Education and Training

MONITOR 2018

Finland
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Education and Training Monitor 2018

Finland
Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2017. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country’s education and training system. Section 3 looks at investment in education and training. Section 4 focuses on citizenship education. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, while section 8 covers adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 1 September 2018.
Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)
1. Key indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and training 2020 benchmarks</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>EU average</th>
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<tr>
<td>Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
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<td>Early childhood education and care (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)</td>
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<td>Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in:</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
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<td>Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)</td>
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<td>Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)</td>
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<td>Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)</td>
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<td>Other contextual indicators</td>
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<td>Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISCED 3-4</td>
<td>€6 432</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISCED 5-8</td>
<td>€13 138</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)</td>
<td>Native-born</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
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<td>Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ISCED 5-8</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
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Sources: Eurostat (see section 10 for more details); OECD (PISA). Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; d = definition differs, 12 = 2012, 13 = 2013, 15 = 2015, 16 = 2016. On credit graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC on the available countries; on degree graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by JRC over Eurostat and OECD data. Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)

Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2017, UOE 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers represented by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers represented by the centre of the figure).
2. Highlights

- Education outcomes have declined slightly over time but remain good, in particular with regard to basic skills.
- The very comprehensive Finnish approach towards citizenship education gives rise to young Finns having high civic skills compared to their peers in other Member States.
- While equity is a key principle of Finnish education performance, gaps between different groups have increased and young people with an immigrant background, although still a relatively small group, perform significantly worse than native-born people.
- Higher education faced consolidation and budget restrictions but the ‘Vision for higher education and research in Finland 2030’ aims to mobilise the sector.
- Finland continues to implement crucial and forward-looking reforms in its education system, in a climate of fiscal adjustment.

3. Investing in education and training

**Fiscal consolidation continues; education expenditure as a share of GDP remains well above the EU average but below other Nordic countries.** Government expenditure on education as a share of GDP declined by 0.5 percentage points between 2010 and 2016, to 6.1%. This is still 1.4 percentage points above the EU average but 0.8 percentage points lower than Denmark and 0.5 percentage points lower than Sweden. Finland spends a higher share on secondary level, 2.6% compared to the 1.9% EU average, more than other comparable countries except Denmark. The share of GDP devoted to higher education is similar to Denmark, but considerably larger than in other comparable countries and the EU average. While most spending categories did not see a reduction over time, compensation for employees (teachers) has declined since 2015.

**Finnish education remains efficient and effective but cutbacks were felt in all educational sectors, most heavily in vocational education and training (VET) and in higher education.** Two thirds of primary education is financed at local level and this share slowly increased between 2012 and 2014 as consecutive governments reduced public education spending by EUR 1.5 billion between 2011 and 2018. Cumulatively, funding for schools was reduced by about EUR 190 million. If savings at municipal level since 2012 for early childhood and care (ECEC) and basic education are added, overall savings would increase to EUR 1 billion. EUR 300 million was cut for VET, and in higher education the cuts reached EUR 250 million for universities of applied sciences and EUR 300 million for other universities. In the same period 2011 to 2018, public funding for research was reduced by EUR 300 million. A recent survey by the Finnish teacher union\(^1\) showed that the workload of teachers in general education, including non-teaching tasks, has increased compared to 2011.

**Measures aim to increase efficiency in education.** This is to be achieved through mergers and by closing institutions at all levels. Job losses in higher education have occurred; 3 000 jobs have been shed in VET. The number of courses offered has been reduced. and an impact on teacher/student ratios has been observed. Institutions have been encouraged, in particular in higher education and VET, to review their course offer. This also allowed them to update their offer and to develop also broader and interdisciplinary courses.

**Recent initiatives aim to increase the quality of education and research.** These include the 'basic education forum', the introduction of a 'guarantee of learning', a new proposal on upper secondary education and the 'Vision for higher education and research in Finland 2030' (all are described elsewhere in this report). All of these outline new approaches to strengthen the quality and relevance of education. However, since the additional funding associated with them does not fully offset previous and current spending cuts it may be difficult for the education sector and education stakeholders to fully benefit from them.

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\(^1\) OJA Trade Union of Education (6.4.2018).
4. Citizenship education

Finland has a very comprehensive approach towards citizenship education. It is both a cross-curricular theme integrated into other compulsory subjects and a subject in its own right. Schools at each level of education are required to implement multi-disciplinary learning modules relevant for citizenship education. Pupils take an active part in planning the learning content and delivery processes (Eurydice, 2017).

Finland has a comparatively high number of minimum recommended hours of citizenship education as a separate subject. This amounts to 9.5 hours per year at ISCED 1 and 28.4 hours at general ISCED 2 and 3 levels — Estonia and Luxembourg are the only other countries teaching between 25 and 30 hours at these levels. In upper secondary general education students can choose the grade at which they complete the three compulsory courses in social studies, but they can also enrol in an additional optional course on this subject area (Eurydice, 2017). Curricula for upper secondary education further state that both educational programmes and the school culture should help to prepare pupils for participation, co-responsibility and rights in a free and democratic society (Eurydice, 2017).

Finland provides rather general guidelines instead of specific recommendations for the classroom assessment of citizenship education and actively trains teachers. It proposes several methods for classroom assessment in primary, in general secondary and in school-based VET, ranging from questionnaires and oral examinations to project-based or self-assessment. These aim to evaluate knowledge and skills rather than attitudes. National tests in social sciences at grade 9 were administered in Finland for monitoring purposes in 2010/11 and are scheduled to be repeated in 2022. Finnish teachers dealing with subjects that are related to citizenship education must cover these topics as elective part of their pre-service or initial teacher education, and can also do further in-service and professional development.

Finland young people have strong civic skills. According to the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), Finnish eighth-grade students score among the best on knowledge on civic issues in international comparison. As in other subject areas, girls do better than boys. Language and immigrant background have a greater impact on performance than in other participating EU countries, whereas the impact on performance of socio-economic status is lower.

5. Modernising school education

Finland continues to be among the best performing EU countries regarding basic skills with a relatively equitable and accessible education system. Finland has reduced its early school leaving (ESL) rate from over 10 % in 2010 to close to 8 % in 2017, the national target for 2020. In 2017, the ESL rate for foreign-born (15.2 %) was almost twice as high as for the native-born (7.9 %). Large differences in the ESL rate also exist between young people in rural areas (10.1 %) and those in cities (7 %). According to the 2015 OECD PISA survey of 15 year-olds, Finland remains one of the best performing countries, notwithstanding a somewhat negative trend over time. Since 2009, performance in mathematics and science has worsened and has stalled for reading (European Commission, 2017a). But the IEA’s survey in 2016 (PIRLS) showed that the reading skills of 10 year-olds remain strong and unchanged compared to 2011. The main factors influencing reading skills are: (1) reading knowledge before entering school, (2) reading as a leisure activity, and (3) the family background (Kaisa Leino et al, 2017).

Finland has a traditionally low participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The share of under 3 year-olds in ECEC increased by 6.7 pps between 2007 and 2016 to 32.7 %. Both the share and the growth are in line with the EU average but are below other Nordic countries. Participation for those between 4 years old and compulsory school age increased to 87.4 %. Lowering ECEC fees in 2018 for families with middle and low incomes should help increase participation (NRP, 2018).

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2 ICCS reports on students’ knowledge related to concepts of citizenship, equity, decision-making and civic self-image. In ICCS 2016 the civic knowledge scale was set to a metric with a mean of 500 (the average score of countries participating in ICCS 2009).

3 Denmark had 70 % and Sweden 51 % in 2016 [ilc_caindformal].
Upcoming legislation aims to improve the quality of ECEC. A new law to be adopted in September 2018 aims to improve quality of ECEC as well as national data collection and statistics. The number of tertiary educated teachers, in particular those having a bachelor of education degree, will rise. From 2030 onwards two thirds of centre based staff must have a tertiary degree and all managers have to hold master degrees. Over the last 5 years, ECEC teacher training places at universities have been expanded by 1 000 and a further 1 000 places are to be created from 2018 to 2021.

Inequality in Finland has traditionally been low but has started to increase (European Commission, 2018a). Comparing OECD PISA 2006 and 2015 in science performance, equity indicators showed a significant deterioration. Of three main determinants of inequalities reviewed in a recent study — low educational level of parents, unemployment or receipt of social assistance — the latter has the greatest impact on the education outcomes of children (Vauhkonen et al, 2017). Foreign-born students not only leave education more often, they also tend to repeat grades. PISA tests show that in 2015 the difference between schools remained one of the lowest internationally and that the largest variation occurs within schools. At regional level, performance differences increased: the best performing region, Helsinki Metropolitan area, outperformed Western Finland, the worst performer, by about 37 PISA score points (equivalent to one school year). Performance decreased the most in Eastern Finland (OECD, 2016b). And the gender performance gap between boys and girls was one of the most pronounced in PISA 2015, in particular in science (Vettenranta J. et al, 2016).

Besides introducing new curricula at all levels of education, Finland is taking a series of additional measures to increase quality in education. The ‘Basic education forum’ convening researchers, experts, teachers, principals, students, parents, municipalities and all other levels of administration, proposes to build on the existing highly egalitarian system to introduce the ‘future basic school’. It will strengthen the diversity of teaching and learning models, use individualised instruction and systemic development of expertise while increasing cooperation within and beyond schools. The school system is already characterised by intensive communication with parents and teachers supporting students attentively.

Finland’s teaching force is ageing but teaching is a very attractive occupation with remuneration in some sectors and in later career lower than in other Nordic countries. At upper secondary level (ISCED 3) the age of teachers continuously increases, with close to 50% of teachers being 50 years or older. This is in contrast to countries like Denmark or Sweden where the average age of teachers remains rather stable or slightly decreases. Finland is one of the few countries with long-term forward planning (Eurydice, 2018). The salary of Finnish teachers compared to other tertiary-educated workers is higher at all education levels except in pre-primary level than in other Nordic countries or the EU/OECD average (OECD, 2018, Table D3.2a). However, comparing Finnish teachers’ salaries after 15 years of experience using purchasing power parity shows them to be clearly lower than those in other Nordic countries and only around the EU/OECD average. In the increasingly important ECEC sector, Finnish teachers earn about the EU average at recruitment but their maximum salary amounts to only two thirds of the EU average (OECD, 2017), potentially limiting attractiveness.

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4 Basic education comprises 6 years of primary and 3 years of lower secondary education.
Formerly weak participation in continuing professional development has improved. In 2013, the OECD’s TALIS survey showed low levels of continuing professional development, with only 15% of teachers having a personal study plan and limited teacher collaboration and networking. A recent national study showed improvement — 80% of teachers in basic and 88% in general upper secondary education have participated in continuing professional development beyond the 3 annual obligatory days during the last 3 years (Kumpulainen, 2017). In 2016, the government established the 'Teacher Education Forum' to reorganise initial teacher education and continuing professional development based on national and international research, best practices and experience. Its result is the 'Development programme for teachers' pre- and in-service education'. EUR 15 million for 2017 and EUR 12 million for 2018 have been distributed to pilot projects through the Forum.

Finland compares generally well on digital skills. For advanced ICT skills and development, Finland retains a leading position. On basic ICT skills, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark score better (European Commission, 2018b). The current government initiated two key programmes in this area. For 2016-2019 it allocated EUR 300 million for the Knowledge and Education programme and EUR 100 million for the Digitalisation programme. This will make it possible to temporarily create 2 500 mentor teacher positions in municipalities to assist teachers in using new technologies and to promote using digital environments. Introducing the upper secondary matriculation examination as a fully computer-based exam by 2019 should encourage all teachers and students to update their digital skills.

6. Modernising higher education

Tertiary educational attainment levels are high but have recently dropped slightly. 44.6% of 30-34 year-olds obtained tertiary education in 2017, 2.7 percentage points fewer than in 2007. With 37.3% in 2017, male tertiary attainment increased by 2.3 percentage points since 2008, while the share of women of 52% declined by 4.6 percentage points. In 2017 only 27% of foreign-born people had tertiary education. This is less than in Austria (36.8%) or the Netherlands (34.6%) and other Nordic countries, where over 50% of foreign-born people had tertiary education5.

Some surveys aim to shed light on the decline in tertiary attainment. Attitude surveys show that, for those who do not start tertiary education, the main reason is the wish to work (40%) followed by family and health reasons (18%). This is in line with the EU average, but Finns are clearly less content with their education level and consider more often that their studies did not meet either their needs or their interests. The reasons behind this are complex. Career tracking started in 2004, was extended to all public universities in 2016 and is currently being further developed in three projects.

5 In 2017, 58.1% foreign-born people aged 30-34 in Denmark had obtained tertiary education compared to 46.6% native-born and in Sweden 51.2% compared to 51.5%.
Higher education has suffered more under the rebalancing of the budget than other education sectors. As described above, higher education was subject to cumulative budget cuts of EUR 850 million for the period 2011–2018. Only some universities could temporarily compensate with their own funding sources. This led to staff reductions and changes to teaching and research routines. Budgetry realignment has speeded up streamlining and consolidation of the higher education offer. Universities have tried to support a process where institutions develop a clearer vision, better cooperation on national and international levels and a matching offer of studies and research.

The ‘Vision for higher education and research in Finland 2030’ aims to mobilise the higher education sector. As a response to identified challenges and as a follow-up to the 2017 OECD Review of Innovation Policy in Finland, the government invited higher education institutions, professors, students and experts to develop a vision to achieve the following goals:

(1) more than 50% of the 25 to 34 year old should complete at least a bachelor’s degree;
(2) improved opportunities for continuous education/learning;
(3) more resources for research outcomes of higher quality;

Box 1: A tournament involving multidisciplinary teams of students promotes innovation in Finland.

The Teiniminnotalkoot project organised the SuperTeam tournament for students from the Metropolia University and the education provider Omnia. The aim is to strengthen innovation skills and support students’ transition from education to employment. Teams included students from a wide variety of fields and were given 6 weeks to develop innovative ideas for actual challenges presented by companies. One of the tournament prizes was awarded to a group who found a new way to inspire physically inactive young people to exercise by using smart watches, encouraging them to exercise through weekly challenges programmed into their smart watches.

The project is financed by the European Social Fund and will run until 2018.

http://www.metropolia.fi/

7. Modernising vocational education and training

The 2017 comprehensive VET reform aims to provide flexible pathways for learners, to integrate separate funding schemes into one coherent funding system and to further develop apprenticeship training and other forms of work-based learning (Cedefop, 2018c). The proportion of VET students of all upper secondary students (ISCED 3) remained stable in 2016 at 71%, which is well above the EU average of 49%. The employment rate of recent VET graduates in 2017 (77%) is slightly above the EU average (76.6%).

Box 2: Reform of vocational education and training

Emerging skills needs, relatively high inactivity rates of the working age population and the low employment rates of the low-skilled (53.2% in 2017) triggered the reform, with the goal of improving the status of VET in Finnish society. It aims to guarantee access to education and training and to strengthen the lifelong learning dimension in line with the Upskilling Pathways Council Recommendation. Important aspects are:

(1) preserving eligibility for further studies;
(2) ensuring a regionally comprehensive network; and
(3) reforming apprenticeship training by easing the administrative and financial burden on employers.

A key aspect of the reform is its competence-based approach, in particular the introduction of individual competence-based study plans for all learners. These include information on identification and recognition of prior learning, competence tests and other demonstration of skills and guidance and support to complete an entire qualification or a supplementary skill set,

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6 This figure encompasses all age groups including adult learners.
for both young people and adults already in working life.

The reform will be supported by a new uniform funding system for upper secondary VET, continuous VET, apprenticeship training and labour market training leading to qualifications. In this way it keeps the various existing educational pathways and includes core funding (50% of total funding, based on the number of learners), performance funding (35%, based on the number of completed qualifications and units) and effectiveness funding (15%, based on learners’ transition to employment, pursuit of further education and feedback from learners and employers). The reform came into force at the beginning of 2018 and will, after a gradual roll-out, be fully operational by 2022. A budget of EUR 60 million has been allocated to the reform.

Successful implementation of the VET reform (Cedefop 2018b) could result in improved skills matching on the Finnish labour market and a better-qualified labour force in the future, contributing to an improved employment rate. However, recent significant cuts in the VET budget (a total of EUR 230 million, with the most significant taking place in 2017) could make it difficult to successfully implement the reform. Monitoring the reform will be essential to potentially allow for corrective action on certain aspects (discontinuation of studies, impact on the regional availability and linguistic accessibility of education, increase in the number of places for apprenticeship training and training agreement, quality of training places). In addition, the National framework for qualifications entered into force on 1 March 2017, with referencing to the European Qualifications Framework and self-certification to the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area completed in December 2017 (Cedefop, 2018a). It covers the full range of national qualifications classified into eight levels on the basis of learning outcomes.

8. Promoting adult learning

Finland continues to improve its high-performing adult learning system. With 27.4 %, adult participation in learning is the second highest in the EU — notably through better alignment of the offer to future labour market needs. New provisions on basic education for adults entered into force on 1 January 2018, introducing a new uniform basic education structure to support the basic skills of individuals who are over the compulsory education age. The Finnish National Agency for Education and the European Social Fund are financing the project ‘National anticipation model for adult education’. Its aim is to develop and pilot an anticipation system for adult education and training. An expert group representing companies, employers and employees’ organisations, providers of further training, administration (relevant ministries and regional administration), researchers and adult learners proposed measures for transport and logistics as a pilot sector to develop the skills and competences of adult learners. Responding to the increase in migrants and refugees, the Liberal Adult Education Act was amended early 2018. The revised act gives greater responsibility to training institutions to provide language and vocational training to facilitate the integration of migrants including refugees into society and employment. Without the prior obligatory national language proficiency test (abolished on 1 January 2018) migrants should more easily enter vocational education and training, learn professions and become integrated into the labour market.

9. References


Kaisa Leino et al (2017), *Lukutaito luodaan yhdessä, Kansainvälten lasten lukutaitotutkimus (PIRLS 2016).*
https://ktl.jyu.fi/fi/pirls-timss/pirls


10. Annex I: Key indicator sources

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11. Annex II: Structure of the education system


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