

EDUCATION IN FINLAND



Finnish education is for all

The Finnish education system is built to encourage people to freely choose their own life path. Every student – regardless of socio-economic background or any other factor – is given equal opportunities for education. Support for individual learning is there every step of the way.

Every country's strongest asset is its human resources: people. But the rapidly changing world is constantly challenging the skills individuals need to have an active and meaningful life. Students need to have resilience and skills to learn how to learn.

Part of the Finnish formula for wellbeing is continuous learning and a holistic approach to education, the seeds of which are planted in the preschool years when children are provided with the assistance they need.

The future can be bright for education in Finland. We need to ensure that everyone has access to a high-quality education, but with the right tools, we can address this and other challenges ahead.

Read more about Finnish education!

Content

- 04 Equality of opportunity
- 06 The Finnish education system
- 08 Early childhood education
- 12 Comprehensive school
- 16 Upper secondary education
- 20 Future skills
- 22 Professional teachers
- 24 Higher education
- 28 Opportunities for all
- 32 Topical issues in Finnish education

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**Free
Equal
Quality
Education
For all**

General principles in Finnish education

The Finnish education system is built on the strong belief that a nation can only fulfil its human and economic potential if every citizen is entrusted and given equal opportunities to find their own life path.

The policy of equal opportunity is supported by the fact that for the most part, education is free at all levels. Up to the age of 18, learning materials, daily meals and transportation for students living further away are free for students. Also, higher education leading to a degree is free for EU/EEA citizens.

Trust is the foundation of Finnish society. We do not draw up lists of the best schools. In place of school inspections, there is self-assessment on the part of the schools and teachers. Instead of being an instrument for top-down control, school evaluations support the work of teachers and students stressing the importance of development rather than monitoring. Trust and cooperation are key.

Everyone in the student-centred system, regardless of life circumstances or other factors, is given equal educational opportunities. This approach dates back to reforms made in the 1970s.

The focus is not only on academic skills, but on supporting pupils and encouraging them to learn by taking an active role in their studies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WELLBEING

Beneficial learning environments also care for the basic physical, emotional and social needs of students and vice versa.

The emphasis is on finding learning methods that best serve each student and support those who have challenges. Healthy learning happens through insight and encouragement, not grading of performance or competition between students.

The local school principle, which means that the majority of children and youth can attend the public school closest to their home, helps to foster a sense of community.

Photo: Sakari Piippo / Finland Image Bank



Equality in focus

Compared to the situation in some countries, differences between schools in Finland are very small. As equality is key in the Finnish education system, the inclusive, high-quality education system is public, with very few private schools. Those that do exist follow the national core curriculum and receive all funding from taxes.

All schools in Finland are publicly funded. By law, everyone has the right to a free education at all levels. Education includes necessary support for learning, school supplies and meals – all at no extra cost.

STUDENT-CENTRIC

Children start first grade at seven years old in a flexible system where they are not expected to

make binding academic decisions at an early age. Compulsory education runs to age 18.

Children spend less time in the classroom and have less homework compared to other countries. Starting with primary school, they have 15-minute breaks between classes to socialise with peers and be active, which helps with learning.

In Finnish schools there are no standardised tests or school inspections.

The education system is based on trust. That means that teachers, who are professionals of learning sciences, have a lot of autonomy in their work. Their main focus is on helping every child to flourish.

Instruction of Finnish as a second language (S2) is available according to pupils' needs if

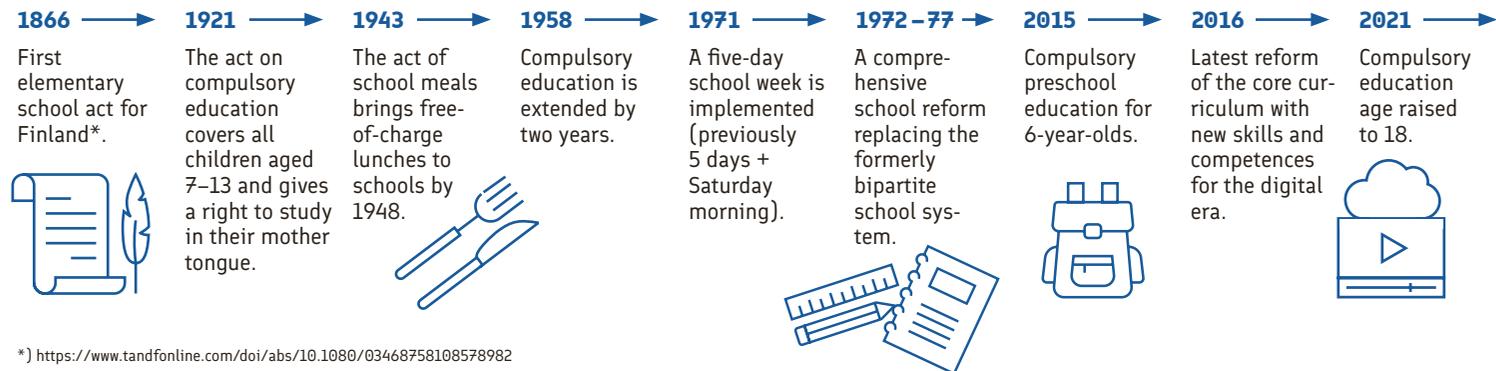
their mother tongue is not one of the official languages (Finnish, Swedish or Sámi), they have a multilingual background, or their basic Finnish language skills are still developing.

The goal is to instil a joy of lifelong learning in everyone. There are no dead-ends in the education system and anyone can continue their education at any point, regardless of age or previous academic background, for example.

After comprehensive education, there are many different options for continuing education from vocational and upper secondary education into higher education at universities and universities of applied sciences.

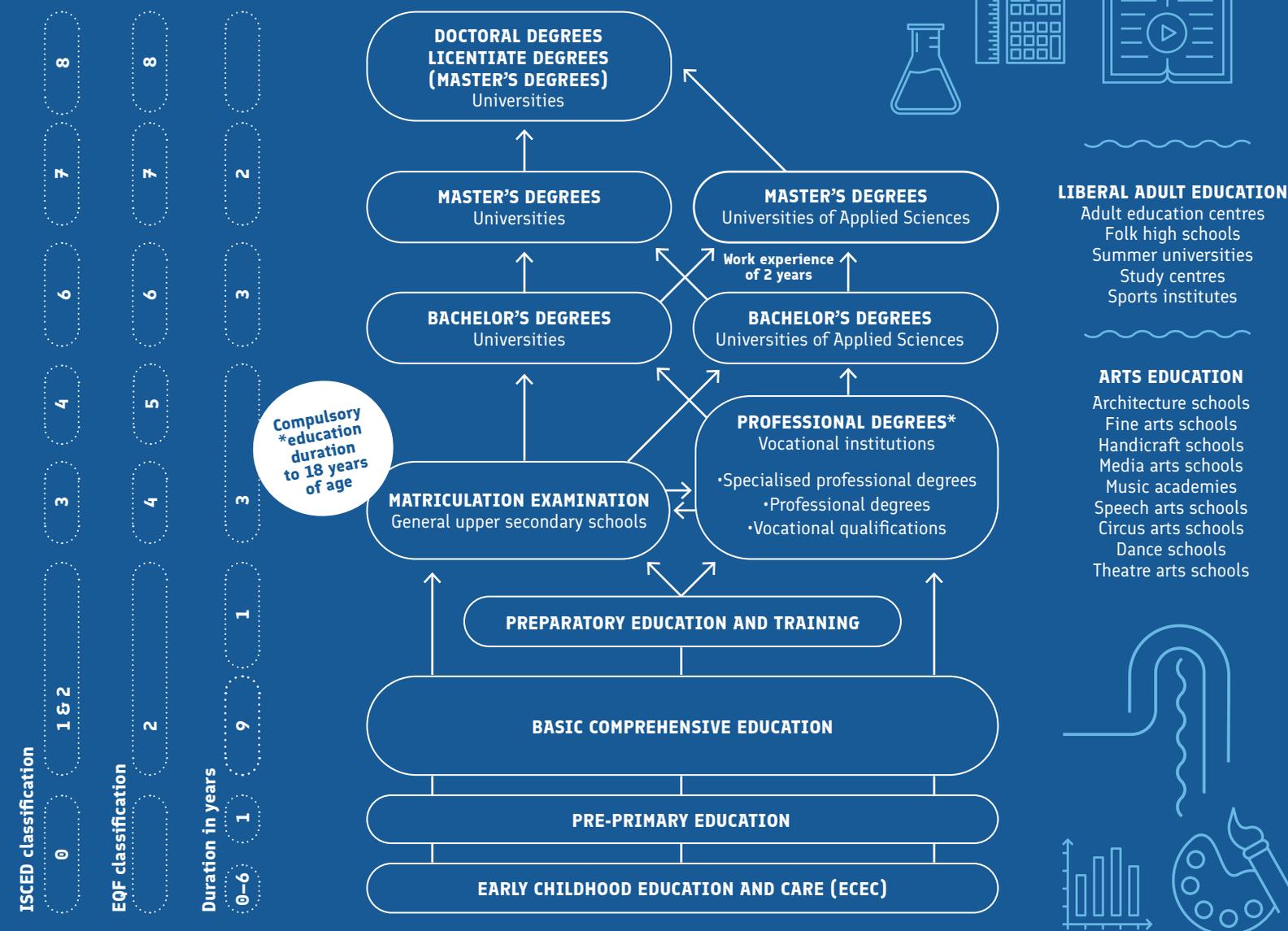
The system is designed to support individual learning – every step of the way.

Finnish education highlights



*) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03468758108578982>

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND



*) Education is also organised as apprenticeship training and workplace internships.

All children under school-age have a right to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The parents decide whether or not their child participates in ECEC.



A gentle start for the school journey

In Finland, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is provided as centre-based early education activities organised in early education centres and as family-based childcare premises.

“Our focus is child-oriented,” says **Annika Pakarinen**, an early childhood education and special educational needs teacher in Vantaa, part of the Greater Helsinki Region.

“Through play, a child can be a child, while the joy of learning is instilled in a caring environment that is strongly grounded in pedagogy,” she says.

PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Each child has their own ECEC plan to ensure they receive planned and goal-oriented education, guidance and care to support their individual needs.

Like all the teachers who work in the Finnish ECEC and pre-primary system, Pakarinen holds a university degree.

The Vantaa early education centre she works at is open from 6 am to 6 pm. There are two ECEC teachers, two childcare workers and an assistant for a group of 16 kids.

Each weekday starts with a shared breakfast, where children also learn everyday skills about food education, table manners and interaction with others.

Activity time is from 9 am to 11 am, with outdoor adventures, exercise, special arts and crafts or trips depending on the day.

After lunch together, the children, who are between the ages of 9 months and 5 years old, have nap time, while others enjoy quiet time listening to a story.

Then, around 3:00 pm or 3:30 pm, the group heads outdoors to the playground, before coming back indoors for the end of the day.

Depending on schedules, some children are picked up from the playground by their parents or guardians, while other children are collected later from indoors.

SUPPORTING LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Whether outdoors navigating the terrain on a playground or indoors painting, children are actively honing their social skills and dexterity and motor skills at the same time.

“Our main focus is to genuinely be present for children and teach important life and school skills through play,” says Pakarinen.



Follow this QR-code, to watch a video about everyday life in the Vantaa early education center.



LEARNING PEOPLE SKILLS

In ECEC centres, children are taught how to develop interpersonal skills vital for life.

Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making comprise what's known as social-emotional learning (SEL).

A practical example of SEL is learning how to practice empathy towards others and oneself.

If children learn early on that their voices and opinions matter, it lowers the threshold for participation in society.

When SEL is taught and practiced, it increases respect for agreed-upon rules and trust in working together with others, and helps to prevent bullying.



Learning life skills and knowledge

Primary and lower secondary education in Finland is the foundation on which everything in society is built.

It supports pupils in their growth towards humane and ethically responsible membership in society and provides them with the knowledge and skills needed in life.

Primary and lower secondary education in Finland refers to the first nine years of comprehensive school, from grades 1 to 9, which is intended for children aged between 7 and 16.

That foundation is built on equal access and inclusion.

Children and youth should have equal opportunity, regardless of socioeconomic background or any other factors, to a free education in Finland.

BUILDING BLOCKS

All schools in Finland follow a national core curriculum, which includes objectives and core contents of different subjects. The education providers – most often municipalities as the local education authorities – and the schools themselves draw up their own curricula within the framework of the national core curriculum.

Subjects taught range from mother tongue (Finnish, Swedish or Sámi) and literature to foreign languages, mathematics, environmental studies, biology, geography, physics, chemistry, health

education, religion or ethics, history, social studies, music, visual arts, crafts, home economics and physical education.

Pupils receive learning materials at no cost, a free daily school meal, health and welfare services and transport from home to school if the distance to school is more than 5 kilometres.

Every pupil is allocated a place in a nearby school, which helps to build a sense of community. They can also choose another school, though with some restrictions.

There are approximately 2,000 comprehensive schools in Finland. All of them offer general, enhanced and special needs support for those who need it.

For children and youth who are newcomers to Finland, a range of support is available such as preparatory education for those who don't speak Finnish or Swedish.

The goal is to ensure that everyone has the possibility for a comprehensive education that sparks joy in lifelong learning.



Photo: Elina Manninen / Keksi / Finland Image Bank

A typical school day



In Tampere, Finland's third largest city, Sorila School is made up of three buildings, one of which is the picturesque Sorila schoolhouse.

The historic wooden building dates back to 1898 and has been renovated in recent years to meet modern standards.

It's a space that holds special charm for **Adelin Rannisto**, 11, one of the comprehensive school's students.

"As the oldest of our school's buildings was once a church in the 1920s, I like to imagine what people might have worn back then or how they behaved as they sat in the pews," says Adelin, whose favourite school subject is history.

A fifth grader, Adelin lives with her parents and her little brother and two little sisters. Their home is near Sorila, as her school is affectionately called.

On average, Adelin's school days are between four and five hours long, which is typical for the first six years of comprehensive school in Finland.

For younger children, those in grades 1 and 2, there are organised after-school clubs and activities that mainly operate on school premises. The idea is that children who are too young to spend time alone after the school day have organised activities while their parents are at work.

A SWEET SCHEDULE

On a regular school Friday, Adelin wakes up at 7:20 am.

Her typical breakfast consists of bread with cheese and cucumber slices, some yogurt and a glass of apple juice.

She leaves for school at about 8:10 am, as school starts at 8:30 am on most mornings.

Adelin makes the three-kilometre journey to school by public bus, which takes about 20



Photos: Ilari Välimäki



minutes as it includes walking one kilometre to the bus stop. During the warmer months of spring and autumn, she cycles to school which takes about 15 to 20 minutes.

Occasionally, her father drives her to school on Fridays.

Fridays are five-hour school days, and she has mathematics, crafts and social studies classes.

In the Finnish school system, for each hour of instruction, there's a 15-minute recess when the children go outside to play.

"During recess, we often do cartwheels with my friends in the schoolyard," says Adelin, whose hobby is dancing.

The school yard is big, and right next to it there's a patch of forest, which Adelin says is handy for orienteering as there's no need to travel far for activities, another of the hobbies she enjoys.

THE BEST THINGS

"I like my school because it's small, about 90 kids, and everyone knows each other," says Adelin. "As well, I've had the same teachers since I started school, so everyone is familiar and friendly," she adds.

Like school children throughout Finland, Adelin receives a free warm lunch at school.

Her favourite lunches include spaghetti with meat sauce, vegetable soup and baked sausage – all of which are popular cafeteria classics throughout Finland.

On most weekdays after school Adelin has dance practice, but her Fridays are free and a cherished activity is baking cookies with her friends.

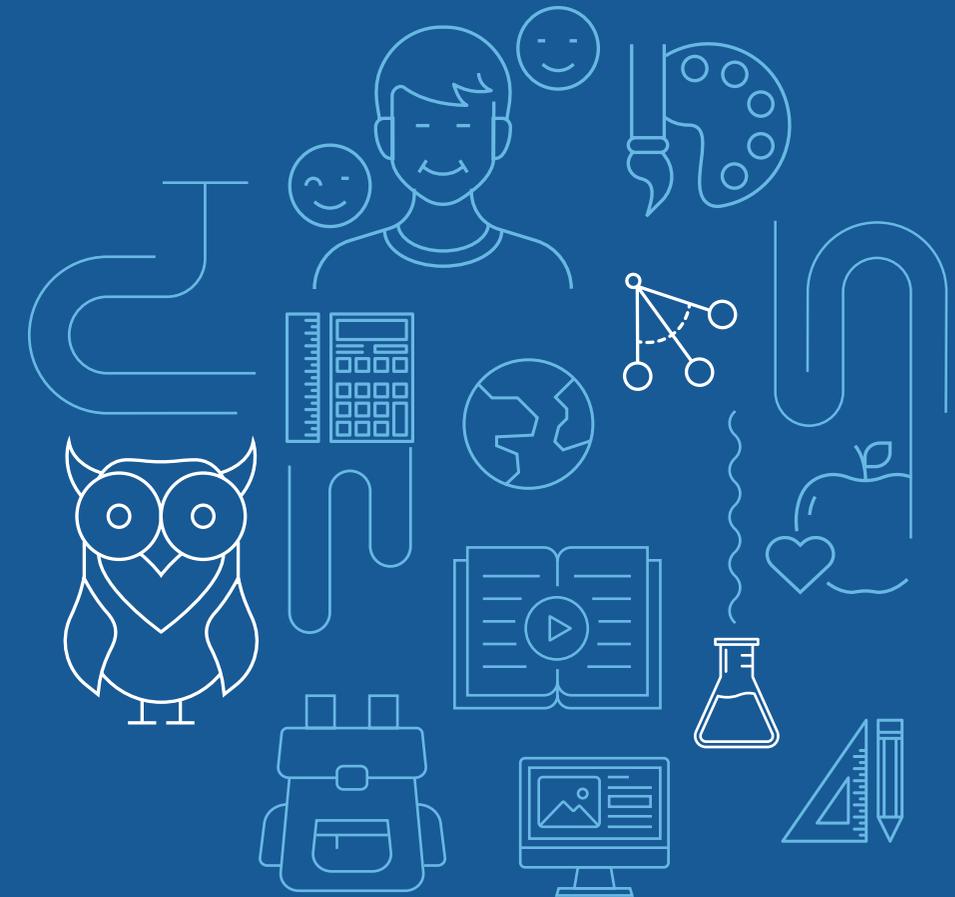
"We just use whatever ingredients are on-hand and come up with our own recipes," she says.



Follow this QR-code, to watch a video about Adelin's school day.

SUBJECTS TAUGHT IN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Mother tongue and literature
 The other national language
 (Finnish or Swedish)*
 Foreign language
 Mathematics
 Environmental studies
 Biology
 Geography
 Physics
 Chemistry
 Health Education
 Religion or Ethics**
 History
 Social studies
 Music***
 Visual arts
 Crafts
 Physical education
 Home economics****



*) Finnish and Swedish are the official languages in Finland, which is a bilingual country.

**) As a rule, pupils in comprehensive school receive religious education or secular ethics.

***) Students can also choose elective subjects, including additional language studies, artistic and practical studies or other courses offered by the school.

****) Pupils receive guidance counselling intertwined with other instruction and schoolwork.



Young voices and vocations

“We have a positive, relaxed atmosphere and good professional teachers at our school,” says **Elmeri Meloni**, 16, who attends the Helsinki Upper Secondary School of Natural Sciences.

Meloni is one of more than 150,000 students enrolled (per year) in Finland’s general upper secondary education system, which includes 378 educational institutions.

Nicknamed “Hellu,” Meloni’s upper secondary school has about 900 students, two thirds of whom are in the general programme like Meloni, while one third are in the natural sciences programme.

In his second year at Hellu, Meloni chose the school because it was familiar to him through his older brother, who had attended, and as it’s located a short walk from his family home.

TOGETHER

“When I started at this school in 2022, I didn’t know anyone,” says Meloni. “And now, we’re all friends.”

He credits the friendly atmosphere to the staff and other students.

“Our teachers encourage us to ask questions and talk about whatever is on our minds,” he says. “And we have a good sense of humour at our school, which helps to keep the mood upbeat.”



In the upper secondary school system students create their own schedules, that is the daily timetable within each study period.

“I think it’s really good idea, as we learn how to take responsibility,” says Meloni, whose favourite subjects are psychology, biology and English.

Post-graduation, he plans to study economics at university, which could neatly complement his

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Compulsory education in Finland was extended in 2021, which means that all young people can study until they graduate from secondary education or turn 18 years old.

General upper secondary education provides an all-round education in topics ranging from maths and natural sciences to history, arts and culture, languages, biology, geography, physics and chemistry.

At the end of general upper secondary school, students take the national school-leaving examination, the matriculation exam, which gives eligibility for further studies at universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational institutes.

Vocational institutes provide education and practical training for a specific occupation in fields including engineering, manufacturing, construction, business and administration, health and welfare, arts and humanities. Vocational studies can lead to a qualification or post-graduate studies.



Photos: Miika Kainu, Suvi-Tuuli Kankeanpää / Keksi / Finland Image Bank

favourite pastime: going to the gym with friends and coaching them as a personal trainer.

“It could turn into a career,” he says. While Meloni is a digital native, he recognises the importance of human connections.

“Technology can do a lot of great things, but when it comes to a coach or personal trainer, a real person is invaluable,” he says.

LEARNING A VALUABLE TRADE

Vantaa Vocational College Varia is one of the 159 vocational institutions in Finland offering multi-disciplinary and practical vocational education to young people, adults and organisations.

Niko Linna, 17, is in the second year of studies at Varia, where he’s training to become a plumber.

“The best thing about vocational school is that you get to challenge yourself mentally and physically while learning hands-on about your own field,” says Linna.

Linna is working towards a vocational qualification in building maintenance technology, to be a tradesperson who specialises in installing and maintaining pipes and drainage systems.

“We have good supportive teachers who are experts in the field,” says Linna.

PRACTICAL SKILLS

He’s currently doing a practical training at a large office building in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

Fixing complex plumbing systems in the office building is part of the job, and Linna credits



Photo: Elina Manninen / Keksi / Finland Image Bank

technology for making the job easier.

“Not only are new work tools more ergonomic, lighter and easier to carry, 3D-modelling programmes make plumbing work easier by allowing us to see inside piping systems, for example,” he says.

Another vocational institution bonus, says Linna, is the food served in the canteen.

All students in the upper secondary education system in Finland are served a free hot meal during the school day.

WIDE-RANGING VOCATIONAL OPTIONS

A major reform of vocational education in recent years has brought plenty of opportunities for personalised continuous learning, education and individual guidance and support. The goal is for every student to experience the joy of learning and find their own place in this world.

The purpose of Finland’s vocational education and training (VET) is to ensure that every young person who graduates finds employment or continues their higher education studies.

As studies are free of charge, it helps to raise the level of education and skills, narrowing learning gaps and increasing educational equality.

This means the learning journey can continue at any time.

Future skills



There are seven areas of transversal competence. They refer to the cognitive skills, meta-skills and opportunities that underlie the lifelong learning paths and competence needed in studies, at work, in hobbies and everyday life.

Adapting to a changing world

As the world rapidly changes, so does the skill set needed to navigate life and work. Students need to have resilience and skills to learn how to learn.

Digital skills, AI skills, media literacy and multiliteracy, environmental education, climate change and sustainability, democracy and human rights, and respect for other people and interaction skills are as important as more traditional subjects such as mathematics and arts and crafts.

Transversal competencies are part of the Finnish education system from early childhood education through to higher education. The purpose of transversal competencies is to support students' abilities to learn and to be active learners throughout their lives.

Their aim is to foster curiosity and information acquisition and encourage students to take initiative and practice critical thinking using a range of forms of literacy while working independently and with others.

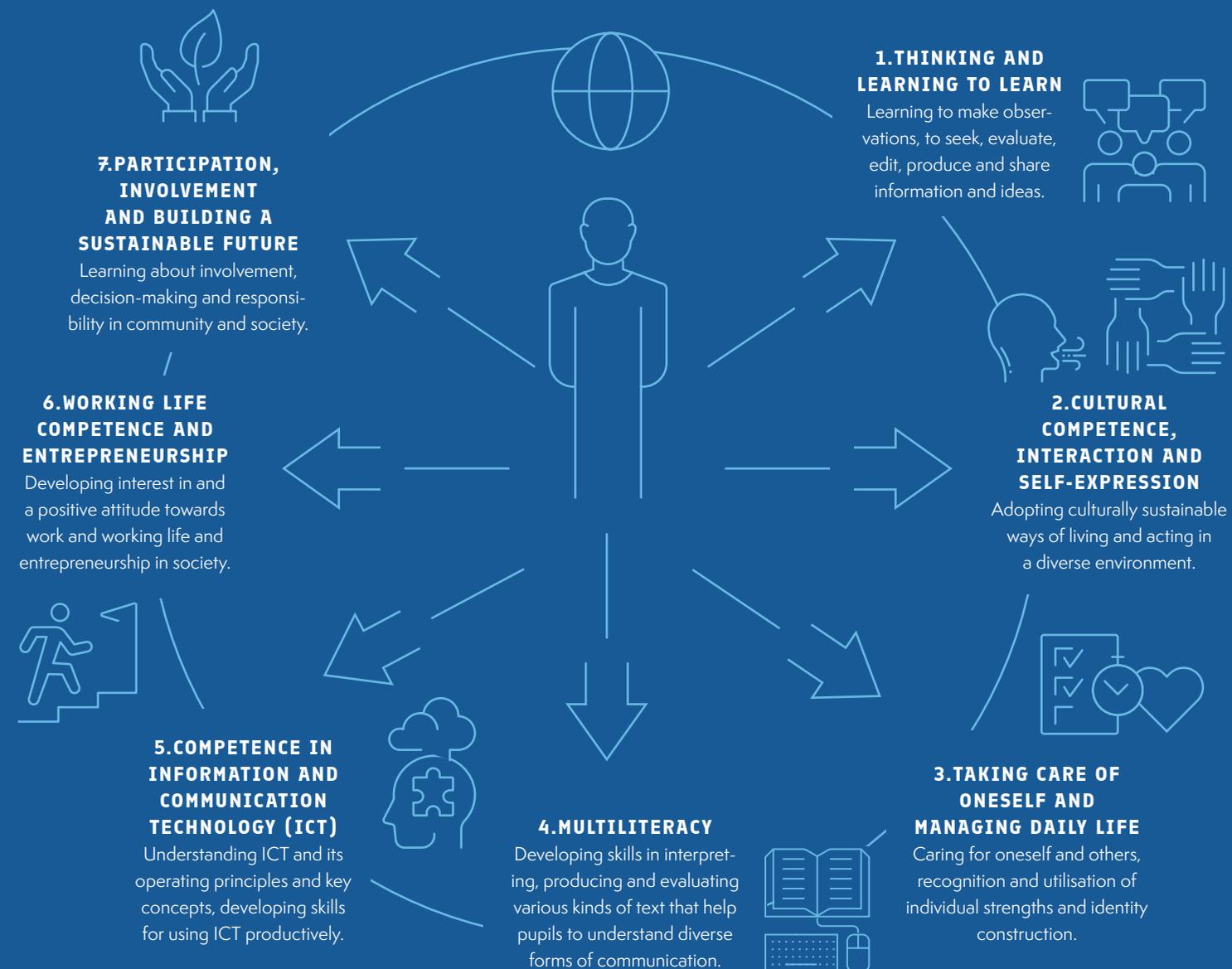
Transversal competencies are connected with real life needs and challenges such as how to manage daily life and live in a sustainable way.

Starting in early childhood education and care, the development of these competencies starts as a natural part of everyday activities and play. In primary and secondary education, these competencies are supported by planning of cross-curricular learning models or phenomenon-based learning.

Transversal competence has been formulated into the core curriculum.

Photo: Jussi Hellsten / City of Helsinki

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCE



Multiliteracy in the digital era

“Every teacher in the Finnish school system is a multiliteracy teacher as it’s part of the curriculum for every subject,” says **Justus Mutanen**, a chemistry and physics teacher at Vuosaari Upper Secondary School in Helsinki. “Multiliteracy is not just a single subject.”

Mutanen is currently working on a pioneering project using artificial intelligence and physics with his students, who are 16- to 18-year-olds.

“Our pilot project is using an AI-tutor bot to help students write a poster about energy and energy production such as wind and solar power,” he says.

As the role of advanced technologies such as AI grows, so does the importance of understanding how to use different forms of literacy. That range includes traditional reading and writing, technology and digital media, as well as visual literacy and interpreting images and videos. These skills are incorporated throughout the Finnish system, starting from early childhood education and care.

“As I have 30 students, the tutor bot is like having an extra teacher on hand to help them find information and check facts, which I can then double-check,” says Mutanen.



THE SCIENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Another common example of multiliteracy and media literacy is a student bringing a science experiment they’ve seen on a social media platform to class.

“We then analyse the science experiment together and go through whether the experiment is actually accurate or not,” says Mutanen. “Can we trust the source? Who has compiled the video and why?”

Media literacy, understanding media representation, analysing messages and their sources

in their context and credibility, and understanding underlying biases, interests and motivations is a critical skill.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

With the AI-tutor bot pilot, students and teacher are working together and gaining invaluable insight and research into how teaching and learning related to AI can be developed.

“Teaching multiliteracy in connection with AI is also a new thing for me,” says Mutanen, who is also practicing lifelong learning with the pilot.

Photos: Miika Kainu, Jussi Hellsten, Riku Isohella / Finland Image Bank



TRUSTED PROFESSIONALS

Finnish teachers are trusted professionals and innovators, who are encouraged and empowered to explore new approaches in their work.

All teachers in Finland hold a bachelor’s degree. Finnish teachers in primary education and higher must hold a master’s degree in education or their specific field.

Teachers’ continuous professional learning and development is supported.

At the school level, teachers are seen as developers of the school community and school culture.

In Finland, teachers are autonomous professionals with a great deal of freedom.

Teachers are responsible for the assessment of their respective subjects. They follow the curriculum and its guidelines for the time allocated for teaching lessons in different subject areas but have flexibility in choosing teaching methods.

Technology is just one tool that supports learning for today and tomorrow’s competencies.



Follow this QR-code, to watch a video about teaching multiliteracy



Follow this QR-code, to access an exhibition, which features eight Finnish teachers.

Building next generation networks

“I chose Finland because it offers the best 6G programme in the world,” says **Safa Arif**.

Arif, who was raised in India and Saudi Arabia, is a master’s student in the wireless communication engineering programme at the University of Oulu.

“This was a clear choice for me as few places offer industrial 6G programmes and Finland is at the forefront of 6G research,” says Arif.

The University of Oulu is just one of the 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences that offer more than 550 English-language bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes in Finland.

It’s also possible to do postgraduate studies and complete a doctorate in English in Finland. A few universities of applied sciences have bilingual degree programmes in fields such as nursing or tourism and hospitality.

The goal with these programmes is that graduates will be able to work in Finland in their



Photos: Juha Niemelä

profession in one of the national languages, Finnish or Swedish, in addition to English.

GOOD CONNECTIONS

The University of Oulu’s 6G flagship programme is the world’s first 6G research programme. Its goal is to build a sustainable and secure future society enabled by unlimited wireless connectivity.

Arif’s thesis is on system-on-chip wireless systems, which she is carrying out while working at Nokia, the Finland-based telecoms, IT and consumer electronics multinational.

That mix of practical and academic learning is beneficial, says Arif.

“I’ve been positively surprised how the university evaluates your understanding and knowledge. Some courses have no exams and

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Finland offers top quality education, from Lapland to Helsinki.

The Finnish take is bilateral, with two different types of universities: universities of applied sciences (UAS) and universities.

UAS offer professionally oriented higher education at the bachelor’s and master’s levels and have strong ties to working life and regional development.

Universities focus on scientific research and offer bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral (PhD) level programmes.

INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

Finnish higher education institutions offer hundreds of bachelor’s and master’s degree programmes fully taught in English. International students tend to appreciate both the high quality and the practical orientation in the programmes, as well as the flexibility in building their own degrees according to their interests.

One of the appeals of studying in Finland starts before arrival: the application process is very easy. Applying can be done online, and it’s a very straightforward process. The residence permit regulations enable students accepted for degree studies in Finland to apply for a permit straight away for the entire duration of the studies. The post-study permit policy is also generous in international comparison.



Finland has 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences overseen by the Ministry of Education and Culture:

others have open-book exams, so you don't need to waste time memorising information that can easily be found online," she says, adding, "I'm actually learning things for real life!"

Arif, a student tutor who guides new students through orientation, has a clear vision of what she wants to do following graduation.

"With a strong focus on the human side of technology, I want to help and encourage other young women in the industry and ensure that it's a safe space," she says.

ARCTIC LIFESTYLE

Finland is Arif's first experience of Europe, as it's the first country she's visited on the continent.

Oulu is located in the northern part of Finland, near the Arctic Circle and Lapland. Though it has four distinct seasons, Finland's far north is known as a winter wonderland.

"I love the snow and am embracing the elements with activities such as skating," says Arif. "I still find it surreal that the water freezes over. My family back home in Uttar Pradesh, India can't quite believe that it's possible to walk or skate on the sea during winter. They ask me:

"How can it be so thick that it's safe to stand on?"

The Northern Lights have also made a great impression on Arif. Also known as Aurora Borealis, the natural phenomenon appears as dancing lights over the night sky in a range of colours such as green, red, violet and blue.

"I can actually see them from my porch," says Arif.



Follow this QR-code, to watch a video about Arif's studies at the University of Oulu.



- Aalto University
 - University of Helsinki
 - University of Eastern Finland
 - University of Jyväskylä
 - University of Lapland
 - LUT University
 - University of Oulu
 - Hanken School of Economics
 - University of Arts Helsinki
 - Tampere University
 - University of Turku
 - University of Vaasa
 - Åbo Akademi University
 - National Defence University (operates under the defence administration)
 - Arcada University of Applied Sciences
 - Centria University of Applied Sciences
 - Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
 - Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
 - Humak University of Applied Sciences
 - Häme University of Applied Sciences
 - Jamk University of Applied Sciences
 - South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences
 - Kajaani University of Applied Sciences
 - Karelia University of Applied Sciences
 - LAB University of Applied Sciences
 - Lapland University of Applied Sciences
 - Laurea University of Applied Sciences
 - Metropolia University of Applied Sciences
 - Oulu University of Applied Sciences
 - Satakunta University of Applied Sciences
 - Savonia University of Applied Sciences
 - Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences
 - Tampere University of Applied Sciences
 - Turku University of Applied Sciences
 - Vaasa University of Applied Sciences
 - Novia University of Applied Sciences
 - Högskolan på Åland (Åland University of Applied Sciences)
 - Police University College (operates under the mandate of the Ministry of the Interior)
- Espoo
 - Helsinki
 - Kuopio
 - Jyväskylä
 - Rovaniemi
 - Lappeenranta
 - Oulu
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 - Jyväskylä
 - Kouvola
 - Kajaani
 - Joensuu
 - Lahti
 - Rovaniemi
 - Vantaa
 - Helsinki
 - Oulu
 - Pori
 - Kuopio
 - Seinäjoki
 - Tampere
 - Turku
 - Vaasa
 - Vaasa
 - Maarianhamina
 - Tampere

Embracing a culture of lifelong learning

Liberal adult education, as it's called in Finland, is based on the idea that lifelong learning supports wellbeing, equality and active citizenship.

Learning at every age and stage of life is actively encouraged and supported, with the goal of access for all.

Each year, liberal adult education institutions organise more than 100,000 courses and programmes that range in length from a few hours to an entire academic year.

Topic categories range from the humanities to business administration, natural sciences, engineering and transportation, along with health and physical education, tourism and hospitality.

Courses and programmes are designed to meet local and regional needs.

SEVERAL WAYS TO CONTINUALLY DEVELOP SKILLS

There are five types of liberal adult education establishments: adult education centres, folk high



Photo: EilinaManninen / Keksi / Finland Image Bank

schools, sports institutes, summer universities and study centres. They all receive state funding.

Adult education centres offer opportunities for self-initiated education and development of civic skills such as personal communication skills and cultural and political awareness.

Folk high schools provide full-time studies, as well as non-formal studies for young people and adults in general education and vocational education and training.

Summer universities emphasise open university education as well as continuing education for those who already hold degrees.

National or regional sports institutes are based in boarding schools that provide full-time education, but also promote athletics and wellbeing for the whole population alongside training and education that supports sports organisations and elite athletes.

Study centres are national institutions that organise education both independently and together with civic and cultural organisations to further lifelong learning and active citizenship.

For newcomers to Finland, there's a range of practical course offerings including basic reading and writing lessons in the country's national languages Finnish, Swedish and Sámi, for example.

All five forms of lifelong learning are complemented by the excellent public library system throughout Finland.

The goal is that everyone should have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills required to function in society and be able to influence matters.



Photos: Laura Dove / Helsinki Partners, Jussi Hellsten / Visit Helsinki, Maija Astikainen / City of Helsinki

Inclusive education

Every child should be accepted and supported as they are.

The Finnish school system aims to provide each student, regardless of background or abilities, with the support needed to thrive.

The starting point is a child's strengths and needs related to learning, development and wellbeing with solutions provided in communal learning environments.

This is written into the official legislation with the Finnish Basic Education Act, adopted in 1998, which provides three tiers of support: general, intensified and special.

General support means individual pedagogical solutions, as well as guidance and early intervention given as part of daily school life. Enhanced support provides personalised assistance as part of a multi-professional collaborative effort. Special needs support, if needed, is created through a customised educational plan for the student.

ALL TOGETHER

The Finnish Basic Education Act represents the unique Finnish approach to inclusion in education as it emphasises the responsibility of all teachers to deliver solutions within the system at the local level.

With the common goals of the curriculum, each teacher can choose which methods and materials they will use to encourage each student.

For example, teachers can design activities that match children's attention spans and use helpful tools such as balancing cushions or stools for physically active children.

Pupils have the right to receive support for

learning. Common forms of aid include remedial teaching in small groups or part-time special education. In most schools there are special needs teachers and assistants.

While there are challenges in creating a learning culture that works for everyone, the goal is clear: equal opportunities for everyone ensure the best possible outcomes.



Modern learning opportunities

Finland has the goal of being an internationally attractive place to study and do research.

Finland plans to invest 4 percent of its GDP in research and development by 2030, putting it among the top of OECD countries. Based on 2021 OECD data, Finland ranks third after Israel and South Korea in terms of investment in education.

As the world changes, educational systems need to evolve in order to provide everyone with the skills needed now and in the future. Factors from the climate crisis to aging populations and artificial intelligence and digitalisation are changing the nature of life and work.

FORWARD THINKING

Topical areas of focus at every stage of the Finnish educational journey – from early childhood

to adult education – include a range of initiatives and programmes.

Multiliteracy and media literacy education aims to strengthen competences in information and communications technology (ICT) and provide tools and skills for understanding different types of media. For example, programming skills are introduced early in childhood education and care. Multiliteracy and media literacy lessons

continue through primary and lower secondary education, into upper secondary education, post-secondary and lifelong learning.

The goal of national action programmes such as Finnish Schools on the Move, for example, is to establish a physically active culture in comprehensive schools by implementing ways to increase physical activity during the school day. Promoting active commuting and encouraging physically

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active breaks help the learning process and establish lifelong habits that promote wellbeing through an active lifestyle.

Another central theme is participation and involvement in building a sustainable future. Learning to understand the significance of protecting the environment through personal relationships with nature is nurtured by learning about involvement, decision-making and responsibility in community and society.

The goal is to empower students of all ages with the skills and competences needed for creating a good life – now and in the future.

Embracing challenges

The strengths of the Finnish education system are learner-centred teaching methods, highly educated teachers, and flexibility within the education system to rapidly adapt to new technologies.

Yet, as the world changes, the educational system needs to evolve in order to provide future skills. That means anticipating and responding to challenges, says **Sari Miettinen**, a project specialist with the Finland Futures Research Centre (FFRC) at the University of Turku.

EQUAL SUPPORT FOR ALL

“In theory, anyone in Finland should have the opportunity to be able to study for a PhD,” says Miettinen, “but in reality, there are still hurdles to overcome in order for that to be true.

“We need to ensure that everyone has access to education and the support services that help them to learn. That means allocating resources and support services, as teachers alone can’t

take care of the growing need for assistance, especially among young people.

“And at the university level, for example, the assumption is often that adult students can take care of themselves and find needed resources, but that’s not always the case,” she says.

EDUCATION 2.0

In Finnish, there’s a concept called “*sivistys*”, a guiding principle in Finnish education and culture, reflecting the value placed on being knowledgeable, wise, ethical and culturally attuned.

“Perhaps it’s time to consider an update, *sivistys* version 2.0,” Miettinen continues. “What does *sivistys* mean today? We need to reconsider the function of higher education. Have some sectors become siloed? What about utilising diverse skills and talents that may be different, for example, academic or occupational qualifications from other countries? Should we reassess the purpose of education now that so much

information is readily available to everyone? Would a better function of education be learning the ability to critically process information and being able to discuss it with others?”

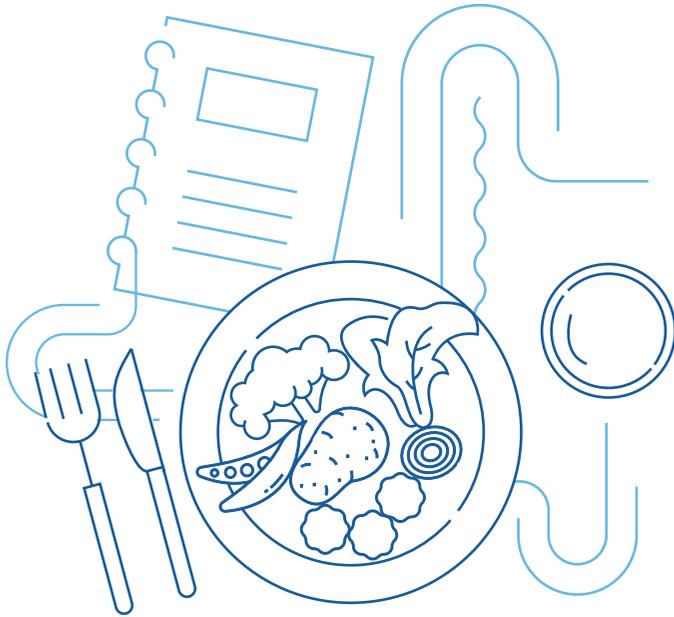
ECO-SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Going forward, the best way to achieve sustainable economic growth and wellbeing is by mobilising everyone’s competence and talents. That requires helping people to better understand the role of the future by differentiating between skills for the future and future skills, says Miettinen.

“The former means we try to anticipate what skills are needed in a certain future, for example, what skills will industries need within 1-5 years? The latter, futures skills, means skills needed in order to make sustainable decisions for the future. The goal of education should be to look even further into a sustainable future,” she says.

Photo: Jussi Heilsten / Visit Helsinki





Did you know?

In Finland, there is such a thing as a free lunch. Finland was the first country to start serving pupils a free daily hot meal, in 1948, and continues to do so.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors.
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