Building Blocks for Education: Whole System Reform
Toronto, September 2010

Case Study/ Finland
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Case Finland: Finnish basic education 2020 – the renewal of basic education

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Demography and geography

Finland (Finnish: Suomi) is a Nordic country situated in the Fennoscandian region of Northern Europe. Finland currently numbers 5,359,538 inhabitants (2010). Finland is bordered by Sweden, Norway, Russia and the Baltic Sea. It is the eighth largest country in Europe in terms of area and the most sparsely populated country in the European Union. It has an average population density of only 17 inhabitants per square kilometre, with the majority concentrated in the southern part of the country. The sparse population poses several challenges for the education system. Providing equal opportunities to education in the sparsely populated areas in the north and the archipelago is a practical and economic challenge. Further, many of these areas battle with serious social and economic problems, such as unemployment and an aging population.

The fact that the aging of the population in Finland is among the fastest in Europe has meant that in recent years considerable attention has been paid and effort made to attract and retain students in education. Further, measures have been taken to shorten study times in higher education.

Another challenge for the education system is the fact that there are two official languages in Finland: Finnish is spoken by 91.2 per cent and Swedish by 5.5 per cent of the population. This means that both language groups have a right to education and training in their own mother tongue. In addition, the indigenous Saami language has a similar official status in the northern part of the country.

1.2 Political situation

The political situation in Finland is very stable and consensus-oriented. Finland's proportional representation system encourages a multitude of political parties and has resulted in many long-life coalition governments. Nowadays, three major parties are dominating the political arena, but no single party — or even two of them together — has a majority position in Parliament (200 seats). The prime minister’s party is the Center Party (Keskusta, traditionally representing rural interests, 51 seats). The National Coalition Party (Kokoomus, conservative, 51 seats) is the second major government party. The third major party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP, left-wing, 45 seats), is now in opposition. The Minister of Education and Science is Ms. Henna Virkkunen (National Coalition Party). The next Parliamentary election will be held in April 2011.

1.3 Administration in education

Four levels of administration have a role in education (Figure 1). At the national level, the Parliament is responsible for the legislation and setting general principles of education policy. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) are responsible for preparing education policy, for setting the general goals and steering the implementation. The government adopts a plan for the development of education and university research every five years. The plan is a comprehensive strategy for the education sector. The latest, Development Plan for Education and Research for 2007–2012, was adopted in 2007. The plan is based on the objectives set for education and science policy in the Government Program.
The Finnish National Board of Education decides on the national core curriculum for pre-primary, basic and general upper secondary, and on vocational qualifications for vocational upper secondary education and training. In the core curricula, the composition of studies and objectives, core contents and assessment criteria are determined.

Figure 1: Administration of education in Finland

At the regional level, there are 15 Centres for Economic Development Transport and the Environment and six regional State Administrative Agencies. The centres and agencies are responsible for the follow up and, to some extent, evaluation of education in their areas. They also deal with complaints related to general education.

The administration in Finland is very decentralized, meaning that the education and training providers (mostly municipalities and joint municipal authorities) themselves decide on how to apply the general goals and guidelines set at national level.

Most of the educational services are provided by municipalities or joint municipalities, especially in basic education and in upper secondary general schools. At the moment, there are 342 municipalities.

Municipal autonomy is a strongly respected principle in Finland based on the Constitution. Besides municipal basic education schools, there are some state-owned schools and some private schools. Only two per cent of the children in basic education study in private schools. These private schools work along the same common, national guidelines as the municipal schools. They are also publicly funded.

The administering and steering at all levels of education is based on clearly defined, common national objectives. Pre-primary and basic education are regulated by the Basic Education Act (1998), Basic Education Decree (1998), Government Decree on the General National Objectives and Distribution of Lesson Hours in Basic Education (2001, will be renewed in 2011), National Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education (2000) and National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004, will be renewed in 2014).


The Vocational Education Act (1998) stipulates that the aim of Finnish upper secondary vocational education and training is to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to gain vocational expertise. The government decides on the general goals of vocational education and training, the structure of qualifications, and the core subjects. The Ministry of Education decides on the studies and their scope.
Early childhood education and care belongs to the realm of social services, so it is not currently a part of the actual educational system. However, the current government policy has listed this changeover as an objective, so the possibility of including early years (three to six) as an integral part of the education system is being studied. Within the municipal administration, a large number of municipalities have already made early childhood education a part of educational services.

1.4 Guiding principles and structure of the education system

The welfare of Finnish society is built on education, culture and knowledge. The basic right to education is recorded in the Constitution. Public authorities must secure equal opportunities for every resident in Finland for study and self-development according to their abilities, irrespective of their place of residence, language or financial status. So all study paths are open from pre-primary education through to higher education according to every individual’s own abilities. All pupils are entitled to competent and high-quality education and guidance, and to a safe learning environment and wellbeing. The flexible education system and basic educational security make for equity and consistency in results. Children permanently living in Finland have a statutory right and obligation to complete the comprehensive school syllabus. Nearly all children (99.7 per cent) do this.

The Finnish education system is composed of nine-year basic education (primary and lower secondary education), preceded by one year of voluntary pre-primary education; upper secondary education, comprising vocational and general education; and higher education provided by universities and polytechnics. Adult education is available at all levels.

Pre-primary education, basic education, upper secondary general education and vocational education are governed by objectives set in legislation and by national core curricula. The school year — 190 working days in basic education — starts in mid-August and ends in the beginning of June.

Education is financed almost completely through public funding. Funding consists of the government transfer (45.3 per cent) and of the funding that comes from the municipality itself (54.7 per cent). Private schools also get this government transfer but it is 90 per cent of what municipal schools receive.

| Characteristics of the Finnish Education System |
|---|---|
| * Finnish children start school relatively late, usually at the age of 7. This is not a set age; the child can start school a year earlier or a year later, depending on his or her individual needs and developmental stage. |
| * The Finnish education system is almost entirely publicly funded. This means that compulsory education is completely free of charge. |
| * There is no segregation or streaming in schools in Finland. Almost all children attend their nearest local school. |
| * Education providers have a high level of autonomy at local level. The Finnish National Board of Education provides a national core curriculum, but a more specific curriculum is made at the local level. |
| * Teachers are respected professionals with masters level qualification from university and have a high level of autonomy in their work. |
| * Quality assurance is based on self-evaluation. There are no school inspections. National evaluations of learning outcomes are based on sample tests and larger evaluation projects (thematic reviews). |
| * There are no dead-ends in the education system. All programs give eligibility to move on to further education. |
| * The first national student assessment is the matriculation examination, which is taken at the age of 18-19 by students in general upper secondary schools. |
1.4.1 Access and participation in pre-primary and basic education

As mentioned earlier, legislation provides for compulsory education and the right to free pre-primary and basic education. That means free basic education, including the necessary equipment and textbooks, school transportation where needed and adequate free meals. In general and vocational upper secondary education, school meals are free and students can get a subsidy for school travel. In continuing vocational education and in liberal adult education, it is possible to charge modest fees. Post-compulsory education is also free, but students pay for their textbooks, meals and travel. They can also apply for financial aid. Most other qualifying education is also free for the students, including postgraduate education in universities.

Pre-primary education is available for children one year before they start actual compulsory schooling. Its aim is to develop children’s learning skills as part of early childhood education and care. Local authorities have a statutory duty to arrange pre-primary education, but children’s participation is voluntary and decided by parents. Local authorities may provide pre-primary education in schools, daycare centres, and family daycare homes or in other appropriate places. Almost full enrolment (99.5 per cent in 2008) is recorded in pre-primary education for children six to seven years of age, about 70 per cent of whom also attend daycare. Primary education, meals, health care and travel if the distance exceeds five kilometres are provided free of charge. Children are also entitled to a daycare place. In daycare, there is an income-based fee.

Basic education is provided in comprehensive schools in the same form for each age group as a whole. Virtually the entire age group completes basic education (currently about 60,000 children). The number of schools has diminished; in particular, small school with fewer than 50 pupils have been closed down (Table 1).

Table 1: The number of comprehensive schools according to number of students in 2004-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools Students</td>
<td>Schools Students</td>
<td>Schools Students</td>
<td>Schools Students</td>
<td>Schools Students</td>
<td>Schools Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;50</td>
<td>1 099</td>
<td>34 915</td>
<td>1 007</td>
<td>32 133</td>
<td>885</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>44 550</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>41 608</td>
<td>596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-299</td>
<td>1 024</td>
<td>193 875</td>
<td>1 025</td>
<td>192 956</td>
<td>1 005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-499</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>214 314</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>209 068</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥500</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>77 626</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>83 228</td>
<td>148</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>3 450</td>
<td>565 280</td>
<td>3 322</td>
<td>558 993</td>
<td>3 155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3 660</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3 692</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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<td>1 581</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 553</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>3 418</td>
<td>560 039</td>
<td>3 290</td>
<td>553 748</td>
<td>3 123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After completing the basic education syllabus, young people have finished their compulsory schooling. It does not lead to any qualification but gives eligibility for all upper secondary education and training.

1.4.2 Access and participation in upper secondary education

When finishing basic education, young people have two options for continuing their studies: general upper secondary education at upper secondary school, or upper secondary vocational education and training (VET). The aim is for as many young people as possible to move on to the upper secondary level. Every comprehensive school leaver can apply for upper secondary studies through the national joint application system (administrated by the Finnish National Board of Education). This contributes to ensuring that 94 per cent of comprehensive school leavers continue their studies immediately upon completion of basic education.
The intake of vocational education and training has increased in recent years, partly due to labour market prospects and the development efforts of the vocational sector by the national administration. There have been many remarkable reforms in the VET sector during last 10 years: building strong links between VET and working life (competence-based qualifications, work-based learning, skills demonstrations, social partner participation); general eligibility to higher education after upper secondary VET studies (VET as an educational pathway to higher education); reform of the qualifications; increased work-based learning (on-the-job learning, apprenticeship training); increased use of skills competitions (celebrating excellence in skills, benchmarking, raising the skill levels); performance-based funding to training providers; and consolidation of training providers.

A steady increase in the proportion of students choosing the vocational path has been clearly visible in the 2000s. As can be seen in Figure 2, 54 per cent of basic education leavers opted for upper secondary general education in 2001. This figure was 51 per cent in 2007, and about 49 per cent this year. During the decade those choosing the VET pathway directly after basic education have increased from 36 to about 45 per cent.

![Figure 2: Choices after compulsory education 2001/2007](image)

The total number of general upper secondary school students was 109,000 and vocational education and training students 157,100 in 2007. The total number of students starting vocational education and training is high because those starting vocational studies come from several age groups, whereas upper secondary school studies are generally pursued immediately after comprehensive school.

Upper secondary education — both general and vocational — is primarily free of charge for students, but students have to pay for materials. Students taking the matriculation examination are required to pay a basic fee and a fee per subject in which they take the examination.

General upper secondary education is mainly organized without division into grades and teaching is not tied to year classes. This education prepares students for higher education and ends with the national matriculation examination. The Matriculation Examination Board administers the matriculation examination, and sets and assesses the tests. Virtually all students who complete the upper secondary school syllabus will also take the national matriculation examination, which is the first national test for the students and can also influence their admission into higher education.

Vocational qualifications can be acquired in VET institutions, in apprenticeship training or as a competence-based qualification, all organized by VET providers. The latter is based totally on the demonstration of acquired competences. All VET qualifications include skills demonstrations. Students can also complete general upper secondary school courses and take the matriculation exam simultaneously (double qualification).
1.4.3 Access and participation in higher education

Higher education is provided in Finland by universities and polytechnics, also known as universities of applied sciences. The total number of university students is 164,000. This includes 19,600 new entrants and 38,200 graduates. Female students accounted for 56 per cent of university entrants and for an even higher proportion (64 per cent) of graduates. In the same year, the number of students enrolled in polytechnics was 132,500, with 37,000 of them being new students. A total of 21,800 students completed a degree that year. Female students accounted for 57 per cent of polytechnic entrants and 64 per cent of graduates. In 2008, there were 66,188 applicants to universities and 87,162 applicants to polytechnics. The proportion of accepted applicants was 30 per cent at universities and 42 per cent at polytechnics.

Degree instruction at higher education institutions is basically free of charge. In the university sector, students in Bachelor’s and Master’s programs pay a small membership fee to the student union every year; in return, they get reduced price meals, health care services and other social benefits.

A non-European Economic Area (EEA) tuition fee trial will take place in 2010–2014. The trial concerns students coming from outside the EEA. For EEA students — students from the EU, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway — tuition will continue to be free. Fees will also not be charged for students who have the right to permanent residence permit in Finland.

The network of universities and polytechnics is being developed so that overlaps in programs are reduced and by bringing together administrative and support services. This is done through merging universities and polytechnics, intensifying co-operation in teaching, research and shared equipment.

Higher education institutions enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The new University Act in 2009 increased the autonomy of universities further. Universities confer Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and postgraduate licentiate and doctoral degrees.

The system of polytechnics was set up in the 1990s, when one part of the vocational education sector was upgraded into non-university sector higher education. Polytechnics are multi-field regional institutions focusing on professionally-oriented higher education, contacts with working life and regional development. Polytechnics confer polytechnic Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees.

Finnish universities and polytechnics have autonomy regarding student admission. However, co-operation in this respect has increased in the 2000s. The co-operation concerns joint entrance tests and application systems. A national online application system developed for university student selection was implemented for the first time in autumn 2008. The aim is that the online system will become the prevalent means of application. A similar online application system has been in use in the polytechnic student selections since 2003.

1.4.4 Access and participation in adult education and training

Finland is one of the leading countries regarding participation in adult education. For the individual, there is a wide variety of options and opportunities for study. There are courses and programs for adults at all levels of formal education, along with extensive provision of liberal adult education.

The level of education among Finland’s adult population has increased rapidly over the last few decades. The proportion of adults with a post-compulsory qualification is almost ten percentage points higher than the OECD average. In total, 80 per cent of 25–64-year-olds have completed at least an upper secondary qualification.
With the exception of further and specialist vocational qualifications, adult education and training leading to qualifications is provided free of charge. The government also subsidizes other forms of education and training intended for adults to keep student fees at a reasonable level. Reforms in the field of adult education and training focus on the administration, funding and steering of vocationally oriented adult education and training. The system needs to be both sufficiently flexible and capable of rapid response, in order to facilitate mismatch problems on the labour market and to enable equal opportunities for people from different backgrounds to maintain their competencies.

Findings in OECD Assessments and Comparative Analyses

(Education Today – The OECD Perspective. 2009)

*Early childhood education and care are widely available in Finland. With the exception of the Nordic region, the demand for early childhood provision for those aged under 3 years far outstrips supply in the OECD countries.

*Teaching is efficient in Finland: good results have been achieved with relatively few instruction hours. Finland is the OECD country with the lowest number of “intended instruction hours” for 7-14-year-olds.

*Education is valued in Finland. Based on current enrolment patterns, over 70 per cent of the population of Finland will participate in tertiary education at some stage of their lives, compared to the OECD average of over 50 per cent.

*There are no wide gaps in performance levels among Finnish students. In mathematics, with the exception of Finland and Korea, all OECD countries have at least 10 per cent of students who achieve at only PISA level 1 or below. In the case of Finland, low spread in student performance goes hand-in-hand with high levels of excellence.

*Reading and literacy is highly appreciated in Finland. Finland is one of the few countries where more than two-thirds of young people reach or surpass PISA level 3 in reading literacy.

*Low “between-school variation” is a significant feature of the Finnish school system. The between-school variation in mathematics achievement in 2003 was less than 10 per cent, while the OECD average is three times higher.

*Finland’s education system guarantees equal access to education for everyone. The influence of socio-economic background on educational expectations in the OECD countries is the lowest in Finland.
2. Proposal concerning the renewal of basic education in Finland

The Ministry of Education set the parliamentary committee in spring 2009 to formulate a proposal for the distribution of lesson hours and the general national objectives for the new Basic Education Act. The committee — chaired by Mr. Timo Lankinen, Director General of Finnish National Board of Education — put forward its proposal in June 2010. It also made a proposal for the renewal of basic education as a whole.

The aim of the proposal is to develop basic education and its objectives in a consistent way by taking into consideration the present strengths of basic education and the development needs for the future. It examines major changes in the national and international operational environments. The main lines are connected to questions such as:

- How is the world changing and what kind of effects does it have on the learning process, on what children should learn and how should they work at school?
- What are the most important competences people should master in order to be able to lead a good life, to study further and to manage in working life and in society?
- What would then be the most important goals of the reform?
- How should we organize the content of learning in basic education and allocate the time for different learning areas?
- How could we strengthen the active role of pupils and offer more individual choices for them to improve their learning motivation, help them to find their own strengths and orientate to further studies?
- How should we support the municipalities and schools in their work even better than we do at the moment? What are the most important areas of school work that should be found in all schools?

2.1 Evidence-based approach and open process of data collection

The committee invited a secretariat from the Finnish National Board of Education to help with the collection of background information. A wide range of research-based information was collected. Further, a separate study was made to get an international and comparative perspective to the Finnish educational system and its specificities.

During its term the committee organized five seminars. Researchers were invited to bring forth the most important findings and issues they thought would be necessary when formulating basic education for 2020. The committee also invited specialists from the universities and from the Finnish National Board of Education to present up-to-date information about their areas of expertise. These could be related to individual school subjects, or larger areas of teaching and learning. The committee also invited all the pedagogical teacher and student organizations, representatives from vocational and general upper secondary education and the labour market, as well as the children's ombudsman to express their opinions about the future of the basic education. The committee received 120 large written statements from different interest groups.

There was also a possibility for individual citizens to participate in an open discussion on the website. There were questions like:

- What do we need basic education for?
- What kind of values should basic education be based on, and what kind of values should education and teaching foster?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of basic education today?
How should schoolwork be organized in order to support learning and wellbeing at school in the best possible way?

What about school subjects – are they all important?

Where and how are children and young people learning today? What is necessary to learn at school and what can be learnt somewhere else?

The committee also prepared a special web-interview for students over 13 years of age in basic education, vocational and in general upper secondary education. There were altogether 65,000 students who answered the interview called “Basic Education of the Future.”

In addition to research into the qualitative issues, the committee examined the implementation of the present lesson hour distribution for basic education in different municipalities and teaching offered by other education providers. The committee found that there are significant differences in the number of teaching hours provided for pupils. In order to increase equality in education at a national level, the committee proposed that the minimum number of annual weekly lesson hours in basic education be increased by four annual weekly lesson hours, that is, with 152 teaching hours. This suggests that the minimum number of lesson hours increases from 222 annual weekly lesson hours (8,436 teaching hours) to 226 annual weekly lesson hours (8,588 teaching hours). The increase is 1.8 per cent compared to the current minimum number of lesson hours. It has been suggested that the increase in the number of lesson hours will be aimed at Grades 1 and 2 as well as Grades 5 and 6.

The committee’s work was further supported by a barometer that was designed especially for this work. The barometer is meant to support the renewal of the national core curriculum as well. It was designed to process the possible change needed in learning, in learning contents, the meaning of the teaching, values of the schools, operation modes, the meaning and mission of teaching, changes in the operational environment and in the liability distribution between the students and the teachers. The barometer was applied using the Delfoi-method in a web-based program.

As mentioned earlier, the committee set future objectives for the renewal of basic education as a whole (Figure 3). These demonstrate the committee’s view of the mission and integrity of basic education in the future Finnish society.

Figure 3: The four objectives set by the Parliamentary Committee for the renewal of basic education

In the following section, the committee’s proposals will be examined according to the four objectives set out to clarify and enhance the mission and integrity of basic education; to ensure a high level of knowledge and skills; to strengthen the provision of individual support and guidance; and to clarify the principles of providing basic education.
2.2 To clarify and enhance the mission and integrity of basic education

The mission and integrity of basic education involves citizen skills needed in future by society and individuals. At the same time, they highlight deeper learning goals and high-order skills. Citizen skills are tools which support deeper learning and applied knowledge. They have been classified into five groups: thinking skills, ways of working and interaction, crafts and expressive skills, participation and initiative, and self-awareness and personal responsibility (Figure 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITIZEN SKILLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Thinking skills** | • problem solving, reasoning and argumentation  
• critical, analytical and systemic thinking  
• creative and innovative thinking |
| **Ways of working and interaction** | • acquisition of information, analysis and use  
• skills to communicate, collaborate and negotiate  
• ability to work independently  
• time management and flexibility  
• entrepreneurship and ability to react to change  
• ICT and other technology skills  
• learning skills |
| **Crafts and expressive skills** | • coordination of body and hand  
• skills and courage of expression  
• planning and production skills  
• creativity and curiosity |
| **Participation and initiative** | • perception of community and society  
• initiative and leadership skills  
• ability to be constructive  
• acceptance of diversity and difference in perspectives  
• media skills  
• ability to think long-term and construct the future |
| **Self-awareness and personal responsibility** | • Self-awareness and reflection  
• looking after health and security  
• ability to act in an ethical, responsible way and as a member of a community  
• good manners and empathy |

Figure 4: Proposal for five groups of skills needed in society

The skills represent what an individual needs in life and society. The skills are described as multi-disciplinary as well as tools for using the learned material in a creative way. Citizen skills will be defined by a decree pertaining to the general national objectives for basic education. They will be combined with the objectives set for each multi-disciplinary subject group as well as their component subjects. The assessment criteria will also be defined.
2.3 To ensure the high level of knowledge and skills

The high level of skills and knowledge provided by basic education should also be ensured in the future. This requires that the goals of knowledge and skills are defined at a high level, that citizens’ knowledge and skills are strengthened, that the welfare and functionality of the pupils and school communities are taken care of, and that their resources are ensured. The implementation of the basic education mission in a changing operational environment requires bringing together the core contents and focusing on the important issues so that there is space for practising knowledge and skills (citizen skills).

The committee proposes that the national core curriculum for basic education should consist of compulsory and optional subjects. These would be defined as multi-disciplinary subject groups, with different subjects as their components. According to the proposal, there would be six different multi-disciplinary subject groups (Figure 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-disciplinary subject groups</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language and interaction</td>
<td>Mother tongue and literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second national language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment, science and technology</td>
<td>Biology</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Geography</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physics</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chemistry</td>
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<td>Individual, enterprise and society</td>
<td>Religion/Ethics</td>
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<td>Social studies</td>
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<td>Educational and vocational guidance</td>
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<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>Visual arts</td>
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<td>Music</td>
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<td>Crafts</td>
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<td>Health and personal functionality</td>
<td>Physical education</td>
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<td>Health education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Proposal for multi-disciplinary subject groups

Each multi-disciplinary subject group and subject follows the general national objectives for basic education. Their aim is to improve pupils’ citizen skills. Specific objectives that will combine the general objectives and core contents, as well as methods appropriate for each field of knowledge, will be defined for each multi-disciplinary subject group taking into account the present core contents.

The committee proposed two new school subjects: ethics and drama. Within the multi-disciplinary subject group individual, enterprise and society, ethics is designed to reinforce the basic values of the Finnish society and to enhance a dialogue amongst pupils representing different world views. The objective for drama is to strengthen a comprehensive approach to art education in the multi-disciplinary subject group of arts and crafts.
In order to support the development of the pupil’s identity and growth in a versatile way, the multi-disciplinary subject groups arts and crafts, and health and personal functionality will be emphasized. It has been proposed that the minimum number of lesson hours and the number of optional lesson hours will be increased in arts and crafts, and physical education in particular. The increase aims to give pupils more opportunities to try different options in these subjects. The proposal takes into account multiculturalism within the society, the need for a discussion of values, and as the need to enhance a dialogue amongst different world views. The proposed number of weekly lessons per multi-disciplinary subject groups can be seen in Figure 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi-disciplinary subject groups</th>
<th>Total number of weekly lesson hour in grades 1-9 together</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language and interaction (without optional language studies)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>28,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment, science and technology</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual, enterprise and society</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and crafts</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and personal functionality</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pupil’s minimum number of weekly lessons during the 9 year basic education</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
<td><strong>100,0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 weekly lesson hour = 38 lessons*

Figure 6: Proposal for the number of weekly lessons per multi-disciplinary subject group

The committee proposed that the objective for language education is to strengthen the language skills in society, diversify language programs and introduce it earlier, and to ensure the position of a second national language.

The implementation of foreign language education and studies in the second national language as well as the opportunity to choose amongst them in an equitable manner will be strengthened with national guidance. Foreign language education and second national language studies will be diversified and introduced earlier than they are now. The first language of the pupils, the A1-language, commences in Grade 2 at the latest. The second compulsory language, the B1-language commences in Grade 6 at the latest. The education provider’s duty to offer a diversified language programs will be specified. The education provider must offer at least three alternative A1-languages, of which one is the second national language. Instruction in a language must be provided if there are at least 10 pupils who have chosen that language.

### 2.4 To strengthen the provision of individual support and guidance

The committee emphasized that in order to gain a good educational base, to provide opportunities for individual growth in a versatile way, develop knowledge-based skills and be successful as a learner, the pupils’ competences must be taken into account. Each pupil must further be provided with the guidance and support they require. The guidance should motivate pupils to find and develop their own strengths, as well as be motivated by their own learning.

The proposal aims to enhance pupils’ freedom to choose optional lesson hours in an equal and equitable manner. The number of optional lesson hours will be increased significantly in Grades 3 to 6 and 7 to 9. The increase aims to
strengthen the objectives set for the multi-disciplinary subject groups as well as to integrate and deepen their content. This also aims to give pupils and education providers more opportunities for different options and flexible solutions, and to increase the motivation to study.

The optional lesson hours will be part of the pupils’ minimum number of compulsory lesson hours. It has been proposed that there will be 13 annual weekly lesson hours in Grades 3-6 of optional subjects which have been added to the number of minimum lesson hours in these grades. They can be implemented in two ways:

- The education provider decides how the lesson hours that are part of the multi-disciplinary subject groups or the ones promoting the shared objectives within the multi-disciplinary subject groups will be used.
- The education provider offers optional subjects according to the principles guiding the optional subjects or elective lesson hours. The pupil chooses from the offered choices.

It has been proposed that there will be 15 plus six annual weekly lesson hours of optional subjects in addition to the number of the minimum lesson hours in these grades. The optional subjects in Grades 7-9 must always be optional for the pupil in every respect. The education provider must offer optional lesson hours according to the principles described above from which the pupil chooses according to his or her needs and orientation.

The lesson hours in arts and crafts are proposed to be increased, and pupils’ opportunities to choose optional lesson hours in these subjects will be increased. The optional lesson hours have been added to the multidisciplinary subject group arts and crafts to also strengthen the pupil’s opportunity to concentrate on subjects that he or she is inclined and orientated to. In the arts and crafts subject group, in Grades 8-9, the pupil chooses two subjects from music, visual arts, crafts and drama which he or she will study for a minimum of six annual weekly lesson hours in total during Grades 8-9. In addition, there are optional subjects in the multidisciplinary subject group arts and crafts in Grades 3-6 with a minimum scope of eight annual weekly lesson hours in total; and in Grades 7-9 with a minimum scope of two annual weekly lesson hours in total.

The number of lesson hours in physical education will be increased with four annual weekly lesson hours — from which one will be in Grades 1-2, one in Grades 3-6 and two in Grades 7-9. The number of optional subject in the multi-disciplinary subject group health and personal functionality will also be increased in Grades 3-6 with a minimum scope of two annual weekly lesson hours in total, and in Grades 7-9 with a minimum scope of two annual weekly lesson hours in total.

The number of optional lesson hours in the multi-disciplinary subject groups arts and crafts, and health and personal functionality can be viewed and used as one component with a minimum scope of 14 annual weekly lesson hours.
2.5 To clarify the principles of providing basic education

The committee proposed that basic education will be developed as an integral whole by combining the three dimensions, objectives, contents and implementation in a systematic way. The guidance system will similarly be developed to support basic education as an integral whole (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Proposed structure of basic education

The objectives for the skills and competences an individual needs in society have been classified into five groups:
- thinking skills
- ways of working and interacting
- crafts and expressive skills
- participation and initiative
- self-awareness and personal responsibility.

These above-mentioned skills — named citizen skills — will be defined as part of the general national objectives by the new basic education decree. They will be included in the objectives of the multi-disciplinary subject groups and the objectives of individual subjects. The committee underlined that the implementation of objectives for basic education requires a national and comprehensive agreement of the aims of the reform. Further, a clarification of the principles of implementation and support for the education providers will be necessary in order to implement the renewal and provide instruction according to the objectives.

It has been proposed that the curricular transition points will be integrated in every subject so that the first takes place between Grades 2 and 3 and the other between Grades 6 and 7. The integration of transition points aims, for example, to ease the provision of education in schools which have a single structure (i.e. all nine grades “under one roof”), and improve the collaboration between institutions. The purpose of defining transition points this way is not to return back to the old division between primary and lower secondary school. The committee underlined that the integrity and cohesiveness of basic education should be developed further at both the national and local level in a pedagogic way and with solutions that promote the collaboration of teachers.
The committee underlined that the Basic Education Act requires providing education for pupils of compulsory education age, and taking into account the learning environment and the importance of diverse teaching methods.

3. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

At the moment the Ministry of Education and Culture is collecting advisory opinions about the proposal. The circulation of the proposal for comments will include almost 300 interest groups who were asked to give their opinions by the end of August 2010. Based on these comments, the proposal for the new legislation will be finalized. The impact of the committee’s proposals will be implemented in the new curriculum process after the legislation has entered into force, hopefully during the first half of 2011. The process is illustrated in Figure 8.

![Figure 8: Process of implementing proposal for the renewal of basic education](image)

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) is in charge of the renewal of the core curricula, in co-operation with broad networks of municipalities and schools, teacher educators, representatives of teacher education departments, publishers of learning materials, researchers, municipal education authorities, principals and teachers, and representatives of the social services and national healthcare systems. This co-operation helps ensure that everyone working in the education sector at the local level will be supported by other actors in society.

Each municipality draws up a municipal curriculum based on the national core curriculum, and considers the needs of local children and families. Every school has its own curriculum, which it uses to develop its annual work plans for the school and each teacher, and individual study plans for students when needed. Through this process, teachers learn to view the operations of their school as a whole and also commit to being responsible for more than their own class or subject. This develops their overall expertise, creating a better basis for inclusive practices. Students and their parents are also increasingly involved in school curriculum processes, and their needs and opinions influence school practices.
4. AREAS OF FOCUS

4.1 Standards and targets

4.1.1 National framework of educational targets

The two most important documents that steer the development of education and training in Finland are the Government Program, and Development Plan for Education and Research for 2007–2012. These are based on the education and science policy aims of the present government. Based on these aims and their formulation, a number of national development project have been set up.

The large-scale project called “Better Basic Education” (POP) program (2007–2011) is linked to the government objectives to improve the quality of education. The government has decided to reallocate funds freed by the decrease in age groups to quality enhancement in education. Implementation of the program is reserved for a total of 80 million euros, which is allocated directly to municipalities as state grants.

The priorities of the POP program are the special learning needs of pupils, development of guidance activities and home-school co-operation. Other aims are to reduce the size of teaching groups and to develop foreign language teaching. There are also many subprojects connected to the POP program.

As a part of the POP program, quality criteria for basic education have been approved. The purpose of these 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 economic standing.

The quality criteria offer a useful tool for local policy-makers for evaluating shorter- and longer-term effects of their decisions on school quality. At its best, the information gained with the help of quality criteria will enable policy-makers and authorities to identify shortcomings and put them right in the context of yearly operational and economic planning. Quality criteria also make for regional co-operation. A regional action model enables authorities to co-operate in evaluation beyond municipal borders. Besides being a regional tool, quality criteria in basic education specifically offer schools and education providers a tool for evaluating their activities and operations together.

Another focus today is the continuing professional development for education staff. In 2008, in accordance with the government program and plan for the development of education, the Ministry of Education appointed a working group to prepare the requirement to be set for education providers to ensure their personnel receive regular continuing education to improve their professional competence. The working group came up with a proposal and recommendations to ensure the availability of continuing professional development (CPD) to all education personnel through changes in legislation, increased funding and follow up.

The working group proposed changes in legislation to obligate education providers to systematically ensure that the teaching personnel and personnel employed in the management and support functions of teaching participate sufficiently in continuing education organized for them. The intention is not to legislate on the quantitative obligation, but that the education requirements would be dictated by professional competence and the demands of the job description. The proposed legislation is due to enter into force in January 2011.

The working group also proposed that a new fixed-term national program be set up. The program would support the obligation of education providers to see to the continuing education of their education personnel and to ensure staff...
opportunities to improve their professional competence. The Ministry of Education has allocated an extra 8 million euros for CPD for education staff for the year 2010. The plan is to increase this funding in the following years. The program is foreseen to continue until 2016. The national objectives for the program have been drawn up by the advisory board for the development of continuing training for education personnel.

4.2 Assessments and use of data

Evaluation plays an important role in the educational management system in Finland. The transition from norm-based management and inspection to management by information has increased the need for evaluation data in educational decision-making. The main objective of evaluations in education is quality assurance and the identification of developmental areas in current educational policies and practices. Evaluations thus serve the educational needs related to evidence-based planning and development work, policy-making and performance-based steering at a local, regional, national and global level.

In Finland, local educational administration has an imperative role in how education is organized, and how local curricula are designed and implemented. The educational legislation introduced in 1999 strengthened the importance of evaluation as a tool for managing education. Today, education and training providers in Finland have a statutory duty to evaluate their own activities and participate in external evaluations. Evaluation of basic, general upper secondary, vocational upper secondary, basic education in the arts, vocational adult education and liberal adult education is stipulated in respective acts.

An example of the integration and continuous evaluation of operations is the quality assurance process of the previous renewal of the national core curriculum. The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) decided in 2004 about the most recent national core curriculum of the basic education. In spring 2005, the FNBE started to gather information about the reform. This work was carried out in several different stages during the years 2005–2009. Opinions and experiences were collected from:

- providers of education (mostly municipalities)
- schools
- principals
- teachers
- other stakeholders.

The collection and evaluation of the aforementioned information is an important part of the future national core curriculum preparation and renewal process. Based on that information, it is possible to make deeper conclusions for future educational reforms and about the functionality of the whole educational steering system.

National monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes thus plays a very important role in preparing the national core curriculum and in developing the whole educational system.

4.2.1 History and legislation

The systems regulating and managing education changed dramatically during the 1990s. Finnish education policies underwent a significant process of expansion from the 1960s to 1990s, and that period also witnessed many structural reforms of the education system. That was the golden era of faith in central planning. A strong centralized management system was seen as necessary in implementing the reforms and attaining their objectives. A centralized management system was believed to rationalize and strengthen the implementation of large-scale social policy reforms, advancing equal opportunities and meaningful allocation of public resources. Educational objectives, curricula and methods of management organization were regulated nationally in a uniform manner.

Resulting from the 1991 central administration reform, the responsibility for providing education was transferred almost entirely to the local authorities — mainly the municipalities. Today, local authorities and schools in Finland have a strong role in education management and sector development. Most schools are owned and operated by the
municipalities. The new reform legislation made municipalities fairly autonomous in arranging their public services, including education.

The evaluation function of the Finnish National Board of Education was amended in 2003 in the Government Decree on Evaluation of Education (150/2003), which led to the establishment of the Education Evaluation Council attached to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Further, the decree stipulated that the evaluation of education be organized by the council through a network of universities, the Finnish National Board of Education and other expert bodies within evaluation.

In 2009, the acts of basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational upper secondary education as well as adult education were amended to make the organization and responsibilities of national evaluations clearer. According to the amendments, the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for national assessments of learning outcomes in education from pre-primary to adult education. The Finnish Education Evaluation Council acts as an independent expert organization under the Ministry of Education and Culture and is responsible for external evaluations. The Ministry of Education and Culture draws up the evaluation plan for external evaluations and assessments of learning outcomes. Responsibilities, assembly, organization of activities, and preparation of issues of the Finnish Education Evaluation Council, as well as the content of the evaluation plan are regulated by a decree.

4.2.2 Administrative framework

The Ministry of Education and Culture prepares a national evaluation plan at regular intervals. Priorities for the external evaluation of education include the effectiveness, quality, efficiency and economy of education. Special targets for monitoring include the impacts of the municipal and service structure reform. The Ministry of Education and Culture decided in October 2008 on the National Evaluation Plan of Education 2009–2011. The plan will be revisited in 2010 as needed.

As there is no inspection of schools in Finland, the government and the Ministry of Education and Culture take responsibility for monitoring and steering education in Finland. Many aspects of monitoring and the realization of educational standards have been entrusted to the providers of education. These activities are steered through the national core curricula and objectives ratified by legislation. Feedback concerning the operations of the education system is collected by means of statistics and evaluations.

The only standardized high-stake assessment of students in Finland is the Matriculation Examination at the end of general upper secondary education. Prior to this Matriculation Examination, no external national tests or exams are required.

In sum, the Finnish evaluation system builds on

- Local evaluations conducted in municipalities and educational institutions. Education providers’ obligation to evaluate their education and its effectiveness and to participate in external evaluations is based on educational legislation. Evaluation primarily stems from the educational objectives of the municipality, which must be based on national objectives.

- At a regional level, the monitoring of education is partly carried out by the Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI). 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. The regional level supports the acquisition of information required for national evaluation.

- The national-level evaluation system comprises of (i) an assessment system of learning outcomes; (ii) production of indicators; and (iii) variable evaluation projects (reviews of education or thematic reviews). Evaluation is used to collect data in support of education policy decisions and as a background for information- and performance-based steering and evidence-based decision making. Evaluation findings are used in the development of the education system and the core curricula and in practical teaching. They, and international comparative data, also provide a tool for monitoring the realization of equality and equity in education.
International co-operation in evaluation, where the quality of national evaluation systems will be developed, thus securing a high quality of education in the European framework.

Decisions regarding directions and financing of national evaluations will be taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Related to the renewal of basic education and the core curriculum, the Ministry of Education has commissioned the Council to carry out a project for evaluating the functionality of the national core curriculum of pre-primary and basic education. The project will be carried out during 2009–2010. The evaluation focuses on the suitability, steering quality and applicability of the curriculum system and the distribution of lesson hours. Decisions on further evaluations will be taken annually by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

4.2.3 Publicity of evaluation outcomes in Finland

The obligation to evaluate education implies that the evaluation outcomes need to be made public. The responsibility to publish the main findings lies with the education provider as it comes to self-evaluation and in case of external evaluation with the body that conducted the evaluation.

The obligation to publish the essential outcomes only concerns the evaluation referred to in the legislation. For example, summaries made in conjunction with student assessments are not evaluations meant in the respective Acts and hence, are not results to be publicized.

Furthermore, there has been much discussion to what extent the evaluation results should be public or not. The viewpoint held by the Parliamentary Education and Culture Committee is that making evaluation results public must not result in ranking lists. Neither must it place schools, teachers or students at a disadvantage. The guiding principle in making evaluations public is positive discrimination; those with weaker results receive more support.

4.2.4 Evaluation of learning outcomes in the Finnish education system

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) takes responsibility for assessing learning outcomes throughout the Finnish educational system from pre-primary to adult education (higher education excluded). The purpose of these assessments is to examine, as diversely and reliably as possible, the extent to which objectives set forth in the national core curricula are achieved. Another aim is to investigate achievement of educational equality in Finland. The results are also used for developing the national core curricula and for planning continuing training for the teachers.

The information for evaluations is mainly collected by using stratified random sample-based surveys, tests and/or national statistical sources. The assessments of learning outcomes are mostly conducted in Grades 6 and 9 on a regular basis in mathematics, 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.

Education providers can commission the FNBE to carry out evaluations when they are not included into national assessments. The education providers pay for this service. In addition to the sample schools, the analysis also includes the learning outcomes of pupils at those schools that have ordered the assessments.

4.2.5 Framework for assessing educational outcomes

The Finnish national evaluation system is founded on the following cornerstones: national education indicators, an evaluation system for learning achievements and evaluation projects with varying themes. The evaluation system is an integrated whole consisting of national-level evaluations and local-level self-assessments.

The national evaluation system seeks to support the local/municipal education administration and the development of schools as goal oriented and open functional units. It also produces and provides varied, up-to-date and reliable information on the operational context, functioning, results, and effects of the education system in the central target areas within the national and international frameworks.
The national evaluation system covers the following areas:
- the supply of and demand for education, access to education, and student flows
- the structure and functioning of the whole education system and of its parts
- the relationship between educational quality and resources available
- development trends in education policy and changes in the field of education
- relations between education and the rest of society
- curricula and syllabi
- learning achievements
- evaluations of effectiveness, efficiency and economy, and
- topical areas of emphasis in evaluation.

4.2.6 Guiding principles in the national evaluation of educational outcomes

The evaluation of learning outcomes is holistic in nature and designed to investigate how well the goals have been reached and how successfully available resources have been used. The evaluation of outcomes is broad based and seeks to utilize various sources of information as diversely and objectively as possible.

When evaluating outcomes, attention is paid to the effectiveness, economy and efficiency of the activities being studied. To put it simply, effectiveness means that people are doing the right things, while efficiency means that they are doing them in the right way.

Based on the system for evaluating outcomes wielded in state administration in general, the evaluation of educational outcomes has been defined for educational administration as follows:

Education has been successful (that is, it has produced the desired educational outcomes) when the nationally and internationally set objectives for each organizational form of the education system, for each school or institution and for the learning activities of each individual, have been achieved.

* Education is efficient when the functioning, flexibility and timing of the education system, educational administration and teaching arrangements are as appropriate as possible and the quality of teaching is high.

* Education is effective when it succeeds in promoting the growth of individuals and the development of society, culture and working life.

* Education is economical when the resources of education have been allocated in an optimal way with respect to the educational objectives, and the amount of resources is in proportion with the number of educational services provided, and appropriate with regard to the structure and organization of the service provision.

4.3 Capacity building and the development of the teaching profession in Finland

Unlike many other countries, in Finland the teaching profession is highly valued and a popular field of study. In Finnish society, teachers are trusted experts who are also seen as change agents in the development of the curriculum and the whole education system. Teachers have plenty of independence in planning their work, implementing the national core curriculum, shaping their lessons, and choosing their teaching methods and materials. Teachers are expected, not so much to transmit knowledge to students by ‘delivering’ the curriculum, but to guide the learning process and to strengthen their students’ “learning to learn” abilities and skills. They are also expected to cope with different kinds of learners, and to provide adequate and on-time support to students with special needs. In order to respond to the diverse pressures and equip teachers with the necessary skills and competences, teacher education has and continues to be an area of ongoing development.
4.3.1 Pre-service teacher education

Skills and competences needed in teachers’ work today are the ability to support different learners; the ability to co-operate with colleagues and with other educational professionals; the ability to develop and improve curriculum and learning environments; the ability to solve problems in school life and educational institutions; and the ability to reflect on one’s own professional identity. Teachers of today and tomorrow must have competences to notice, analyze, reflect and make informed decisions that serve the needs of every learner and society at large. The ability to analyze and reflect further ensures that teachers are equipped to deal with and participate in reforms and changes in the education system. A description of the education of teachers in Finland can be found in the Appendix.

The proposal for the renewal of basic education also provides recommendations for teacher education. The recommendations aim at ensuring that teachers are equipped for the changes brought about by the grouping of subjects, the two new proposed subjects and the new distribution of lesson hours.

The recommendation is that the knowledge, skills and competences that form the basis for teaching all subjects should be clearly defined. Further, teachers need to understand the idea of the integration of subjects into subject groups and be able to implement this in their teaching practice. The new subject groups need to be taken into account in both planning and the actual teaching. As the subject groups span across a number of different subjects, teachers must be able to collaborate genuinely. It is further required that the skills and knowledge defined as citizen skills in the proposal must be taken into account in all education and activities of the schools.

The recommendation also pays attention to the co-operation with the home and other interest groups. Teacher education should provide future teachers with the skills and competences for such co-operation. In-service education should strengthen these competences.

In the future, teachers will need more and more competences to support and guide individual pupils and to manage multicultural groups. Finally, versatile skills and the competences to apply ICT, social media and new learning environments will be necessary for every teacher.

The proposal to increase the number of hours in arts and crafts as well as physical education might increase the need for teachers in these subjects. It is, however, difficult to anticipate the quantitative need as there is local variation in how well the schools can cope with the changes with their present resources.

The introduction of drama and ethics as new subjects does not bring any dramatic changes. A teacher who has a class-teacher or subject-teacher qualification in mother tongue and literature, music, physical education or arts is qualified to teach drama after having completed appropriate further studies of 30 ECTS at university. Ethics can be taught as part of religion or the ethics studies that today are an alternative to studies in religion. It can also be taught collectively to all pupils, regardless of religious denomination. Teachers who are qualified to teach religion and ethics will be qualified to teach the new subject of ethics. This might mean that studies in ethics need to be increased in the education programs for teachers of religion and ethics.

4.3.2 In-service education and professional development of teachers

Today teachers’ work is characterized by constant change, cultural dispersion and increasing diversity. There are rapid and unforeseen changes in economic life, in societal structures, production and information technologies. It is all these features that teacher education also needs to respond to. Therefore, constant attention is paid to the continuing professional development of teachers in Finland. The continuous update of competences and reflection on professional practice facilitate the introduction of educational reform and enable the teachers to adapt to changes and advances in conceptions of teaching and learning.
Education that is important in terms of education policy and priorities is funded by the state. This promotes the practical implementation of the objectives defined in Parliament and government decisions and in the target outcome negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education. Thus the renewal of the distribution of lesson hours and basic education will be visible in the topics and emphases of state-funded in-service education in the near future.

The state-funded in-service education for 2010 is expected to

- promote the functionality of the education system
- support national education and training policy
- provide competence needed in reforms
- apply models and information acquired through research
- promote national and regional co-operation with the world of work
- ensure the availability of in-service education for education personnel in the different phases of their careers
- improve participation rates and accessibility to in-service education
- promote operating models that support the development of the working communities
- increase work placements and other flexible, collegial and individualized opportunities for learning
- strengthen the link between operational development and research and evaluations
- increase the use of ICT.

The annual budget for state-funded in-service education is about 21 million euros. The number of teaching personnel taking part in this education is about 30,000 people per year. This represents one-quarter of all teaching personnel. The state-funded education is free of charge for the participants.

4.4 Leadership development

In Finland, there is a political understanding that leadership matters. The Development Plan for Education and Research for 2007–2012 stresses the importance of knowledge of leadership and development of educational institutions as part of teacher education. The development plan also underlines the significance of professional leadership in vocational education and training, and higher education.

Although the status of educational leaders is high in Finland and traditionally been considered attractive positions, the increase in the responsibilities of principals and heads of local education departments has led to a situation in which the profession is considered too wide-ranging and too difficult to be attractive. It is possible that those who have ambitions to steer educational development and have idealistic or innovative visions of future might opt out because of the huge administrative burden, seeing the “mission impossible”, leaving those to volunteer whose motives are not always purely related to the development of education and training.

In view of educational reform and development, the role of principals is crucial. At the same time, a situation where leadership positions are not attractive enough is highly worrying. For a remarkable national reform, such as the renewal of basic education, to succeed it is vital that principals are provided with the necessary skills and competences and that these are updated.

A further challenge is that Finnish principals are aging. According to statistics, more than half of the principals in basic education were over 50 years of age in 2008. Thus, a shortage of competent leaders can be foreseen. The challenge is to attract younger professionals to enter a leadership career.

In the in-service education for educational leaders, the emphasis has traditionally been on providing education for both new leaders and those who have been in the profession longer. In the future, there is a need to stress education targeted
beginning leaders to attract new and enthusiastic leaders and innovators. Further, continuous co-operation with professional associations and organizations of leaders is considered central. A continuous supply of competent leaders in the future can be guaranteed by making the profession attractive and by supporting leaders with in-service training to support their continuous professional development.

4.5 Sustainability

The next Parliamentary election will be held in April 2011 in Finland. It will also mean a change of national government and the adoption of a new government program. The new development program based on the government program will be prepared and adopted for 2011-2016 after the Cabinet change. This cycle shows the stability of Finnish political system, and it also creates a strong basis for dynamic education policy.

The purpose of both the government program and the development plan for education and research is to ensure the realization of basic security in education. The priorities are to improve the efficiency of the education system, to support children and young people, and to improve adults' opportunities for education and training. The implementation of new large-scale national educational programs (such as POP) will be decided in negotiations.

The Finnish consensus policy and the general agreement on the importance of education and training ensure the continuity and sustainability in educational policy and its implementation. Consequently, processes such as the described curriculum renewal process do not remain single instances of development but form a basis for continuous work on improving education and training.

5. OUTCOMES

The committee that was set up to renew the distribution of lesson hours on basic education proposed an overall renewal for basic education. Strengthening the integrity and mission of basic education in a consistent way, ensuring the high level of knowledge and skills, providing individual support and guidance, as well as increasing pupils’ opportunities to choose learning content provides knowledge and skills which are an important resource for the Finnish society.

Clarifying the principles of providing basic education strengthens the sense of equality in basic education at a national level.

The renewal is now just in the beginning and will take time. The outcomes will be seen only after years. In order to be successful, the renewal process requires a shared vision of the development and objectives for basic education. The implementation and provision requires focused and persistent leadership at every level. Leading the process of change and development of teaching should be based on a strong understanding of the substance.

Successful change requires looking after economic and other operational prerequisites for basic education. In order to reach the set objectives, it is a requirement for the educational system that all the actors at a national and local level, school leaders and teachers commit themselves to the renewal. Efficient co-operation between guardians and other partners and actors is also required.

The school community should work towards an operational culture which supports learning, welfare and development as well as maintains the school community. Pupils’ opportunities for growth and learning as individuals and members of the group should be supported within school community. The process of the renewal is illustrated in Figure 9.
Objectives for the renewal

Requirements to achieve the general national objectives

General national objectives

- Shared vision of the direction and mission of the development process
- Persistent and focused leadership at every level
- Home-school co-operation/partnership
- Looking after economic and other operational prerequisites for basic education

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

4. Shared vision of the direction and mission of the development process
5. Persistent and focused leadership at every level
6. Home-school co-operation/partnership
7. Looking after economic and other operational prerequisites for basic education

ADMISTRATION

- Future orientated and evidence-based process of change and development of education
- Full commitment to development of education in all levels
- Professional leadership
- Professional teachers
- Quality assurance

SCHOOL

- Ethos of the school community
- Co-operation, interaction and human relationships
- School culture, welfare and toimintakyky

TEACHING

- Demanding objectives, focused content
- Teaching based on the knowledge and skills of an individual pupil
- Logical quality teaching
- Versatile learning methods and environments

- Pupils growth and development is taken into consideration
- Logical and supportive evaluation that fosters learning
- Motivation strengthened by opportunities to choose learning content

To promote the growth towards humanity and citizenship

To ensure the high level knowledge and skills

To strengthen the provision of individual support and guidance

To clarify and enhance the mission and integrity

To clarify the principles of providing basic education

Knowledge and skills needed

To promote the equal opportunities in education and lifelong learning
Figure 9: Process of renewal of basic education

6. REFERENCES


http://www.oph.fi/tietopalvelut/kansainvalinen_koulutustieto/cedefop/cedefopin_julkaisut
7. APPENDIX

TEACHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

The following teaching professions are recognized within basic and upper secondary education and have their own qualification requirements in Finland:

- Kindergarten teachers in early childhood care may give pre-primary education in separate pre-primary classes;
- class teachers mainly teach in Grades 1-6 in basic education; may also give pre-primary education;
- subject teachers teach one or several subjects in basic education (mainly Grades 7-9) and in upper secondary education, including vocational and adult education and training;
- special needs teachers and special class teachers;
- guidance counsellors;
- teachers of vocational studies in vocational education and training.

Principals are often considered part of the teaching staff as many of them also have teaching responsibilities.

Pre-service education of teachers

The education of teachers for teachers at all levels is today provided in higher education institutions. A unique feature of Finnish teacher education is that both primary and secondary school teachers must earn a Master’s Degree and that their academic status is the same. Also the pedagogical training has been harmonized so that it gives the qualifications to teach at many levels and types of education. The same minimum of 60 ECTS credits of pedagogical studies is required of teachers for all types of educational institution. These studies must comprise basic and subject studies in education, subject didactics and teaching practice.

Class teachers, generalists who teach mainly at primary level in Grades 1-6 hold a Master’s degree, majoring in education. Subject teachers mainly teach at lower secondary (Grades 7-9) and upper secondary education have a Master’s degree with a major in their teaching subject. The Master’s degrees also qualify for postgraduate Licentiate or Doctorate studies. Kindergarten teachers hold a Bachelor’s degree.

The main principles for present-day teacher education were created in the 1970s, when the Teacher Education Committee (Committee Report 1975) defined the main aims for research-based teacher education as follows:

1. Initial education of teachers must give common and broad qualification to all teachers and this common background can then be flexibly complemented by in-service education.
2. Pedagogical studies should be developed in such a way that teachers are prepared to be educators in the broad sense of this concept and can support students’ socio-emotional growth. Teachers should have pedagogical, optimistic attitude to their work that is grounded in the latest research. Theoretical and practical studies as well as academic content and pedagogical studies should be integrated.
3. Teacher education should include also societal and educational policy studies.

The original principles from 1970s and their implementation have been developed in many ways. Finland has used continuous national and international evaluations to be able to improve teacher education. Especially, common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications launched by the European Council and the European Commission have been taken into account. For instance, the strategy of the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Helsinki emphasizes that teachers should:

- be aware of the different dimensions of the teaching profession (social, philosophical, sociological and historical basis of education)
- be able to reflect broadly on their own work
have potential for lifelong professional development and to learn more subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge
be able to think pedagogically in planning, teaching and evaluating
have the basic knowledge of 1) the subject matter, 2) the nature of information and 3) the information collection in the subjects they teach
be capable of multidisciplinary thinking, argumentation and integrative teaching, which are all in line with the general values related to education and teaching
be capable of creative and flexible thinking, and ready to face and carry out changes in the work community
have good co-operation and communication skills (mother tongue, foreign language) and know how to use ICT in education
be competent for postgraduate studies

Today teacher education programs are designed and implemented by teacher education departments in higher education institutions. The autonomy of the institutions in designing their curricula gives flexibility to changing skills needs. However, even if programs vary to some extent from institution to institution, they are based on a common structure developed as a part of voluntary co-operation between universities in 2003-2006 in line with the Bologna process. Also the close co-operation and benchmarking between the different university teacher education departments or vocational teacher education institutions at polytechnics ensure a high quality all over the country.

Teacher education in Finland is characterized by the integration of theory and practice. First, theory orientation means that teacher education is based on academic research which qualifies teachers to use scientific knowledge in their work and autonomously develop their work. Teachers also need to be familiar with the latest research on teaching and learning. The aim is that teachers develop a research-oriented attitude towards their work. Research orientation also means that teacher education in itself should be an object of study and research.

Practical orientation means that teacher students visit different kind of schools during their studies, observe the working and teaching-learning processes in schools and compare the everyday school life to what they have theoretically learnt. In their studies, they have periods during which they perform their supervised practice. They learn to plan teaching lessons, teach different learning groups and different subjects, and evaluate and improve their own teaching. These practice periods take place both in regular field schools and in the training schools of teacher education institutions.

Something that should be noted is that there is no separate process of accreditation for teachers in Finland. The qualification requirements are defined in the legislation and completion of the required studies provide the students with the formal qualifications. The education of the different teacher groups are described in more detail in the following sections.

Kindergarten teacher education

Kindergarten teachers hold a Bachelor’s degree (180 ECTS) with education as a major. This degree qualifies to serve as a Kindergarten teacher and as a pre-primary teacher. The degree may be completed in three academic years. The majority of the graduated Kindergarten teachers work in daycare centres as teachers and educators of children under school age.

Studies in Kindergarten teacher education consist of the following study modules:

- language and communication studies, ICT
- 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 chiefly in different forms of daycare 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.

Qualified Kindergarten teachers can continue their studies to become special Kindergarten teachers, to complete a Master’s degree with an orientation to education or early childhood education and care, or to choose other options provided by universities.

Class teacher education

The main goal of class teacher education is to educate pedagogically thinking teachers, and to support their personal growth and their understanding of human development. It is important that teachers learn to understand historical, cultural, and social structures and processes of education, and that they understand also the aims, contents and strategies of teaching.

The basic principles of class teacher education are, according to Krokkors (2005):
- the interaction is based on a collegial working culture and on the development of the teachership
- the expertise is based on pedagogical thinking, on the teacher as a researcher-thinking, and on an active and wide knowledge base
- the orientation to the society is based on the ethical base of teachership, and on the teacher’s activity as a member of school community and society.

Class teachers have to complete a master’s degree of 300 ECTS credits. Class teachers have education science as their major (140 ECTS). Class teacher education consists of the following studies:
- language and communication studies, ICT
- basic and subject studies in education
- advanced studies in education
- minor subject studies (school subjects)
- optional studies.

The supervised teaching practice periods have a very important function. There is some variation between universities in how they organize these periods. For instance in Helsinki University, the class teacher education includes 20 ECTS supervised practical studies.

Subject teacher education

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.

Competences of a subject teacher are, according to Lavonen (2008):
- subject knowledge and skills; a well-organized knowledge structure in a subject, understanding of the nature of knowledge and how new knowledge is acquired and adopted in the subject
- pedagogical knowledge and skills so that the teacher can plan, implement and evaluate learning activities (teaching methods) and learning (psychological, philosophical, historical and sociological background), can motivate students and use ICT in his/her teaching, and is competent to choose a variety of teaching methods
- competence for continuous professional development; readiness to learn new subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills, skills for reflective thinking (teacher as a researcher), skills for collaboration with colleagues.

A subject teacher teaches typically two or three subjects, for example mathematics and physics. Subject teachers complete a major and one to two minors in their academic teaching subjects. A subject teacher’s Master’s degree (300
ECTS) consists of about 140 ECTS subject matter studies in the major subject, including the Master’s thesis. Subject teachers can complete their pedagogical studies either concurrently and as a part of their academic major studies or as a one-year block at the end of their studies.

Subject teacher education consists of

- major subject studies
- minor subject studies
- pedagogical studies
- languages and communication studies, ICT
- optional studies.

Teaching practice takes place at affiliated schools or at the teacher training schools of universities. The training includes teaching observation, giving supervised lessons alone and/or alongside other teacher trainees, and subject-didactic group counselling.

Teachers of core subjects at vocational institutions have the same education as subject teachers working within the general education sector.

**Special needs teacher education**

Special needs teacher’s studies of 60–75 ECTS credits can be included into the degree of Master of Education or completed as separate studies after taking a Master’s degree or vocational teacher qualifications. Thus teachers having general or vocational subject qualifications can specialize in special needs education. The aim of special needs teacher education is to train experts who, in addition to their own educational work, can supervise the special pedagogical work of other teachers and the institution as a whole. Special needs teachers work in mainstream education or special institutions. Admission requirements include teacher qualifications and often teaching experience.

**Guidance counsellor education**

People with a Master’s degree are entitled to apply for separate pupil or student counsellor studies. The scope of the education is 60 ECTS credits and it provides qualifications to work in pupil and student counselling assignments in basic education and upper secondary education.

In student counsellor education leading to a Master’s degree, the main subject is an educational subject. Pedagogical studies for teachers may be included in the main subject or completed separately. In addition, the education includes guidance counsellor studies with a scope of 60 ECTS credits.

The students familiarize themselves with the underlying social factors involved in student counselling as well as with various areas and methods of counselling both within their own institutions and in co-operation with other organizations.

**Vocational teacher education**

Vocational teacher education refers to teacher education for those aiming to teach at polytechnics and vocational institutions. The aim is to provide students with the skills and knowledge to guide the learning of different kinds of students, and to develop their own field of teaching — taking developments in occupations and working life into account. The studies include basic studies in education, vocational subject pedagogic studies, teaching practice and other studies.

In vocational teacher education, the pedagogical studies are taken after a professional degree and three years’ work experience. Thus, the students generally either have a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree as a basis. The scope of the pedagogical training is 60 ECTS credits of which practical training is 20 ECTS credits.
The pedagogical training for vocational teachers combines theoretical studies with practice, comprising:

- basic studies in education
- studies in vocational pedagogy
- optional studies (e.g. studies in adult education or special needs education)
- teaching practice.

As most vocational teacher students already work as teachers, the training programs are more and more flexible and personalized. Since autumn 2005, one of the vocational teacher education colleges has offered a virtual teacher education program.

There are no specific teacher training schools for vocational teacher education. Instead, teaching practice takes place at different educational institutions, very often the institution where the students are already working.

**In-service education and professional development of teachers and principals**

Teachers are supported in their work by in-service education and by the pedagogical leadership of principals. Moreover, municipal and national education authorities offer possibilities for teachers to participate in development projects and national and international teacher networks where mutual learning and co-operation can take place.

The responsibility for in-service teacher training has been transferred to the maintaining bodies of educational institutions as part of the overall decentralization of administration. These bodies ensure that teachers participate in in-service training as laid down in legislation and collective agreements. On the other hand, teachers themselves have been given greater responsibility for participation in continuing education and training. More and more attention is being paid to self-motivated continuing education and training and local authorities support it within their financial limits. The state is primarily responsible for education that is important in terms of education policy and which promotes its aims.

Education providers and teachers are supported by government funding in terms of reforms significant to education policy. Most of the funding is channelled through the Finnish National Board of Education. In-service training for those providing teacher training is funded directly by the Ministry of Education on the basis of applications from universities.

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) has the responsibility of coordinating national development programs of education and also continuing training programs for teachers and other school staff. These programs are voluntary and free of charge to municipalities and schools. By participating in these programs, teachers acquire new knowledge and skills and also have a chance to influence national development of education. Municipalities and schools are today very actively participating in these programs. The FNBE also offers training days and programs which municipalities and schools can buy to serve their own needs.

Continuing teacher education is organized by different types of training centres such as university continuing education units, vocational teacher education institutions, university departments of teacher education and various private organizations. Continuing education is largely based on the logic of supply and demand. The number of applications for continuing education programs focusing on the priorities of education policy is considerably higher than the capacity for funding such programs.

State-funded continuing education supports the implementation of educational reforms and ensures continuing training related to the reforms for all teaching staff. The Ministry of Education and Culture has, in 2008, appointed an advisory council for the development of continuing education for teaching staff. The council’s task is to anticipate the changes in the learning needs of teaching staff, to follow up on the status of continuing training and its development needs. It also proposes initiatives for the development of continuing training. The advisory council is broad based: it comprises representatives from education administration, universities and polytechnics, labour market organizations, teacher and student organizations, municipal organizations, researchers in continuing training, and regional and local administration.

There is no pre-service training for principals. Consequently, in-service education is of utmost importance for both beginning leaders and those who have been in the profession for a long time. The importance of in-service training for leaders has been understood also at national level. In 2010, a separate in-service training program has been set up for
leaders in education and training. The priorities include, for example, training for new or aspiring leaders and mentoring. Nearly 1.5 million euros have been allocated to this training.

**Evaluating teachers and teacher education in Finland**

Neither teachers nor their teaching are evaluated in Finland as such. However, the principal is always the pedagogical leader of his/her educational institution, thus being responsible for both instruction and teaching staff. Most schools have a quality system, which includes annual development discussions or appraisals. These discussions are organized to evaluate the achievement of the objectives set for the previous year and the teaching staff’s objectives or needs for the following year.

The quality of all teacher education is monitored mainly through the self-evaluation of each university or polytechnic. External evaluations are conducted by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). External evaluations are not carried out regularly.

During the last 20 years the Ministry of Education and Culture has commissioned several large-scale teacher education evaluation projects. The outcomes of these evaluations have highlighted the strengths and challenges of Finnish teacher education, guiding its development for the future. The evaluations have shown that teacher education attracts highly talented and motivated students. Teacher education programs in Finland have not faced a serious drop-out of students. The evaluations have also shown that research orientation plays a central role in Finnish teacher education providing teachers with competences for evidence-based inquiry and reflective practice.

Despite the apparent strengths, there are also areas in need of development. The evaluations have indicated that there is too little co-operation between institutions providing teacher education programs. Another concern has to do with responding adequately to the demands of the changing society, such as providing teachers with competences to respond to the needs of the diverse student groups and to harnessing 21st century innovations for teaching and learning. Also “selling” the culture of professional learning which takes place in the form of a collaborative inquiry process to student teachers requires further attention and development.

A regular monitoring of the continuing and in-service education of teachers and principals started some years ago. Continuing and in-service education is included in the teacher data collection carried out on a regular basis. Also an evaluation of the continuing education of personnel in the education sector may be commissioned in 2014.