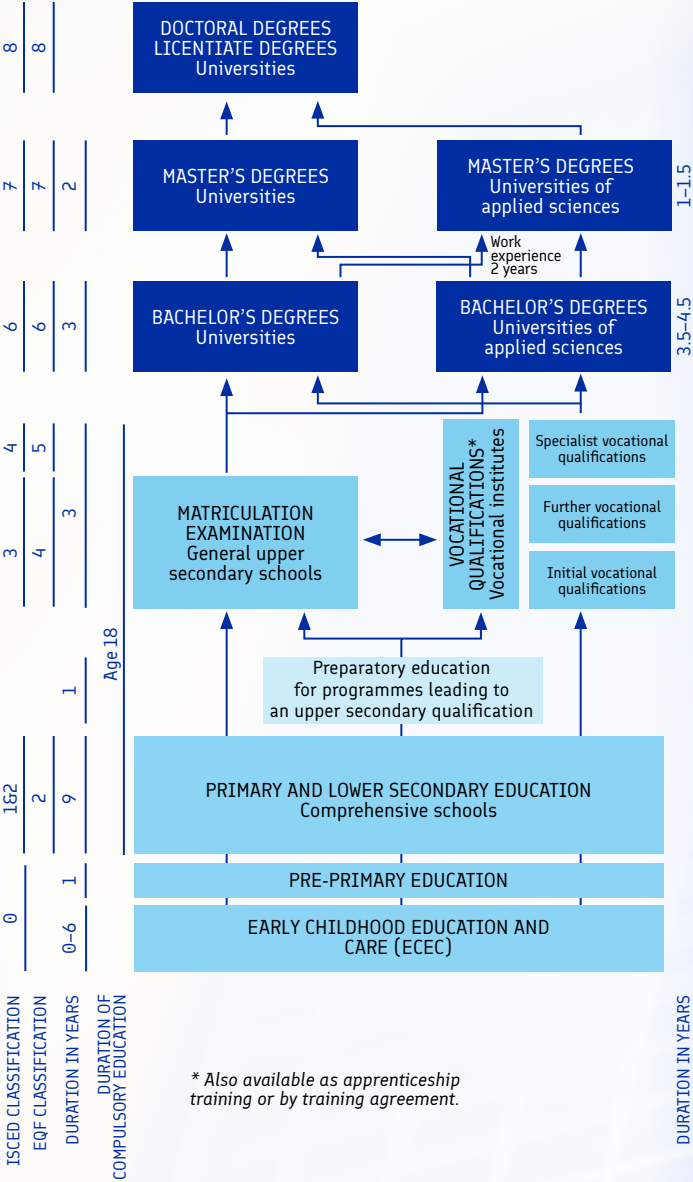





Finnish education in a nutshell

EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Education system in Finland





LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION

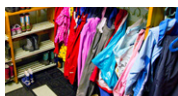
Adult education centres
Folk high schools
Summer universities
Centres of learning
/Study centres
Sports institutes

**BASIC EDUCATION IN THE
ARTS**

Schools of architecture,
circus,
crafts,
dance,
media,
music,
literary art,
theatre and visual arts

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The structure of the Finnish education system

The Finnish education system consists of:

- early childhood education and care
- pre-primary education
- primary and lower secondary education
- upper secondary education: general upper secondary education/vocational education and training
- higher education: universities/ universities of applied sciences
- adult education
- non-formal education.

All 6–18-yearolds participate in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary and upper secondary education. The Finnish education system has no dead-ends. Students can always continue their studies on any level of education as long as they meet the admission requirements of the level in question. ●



Early childhood, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education as part of lifelong learning

Early childhood education supports children's development and learning

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) comprises education, care and upbringing which supports children's balanced growth, development and learning. Every child has a subjective right to attend early childhood education after the end of parental leave. It can take place at early education centres, smaller family day care groups or in so-called open ECEC services. Municipalities are responsible for organising ECEC according to local demand.

Pre-primary education is compulsory for children aged 6. Pre-primary education is provided both in early education centres and in schools. At the pre-primary level children adopt basic skills, knowledge and capabilities from different learning areas in accordance with their age and abilities. Learning through play is essential.

Single-structure primary and lower secondary education

Education at that level starts the year a child turns 7 and lasts 9 years. Local authorities assign a school place to each pupil close to their homes. However, parents or guardians are also free to apply for a place in another school of their preference, where the pupil can start if there is room for them.

Primary and lower secondary education is provided within a single structure and is provided in comprehensive schools. Comprehensive schools have grades 1–9. Instruction is usually given by the same class teacher in most subjects in the first six year-classes, and by subject specialists in the last three years.

The school year consists of 190 days between mid-August and the beginning of June. The minimum number of lessons per week varies from 20 to 30, depending on the year-class and the number of optional subjects taken. Daily and weekly timetables are decided in the schools. In addition, it is possible to decide locally when holidays will be held.

There are also study programs for adults who lack the leaving certificate from primary and lower secondary education.

National core curriculum leaves room for local variation

The national core curriculum for primary and lower secondary education is determined by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The curriculum is renewed approximately every ten years in broad-based consultation and all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process. Working groups consist of educational officials, researchers and teachers as well as experts and stakeholders of relevant sectors and disciplinary fields. In addition, the wider public is also invited to comment on the drafts.

The national core curriculum contains the objectives and core contents of subjects and transversal competencies that cross the subject boundaries. In addition, the principles of pupil assessment, special needs education, pupil welfare and educational guidance are included. The principles of a good learning environment, and the conception of learning are also addressed in the core curriculum.

Education providers draw up their own curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum. Therefore, there is room for local or regional perspectives and emphases that complement the underlying values and conception of learning. Local curricula address any such perspectives and emphases, and how they are implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Local education providers decide for example the language programme and the local lesson-hour distribution within the national framework. Furthermore, cooperation with homes and instruction of pupils requiring special support or belonging to different language and cultural groups are defined in more detail in the local curriculum.

Assessment is part of daily schoolwork

The main types of pupil assessments are continuous assessment during studies (formative assessment) and final assessment (summative assessment). The aim of continuous assessment is to guide and help pupils in their learning process. Each pupil receives a school certificate at least once every school year.

There are no national tests for pupils in primary and lower secondary education in Finland. Instead, teachers are responsible for assessment, class teachers for their own class and subject teachers for their own subject, based on the goals and

assessment criteria written down in the curriculum. The grades in the primary and lower secondary certificate, the final certificate given at the end of year 9, are given by the teachers. Pupils will be selected for further studies based on this assessment. The national core curriculum includes assessment guidelines in all common subjects.

One task of primary and lower secondary education is to develop the pupils' capability for self-assessment. The purpose is to support the growth of self-knowledge and study skills, and to help pupils learn awareness of their progress and learning process. ●

Two types of upper secondary education – general and vocational

Completion of upper secondary education, both general and vocational, gives students eligibility to continue to higher education.

Preparatory education for upper secondary education

A preparatory education (TUVA education) for the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education provides students with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to apply for an upper secondary qualification. It is intended for pupils of compulsory education age, for students with immigrant background as well as for those adult learners, who are lacking the upper secondary qualification. The training lasts for a maximum of one year. TUVA is not

compulsory; it is designed to provide an extra support for learners. During the preparatory year students also have more time to think about their further studies and career choices.

General upper secondary education is flexibly organised

The syllabus of general upper secondary education is designed to last 3 years, but students may complete it in 2 to 4 years. Instruction is organised in modular form that is not tied to year-classes, and students can decide on their individual study schedules rather freely. Each study unit is assessed on completion and when a student has achieved the required number of credits from compulsory and elective studies, they receive a general upper secondary school certificate.

The Finnish National Agency for Education determines the National core curriculum for general upper secondary education. Decisions laid down in the core curriculum concerning the objectives and learning outcomes of the various subjects and study modules are made in broadbased consultation with educational officials, researchers as well as experts and stakeholders of relevant sectors and disciplinary fields. Due to the modular structure of upper secondary education, students may also choose elective studies both from higher education institutions and from vocational education and training.

First national examination at the end of general upper secondary education

General upper secondary education ends with a national matriculation examination. It includes 5 compulsory tests: mother tongue and, according to the choice of each candidate, 4 of

the following: the second national language, a foreign language, mathematics, or one subject in general studies such as humanities and natural sciences.

Students may also include optional tests. Having completed the matriculation examination and the entire upper secondary school syllabus, students get a separate certificate that shows details of the examinations completed and the levels and grades achieved.

Finnish VET is competence-based and customer-oriented

Vocational education and training covers 8 fields of education, made of more than 150 vocational upper secondary and further and specialist vocational qualifications. The nominal duration of vocational qualifications is 3 years but can vary depending on the individual personal competence development plan. Each qualification includes workplace learning.

All qualifications are competence-based. Representatives of working life and businesses play an important role in planning, implementing and assessing these qualifications. A specific benefit of the competence-based qualification system is that completing a qualification does not depend on where competences have been acquired or whether they have been acquired through studies, work experience, or other activities.

Studies are based on a personal competence development plan made for each student. The plan recognises the students' existing skills, outlines what kind of competences they still need for the qualification and explains how to acquire them – by studying in a vocational school or by learning in a workplace, for example.

The plan includes both compulsory and optional study modules. Students' learning

Vocational studies take into account individual needs and circumstances.

and acquired competences are assessed throughout the period of study. The assessment is based on the criteria defined in the national qualification requirements. One of the main assessment methods is the vocational competence demonstration. The demonstrations are work assignments relevant to the vocational skill requirements and are given in authentic settings. They are planned, implemented and assessed together with working life representatives.

Vocational education and training in cooperation with the working life

Training is provided according to the same set of principles to young people completing their first qualification as well as to adults who supplement or update their skills or change fields. There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications.

The national qualification requirements are based on a learning-outcome approach. Vocational qualifications are developed with representatives of working life. This will ensure that qualifications support a smooth and efficient transition to the labor market, as well as professional development and career change.

In addition to the needs of working life, development of vocational education and training as well as vocational qualifications take into account the link of qualifications to lifelong learning skills. Individual needs and opportunities to complete qualifications flexibly to suit the student's own circumstances are also taken into account. ●



Professional and scientific higher education

Higher education is offered by universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS). Both sectors have their own profiles. Universities emphasise scientific research and instruction is based on that while UASs have a more practical approach.

Completion of the Finnish matriculation examination or a vocational upper secondary qualification gives general eligibility for higher education. Higher education institutions may also admit applicants who are otherwise considered to have the necessary skills and knowledge to complete the studies.

There is restricted entry to all fields of study. As applicant volumes outweigh the number of places available, universities and UASs use different kinds of student selection criteria. Most students are selected based on the success in their previous studies or in an entrance test.

Most university students aim for a master's degree

At universities, students can study for bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as scientific or artistic postgraduate degrees (licentiate and

doctorate degrees). In the three-cycle degree system students first complete a bachelor's degree, after which they may go for a master's degree. Most often students are admitted to study for a master's degree with the same application as the bachelor's degree.

The extent of a university degree is usually 300 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) consisting of a bachelor's degree of 180 ECTS and a master's degree of 120 ECTS. The target time for completing a master's degree is usually 5 years. However, the average duration for completing a master's degree in Finland is longer than 5 years. Policymakers have introduced a number of measures – for example, personal curricula and financial incentives – which are designed to shorten graduation times and increase the number of degrees.

Degrees from the universities of applied sciences provide students with practical professional skills

At universities of applied sciences (UAS), students can study for bachelor's and master's degrees. Degree studies at universities of applied sciences provide a higher education qualification and practical professional skills. All UAS bachelor's degrees include practical on-the-job learning. The extent of UAS bachelor's degree is generally 210–240 ECTS credits (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), which means 3.5–4 years of full-time study. Furthermore, it is possible to take a UAS master's degree after a minimum of 2 years' work experience. The UAS master's degree takes 1.5–2 years and is equivalent to a university master's degree. Typically, UAS students complete a bachelor's degree but master's degrees have become more popular over the last years. ●

Non-formal education

Liberal adult education


Liberal adult education institutions provide non-formal grassroots education and continuous learning for all residents in Finland. Despite its English name it is meant for all age groups. The institutions offer studies in civic skills, social studies, general and vocational studies, and studies for hobby-based or interest-based information and skills acquisition.

The goal of instruction is to promote versatile personal development, social cohesion, equality and active citizenship as well as sustainable development, multiculturalism and internationalism. Adult education emphasises self-motivated learning, a sense of community and inclusion. Liberal adult education institutions include adult education centres, folk high schools, learning centres, sports training centres and summer universities.

Basic education in the arts

Basic education in the arts is provided mainly for children and young people on an extracurricular basis, but students in all age groups may participate in it. Students can study music, fine arts, crafts, architecture, media arts, literary arts, circus arts, dance and theatre. Education is provided, for example, in art and handicrafts schools along with music and dance institutes and schools.

Basic education in the different fields of art progresses in a goal-oriented way from one level to the next. The goal is to provide students with the skills and capacities to express themselves as well as the ability to apply for vocational training and education or higher education in this field. ●



Adult education
emphasises
self-motivated
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of community
and inclusion.



Equity in education

One of the basic principles of Finnish education is that all people must have equal access to high-quality education and training. All citizens should have the same educational opportunities irrespective of their background, such as ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live.

Education is free

In Finland education is free at all levels. There are, however, a few exceptions.

In early childhood education and care families pay moderate fees depending on the family's size and income. Adult education, liberal adult education as well as basic education in the arts may require a fee. However, these fees must be reasonable for the students. In higher education, tuition fees apply to students coming from outside the EU/EEA area.

In pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education learning materials, daily meals and transportation for students living further away from the school are free for the

students. At the higher education level, lunches are supported by the state. Finland has a high-quality library system and students can borrow the necessary textbooks from libraries. Higher education leading to a degree is free for EU/EEA citizens.

To ensure equal study opportunities for all, there is a well-developed system of study grants, living subsidies and loans. Financial aid can be awarded for full-time study in upper secondary schools, vocational institutions or institutions of higher education.

Every child, pupil and student has the right to educational support and welfare services

Equity also means that the potential of each child should be maximised. Teachers and other school staff are required to treat children and young people as individuals and help them proceed according to their own capabilities. Learners should be able to experience success and joy of learning.

All children, pupils and students have the right to student welfare services. They support students' physical health and mental well-being. In addition to free school meals as well as free school transportation for those living far from school also healthcare and welfare services are free for all pupils and students in pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. School nurses, dentists, school psychologists and social workers are available through schools.

In addition, educational guidance is essential. The purpose of guidance and counselling is to support, help and guide pupils and students so that they can all perform as well as possible in their studies and be able to make decisions

concerning their education and careers that are suitable and appropriate for them. Guidance and counselling connect the school to society and the working life.

Also HE institutions offer study and career guidance to students. The personnel support the student in drawing up a personal study plan and progress in studies. In addition, students are offered health and welfare services, subsidised meals, accommodation and public transport.

Support in learning is generally provided in conjunction with mainstream education

In Finland, special needs education is primarily provided within mainstream education. In ECEC, pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education all children, pupils and students have the right to receive support for their learning, development and wellbeing according to their needs. The need for support is continuously monitored and assessed in cooperation with parents or guardians and the pupil or student themselves.

Three levels of support in primary and lower secondary education

The support has three levels and the measures become more robust when moving up the levels of support.

- General support – Every pupil has the right to sufficient support for learning and attending school as soon as problems emerge. Generally, this means guidance and support – such as remedial instruction – as part of the everyday activities of the school.
- Intensified support – Pedagogical assessment and a plan for intensified support is made in the pupil welfare group of the

school. Intensified support is more robust and consistent than general support. It aims at preventing problems from accumulating and becoming more serious or complex.

- Special support – If intensified support is not enough, the education provider makes – in co-operation with the teachers and the school welfare group – an official decision about special support and an individual education plan is drawn up. All available support measures can be used. The main purpose is to provide pupils broad based and systematic help so that they can continue to upper secondary level.

Upper secondary level students are entitled to support

Students in general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions are also entitled to support and special education. The need for support is defined according to individual needs and several forms of support measures are available for the student.

Efforts are made for supporting language minorities and migrants

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Both language groups have their own educational institutions at all levels. Approximately 6 % of students in primary and lower secondary education and upper secondary education attend a school where Swedish is the language of instruction. In addition, there are some educational institutions where most instruction is provided in a foreign language, most commonly in English. All higher education institutions also provide degree programmes or smaller study modules in English.

Sámi-speaking children are entitled to ECEC in their own language. Local authorities must also provide pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education in the Sámi language in Sámi-speaking areas of Lapland, the northernmost part of Finland. Care is taken to ensure that educational opportunities are provided for Roma and other linguistic minorities, including people who use sign language.

Second language instruction is provided for pupils who do not know the language of instruction well enough to function as an equal member of the school community in daily interaction. Education providers can also organise preparatory education for migrants to enable them to enter primary and lower secondary, upper secondary or higher education.

Lifelong learning in focus

The Finnish education system has no dead-ends. Learners can always continue their studies on a higher level of education, in spite of whatever choices they have made earlier. The practice of recognition of prior learning has been developed in order to avoid unnecessary overlapping of studies. Efforts are made to ensure smooth transition from one level of education to another. Education is seen as a continuum, with an emphasis on competences for lifelong learning, since everybody in society should be prepared to learn throughout life.

Finland has a long history of participation in and promotion of adult education. The first Finnish folk high school started in 1889. Adult education is very

**Adult
education
has a long
and strong
tradition.**

popular in Finland, and the participation rate is high in international terms.

The main objectives of adult education policy are ensuring the availability and competence of the labour force, providing educational opportunities for the entire adult population and strengthening social cohesion and equity. The objectives support efforts to extend working life, raise the employment rate, improve productivity, create the conditions for lifelong learning and enhance multiculturalism.

Educational institutions organise education and training intended for adults at all levels of education. Efforts have been made to make the system as flexible as possible to enable adults to study alongside work. Adult education comprises the following:

- education and training leading to a degree or certificate
- liberal adult education
- staff-development and other training provided or purchased by employers
- labour market training, which is mainly targeted towards unemployed people.

Higher education institutions also offer various forms of continuing education such as open university and open university of applied sciences education, as well as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course). The purpose of both adult and liberal adult education is to promote personal growth, health and well-being by offering courses related to citizenship skills and society. Liberal adult education offers non-formal studies, courses are provided for example of variety of craft and leisure topics. ●



Education system **based on trust and** **responsibility**

Most education is publicly funded

Most institutions providing early childhood education and care (ECEC), pre-primary, primary and lower secondary and upper secondary level education are maintained by local authorities, mainly municipalities, or joint municipal authorities. Responsibility for educational funding is divided between the state and the local authorities. Most private institutions do not differ from those that are publicly maintained. They also receive public funding and follow the national core curricula and qualification requirements.

ECEC, pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education are part of the municipal basic services that receive statutory government transfers. The statutory government transfer is based on the number of 0–15-year-olds living in the municipality and the special conditions of the municipality. This funding is not earmarked,

and the municipality can decide independently how the funds are allocated. The statutory government transfer for municipal basic services is approximately 25 % of the calculatory costs and the municipality is responsible for the rest of the costs.

The funding for general upper secondary education is based on the number of students reported by the school as well as on the unit prices set by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Vocational education and training (VET) is jointly financed by central and local government. The VET funding system rewards education providers for their outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness of the activities. The focus of funding is on completed units and qualifications, employment or placement in further studies after the education as well as the feedback collected from students and working life. The funding comprises core funding, performance-based funding, effectiveness-based funding and strategic funding.

The government allocates core funding to universities and universities of applied science (UAS). This is a significant part of the total funding of higher education institutions. Funding is allocated to institutions as a lump sum. The higher education institutions decide on the internal allocation of funding independently on the basis of their strategic choices. Universities and UASs are also expected to raise external funding.

The funding models for the universities and for the UASs comprise three main components: education, research and development, and other education and science policy objectives. To calculate the core funding, performance indicators are used for education and for

research and development. Other education and science policy objectives are mostly negotiated as a part of performance agreement process between the Ministry of Education and Culture and higher education institutions. For example, completed degrees are part of performance-based funding.

Local administration and educational institutions play a key role

At ECEC, pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary education, the national education administration is organised at three levels. Education policy is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for the implementation of the policy aims.

Regional administration monitors that the actions of education providers are based on legislation.

Local administration is the responsibility of local authorities, most commonly municipalities or joint municipal authorities. These make the decisions on allocation of funding, development of local curricula and recruitment of personnel. The municipalities also have the autonomy to delegate the decision-making power to the ECEC units and schools. Typically, the principals recruit the staff of their schools.

Educational autonomy is high at all levels

Education providers are responsible for practical teaching arrangements as well as the effectiveness and quality of its education. There are, for example, no regulations governing class size. Education providers and schools are free to decide how to group pupils and students. In early

childhood education and care, on the other hand, the child/staff ratio and maximum group size are determined in legislation.

Local authorities decide how much autonomy is given to schools. The schools have the right to provide educational services according to their own administrative arrangements and visions, as long as the basic functions, defined by law, are carried out. In many cases budget management, acquisitions and recruitment are the responsibility of the schools.

The teachers have pedagogical autonomy. They can decide themselves which teaching methods and learning materials to use.

Universities and universities of applied sciences enjoy extensive autonomy. The activities of higher educational institutions are built on freedom of education and research. They organise their own administration, decide on student admission, design the contents of degree programmes and enjoy financial autonomy.

Quality assurance is based on steering instead of controlling

In Finland, school inspections were abolished in the early 1990s. Since then, the aim has been to steer through information, support and funding. Instead of inspections the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) carries out national evaluations at all levels of education. It also supports ECEC and education providers and higher education institutions in their quality assurance work.

The main purpose of the national evaluations of learning outcomes is to follow how well the objectives set in the steering documents have been reached on a national level. Consequently, the results are not used

for ranking the educational institutes but for development purposes.

The activities of ECEC and education providers are guided by objectives laid down in legislation as well as the national core curricula and qualification requirements. The system relies on the skills and expertise of teachers and other personnel. There is a statutory duty on self-evaluation of educational institutions and education providers.

On the level of primary and lower secondary education, sample-based national evaluations of learning outcomes are done regularly, including a test of either in mother tongue and literature or mathematics. Other subjects are evaluated according to the evaluation plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition to academic subjects, subjects such as arts and crafts as well as transversal competencies are also evaluated. Evaluations are sample-based. From the schools' perspective it means that the evaluations are not regular. The education providers receive their own results to be used for development purposes.

Upper secondary institutions, universities and universities of applied sciences are responsible for the quality, development and quality assurance of their education and services. The Finnish Education Evaluation Center supports higher education institutions in their quality work for example by auditing quality assurance systems and carrying out thematic evaluations. The Ministry of Education and Culture monitors the activities and effectiveness of higher education institutions through indicators as part of the funding model. In addition, there is a student feedback system in which recently graduated students give feedback on their studies. ●



Highly educated teaching personnel

Teaching is an attractive career choice in Finland. Thus, the teacher education institutions can select the most suitable applicants for the teaching profession. For example, the intake into class teacher education is well below 20 % of all applicants. In subject teacher education the intake varies from 10 to 50 % depending on the subject. In vocational teacher education the intake is typically below 40 % of the applicants.

The most common pre-service requirement is a master's degree

Teachers are required to hold a higher education degree. The high level of training is seen as necessary as teachers in Finland are very autonomous professionally. Teacher education in Finland always also contains teaching practice.

Teachers in the six years of primary education are usually generalist class teachers. Teachers in the three years of lower secondary education and at upper secondary level are subject teachers specialized in their subject. Class teachers have a master's degree in

education. Subject teachers have completed a master's degree in the subject they teach as well as pedagogical studies.

Guidance counsellors in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education support pupils or students in their studies and with any possible learning difficulties. The qualification requirements are a master's degree and guidance counsellor studies. Special needs teachers help learners who have more serious difficulties, both in mainstream education and special needs education. They also support and consult teachers. Special needs teachers hold a master's degree with special pedagogy as the main subject or a teaching qualification including special needs teacher studies.

Depending on the institution and subject, vocational teachers are generally required to have an applicable university or university of applied sciences degree, or the highest possible qualification in their own vocational field. In addition, at least 3 years of work experience in the field and pedagogical studies are required.

Teachers at universities of applied sciences are required to have either a master's or a post-graduate licentiate's degree, depending on their position. They must also complete pedagogical studies. University teachers are generally required to hold a doctoral or other postgraduate degree.

Educational leaders are required to have a teaching qualification

Responsibility for the operations of ECEC units and schools rests with school heads and principals. Principals are generally required to have a master's degree and teaching qualifications. In addition, they are required to have appropriate

work experience and a certificate in educational administration or equivalent qualification.

University rectors must hold a doctoral degree or a professorship. Most commonly the rector is appointed from among the professors of the university. In universities of applied sciences, rectors are required a postgraduate licentiate's or a doctoral degree and have administrative experience.

Continuing teacher education is encouraged

At most levels of education, teachers are expected to participate in continuing professional development (CPD) training each year as part of their agreement on salaries. The duration of annual CDP depends on the field of education. In ECEC, the right and duty of personnel to CPD is based on legislation. On other levels, both employers and the teachers themselves have responsibility for developing teachers' professional skills and expertise.

The state also funds CPD programmes, primarily in areas important for implementing education policy and reforms. Education providers can also apply for funding to improve the professional competence of their teaching

personnel. Teachers are recognised as keys to quality in education. Therefore, continuous attention is paid to both their initial teacher education and continuing professional development. ●

Teachers are recognised as keys to quality in education.

Cover photos: Riku Isohella Velhot Photography Oy, Eina Manninen Keksi Agency Oy, Sakari Piippo / Finland Promotion Board, Jetro Stavén.
Photos: Satu Haavisto, Mikko Lehtimäki, Hannu Pirrainen, Santteri Sarkola, Janne Westerlund

Printed in: PunaMusta 2022 **ISBN:** 978-952-263-805-2 (PDF)

**“EDUCATION IN FINLAND”
SERIES PUBLISHED BY**



**MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION AND CULTURE
FINLAND**



**FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION**