



Research Office
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Fact Sheet

Teacher training in Finland

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1. Introduction

1.1 Finland has consistently been one of the most successful countries in global education rankings.¹ Its highly competent and motivated teachers are considered as the cornerstone of the Finnish education system. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ("OECD"), Finnish teachers are among the best in the world in many ways, including education attainment, teaching independence and autonomy. Teaching is a highly-regarded occupation and teachers are viewed as experts in both their subject areas and teaching. This fact sheet provides an overview on the teacher training system in Finland, covering information on university admission and programme training, continuing professional training and recent developments.

2. Overview

2.1 According to OECD, Finland's success in education has taken many decades to achieve through a series of reforms and in response to changing economic needs. In the late 1960s, the Finnish government made a policy decision to develop a comprehensive system aiming to provide high-quality education to all students. One of the accompanying moves was to significantly improve the quality of teaching, by **transferring teacher training from teacher colleges (known as seminarium) to universities** in the 1970s and making it much more rigorous.²

¹ Finland has been a top performer since the Programme for International Student Assessment (known as PISA) launched in 2000 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

² See OECD Observer (2019).

2.2 Finland's high level of education and competence today is largely based on **high-quality teacher training**. Teacher education is highly respected and very popular in Finland. As such, it is difficult to get admitted, particularly in primary teacher education. In 2016, its admission rate was only 11%. For kindergarten teacher education and vocational teacher education, the admission rate was 16% and 41% respectively.³ Admission depends not only on academic achievements, but also on applicants' interest and passion to become a teacher.⁴

2.3 In Finland, kindergarten teachers are required to hold a **bachelor's degree**. Teachers in basic education (i.e. primary and lower secondary education) and general upper secondary education are required to have a **bachelor's degree and master's degree**, which approximately take a total of five years to complete the studies and become a qualified teacher. Vocational teachers are generally required to have a master's or bachelor's degree in their own vocational sector.⁵ An essential characteristic of teacher education in Finland has been its emphasis on building a research-oriented capability of student teachers, in particular pedagogical knowledge, to enable them to carry out the teaching work and solve problems independently.⁶

2.4 Once teachers are deployed to schools, they are expected to continuously upgrade their skills through professional development. In 2016, there were about 63 500 teachers working in basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, as well as liberal adult education.⁷ While the pay is not particularly attractive⁸, teaching is seen as an important and well-respected profession.

³ Those who are not admitted often turn to law or medical discipline instead. See OECD Observer (2019).

⁴ See The World Bank Group (2018).

⁵ A degree can also be supplemented by the highest possible other qualification in the sector. See Ministry of Education and Culture (2018).

⁶ See Ministry of Education and Culture (Undated).

⁷ See Ministry of Education and Culture (2016d).

⁸ Teachers' salaries and employment conditions are agreed upon nationally as part of collective agreements negotiated between the representatives of the employers, most commonly municipalities, and the teachers' union. According to the Finnish government report issued in 2016, the average monthly salary of teachers in lower secondary education was €3,800 (HK\$35,150). Based on OECD's 2016 data, the salaries of teachers in basic education were 1%-11% lower than the average earnings of full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education.

3. Teacher training at universities

3.1 In Finland, the objective of professional teacher education is to provide teachers with sound skills and knowledge to guide the learning of different students. According to OECD, there are nine universities offering teacher education in Finland.⁹ Applicants are assessed based on their upper secondary school record, their extra-curricular activities, and their performance in the matriculation examination taken at the end of upper secondary school. Moreover, applicants must also take the entrance examination known as **VAKAVA**¹⁰, which is a multiple-choice assessment used to evaluate applicants' academic study skills needed in educational science. Once the applicants pass the entrance examination, they are then required to undergo an interview and aptitude test. Some universities also include skills demonstration through teaching-like activities. Only candidates with a clear aptitude for teaching and strong academic performance are admitted.¹¹

3.2 Under the Finnish education system, students at primary level (grades 1-6) are taught by class teachers, while students at lower secondary level (grades 7-9) and general upper secondary level (grades 10-12) are mainly taught by specialized subject teachers.¹² As such, **class teachers** are required to major in educational science provided by faculties of education, with the choice of two or three other subjects as minors (e.g. mathematics, history, music, etc.), whereas **subject teachers** must complete a five-year education in the specialized subject they intend to teach.

3.3 Finland **does not have any common national standards for teacher education**. Each university is responsible for the quality of the programmes and studies they provide. In 2005, all universities responsible for teacher education established a **national network** for Educational Sciences and Teacher Education, to facilitate knowledge sharing and interaction between teacher education units. As a consequence of the co-operation, all universities have agreed on the **common guidelines** on teacher education curricula, which are broadly grouped into (a) **academic disciplines**; (b) **research studies**; (c) **pedagogical studies**; (d) studies on **communication, language, and**

⁹ The universities in Finland are externally reviewed and evaluated by the Higher Education Evaluation Council.

¹⁰ VAKAVA entrance examination is conducted annually in April/May.

¹¹ See National Center on Education and the Economy (2019).

¹² See Ministry of Education and Culture (Undated).

information and communication technologies; (e) personal study plan preparation; and (f) optional studies.¹³

3.4 In addition to theoretical studies, student teachers must undergo practical training in a **teacher training school** before graduation.¹⁴ These schools are notably run by universities, offering similar curriculum and teaching requirements as other ordinary municipal schools. They provide student teachers with supervision and tutoring, as well as teaching experiments and educational research.¹⁵ There are over 10 teacher training schools across Finland, with thousands of student teachers completing their teaching practice every year. The **Oulu University Teacher Training School** is one of the teacher training schools in Finland. The School houses about 600 student teachers and 120 staff members, providing education to over 1 100 students from basic education to general upper secondary level.

4. Teachers' continuing professional development

4.1 In Finland, while teachers must follow the national core curriculum¹⁶, they have the **autonomy in the implementation** with freedom to decide which teaching methods and learning materials they desire to use. School principals act as pedagogical leaders and provide teachers with trust and steering. There are no classroom inspectors or supervisors, nor is there a national evaluation on teachers. To ensure that teachers are equipped with the updated knowledge and skills, every year, teachers are required to receive **at least three days** of government-funded professional development training. The programmes and forms of training are decided by the government at the municipal level.¹⁷

¹³ See The Educationist (2019) and Niemi, H. (2011).

¹⁴ See The World Bank Group (2018).

¹⁵ See National Center on Education and the Economy (2019).

¹⁶ The national core curriculum for basic education defines the objectives and core contents of each subject. Municipal governments are responsible for quality assurance and preparation of local curricula, in collaboration with local stakeholders. Since 2016, a new core national core curriculum has been implemented, which, among others, emphasizes the joy of learning.

¹⁷ See National Center on Education and the Economy (2019) and OECD (2013).

4.2 Despite the minimum of three-day compulsory training, it is estimated that teachers on average spend seven days a year on professional development. Some municipalities organize large, multi-school training events and some others leave it up to schools to develop in-service programmes.¹⁸ Over the past decade or so, the Finnish government has put high efforts to strengthen the continuing competence development of teachers. For example, in 2008, the Ministry of Education and Culture¹⁹ appointed an Advisory Board for Professional Development of Education Personnel to examine the professional development needs of teachers to ensure that teachers are provided with sustainable support for development; and in 2010, the Ministry launched a Finnish Network for Teacher Induction (known as Osaava Programme), with a focus on promoting **professional development of new teachers** through mentoring and peer support, and fostering greater **networking and collaborations**.²⁰

5. Recent developments

5.1 While Finland is renowned for its education system and teacher training, future challenges and rapid societal changes have presented the sector with new challenges. To ensure that the Finnish teacher education remains sound, attractive and internationally appreciated, the Ministry of Education and Culture set up in 2016 a **Teacher Education Forum** to support the reform of pre-service and in-service training of teachers. About 100 experts participated in the Forum to work out the directions, with inputs from almost 2 000 stakeholders.

5.2 After the above consultation, the Ministry of Education and Culture has published a list of **six strategic guidelines** for the development of teacher education and training, based on the new objective that "teachers should be future oriented and able to create new pedagogical innovations". The six strategic guidelines apply to all teachers from early childhood education, basic education, to tertiary and vocational training, focusing on: (a) developing the competence of teachers using a goal-oriented approach with an emphasis on **pedagogical competence**; (b) ensuring that students with the **best capacity** to act as teachers will be selected in teacher training; (c) developing methods to

¹⁸ See The World Bank Group (2018).

¹⁹ It was formerly known as Ministry of Education. Name change took place in 2010.

²⁰ See National Center on Education and the Economy (2016) and Jyväskylän yliopisto (2013).

enable students to acquire **broad-based basic competence and expertise**, as well as develop their **personal competence**; (d) promoting **collaborations and networking** among education institutions; (e) strengthening **management and leadership training** at education institutions; and (f) strengthening **research-based** teacher education.

5.3 According to the Finnish government, development plans are being implemented in all six strategic target areas. In total, a sum of €60 million (HK\$555 million) is allocated to improve teachers' competence over three years. Many of the projects have a strong emphasis on community building, with partnerships formed between teacher education institutions. Moreover, to promote **collaborative peer learning**, the Finnish government has implemented a **Tutor Teacher Model**, under which every comprehensive school (i.e. school providing basic education from grade 1 to grade 9) has one or more tutor teachers providing peer support to other teachers in **digitalization of teaching** and **utilization of ICT**, as well as implementation of the new curriculum. In the past few years, most municipalities have implemented the scheme with grants from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Responses were positive and the Model has newly been expanded to general upper secondary education since early 2019.²¹

²¹ See European Commission (2019) and Ministry of Education and Culture (2016b).

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Research Office
Information Services Division
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Tel: 3919 3581

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