

## UNESCO National Commission Country Report Template

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[Section for Higher Education](#) | Division for Education 2030

### **Higher Education Report: Finland**

Ministry of Education and Culture, Helsinki

20 April 2022

#### **Content**

Current situation of higher education	2
1.1 Legal and institutional framework of higher education	2
1.2 Historical enrolment and graduation rates	4
Current challenges in higher education	5
Challenge 1. Level of education in Finland	6
Challenge 2. Development of higher education and expertise in different life situations	6
Challenge 3: increasing investments in research, development and innovation.	7

## Current situation of higher education

### 1.1 Legal and institutional framework of higher education

For a comparable system description, see Eurydice at [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/higher-education-25\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/higher-education-25_en)

In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the **planning and implementation of higher education and science policy** and preparing statutes, national Budget proposals and Government decisions that apply to these. The Ministry steers and finances the activities of the higher education system, science agencies and research institutes as well as supports the operating capacity of research organisations.

Targets for development are based on the **Government Programme** as well as other strategic objectives set by the Parliament and Government for higher education institutions, including the [Vision for higher education and research in 2030](#). The objective of **Finland's higher education policy** is to develop higher education institutions as an internationally competitive entity where each institution also flexibly responds to regional needs. [The Sustainable Growth Programme for Higher Education in Finland](#) seeks solutions through which higher education and research can contribute to the strengthening of the Finnish public economy and fuel sustainable growth.

The Finnish higher education system has a **dual structure**, consisting of **universities and universities of applied sciences**, each profiled in their core areas. Finland has 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences. The Universities of applied sciences (UAS for short) offer professionally oriented higher education on bachelor's and master's level, and have strong ties with working life and regional development, whereas the Universities focus on scientific research and the education they provide is based on it. Universities offer bachelor's, master's and doctoral (PhD) level programmes.

Higher education institutions are **autonomous actors** that are responsible for the content of their education and research as well as the development of their own activities. There is restricted entry to all fields of study. As applicant volumes outweigh the number of places available, universities and universities of applied sciences use different kinds of student selection criteria. Most commonly these include success in matriculation examination and entrance tests.

The higher education system promotes **Finnish competitiveness, well-being, education and learning as well as sustainable development**. The higher education institutions exercise foresight and help regenerate society, culture and working life and make sure the required highly educate workforce is available.

The higher education institutions aim to **improve the quality of education** by revamping education content, teaching methods, learning environments and the competence of teachers, as well as to increase cooperation. The institutions make full use of the possibilities offered by **digitalisation**. They develop their student admissions, procedures for the **recognition of prior learning** and degree programmes in order to step up **national and international mobility**. Another aim for the higher education institutions is to make **mobility of students between universities and universities of applied sciences** easier.

Other objectives include ensuring that higher education institutions make wider use of secondary education qualifications in their **student admissions** and no longer organise entrance examinations that require sustained preparation. To accelerate transition to higher education studies, **cooperation with secondary education providers** will be improved. To enhance admission procedures, cooperation between different scientific fields will be carried out. The percentage of students studying towards their first higher education degree among new student admissions will be raised by reserving more places for first-time applicants and updating the admissions procedures for transfer students.

The higher education institutions must support **equal opportunities** and encourage students to graduate within the normative period at all degree levels. The institutions will provide more flexibility in studies and improve the recognition of prior learning. Student guidance will become more versatile and cooperation with working life will be closer. **Effective career and recruitment services** make it easier to graduate quickly and find a job. The institutions have also introduced national career monitoring.

To meet the new challenges facing society, the institutions assume responsibility for identifying the competence and educational needs of **immigrants** and improving their potential for accessing the labour market.

#### Steering of higher education institutions

The activities of higher education institutions are based on **extensive autonomy and the freedom of science**. The autonomy of higher education institutions comprises the right to make decisions on matters related to the institution's internal administration. Universities of applied sciences are public limited companies whereas universities are independent legal entities.

The Ministry of Education and Culture and the higher education institutions interact continuously. The institutions and the Ministry hold negotiations at the start of each **four-year agreement period**, covering the following: common objectives for the higher education system, key measures for each higher education institution, the tasks, profile, core areas and newly emerging scientific fields in each higher education institution, degree objectives as well as the appropriations allocated on the basis of these. The agreement also specifies how the outcomes of the objectives will be reported on.

Other steering measures used by the Ministry, such as steering by information, aim to encourage and engage higher education institutions in other action that require mutual interaction. Ministry representatives visit each higher education institution in the course of each agreement period and organise regional events for actors and key stakeholders in the field to strengthen mutual interaction.

Every year, each higher education institution receives statistical data on their ranking among other higher education institutions. The Ministry also periodically gives written feedback the institutions on their activities and development needs. When necessary, the Ministry also invites the management of the institutions to discuss the special characteristics and specific questions related to different fields.

Financing of higher education institutions

In connection with annual Budget formulation, **Finland's Parliament decides on the amount of core funding** allocated by the Ministry of Education and Culture to the universities and universities of applied sciences. The Ministry disburses the disposable core funding using the financing models for the two types of higher education institutions. Besides the core funding, higher education institutions receive financing from other sources (external funding), such as the Academy of Finland, Business Finland, foundations, enterprises, the European Union and other international sources.

The appropriations for core funding are allocated mainly in an imputed way to the universities on the basis of their teaching and research performance, and to universities of applied sciences on the basis of their performance in education as well as research and development. Part of the financing for both higher education sectors is allocated on the basis of their strategies, which are formulated together between the Ministry and each institution. Additionally, the national tasks and duties of the universities are taken into consideration in the central government funding for universities. The purpose of the financing models is to improve the quality, impact and productivity of the higher education institutions.

The model allows the core funding divided between the higher education institutions to be allocated as a single entity. The higher education institutions then decide on the internal allocation of funding independently on the basis of their strategic choices.

**1.2 Historical enrolment and graduation rates**

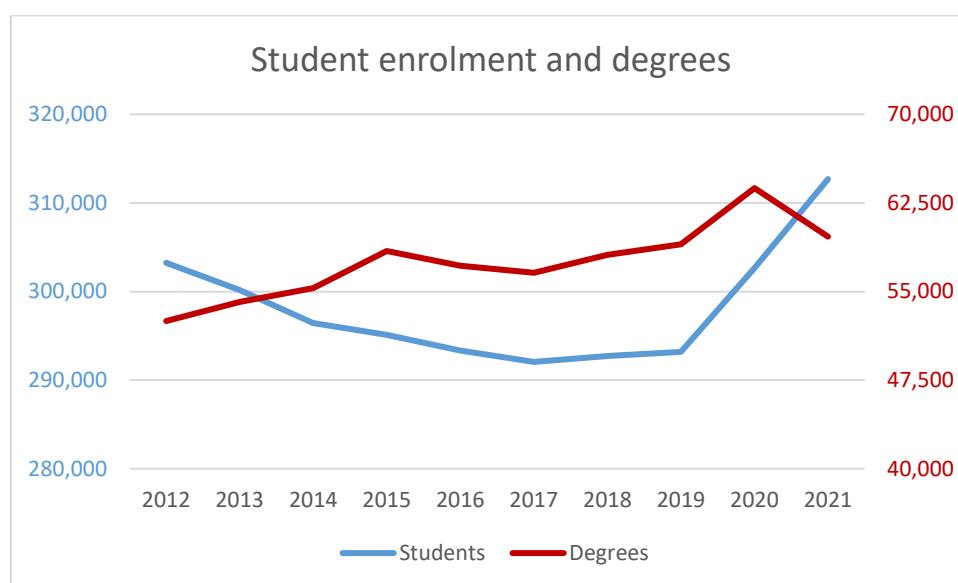
TABLE 1. Student enrolment in tertiary education (Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences), by target degree. Data source: Statistics Finland

Year	Bachelor's (UAS)	Master's (UAS)	Bachelor's (University)	Master's (University)	Doctoral & licentiate	TOTAL
2012	131 373	7 833	95 760	47 745	20 529	303 240
2013	129 636	8 565	92 727	49 029	20 220	300 177
2014	128 751	9 219	89 394	49 272	19 800	296 436
2015	128 568	10 161	85 146	51 765	19 449	295 089
2016	128 664	11 001	80 802	54 084	18 783	293 334
2017	127 728	12 198	77 781	55 827	18 519	292 053
2018	127 032	13 410	76 482	57 603	18 210	292 737
2019	126 279	14 208	76 290	58 074	18 348	293 199
2020	131 154	15 981	77 364	59 565	18 591	302 655
2021	136 056	18 432	78 183	60 960	19 059	312 690
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1 295 241</b>	<b>121 008</b>	<b>829 929</b>	<b>543 924</b>	<b>191 508</b>	<b>2 981 610</b>

TABLE 2. Tertiary degrees awarded by Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. Data source: Statistics Finland

Year	Bachelor's (UAS)	Master's (UAS)	Bachelor's (University)	Master's (University)	Doctoral and licentiate	TOTAL
2012	22 122	1 707	13 014	13 830	1 830	52 503
2013	22 800	1 947	13 017	14 445	1 905	54 114
2014	22 779	2 115	13 500	14 856	2 022	55 272
2015	23 715	2 367	15 039	15 315	2 004	58 440
2016	23 043	2 517	14 289	15 321	2 010	57 180
2017	23 166	2 754	13 893	14 910	1 857	56 580
2018	24 504	3 117	13 461	15 162	1 857	58 101
2019	24 315	3 330	13 419	16 128	1 797	58 989
2020	24 372	3 870	15 096	18 513	1 902	63 753
2021	24 240	4 335	13 461	15 963	1 641	59 640
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>235 059</b>	<b>28 059</b>	<b>138 192</b>	<b>154 440</b>	<b>18 819</b>	<b>574 572</b>

FIGURE 1. Student enrolment and degrees in tertiary education in Finland, totals 2012-2021. Data source: Statistics Finland



### Current challenges in higher education

In the following, we refer to a process called “**The vision for the Finnish higher education and research in 2030**”, which was drawn up in cooperation with higher education institutions and other stakeholders and was published in October 2017. The purpose was to formulate a future scenario, which enables the development of a high-quality, effective and internationally competitive higher education system in Finland by the year 2030.

In the course of this work, different alternatives and models for improving the Finnish higher education system were examined and their impacts and feasibility assessed. The development

needs of the Finnish higher education and research were reviewed and the future desired state defined on the basis of the changes in the national and international operating environment.

The work was carried out in broad and open cooperation with the higher education institutions and their staff, students and stakeholders.

### **Challenge 1: level of education in Finland**

By international standards, Finland has a reputation for having created a top-performing system of comprehensive school education. However, inequality, exclusion and differences in learning outcomes are beginning to threaten the Finnish success story. Those born in the 1970s are likely to be the age cohort with the highest level of education in Finland, leaving all others behind. What is more, we have not been able to keep up with the trend towards more international systems of education in our increasingly globalised world.

This is why in our vision for the Finnish higher education and research in 2030 (2017), our aim is to **enable 50 per cent of all young people to complete a higher education degree by 2030**.

Since 2019, we have increased the number of available student places in tertiary education, implemented a Parliamentary reform on continuous learning, completed a reform on extending the compulsory education and the minimum school-leaving age to 18 years and prepared a higher education accessibility plan, examining the accessibility in terms of socio-economic status, regions, gender, immigrant background, ethnic groups, language groups and people with disabilities.

We have aimed to ensure that the increased number of available student places at universities and universities of applied sciences also meets the needs of society and that the number of places is based on employment foresight for each sector and region, while keeping in mind that higher education also creates new jobs.

We will continue efforts to allocate student places particularly to those applicants who will study for their first higher education degree. We also plan to develop alternative options for gaining admission to degree education for those who wish to retrain or gain further qualifications.

### **Challenge 2: Development of higher education and expertise in different life situations**

**The Sustainable Growth Programme for Higher Education** in Finland seeks solutions through which higher education and research can contribute to the strengthening of the Finnish public economy and fuel sustainable growth. The programme started in August 2021 and it is linked to the Government's Sustainability Roadmap. Its objectives and solutions are interlinked with the vision for the higher education and research in 2030, and provide concrete actions to reach the vision's objectives. Many of the concrete actions set out in the Sustainable Growth Programme respond to the second aim/challenge identified in the vision document: development of higher education and expertise in different life situations.

For example, the programme aims to **triple the number of foreign students in Finland**, improve their integration to the Finnish society, and to build pathways for foreign students to the Finnish labour market. There are also proposals to improve flexibility of higher education, so that it would be easier to combine studies with work. The programme also strengthens the collaboration between higher education institutions in providing continuing education, and sets

out to improve the how the society could better benefit from the expertise of those with advanced degrees (licentiates and doctorates).

### **Challenge 3: increasing investments in research, development and innovation**

Finland's expenditure-to-GDP ratio for research, development and innovation is currently 2.8 per cent. According to the Government Programme of Prime Minister Marin (2019), as well as in our vision for the Finnish higher education and research in 2030 (2017), **our aim is to allocate 4% of GDP to research and development by 2030.**

For this purpose, we have adopted a National Roadmap for Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) in April 2020. The measures in the Roadmap aim at improving the global attractiveness of the Finnish RDI environment and encourage businesses to invest more in RDI in Finland. Besides raising the level of competence and education domestically, the Roadmap emphasises that Finland must be more attractive to international researchers, experts and RDI professionals. The aim is also to build a new partnership model, which serves to create an attractive environment and incentives for long-term cooperation between the research community, the business community and other RDI actors.

The roadmap was prepared in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, in consultation with RDI stakeholders and other ministries.