

HIGHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Ilkka Virtanen

Finnish education system in brief



The Finnish education system consists of voluntary pre-school, compulsory comprehensive school, upper secondary level education (upper secondary school and vocational school), higher education and adult education.

Pre-school education is intended for six year old children, who will start their compulsory education in the following year. Over 90 % of the entire age group attend this voluntary education. It is normally provided in day care centres.

Comprehensive school provides a nine-year educational programme (with a voluntary 10th form) for all school-aged children, beginning at the age of seven. The largely standard comprehensive school curriculum prepares pupils for further studies at upper secondary level.

After comprehensive school, at the **upper secondary level**, there is a choice between the general upper secondary school and a vocational institution. On completion of the upper secondary school, students take the national matriculation examination. The general upper secondary education, together with the matriculation examination, qualifies students for all higher education studies. Finnish vocational education is traditionally institution-based; apprenticeship training covers only about 10 per cent of the intake to initial vocational training. Taught courses form the core of the programmes, but on-the-job training is nowadays included in the study programmes in all fields. From 2001 onwards all the qualifications are based on three-year courses and they produce general eligibility for higher education.



The Finnish **higher education** has been developed during the last two decades as a system of two parallel sectors, the university sector and the non-university sector comprising the polytechnics. Universities focus on scientific research and education based on research. Polytechnics are professionally oriented higher education institutions. In addition to their educational role, polytechnics conduct R&D that serves teaching and the world of work.

Adult education, which is designed for the entire working-age

population, has expanded rapidly especially during the last ten years. General adult education is provided by evening schools, local adult education centres (e.g. Vaasa-opisto), folk high schools, and summer universities. Vocational adult education is given by most vocational institutions and specifically by vocational adult education centres. At polytechnics adult education is provided on the same degree programmes as education for young students and it leads to the same polytechnic degrees. In addition, polytechnics offer professional specialisation studies as a form of continuing education. Adult education at universities comprises further education and open university education and it is offered by their own continuing education centres.

The binary system of Finnish higher education

The mission of **the universities** is to promote free research and scientific and artistic education, provide higher education based on research, and educate students to serve their country and humanity. In carrying out this mission, universities must interact with the surrounding society and strengthen the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society. The university sector consists of 16 (20 before the large-scale university reform implemented in the beginning of 2010) universities, nine of which are multi-faculty universities and seven are specialised institutions. Of the specialised institutions two are universities of technology, one is a school of economics and business administration, and the remaining four are art academies. In addition, university-level education is provided at the National Defence College under the Ministry of Defence. All institutions in the university sector carry out research and confer doctorates.

The Finnish **polytechnic** system was built during the 1990's to create a non-university sector of higher education. It was founded on the ground of institutions which previously provided post-secondary vocational education. The polytechnics form nowadays a nationwide network of regional institutions of higher education. There are 26 polytechnics, most of which are multifield and operate in several units. Polytechnics train professionals in response to labour market needs and conduct R&D which supports instruction and promotes regional development in particular. Polytechnic-level education is also provided at the Police College, which operates under the Ministry of the Interior.

Two big university reforms in the 2000's

The Finnish universities experienced a **degree reform** in the middle of the last decennium. From the year 2005 onwards, the Finnish universities follow the education system based on the Bologna process. The degree system is so called 3 + 2 + 4 system. Students study first for Bachelor's degree (3 years) and after that for Master's

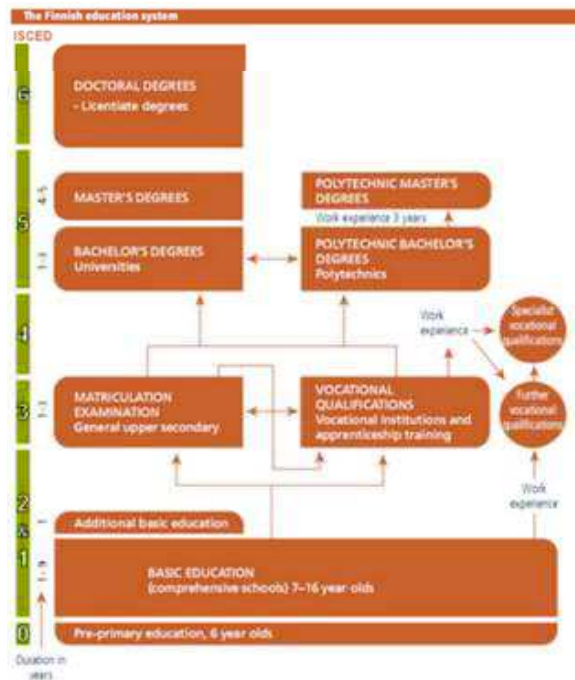
degree (2 years). The main scientific or artistic postgraduate degree is Doctor's degree (4 years) with an intermediate (not compulsory) Licentiate's degree.

Studies are quantified as credits (ECTS). One year of full-time study corresponds to 60 credits. The extent of the Bachelor's degree is 180 credits and takes three years. The Master's degree is 120 credits, which means two years of full-time study on top of the Bachelor's degree. University postgraduate education aims at a doctoral degree. In addition to the required studies, doctoral students prepare a dissertation, which they defend in public. The requirement for postgraduate studies is a Master's or corresponding degree. The nominal duration of full-time doctoral studies is four years.

The other **big university reform**, the biggest since the reforms in the 1960's and 1970's, was the preparation of the new Universities Act. Under the new Universities Act, which was passed by Parliament in June 2009, Finnish universities have become independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law. The universities have operated in their new form from 1 January 2010 onwards. Their operations are built on the freedom of education and research and university autonomy. At the same time, the universities' management and decision-making system was thoroughly reformed.

The reform will give universities more power by reducing the steering of universities by state administration. The universities will therefore no longer be developed as part of state administration, but in terms of their main mission: education and research. University staff will no longer be employed by the State. Civil-service employment relationships will become contractual employment relationships, and universities will negotiate in collective bargaining. The universities will be able to pursue independent human resources policies, improve their attractiveness as an employer and in this way strengthen their competitive advantage in order to recruit the best personnel.

The universities will be better placed to make the best use of their income from capital and to supplement their financing with donations and business activities. This will facilitate the targeting of research and education resources and allow the universities to develop stronger profiles on the basis of their strengths. Government will, however, continue to guarantee sufficient core funding tied to the rise in costs for the universities. In addition, the universities will be able to apply for competed public funding and use the revenue from their business ventures, donations and the return on their capital for financing their operations.



The Finnish education system (source: Wikipedia)

WEDNESDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2009

Agreements of the Vaasa Meeting

1. Each partner will choose max 20 of the texts written by students to be published and send them by the end of the year 2009 to Marie Matejakova (matejakova(at)chello.cz).
2. Each partner will produce DVD-material or a live presentation in English to the meeting in Madrid June 2010. The DVD-material or the presentation should be something inspiring, for example a new way of studying English, a play, a song or so on – something funny.
3. An evaluation of the student's studies should be made and therefore send the questions/proposals to Vlasta Kreckova (Kreckova(at)fel.cvut.cz) by the end of the year 2009.
4. The students should be encouraged to use the latest technology in the project, e.g. iPod, Facebook, Skype, but at least the email.
5. The national identity and heritage will be in focus in the project studies. At the same time the students will learn about the other countries in the project by reading, by conversations and by email-group discussions. It has been noticed that the communication between the students has already increased and become better.
6. The next and the last meeting of the project will be from 6th to 8th of June in 2010 in Madrid, Spain. The attendance of the meeting should be informed to Beatriz Luna