

UNESCO; Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education; report of Finland 2012

I

Education and Research 2011-2016 - Development plan

In accordance with the Decree on the Development Plan for Education and University Research (987/1998), the Government adopts a plan for the development of education and university research within the administrative sector of the Ministry of Education and Culture every four years for the year of adoption and the following five calendar years.

According to the current plan, equal opportunity in education is the underpinning of Finnish welfare. For educational equality to be realised, it is imperative that everyone gains a solid basis for learning already in early childhood and in basic education and that pupils and students with special needs and at risk of exclusion have access to a diverse range of supportive action. Measures must also be taken to alleviate differences and heredity in post-compulsory education. The participation of underrepresented population groups requires special supportive measures. Special development targets in the Plan are to alleviate poverty, inequality and exclusion, to stabilise the public economy and to foster sustainable economic growth, employment and competitiveness.

According to the Development Plan measures are also taken to help foreign students to integrate into Finnish society and labour market by means of targeted instruction of the national languages (Finnish and Swedish).

An action plan to promote equal opportunity in education

One of the main goals of the Development Plan is that the Ministry of Education and Culture will prepare an action programme to promote equal opportunity in education. The aim is to lower gender differences significantly in competencies and education, to lessen the effect of the socio-economic background on participation in education, and to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups in education. The programme will enhance the possibilities of every individual to learn and to develop creativity, knowledge and different talents, prevent gender segregation and promote gender sensitivity in education. A research project will be initiated in support of the action programme. The Government will adopt the action programme for equal opportunity in education by the end of 2012.

II

Basic Education

Legislation

Finnish legislation (the Basic Education Act 628/1998) provides for compulsory education for all children living permanently in Finland. This means a duty to acquire education corresponding to the basic education syllabus as determined in the Basic Education Act and the Basic Education Core Curriculum. The parents and guardians must see to it that the child attains the required knowledge and skills. The local authority in turn has the responsibility to arrange basic education for all school-aged children in its area.

The Act on Non-Discrimination (21/2004) entered into force in February 2004. According to Section 2 of the Act, the provisions also apply to education. The Act is applied, inter alia, on in student admissions and the selection procedure. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, citizenship, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other reason relating to the person. Every authority must draw up an equality plan for the promotion of ethnic equality.

The equality plan of the Ministry of Education and Culture has influenced the equality plans of the agencies and the training providers in the Ministry's sector. According to the equality plan, that the main groups to be taken into account in equality plans are immigrants and Finnish national minorities, such as Roma and the indigenous Sámi people.

Values underpinning basic education

Basic education rests on a value base of human rights, equality, democracy, the preservation of diversity in nature and a viable environment, and appreciation of multiculturalism. Basic education promotes communality, responsibility and respect of individual rights and liberties.

Basic education is a means of enhancing regional and individual equality. The instruction caters for different learners and promotes gender equality by equipping girls and boys with to operate with equal rights and duties in society, in working life and in family life. In basic education, the teaching of different subjects is politically and religiously neutral. The local basic education curricula specifies the values underlying instruction. They must permeate the education provided and daily work at school.

Rights of national minorities

There is a Ministry of Education and Culture decree (1777/2009) determining the grounds for subsidising supplementary instruction provided for children with foreign, Sámi or Roma backgrounds in basic education and upper secondary education. If an educational institution does not arrange mother tongue instruction for foreign, Sámi or Roma language pupils, as laid down in the Basic Education Act, a separate subsidy may be granted in accordance with the said decree to arrange instruction in the pupil's own mother tongue.

The earmarked state subsidies will be granted of maximum two lessons a week, per group. There may be mother tongue speakers in the group as well as those who speak the respective language at home as a second language. The groups may consist of pupils and students from different age-groups, classes and schools. There are also children participating in the early childhood education. If the education provider has fewer than four pupils or students speaking Sámi or Roma, the minimum size of a group can be two pupils or students according to the decree. Since the minimum size of a group was earlier set to four, there's a remarkable improvement of the situation in this respect.

In 2009, separate, earmarked state subsidies were earmarked to a total of 6 million euro and, in 2010 and 2011, to a total of 12 million euro, for supplementary instruction to foreign, Sámi and Roma pupils, i.e. the situation has improved also in regard to financing since the beginning of 2010.

Sámi people

The Sámi Homeland consists of three northernmost municipalities of Lapland as well as of the area of Lapland reindeer owners' association in the northern part of Sodankylä. Approximately 40 per cent of all Finnish Sámi live in the Homeland. In the Homeland, a total of 495 pupils are inside the education system, from pre-primary to upper secondary education. Pupils living in the Sámi Homeland and speaking Sámi have the right to basic education in their own language. In upper secondary schools and in secondary vocational training, the teaching language can be Sámi. Elsewhere in Finland, this right to education in the Sámi language student's own language does not exist. Sámi can also be studied as an optional subject. The Sámi Education Centre in Inari (Anár) - Sámi oahpahušguovddáš - is the only vocational learning institution in Finland with Sámi as the teaching language.

In the education sector, the right to their own language of the Sámi is mainly realised by the Basic Education Act (628/1999), Upper Secondary Schools Act (629/1999) and the Vocational Education Act (630/1999). Sámi can be the teaching language of a school, a mother tongue subject and an optional foreign language subject. In the Basic Education Act and the Upper Secondary Schools Act, Sámi is regarded equal with the national languages Finnish and Swedish as a mother tongue.

The Ministry of Education and Culture grants full support to the instruction of Sámi language in the Sámi Homeland. According to Section 45 of the Act on Financing Education and Culture (1705/2009), the municipalities of the Sámi Homeland and other education providers in that region, shall be granted a yearly state subsidy to cover the costs arising from the provision of education in Sámi and instruction of Sámi in basic education, upper secondary schools and vocational training as provided in the Government decree (1769/2009). Consequently, pupils of basic schools in the Sámi Homeland should be provided instruction in Sámi. The language of instruction can be Sámi also in upper secondary schools. The municipalities in the Sámi Homeland will receive the full state subsidy when Sámi is the language of teaching or lessons of Sámi language are given, when the group size is 3 students on average.

The Finnish National Board of Education grants the Sámi Parliament annually state subsidies for the production of Sámi textbooks and learning materials in Sámi. The amount of the state subsidy has for a long time been 258,000 euro a year. In 2011, the appropriation was 290,000 euro. The Finnish National Board of Education receives yearly an appropriation in its own budget and grants it to the Sámi Parliament, who is responsible for the production of learning materials. By means of the appropriation, basic textbooks and various readers have been produced. The textbooks produced in Sámi languages are free of charge for the schools.

In 2009-2010, Sámi culture and language nest activities were supported through the appropriations for the development of child and youth policy. A subsidy of 350,000 euro has been granted from the state budget for 2011 to language nest activities and 100,000 euro to club activities supporting Sámi language skills. Language nest activities have proved to be a good practice, equally used in revitalizing the Roma language.

The fact that many Sámi children and youth live outside the homeland, can be regarded as a challenge as there is a lack of qualified teachers in Sámi language or speaking Sámi. Concerning the teaching and learning materials, the challenge has been the lack of translators and scriptwriters. The Finnish Sámi Parliament has intensive Nordic cooperation with the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and the Sámi Education Board in Sweden (Sameskolstyrelsen).

The Sámi language and culture can be studied at three universities in Finland: Oulu, Helsinki and Lapland. The Giellagas Institute of the University of Oulu has a special task on the national level to teach and research Sámi language and culture. In Koutokeino, Norway (Guovdageaidnu), the Sámi University College Sámi allaskuvla is the only college in the Nordic Countries, with Sámi as the main language of teaching, research and administration. Sámi allaskuvla trains e.g. Sámi language teachers and also admits students from the neighbouring countries Finland, Sweden and Russia.

Roma people

The native language, or mother tongue, of the Roma people living in Finland is either Finnish or Swedish. As a mother tongue, the Roma language in Finland is not even close to a level that would enable the Roma to study by the means of it. This is why the challenge of reviving the Roma language primarily is at this point a matter concerning the Roma themselves, but does entail the education of teachers of the Roma language and later will concern pre-primary and basic education.

A scheme for supporting the basic education of Roma children was launched by the National Board of Education in 2008; it rests on a value base of equality and cultural diversity. The aim is to promote the full realisation of the value base set out in the national core curriculum, to accommodate language and cultural considerations relating to Roma pupils in basic education and to translate the procedures developed within the project into everyday school life.

The action contains procedures for encountering the Roma pupil; developing cooperation between the pupil's family and the school; promoting tolerance and good ethnic relations and increasing knowledge about Roma culture; increasing contacts between the Roma minority and the mainstream population in the school community; supporting Roma pupils in building their identity and learning the Roma language; promoting learning opportunities; developing the education of special-needs pupils; and developing pedagogy and materials that cater for the different backgrounds of the Roma pupils.

The government subsidy for this development was 650,000 euro in 2010-2011. During the period 2008 – 2010 the subsidy covered 24 municipalities. Although the number of participating municipalities is small, the subsidy is fairly accurately targeted to municipalities with large Roma populations. On estimate, some 80% of all Roma children in basic education age were within the development action. The subsidised local authorities have slightly over 1000 Roma pupils of compulsory school age. All in all, there are about 1200 -1500 Roma children of that age in Finland. The dropout rate has been minimal in recent years, only a few dozens of pupils annually.

Religious and moral education

According to the Basic Education Act (628/1998) the provider of basic education shall provide religious education in accordance with the religion of the majority of pupils. In this case, religious education is arranged in conformity with the religious community to which the majority of pupils belong. A pupil who does not belong to this religious community may attend the said religious education after the provider of basic education has been notified of the matter by the parent/carer.

Three or more pupils belonging to the Evangelical-Lutheran Church or the Orthodox Church who do not participate in religious education referred to above, shall be provided education in accordance with their own religion.

Three or more pupils belonging to a religious community other than the Evangelical-Lutheran Church or the Orthodox Church, and who do not participate in religious education referred to in chapter one shall be provided religious education in accordance with their own religion, if their parents/carers so request. If a pupil belongs to more than one religious community, the pupil's parent/carer shall decide in which religious education the pupil will participate.

Pupils who do not belong to any religious community and do not take part in religious education shall be taught ethics. A pupil belonging to a religious community who is not provided religious education in accordance with his or her religion shall be taught ethics when requested by his or her parent/carer. The provider of basic education shall organise ethics education if there are at least three pupils entitled to it. A pupil who does not belong to any religious community may, at the request of his or her parent/carer, also participate in religious education provided by the provider of basic education which, in view of his or her upbringing and cultural background, evidently corresponds to his or her religious beliefs.

Quality education

There have been several initiative and developments aiming to promote quality in education in Finland in the recent years: for example the organisation of Flexible Basic Education, the further development of club activities, reducing class-size in basic education, KiVa-koulu, an anti-bullying programme, the development of instruction in foreign languages, quality criteria in basic education, developing guidance counselling in general upper secondary education, developing the use of IT in the matriculation examination, developing student welfare and developing intensified and special support in basic education.

III

Secondary education

Provision of general and vocational upper secondary programmes is quantified so as to give all young people an opportunity to continue their studies after basic education.

General upper secondary education continues the teaching and educational tasks of basic education. The role of general upper secondary education is to provide extensive all-round learning. It must provide sufficient capabilities for further study based on the general upper secondary school syllabus.

Upper secondary vocational education and training student are required to have completed the basic education syllabus or an equivalent previous syllabus. In addition, vocational education and training providers may also admit people who are otherwise deemed to have sufficient capabilities to cope with the studies. Those aiming for upper

secondary vocational education and training generally apply through the joint application system.

Instruction and completion of qualifications is free of charge for students studying for upper secondary vocational qualifications and general upper secondary education. Students are also offered one free meal per day and have the opportunity to receive school transport subsidy.

Education providers

Under Section 8 (Amendment 1391/2001) of the Vocational Education and Training Act (630/1998), the Ministry of Education and Culture may license a local authority, a consortium of local authorities, a registered association or foundation or a state enterprise to provide education and training. Under Section 8, the condition for the licence is that the education is necessary and that the provider has the professional and economic prerequisites for appropriate provision. Vocational education and training may also be provided by a state institution, as determined by the Ministry. Under Section 4 (Amendment 1392/2001) of the Adult Vocational Education and Training Act (631/1998), the provision of adult vocational education and training is also subject to licensing. The provision of vocational education and training is financed by local authorities and the government; the public funding for further education and training is provided by the government.

Rights of national minorities

Sámi people

There is a state-run vocational institute, Sámi Education Institute, licensed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to provide both initial and further vocational education and training. The languages of instruction are Finnish and Sámi. The training provider may independently determine the amount of education and training it wants to provide in the Sámi language. Initial training must be in accordance with the national qualification requirements but may take local needs into account. The individual study plan must accommodate the student's personal needs.

Roma people

Two providers of vocational education and training founded a joint training centre in April 2009. One of their aims is to raise the level of education and training among the Roma, with special focus on adults. The Ministry of Education and Culture has granted a permission to increase intakes in this Tsetanes Centre based on the education and training provided for the Roma. In the spring of 2010 the Ministry authorised another provider to arrange basic education for students above the compulsory school age. In these two institutes, the Roma can finish their basic education and gain a school-leaving certificate, supplement their basic education, to gain vocational qualifications and pursue liberal education studies. Another aim is to develop new paradigms for promoting the education and employment of the Roma in

cooperation with Roma organisations and with authorities and actively influence prejudices and attitudes, especially in educational institutions and in working life, but also in society more widely.

From November 2009 to July 2012 these two institutes, with the participation of a third training provider and the City of Helsinki, are also carrying out a project called Kaaleet kouluun! – Equal inclusion in society for the Roma. It is financed by the European Regional Fund and the aim is to create a permanent model and service structures for the education, training and employment of the Roma with a view to realising equal opportunity in society.

IV

Higher Education

The reform of student admissions in higher education

According to the Development Plan for Education and University Research (987/1998) the reform of student admissions in higher education institutions is underway with view to expediting the start of studies. The universities are independently responsible for student selection and admission. The aim of the reform is to ease the situation in student selections with better availability of information about education provision, a smaller number of programmes and larger programme entities. An electronic application and selection system to be adopted in 2013 will facilitate the application process for the applicant and for the higher education institution.

The Plan also states that the Ministry of Education and Culture, together with the higher education institutions, will be responsible for completing the reform of higher education admissions and study structures by the end of 2015 in order to expedite entry into higher education. To improve first-time applicants' chances of being admitted, they will be selected in a quota of their own, the use and size of which will be decided by the higher education institution. In the second phase, the joint application will be reserved only for first-time applicants. For other applicants, to secure flexible change of fields, there will be separate application and admission channels. In conjunction with the reform, there will also be a review assessing the appropriateness of young people's obligation to apply for education or training to keep their right to labour market support.

Preparatory education for polytechnic studies

Starting in the academic year 2009–2010, the polytechnics have been able to arrange free education equipping immigrants with the necessary language and other skills for polytechnic studies. After these studies, the immigrant must generally apply for admission to a degree programme in the ordinary student application system. The

duration of the preparatory education ranges from a few months to a maximum of nine months. A student participating in preparatory education before degree studies is not, however, entitled to student financial aid. The entitlement is planned to be enlarged in this respect because student financial aid may be granted to students taking part in education preparing for initial vocational education and training. The change would make it financially easier for immigrants to take up polytechnic studies. The student financial aid is needed by immigrants who apply for the preparatory education but are not in the labour market, in which case they would be covered by labour policy benefits and get integration support or unemployment allowance.

Strategy for the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Finland 2009–2015 (Publications of the Ministry of Education, Finland 2009:23)

The higher education institution internationalisation strategy provides guidelines for the internationalisation of higher education institutions in 2009–2015. It sets five primary aims for internationalisation, among them the development of a genuinely international higher education community and supporting a multicultural society.

According to the strategy the HEIs shall actively take part in supporting the multicultural higher education community and civil society. People with immigrant backgrounds and foreign exchange and degree students, teachers, researchers and other foreign personnel of higher education institutions in Finland are seen as a resource that promotes internationalisation at home. The share of students in higher education with immigrant background need to be increased to correspond to their share of the whole population. The measures for achieving the objectives of the strategy include increasing and focusing the teaching of national languages and culture so that it better corresponds to the needs of students, teachers and researchers with immigrant or non-Finnish backgrounds; the development of training models to support integration in the labour markets; preparatory training for polytechnic studies aimed at immigrants; development of open higher education study modules to lower the threshold for people with immigrant and non-Finnish backgrounds to enter a higher education institution as a degree student and improving information on higher education opportunities directed at immigrant families.

Higher Education Institutions' reports to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2011

Almost all HEIs report on the development of support services directed to international students, e.g. services in English, but it is obvious that the development level of those services varies between the HEIs. The major challenges concern Finnish language skills, lacking networks and difficulties in finding jobs. Measures include, inter alia, the provision of Finnish and Swedish courses geared for students with an immigrant background, tutoring services, support in finding practice places and employment, recruitment into HEI's own research projects and cooperation with local and regional authorities.

Capital region polytechnics have made most progress in developing services for immigrants. New instruments include preparatory training for polytechnic studies aimed at immigrants, employment training for immigrants, new arrangements of the entrance exams (use of dictionaries and additional exam time) as well as open university/open polytechnic provision and language studies. There are also courses targeted adult education and continuous training courses. One Polytechnic reported on tailoring education provision for specific large immigrant groups, such as Russian, Estonian, Somali, Chinese and Iraqi students.