilitation of learning difficulties. The primary requirement is to support the development of each child's positive self-concept and healthy self-esteem and to ensure equal membership of the group. Each child in need of special support must be provided with an individual plan for pre-primary education together with the parents or guardians. During pre-primary education, special needs education is primarily organized in connection with other instruction in the form of team teaching, in small groups or as individual study. Children in need of special support may also be gathered into a separate group.

Pre-primary education for 6-year-olds comprises a minimum of 700 hours per year and a maximum four hours a day. Each pre-primary education provider decides on the timetables, the number of working days, the start and end dates and other practical arrangements. In municipalities, pre-primary education is given roughly at the same time as schools operate during the school year.

Working methods are based on playful group and individual guidance stemming from each child's development level. The activities take children's need to learn through imagination and play into account. 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 rest. The essential factors of the learning environment include interaction between the teacher and each child and that between the children, different operating methods and learning assignments. Teachers may freely choose the 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, examining, active participation, and other information processing and problem solving in interaction with adults and peers. It is possible to organize pre-primary education based on different pedagogic methods that emphasize language or the growth of the human being through art and activity. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

Assessment in pre-primary education 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 in regular discussions with them and possibly also with their children. Pre-primary education also promotes children's capabilities for self-evaluation, which will support the 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-primary education provided.

Over 99% of the 6-year-olds attended pre-primary education in 2004. According to the National Board of Education, in 2009 pre-primary education was provided to 12,580 children in school-based settings and to 44,405 children in day-care centres, for a total of 56,985 children representing 99.4% of the 6-year-olds. Statistics Finland reports that in 2011 there were 58,800 children in pre-primary education, of whom 46,200 were in day-care centres. (Statistics Finland website, data released in November 2011).

Primary and lower secondary education (comprehensive school)

As mentioned, the comprehensive school encompasses primary and lower secondary education and provides nine years of compulsory general education free of charge for the age group 7-16. There are no entrance requirements. 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). The comprehensive school was divided into the lower stage (years 1 to 6) and upper stage (years 7 to 9), but the Basic Education Act of 1998 only states that basic education lasts nine years and that during the first six years instruction is usually given by the class teacher.

Local authorities may provide those who have completed the basic education programme with additional instruction comprising 1,100 hours. This 'tenth year' is voluntary and the local authorities decide whether the additional year is organized. Pupils having completed the nine-year comprehensive school receive the basic education certificate. A certificate on completing the additional syllabus is given to a pupil who has successfully completed the entire syllabus of additional education (i.e. the tenth year). National assessments of learning outcomes are mostly conducted in years 6 and 9 on a regular basis in mathematics and mother tongue and literature.

Comprehensive schools are primarily run by local authorities, with the exception of a few private schools. The school premises may house all years/classes of basic education (1–9), the first six, the last three, and sometimes the last three years (7-9) co-exist with a general upper secondary school. There is a great variation in sizes of comprehensive schools. The classes are made up of pupils of the same age. Smaller schools may have combined classes with pupils from different age groups.



(Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10). Basic education in the arts differs from compulsory basic education and is provided by music, art, dance, visual arts and craft schools and other institutes. The objectives and core contents are determined in national core curricula devised by the National Board of Education (NBE) for nine different art forms, e.g. music, literary arts, dance, performing arts (circus and theatre), and visual arts (architecture, audiovisual art, visual arts, and craft).

According to the Basic Education Act, last amended in 2010, the general objective of basic education is to support pupils' growth towards humane and ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed in life. Equality in education shall be promoted as well as pupils' opportunities to participate in education and to otherwise develop themselves during their lives. (NBE, 2008). The general national objectives for pre-primary education, basic education, voluntary additional basic education and preparatory education for immigrants are provided in the Government Decree No. 1435/2001.

The underlying values and mission of basic education are further elaborated in the revised national core curriculum for basic education of 2004, introduced in schools in 2006. The underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. Basic education promotes responsibility, a sense of community, and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual. The basis of instruction is Finnish culture, which has developed in interaction with indigenous, Nordic, and European cultures. Special national and local attributes, the national languages, the two national churches, the Sami as an indigenous people and national minorities must be taken into account in the educational process. Basic education helps to support the formation of pupils' own cultural identity, and his or her part in Finnish society and a globalizing world. It also helps to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding. Basic education helps to increase both regional equality and equality among individuals. The diversity of learners is taken into consideration, and gender equality is promoted by giving girls and boys the ability to act on the basis of equal rights and responsibilities in society, working life and family life. In the local curriculum the values that underlie education are to be specified, incorporated into the objectives and contents of basic education and into everyday activity.

Basic education has both an educational and an instructional mission. Its task is, on the one hand, to offer children the opportunity to acquire general education and complete their educational obligations; and, on the other, to furnish the society with a tool for developing educational capital and enhancing equality and a sense of community. Basic education must provide an opportunity for diversified growth, learning, and development of a healthy sense of self-esteem, so that pupils can acquire the knowledge and skills they need in life, become capable of further study, and, as involved citizens, develop a democratic society. Basic education must also support each pupil's linguistic and cultural identity and the development of his/her mother tongue. A further objective is to awaken a desire for lifelong learning. (NBE, 2004b).

With regard to the necessary knowledge and skills, the Government Decree of 2001 indicates that instruction must give pupils a basis for a broad general education and ingredients and stimuli for broadening and deepening their world-views. This requires knowledge of human feelings and needs, religions and different views of life,



history, culture and literature, nature and health, and economics and technology. The instruction must offer aesthetic experiences in different aspects of culture and opportunities to develop manual skills, creativity and sport skills. The instruction should 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 pupils learn the fundamentals of mathematical thinking and the application of mathematics, and have a command of information and communication technologies. 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.

The national core curriculum of 2004 includes the following core subjects: mother tongue and literature (i.e. Finnish or Swedish); the second national language (i.e. Swedish or Finnish); foreign languages; environmental and natural studies; health education; religious education or ethics; history; social studies; mathematics; physics; chemistry; biology; geography; physical education; music; visual arts; crafts; and home economics. The subjects (or subject groups) are grouped into sections combining several years/grades. The sections for mother tongue and literature and mathematics cover years 1-2, 3-5 and 6-9. A first foreign language is normally introduced in year 3, and a second foreign language in years 7-9. Environmental and natural studies (in years 1-4 only) include elements of biology, geography, physics, chemistry and health. Biology and geography as well as physics and chemistry are taught as combined subjects in years 5-6 and include elements of health education; in years 7-9, biology, geography, physics, chemistry and health education are taught as separate subjects. The sections for history cover years 5-6 and 7-9, and those for religion (Lutheranism, Orthodox religion and others religions) and ethics encompass years 1-5 and 6-9. Ethics is a multidisciplinary subject, including elements of philosophy, social sciences and cultural studies, human relations and moral growth, self-knowledge and cultural identity, the community and human rights, and the individual and the world. The sections for music, visual arts, crafts and physical education encompass years 1-4 and 5-9. Crafts are implemented through projects and subject areas, and the aim is develop creativity, problem-solving skills and understanding of technological phenomena, and aesthetic, technical and psychomotor skills. Social studies and home economics are introduced as separate subjects in years 7-9. The aim of home economics is to develop cooperation aptitudes, information acquisition and practical working skills required to manage day-to-day life. Guidance and counselling activities are organized in order to boost the productivity of schoolwork, enhance well-being at school, and prevent social exclusion (sections cover years 1-2, 3-5, and 6-9). Counselling should also help promoting educational, ethnic and gender equality. Introduction to working life periods shall also be organized for the pupils as a basis for their educational and occupational choices and to enhance their respect for work. (NBE, 2004b; see also precedent sections).

Before- and after-school activities refer to supervised activities provided for pupils in basic education according to the Basic Education Act. Before- and after-school activities are based on the values of basic education, which include human rights, equality, democracy, preservation of natural diversity and viability of the environment, and acknowledgement of multiculturalism. In the same way as basic education, activities should promote responsibility, a sense of community and respect

for the rights and freedoms of the individual. The key purpose of activities is to support children's growth and development, while also supporting their families and schools in their educational tasks. The provision is organized according to the National Framework issued by the NBE and effective 1 August 2011. (NBE, 2011c).

In the context of special needs education, integration means the aim to implement special needs education, as far as possible, in connection with and integrated into mainstream educational services. Integration has been promoted in basic education since the 1970s. The first alternative for providing special needs education is to include pupils with special education needs in mainstream classes and, when necessary, provide special needs education in small teaching groups. Only when this is not feasible is the second alternative considered: the provision of special needs education in a special group, class or school. Instruction for pupils admitted or transferred to special needs education is usually organized either within general or extended compulsory education as determined in the decision concerning admission or transfer to special needs education. Pupils with minor learning or adjustment difficulties are provided with special needs education in conjunction with mainstream education. In such cases, only some education is provided as special needs education (part-time special needs education) by exploiting teaching and support measures. Part-time special needs education is provided by special needs teachers. (Eurydice, 2009/10). If, owing to a child's disability or illness, the objectives set for basic education cannot be achieved in nine years, compulsory education will begin one year earlier and be 11 years in duration. The duration of pre-primary education provided for pupils falling within extended compulsory education may be one or two years. The purpose is to consolidate these pupils' abilities to help them cope with their studies in basic education as well as possible. Extended compulsory education is intended for children with severe disabilities, including those with visual and hearing impairments as well as those with other severe physical or intellectual disabilities or developmental delays. A serious illness may also be a reason for extended compulsory education. As a general rule, a decision on extended compulsory education is made before commencement of compulsory education. (NBE, 2011).

The government decides on the overall time allocation by defining the minimum number of weekly lessons per year for core and elective subjects. Within the framework of the national core curriculum the municipalities or the schools themselves are free to decide at which stage the subjects are studied. The Basic Education Decree of 1998 stipulates that the minimum number of lessons per week shall be 19 in years 1-2, 23 on average in years 3-4, 24 on average in years 5-6, and at least 30 lessons a week in years 7 to 9. This means a total of 222 lessons per 38 weeks distributed over nine years, or a minimum of 8,436 lessons during the nine-year programme (a lesson is defined as a 60-minute period of which instruction must account for at least 45 minutes). In years 1 and 2, a school day may consist of no more than five lessons; in years 3 to 9, the maximum number is seven lessons per day. According to a proposal made in 2010 by the expert group on the basic education reform, the minimum number of lessons (not including optional classes) should be increased to 226 and distributed as follows: 20 in years 1-2; 23 in years 3-4; 25 in years 5-6; and 30 in years 7-9. This would increase to 8,588 the minimum number of lessons over the nine-year programme.



Instruction is mainly provided by a class teacher in grades 1–6 and by subject teachers in the upper grades (7–9). However, an individual school’s curriculum may also determine its provision in another way. In grades 7-9 the pupils also have a tutor, that is, one of the teachers assigned the overall responsibility of one group. In years 7-9, both core and elective subjects are included as well as introduction to working life periods. The municipality (or the school) decides what optional subjects are offered. Elective subjects in years 7-9 may include, for example, advanced courses in the compulsory subjects, or courses where the knowledge acquired in those subjects is applied in a new way, courses in foreign languages, computer skills, or combinations formed from various subjects. In addition to the power to decide how lessons are distributed, the municipality or school can also allocate a higher number of lessons to compulsory subjects.

The minimum number of lessons per subject or subject group is shown in the table below:

Finland. Basic education: minimum number of lessons per subject/subject group over the nine-year programme

Years/subject	1-2	3-5	6-9	Total
Mother tongue and literature	14	14	14	42
Mathematics	6	12	14	32
Years/subject	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
A language	–	8	8	16
B language	–	–	6	6
Years/subject	1-4	5-6	7-9	Total
Biology and geography		3	7	
Physics and chemistry	9	2	7	31
Health education			3	
History and social studies	–	3	7	10
Years/subject	1-5	6-9		Total
Religion/Ethics	6	5		11
Years/subject	1-4		5-9	Total
Music	4		3	
Visual arts	4	26 30*	4	56
Crafts	4		7	
Physical education	8		10	
Years/subject	1-6	7-9		Total
Home economics	–	3		3
Counselling	–	2		2
Elective subjects	–	13		13
Minimum number of lessons				222
(years 1-9)				
Years/subject	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
Optional A language	–	(6)	(6)	(12)

Source: Government Decree No. 1435/2001, November 2001; NBE, 2004b. A lesson includes 45 minutes of teaching.

Note: The minimum number of lessons per week is: 19 in years 1-2; 23 in years 3-4; 24 in years 5-6; and 30 in years 7-9. In years 1–4, the integrated subject ‘environment and nature studies’ includes contents relating to biology, geography, physics and chemistry as well as health education. A or B language mainly refer to foreign language.

(*) 26 lessons in years 1-4 and 30 lessons in years 5-9.

As mentioned, the distribution of the minimum number of lessons is being revised. Some of the issues that have been addressed include: how arts and crafts subjects could be strengthened, what new subjects are needed, how the language choices made by the pupils could be made more versatile, and how the use of ICT could be strengthened. The national core curricula will be reformed on the basis of the new time allocation. The quality of basic education has been addressed by drawing up national quality criteria. The purpose of the quality criteria is to secure the quality and a diverse supply of education and to guarantee the basic educational rights of children irrespective of their place of residence, native language and socioeconomic background. Quality criteria will offer a tool for local policy-makers for evaluating



shorter- and longer-term effects of their decisions on school quality. The quality criteria comprise four quality cards for the quality of structures and six quality cards relating to the pupils. The latter include issues such as implementation of the curriculum, support to learning, growth and well-being, school-home cooperation and safety of the learning environment. The cards include a description, quality criteria and factors supporting operations. Each card contains criteria for both education providers and schools. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

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

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

Pupils' assessment must be truthful and based on a diversity of evidence; it has to address the pupil's learning and progress in the different areas in relation to the curriculum objectives and descriptions of good performance. In verbal assessment, the description helps the teacher assess the pupil's progress and determine whether the pupil has acceptably met the objectives for the school year. Subjects, subject groups, and behaviour are evaluated numerically, by verbal summaries, or a combination of both. In assessment in core subjects, the report is to employ grades by year 8 at the latest (or earlier if the pupil completes all studies in some core subject before year 8). In addition to the school years reports, the pupil and his or her parents/guardians are to be given assessment feedback adequately and in a diverse manner. Information should focus on pupil's progress and strengths as well as those areas of learning that need improvement. Excepting the environmental and natural studies subject group, all basic education subjects are assessed separately or as a study module when they are combined (e.g. biology-geography and physics-chemistry in years 5-6). Work skills and behaviour are also assessed, and pupils' self-assessment is encouraged.



The final assessment must be nationally comparable and treat the pupils equally. A numerical grade of 8 ('good') is given if, on average, the pupil demonstrates the performance level of knowledge and skills required by the criteria for the subject. The numerical grades range from 4 (fail) to 10 (excellent). A grade of 5 is given if the pupil has acquired the knowledge and skills adequately, or is able to demonstrate to some degree the performance level required. In the final phase of basic education (e.g. years 8 and 9), the following core subjects are to be graded numerically: mother tongue and literature; the first and second national languages; foreign languages (English or another language is normally introduced in year 3; an additional foreign language is taken in years 7-9); mathematics; physics; chemistry; biology; geography; health education; religion or ethics; history; social studies; music; visual arts; crafts; physical education; and home economics. Optional subjects involving fewer than two weekly lessons per year (e.g. fewer than 76 yearly lessons) or modules consisting of such syllabi are assessed verbally. (NBE, 2004b).

Attendance is practically universal and almost all pupils complete the comprehensive school. The drop-out rate is approximately 0.3%. (NBE, 2008). According to Statistics Finland, in 2004 there were 3,720 comprehensive schools with 634,199 pupils enrolled.

Statistics Finland reports that in 2011 there were 541,931 pupils enrolled in basic education, of whom 264,035 were girls. There were 2,870 active comprehensive schools and municipalities ran 97% of these schools. In 2009/10, 23.3% of pupils (or 128,700 comprehensive school pupils) received part-time special needs education (i.e. individual support to a pupil two to four hours a week provided by a special needs teacher). Altogether 11.5% of boys and 5.5% of girls had been transferred to special education; 27% of boys and 19% of girls attended part-time special needs education during the 2009/10 school year. In 2010, 30% of those transferred to special education were fully and 24% partially integrated into groups attending general education. In all, 32% of those transferred to special education received teaching in special groups in comprehensive schools and 14% in special schools. (Statistics Finland website; data released in November 2011).

In the spring term of 2008, there were 41,126 teachers and principals in basic education; 89.4% of full-time teachers (excluding school heads), 99.2% of school heads, and 27.3% of part-time teachers were qualified. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

Upper secondary education

Post-compulsory upper secondary education is provided in general upper secondary schools and vocational education institutions. Students in general upper secondary education intended for young people are usually 16 to 19 years of age; students in vocational education and training are mainly aged 16-25 years. 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. Entrance and aptitude tests are often organized for applicants. Upper secondary education is provided free of charge; some small fees may be charged for specific purposes (e.g. materials, examinations).



The general upper secondary school syllabus normally takes three years to complete, but rather than being tied to years/forms it is organized into a minimum of 75 courses (compulsory, specialization and applied courses), each consisting of 38 lessons lasting an average of 45 minutes. At the end of general upper secondary schooling, students take a national matriculation examination comprising at least four tests; the test in the candidate's mother tongue is compulsory for all students. The general upper secondary school leaving certificate is awarded to a student who has completed the entire general upper secondary school syllabus and gives eligibility for higher education studies.

Initial vocational qualifications require three years to complete in terms of school-based full-time studies (i.e. 120 credits, one credit being equivalent to an average of 40 hours of study). A qualification certificate is awarded upon completion of all compulsory, elective and free-choice study modules included in the students' personal study plans. Since 2006, a vocational skills demonstration in the form of a competence test has been included in vocational qualifications. The three-year vocational qualifications give general eligibility for both polytechnics and universities. Initial vocational qualifications can also be received through apprenticeship training or through the competence-based qualification system. All upper secondary level vocational qualifications available at educational institutions may also be obtained through apprenticeship training. The practical training periods take place at the workplace in connection with ordinary work assignments; this is complemented by theoretical studies which may be arranged at VET institutions, vocational adult education centres, or other educational institutions.

General upper secondary education is provided by upper secondary schools, upper secondary schools for adults, and other educational institutions. Most providers of general upper secondary education are local authorities (about 87% in 2008). A VET provider may be a local authority, a municipal training consortium, a foundation or other registered association, or a state company. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

According to the General Upper Secondary Schools Act of 1998, the objective of general upper secondary education is to promote the development of students into good, balanced and civilized individuals and members of society and to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for further studies, working life, their personal interests and the diverse development of their personalities. In addition, the education must support students' opportunities for lifelong learning and self-development during their lives. The objectives and basic values of general upper secondary education are further elaborated in the Government Decree 955/2002 and the national core curriculum for upper secondary schools of 2003.

The basic values of are built on Finnish cultural history, which is part of Nordic and European cultural heritage. At upper secondary school, students should learn how to treasure, assess and renew their cultural heritage. Upper secondary education is based on respect for life and human rights and students will be educated in the spirit of tolerance and international cooperation. The educational ideal of the upper secondary school comprises the pursuit of truth, humaneness and justice. General upper secondary education must promote open democracy, equality and well-being. Students are seen to be the constructors of their own learning, competence and views of the world. Educational work will place emphasis on cooperation,

encouraging interaction and honesty. The aim is for students to know their rights and responsibilities and to grow to assume adult responsibility for their own choices and actions. During their upper secondary school years, students must be provided with experiences of how to shape the future through joint decisions and efforts. Upper secondary education must encourage students to recognize conflicts between stated values and reality and to reflect critically the disadvantages and opportunities of Finnish society and international development. Students must become able to form a structured understanding of basic civil rights in Finland, the Nordic countries and the European Union, their meaning in practical terms and ways to uphold and promote them. The upper secondary school must highlight the principles of sustainable development and provide capabilities to face the challenges posed by the changing world. The basic values of upper secondary school are consolidated by cross-curricular themes, which are value-based positions on current challenges in education and schooling. Each curriculum will make the basic values more concrete in terms of those issues that are essential to each specific upper secondary school. The basic values must be conveyed to the upper secondary school's operational culture, to the objectives and contents of instruction in all subjects and to the organization of schoolwork. (NBE, 2003 and 2008).

With regard to the necessary knowledge and skills, the Government Decree of 2002 indicates that the student must be provided with 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 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. 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. (NBE, 2003).

As mentioned, general upper secondary school studies consist of compulsory, specialization and applied courses. All students must complete the compulsory courses. Specialization courses are elective courses relating to compulsory courses in the same subject and students must include at least ten such courses as part of their individual study plan. Students must complete the compulsory courses and, in addition, a number of specialization courses determined in the national distribution of lesson hours. Students may select other specialization courses from either national or school-specific courses. Schools can also offer applied courses. Students may also select courses from other institutions within certain limitations. Most of the compulsory subject areas are similar to those of basic education (see precedent sections). The syllabus consists of a minimum of 75 courses. For each subject or subject group the curriculum determines the courses which students are required to pass in order to progress in the subject or subject group concerned. The table below presents the distribution of lessons in general upper secondary education for young people. One course comprises 38 lessons a year; therefore the number of courses shown in the table below should be multiplied by 38 to calculate the number of

lessons. 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.

Finland. Upper secondary school: distribution of lessons per courses

Subject or subject group	Number of compulsory courses	Number of national courses offered as specialization courses
Mother tongue and literature	6	3
<i>Languages:</i>		
Language studied in years 1-6 of comprehensive school (A language)	6	2
Language studied in years 7-9 of comprehensive school (B language)	5	2
Other languages		16
<i>Mathematics:</i>		
Basic course	6	2
Advanced course	10	3
<i>Environment and natural sciences:</i>		
Biology	2	3
Geography	2	2
Physics	1	7
Chemistry	1	4
Religion/ethics	3	2
Philosophy	1	3
Psychology	1	4
History	4	2
Social studies	2	2
Arts and physical education	5	3
Music	1-2	3
Visual arts	1-2	3
Physical education	2	3
Health education	1	2
Educational & vocational guidance	1	1
Compulsory courses	47-51	
Min. total of specialization courses	10	
Applied courses	(to be added to reach the minimum total)	
Minimum total requirement	75	

Source: Government Decree No. 955/2002 of November 2002; NBE, 2003.



The conception of learning that emphasizes students' own active knowledge construction process calls for upper secondary schools to create study environments which will enable students to set their own objectives and learn to work independently and collaboratively in different groups and networks. Education must also take into account the fact that the abilities of students for independent study vary and that they need teachers to act as supervisors of their studies in different ways. Students must be provided with tools to acquire and produce information and to assess the reliability of information by guiding them to apply the ways of acquiring and producing skills and knowledge. Study situations must be planned so as to enable students to also apply what they have learnt in other situations. Some studies may be provided in the form of distance learning, as independent study or in a foreign language.

The role of assessment is to provide students with feedback on their progress and learning results both during and upon completion of upper secondary school studies. The purpose of such feedback is to encourage and guide students in their studies. Each course shall be assessed upon completion. Each student's progress in studies must be monitored. Course assessment must be diverse and based not only on possible written tests, but also on continuous observation of students' progress in their studies and assessment of their skills and knowledge. Students' own self-assessment may also be taken into account, making use of methods such as course assessment discussions. The compulsory and nationally-determined specialization courses in each subject are assessed numerically. The methods of assessment for other specialization and applied courses may include numerical assessment, a pass or a fail mark, or verbal assessment, as determined within the curriculum. Numerical grades may also be complemented and specified by written verbal assessment and oral feedback given in an assessment discussion. The scale of grades used in numerical assessment is 4–10, where 4 indicates failed, 5 adequate, 6 moderate, 7 satisfactory, 8 good, 9 very good, and 10 excellent.. Some courses are assessed with passed/failed. (NBE, 2003).

The tests of the matriculation examination are initially checked and assessed by each upper secondary school teacher of the subject concerned, and finally by the Matriculation Examination Board. The examination consists of at least four tests; the test in the candidate's mother tongue is compulsory for all students. The candidate then chooses three other compulsory tests from among the following: second national language, a foreign language, mathematics, and one test in the general studies battery of tests (sciences and humanities). The candidate may include, in addition, as part of his or her examination, one or more optional tests. The scale of grades used in the matriculation examination combines Latin grades and numerical points, where 0 indicates failed, 2 passed, and 7 praised. The general upper secondary school-leaving certificate and the certificate for completion of a syllabus indicate the subjects studied, the number of courses completed within these subjects and the grade for each subject in words and numbers or a mark (passed) for acceptable completion of the subject. (Eurydice, 2009/10; NBE, 2003).

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) Act of 1998 stipulates that the aim of upper secondary VET is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain vocational expertise, as well as the capabilities to find employment or to become self-employed. Upper secondary VET provide students with extensive basic vocational skills for various assignments in their field and more specialized competence and vocational skills as required by working life in one sector of the



qualification. This would enable those who are qualified to find placements in working life, to perform various tasks in their field in changing conditions, and so to develop their vocational skills throughout their lives. The objective of VET is to encourage students to take up interests and to develop their personalities as well as enhance their capabilities for further education by providing them with diverse elective and free-choice studies. VET aims at creating an open and positive learning environment to students with different learning capabilities, and to support the positive individual development and healthy self-esteem of students. VET also aims at promoting democracy, equality between men and women as well as general equality in working life and society. (NBE, 2008).

Vocational upper secondary qualifications and study programmes are defined in a Ministry of Education decree. The fields of education are: humanities and education; culture; social science, business and administration; natural sciences; technology, communication and transport; natural resources and the environment; social services, health and sport; tourism, catering and domestic services. Upper secondary VET in humanities, education and sports is mainly provided by liberal adult education institutions. There are altogether 52 vocational upper secondary qualifications and 120 training programmes within these qualifications. The qualifications provide the students with a wide variety of basic skills as well as more specialized skills in some areas.

The VET curriculum system consists of national core curricula, provider's locally approved curricula, and students' personal study plans. The national core curricula are defined by the NBE in cooperation with employers' organizations, trade unions, the Trade Union of Education and student unions. Local curricula and students' personal study plans must follow the relevant national core curriculum. Local tripartite bodies as well as other representatives of working life take part in the curriculum work as advisers and consultants. Local curricula are approved by the boards of education providers. According to the Government Resolution, a curriculum includes: vocational studies and on-the-job learning which vary according to the qualification (90 credits); core subjects, common to all qualifications (20 credits, of which 16 are compulsory and four are optional). These are: studies in the native language; the other national language and a foreign language; mathematics; physics and chemistry; social, business and labour-market subjects; health education; physical education; arts and culture; environmental studies; ICT; ethics, other cultures; psychology and entrepreneurship; free-choice studies, which vary (10 credits). Prior learning acquired in training, working life or other learning environments can be recognized as part of the qualification. These studies include at least 1.5 credits of student counselling and a final project with a minimum two credits. Where Swedish is the language of instruction, the scope of compulsory studies is 17 credits and that of optional studies three credits, whereas studies in the other national language (Finnish) comprise two credits. All 120-credit upper secondary vocational qualifications include a period of on-the-job learning with a minimum scope of 20 credits. In the case of apprenticeship training, approximately 70–80% of the training takes place at a workplace under the supervision of the responsible on-the-job instructor(s). Theoretical education is mainly provided by a vocational institution or vocational adult education centre. Vocational skills demonstrations were introduced as a way of assessment in August 2006 and they mostly take place during the periods of on-the-job learning. (Eurydice, 2009/10; CEDEFOP, 2011).



All the vocational qualifications have been reformed during 2008-2010. The European Union recommendation on key competences has been given much attention in policy development, as well as the recommendation on the European Qualifications Framework. Key competences of lifelong learning and framework for their assessment are now included in the core curricula to make sure they are taken into account in all vocational education. The new core curricula of 2010 changed the grading system in vocational education from a five- to a three-point scale (i.e. excellent, good and satisfactory). The renewed vocational qualifications have been introduced in August 2010. At present, the emphasis is on student-centred working methods, development of students' own initiative and entrepreneurship, 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 into year classes, integration of theory and practice as well as cooperation 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. Further, e-learning is the area of priority in the development of new teaching methods. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

The majority of vocational institutions (usually VET institutions) are maintained by municipalities, federations of municipalities, and the state; 39.5% are maintained by private organizations but only 20% of students study in institutions maintained by private organizations. Funding criteria are uniform irrespective of ownership. The Quality Management Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training has been adopted in 2008 by the Ministry of Education and Culture 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 in vocational education and training. The recommendation has been prepared by the NBE working in cooperation with VET providers, representatives of the world of work and business as well as students. (*Ibid.*).

Drop-out from education is considered a problem in Finland. Interruption of studies is most common in vocational education and training. After some years of slightly growing drop-out rates, in 2006 the trend seems to have started to turn. In 2000/01 some 13% of the students interrupted their studies, while the percentage was about 10% in 2004/05. (NBE, 2008).

According to the VET Act of 1998 disabled students are entitled to assistant services, other student welfare services and any special aids required for studying. Some services are offered by the educational institution, whereas others are organized as services provided by the student's municipality of residence in accordance with the Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled No. 380/1987. The General Upper Secondary Schools Act of 1998 states that students with disabilities and those in need of special support for some other reason are entitled to assistant services, other teaching and student welfare services and special aids, as required in their studies. Instruction, meals and student welfare support are provided free of charge. (*Ibid.*).

According to Statistics Finland, in 2010 a total of 111,778 students attended general upper secondary education, of whom 63,333 were girls. General upper secondary education was offered at 395 upper secondary schools and 44 other



educational institutions. The number of students in curriculum-based vocational education provided by educational institutions was 133,770 (of whom 53% were boys); there were also 59,702 students in apprenticeship training. The majority of students were studying in the fields of technology and transport (42%), welfare and health (16%) and tourism, catering and domestic services (12%). During 2009, a total of 18,300 students in vocational education leading to a qualification received special needs teaching. The share of special needs students was 6.5% among all vocational education students and 13.4% among those attending vocational education aimed at young people. (Statistics Finland website; data released in June 2011).

In 2010, about 50% of the students having completed basic education continued their studies in general upper secondary education (58% girls and 43% boys), 41% entered upper secondary VET (33% girls and 49% boys), and 8.9% did not immediately continue their studies. Of the newly matriculated students, 18% entered university education and 17% polytechnic education in autumn of the same year; 4% entered upper secondary vocational education. Over one-half, or 60% of the students who passed the matriculation examination in 2010 did not immediately continue studying in their year of graduation. (Statistics Finland website; data released in December 2011).

In the spring term of 2008, there were 7,487 teachers and principals in general upper secondary education and 14,828 in upper secondary VET; 96% of full-time teachers (excluding school heads), 98.7% of school heads, and 45.8% of part-time teachers in general secondary education were qualified and in the case of VET the percentages were 73.8%, 93% and 52.8% respectively. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The main objective of evaluation is to develop education and support learning, to be part of the quality assurance processes for education and to provide data and information for evidence-based planning, policy decisions and performance-based steering locally, regionally and nationally. Information is also used for international reviews. Evaluation is mandatory and concerns all educational levels.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) prepares a national evaluation plan at regular intervals. Priorities for the external evaluation of education include the effectiveness, quality, efficiency and economy of education. The evaluations conducted by the National Board of Education primarily concentrate on learning outcomes from pre-primary to adult education. The aim of these evaluations is to provide information on how well the aims set in the national framework curriculum have been met. The results are used in developing national core curricula, and planning for teachers professional development. The Education Evaluation Council is responsible for external evaluation (not including higher education). The evaluation of higher education institutions is under the responsibility of the Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The universities and polytechnics themselves have the primary responsibility for the quality of education they organize. They are responsible for evaluating their operations, quality assurance as well as the developing their quality assurance systems. The FINHEEC supports higher education institutions in designing their own quality assurance and evaluation systems and produces national data for international comparison of institutions of higher education.



At the local level, education providers have to evaluate their education and its effectiveness and participate in external evaluations. Both education providers and schools are required to have a plan for evaluation and development. The aims of evaluation are generally stipulated in the local/school curriculum or the annual plan. At regional level, the monitoring of education is partly carried out by the Regional State Administrative Agencies. Regarding the equitable access to education, regional evaluation targets include the serviceability of the network of educational institutions and the satisfaction of the needs set by demand for education.

Both in general and vocational education, the providers emphasize more evaluating efficiency than effectiveness and economy. In pivotal areas, the main topics for the evaluation are the teaching arrangements, human resources, and the culture of leadership. Effectiveness is mainly focused on assessing learning results. The results of the evaluations are generally reported back to the administrative and teaching staff of the schools and the local bodies in charge of education.

The assessments of learning outcomes are mostly conducted in years 6 and 9 on a regular basis in mathematics and in mother tongue and literature. Ongoing assessments in basic education are arts and crafts subjects, cross-curricular themes and mother tongue. In vocational education and training the ongoing projects concentrate on construction, agriculture, hair-dressing and electrical and automation technology. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

Finnish students' good performance in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 reading literacy was not a surprise as Finnish students have performed well also in earlier comparative studies on reading since the 1991 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). However, few could have predicted that Finnish students would also be among the best in the two minor foci of PISA 2000, mathematical and science literacy. The high mean scores of 546, 536 and 538, respectively, for reading, mathematics and science (OECD mean 500), were not only caused by the share of top-performing students being one of the highest among the participants but also by the number of students performing below the level deemed necessary for full participation in today's world being among the smallest, attesting to the success of the Finnish comprehensive school in equalizing student variance. The only major deviation was the significant difference in Finnish girls' and boys' scores in reading literacy. However, while it was the biggest among all participating countries, it did not prevent also the Finnish boys from being the best readers among the boys of the participating countries. (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The same high level of performance and uniformity of results have since been repeated in PISA 2003 and PISA 2006, regarding both the alternate major domains of mathematical and science literacy, the respective minor domains, and the special component of problem solving in PISA 2003. At each cycle, the performance of Finnish students has been among the best and, except for the chronic gender difference in reading, the results have been among the most even in terms of both between-student and between-school variance. The most prominent feature of Finnish students' performance in PISA is its recurrently high level combined with small variance. The first can be seen in the distribution of Finnish students through the proficiency levels, with a relatively small share of students at the lowest levels and a sizeable one at the two uppermost levels. The latter can be seen in the small overall

variance and the very small between-school variance, both indicating the low impact students' social or economic background has on their performance compared to that in many other countries. Some of this uniformity is due to societal factors characteristic of Finland as a relatively young Nordic welfare state, and some to the implementation of PISA before the split-up of upper secondary education. But some can surely be seen to testify to a successful implementation of the equity goals of the basic school reform. (*Ibid.*).

The most salient explanation for Finnish students' good performance in PISA might simply be the high congruence between the objectives of PISA and of the Finnish basic school reform. Another factor contributing to the uniformly high performance of Finnish students seems to be the relative similarity of the tasks in all domains and the salient role of reading in all of them. The lack of high-stakes testing might also be a positive factor contributing to the Finnish success in PISA. One factor pertaining to the high level and uniformity of Finnish students' performance is the timing of PISA while students are still in the comprehensive school. If attainment in PISA is to be interpreted as an indicator of the success of educational policy decisions concerning the way student variation is met at schools, the excellent relative performance of the weaker Finnish students in all domains could be seen to support the Finnish policy of early remedial teaching and special education. However, as students with immigrant background form a very small minority of the Finnish 15-year-olds participating in PISA 2000, 2003 or even 2006, the composition of the Finnish lower end of proficiency differs considerably from that in many other countries in comprising a far greater share of native-speaking students. The Finnish language and the central role of reading in daily life are factors which have been often brought up when looking for explanations for Finnish students' fine performance in comparative studies on reading literacy or comprehension. The phonetic character of Finnish language makes decoding easy, and beyond the lower grades, dictation is common only in foreign language classes. PISA 2006, with science literacy as the major domain and Finnish students again at the top, finally established the notion of the good fit between the Finnish curriculum and PISA tasks as a salient factor in explaining Finnish students' success. (*Ibid.*).

Finnish students perform well above the OECD average on all PISA studies, including reading, mathematics and science. Regarding PISA science, Finland has the highest score of all OECD countries. On reading and mathematics, only Korean students outperform Finnish students. In 2009, 15-year-olds in Finland score well on the PISA reading assessment in comparison to other OECD countries. Only Korean students outperform Finnish students. Finnish students are among the top-performers regarding the PISA mathematics assessment. (OECD, 2012).

Teaching staff

All education and training of comprehensive and upper secondary school teachers was transferred to the universities during 1973-1975. In 1995, education and training of preschool teachers was also transferred to universities. As part of the reform of the universities, a new degree structure in line with the Bologna process was adopted in teacher training in 2005 and the curricula were renewed. Class teacher education is provided by university faculties of education or other equivalent units called teacher education units. Each teacher education unit has teacher training school(s) for

teaching practice, experiments, research and continuing education. Teacher training schools may have either years 1–6 of basic education or years 7–9 of basic education and general upper secondary school, or all of these. They may also include the pre-primary level. Subject teacher education is provided by university faculties of different subjects. Pedagogical studies are provided by teacher education units within faculties of education. The periods of teaching practice included in pedagogical studies are organized at university teacher training schools and at so-called affiliated schools. Teacher education in art subjects is offered by art academies.

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 organized both within day-care and schools. Class teachers are required to have a master's of education degree (300 ECTS credits, equivalent to five years of full-time studies) and kindergarten teachers a bachelor's degree (180 ECTS credits, equivalent to three years of full-time studies) in education. Class teachers teach most or all subjects in years 1–6. The pre-service programme comprises basic studies in several subjects, specialization in one or two teaching subjects, subsidiary subject studies and a period of practical teacher training.

Subject teachers are subject specialists who teach one or two subjects mainly in years 7–9. Some schools also use subject teachers in years 1–6. Subject teachers must have a master's of education degree in relevant subjects. The degree includes studies in pedagogy as well as periods of practical teacher training. It is also possible to qualify as a subject teacher by taking separate pedagogical studies for teachers with a scope of about one year after completion of a master's degree. 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). Guidance counsellors provide educational and vocational guidance and 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 complemented by studies in guidance counselling (60 ECTS). General upper secondary education teachers are subject specialists with similar qualifications to basic education subject teachers.

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 (including practical training with a scope of 20 ECTS) and an appropriate academic degree. This degree can be a master's or a bachelor's degree or the highest possible qualification in their own occupational field. Pedagogical studies for vocational teachers are organized by vocational teacher education units operating in conjunction with polytechnics. (Eurydice, CEDEFOP & ETF, 2009/10; Eurydice, 2009/10).

Class teacher and kindergarten teacher education is organized concurrently, that is, the pedagogical training and subject studies are intertwined. In subject teacher education, students usually first apply to study a particular subject at the relevant

university faculty and, after one or two years of studying, they may apply for subject teacher education. The department of teacher education is responsible for providing pedagogical studies, whereas subject departments of different faculties provide education in the teaching subjects. Pedagogical studies have a minimum scope of 60 ECTS credits; practical training amounts to 20 ECTS credits for class teachers and subject teachers and 25 ECTS credits for kindergarten teachers. The pedagogical studies combine theory to practice. Teacher qualifications for general and vocational institutions were harmonized at the beginning of 1999. The same minimum of 60 ECTS credits of pedagogical studies is required of teachers for all types of educational institution. Pedagogical studies for teachers are completed within university departments of teacher education or at vocational teacher education institutions in conjunction with the polytechnics.

Applicants for class teacher education are selected on the basis of an entrance examination. Those wanting to become subject teachers apply to the respective university faculties and departments of their main subject. They will then separately apply for subject teacher education. Admission to subject teacher education is based either on aptitude tests alone, or on aptitude tests and the applicant's study record.

Studies in kindergarten teacher education consist of the following study modules: language and communication studies; basic and subject studies in education; studies providing professional skills needed in early childhood education and care and pre-primary education; subsidiary subject studies; optional studies. The education also includes teaching practice in different forms of day-care and pre-primary education. Theoretical studies and teaching practice form an integrated whole, which aims to provide the skills to implement the education process stemming from the child's needs. Research is integrated into the studies at an early stage.

The master's degree in class teacher education consists of the following study modules: language and communication studies; basic and subject studies in education; advanced studies in education; minor subject studies; optional studies. Teaching practice may be included in basic, subject and advanced studies; it consists of an orientation practicum as part of the subject studies in education and of an advanced practicum. In the orientation practicum, students familiarize themselves with teaching and pupils in the lower stage of comprehensive school. In the advanced practicum, students are trained to teach different subjects, to plan lessons, to use basic forms of instruction as well as to assess instruction and learning. Qualified class teachers may continue their studies to achieve eligibility for providing special needs education, pupil counselling and instruction in specific subjects.

The conditions of service for teachers are agreed on in a collective bargaining process and in the relevant legislation. The salary system has been reformed in recent years so as to take into account also the requirements of the work and the teachers' individual competences and performance. There is also room for local flexibility in the salary system. Each local authority, joint municipal authority or private maintaining body may decide which of their bodies is responsible for appointing new teachers. Most teachers (94%) work full time and hold tenured posts as municipal or state officials or employees.



The obligation to participate in in-service training is partly defined in various statutes and partly in collective agreements. Teachers are obligated to participate in in-service training for one or five days a year according to the relevant statutes and collective agreements. Teachers have the right to participate in this obligatory training with full salary benefits. On the other hand, employers have the right to assign all full-time teachers to training. Continuing teacher education is organized by state-owned training centres, university continuing education units, vocational teacher education colleges, university departments of teacher education, teacher training schools, summer universities, and various private organizations.

In addition to teaching, the tasks of teachers include planning of instruction and pre- and post-class work, the school's internal development tasks and cooperation with colleagues, homes and other partners, such as staff in pupil welfare services, social welfare services, the local family counselling clinic, etc. Most teachers' working hours are based on teaching duties. Teaching duties vary between 16 and 24 weekly lessons according to the type of institution and subject. At vocational institutions, the teachers commonly have an annual teaching duty of 798 lessons. In some vocational fields the teachers have overall teaching hours. (Eurydice, 2009/10).

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Web resources

Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities: <http://www.localfinland.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

Educational Evaluation Council: <http://www.edev.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]



Finnish Matriculation Examination: <http://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/> [Mainly in Finnish and Swedish. Last checked: May 2012.]

Higher Education Evaluation Council: <http://www.finheec.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

Ministry of Education and Culture: <http://www.minedu.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health: <http://www.stm.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

National Board of Education: <http://www.oph.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

National Union of Students in Finland: <http://www.syl.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences: <http://www.arene.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

Universities Finland UNIFI: <http://www.ctors-council.helsinki.fi/> [In Finnish, Swedish and English. Last checked: May 2012.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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