

Teachers in Finland – trusted professionals

Teaching is a popular profession in Finland. The applicant numbers are many times higher than the intake to teacher education programmes. Consequently, the qualification situation is relatively good among teachers. There are many reasons behind this popularity. The teaching profession has a high status in Finland. Teachers are also autonomous in their work, as the system is based on trust rather than control.

TEACHERS ARE AUTONOMOUS PROFESSIONALS

Finnish teachers have a lot of professional freedom and opportunities to influence their work and the development of their schools. They decide on the teaching methods, the teaching materials used as well as pupil and student assessment, often in cooperation with other teachers. Most teachers also participate in joint decision-making, drawing up of local curricula as well as acquisitions.

Finnish teachers can also influence the development of education at national level. Teachers are generally represented in the expert groups preparing education reform and new initiatives. The teachers' trade union, which represents 95 per cent of Finnish teachers, is also one of the most important stakeholders who contribute to the development of education and training.

Teachers are not evaluated through external or formal measures. The principals of the institutions are also pedagogical heads and thus the quality of teaching is their responsibility. In many schools

principals and teachers conduct so called development talks annually, where they discuss the past year and the objectives for the coming year.

WHO ARE THE TEACHERS?

A big proportion of Finnish teachers are female. This is the case particularly in pre-primary education, where more than 90 per cent of the teachers are female. In

upper secondary education the gender distribution is more in balance. Also in an international comparison, the teaching profession is slightly more female-dominated than in other countries.

The teaching profession is ageing in Finland. On the one hand, the percentage of teachers under 40 years of age is 33 per cent which is below the OECD average. On the other hand, the proportion of teachers between 40–65 years is above the OECD average.

TEACHERS ARE RECRUITED IN AN OPEN PROCESS

In Finland education providers are responsible for employing their teaching staff. They also determine the types and number of posts needed. The recruitment is an open process and the vacant posts are advertised in newspapers, professional journals and relevant websites.

Each education provider decides who is responsible for appointing new teachers. It may be the education committee or another equivalent committee, the municipal board, the school board or – especially in the case of temporary and short-term substitute teachers – the principal.

Teachers are required a master's degree and pedagogical training, but education providers set the other criteria. The aim is to select a person who is both qualified and suitable for both the position

in question and the school community.

Most teachers work full time and hold posts as municipal civil servants or employees. Some teachers work part-

Teachers
participate in
developing
education

Teachers are
not evaluated
through external
or formal
measures.

time. When the total number of lessons amounts to less than 16 per week, the teacher is considered to work part-time.

Teachers can only be dismissed if there is a legitimate reason for this. Such reasons can be economic or productive, for example if the teacher's workload decreases significantly and permanently. However, dismissal is only possible if the employer is unable to offer the teachers another job or train them for a new position. Teachers may also be dismissed if they are unable to carry out their duties adequately.

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE NEGOTIATED COLLECTIVELY

The conditions of service for teachers are negotiated collectively between the Local authority employers and the Trade Union of Education in Finland with an interval of a few years. These negotiations result in small adjustments to the conditions. The salary development has in general been in line with that of other professions.

Teachers' salaries are based on the tasks and their requirements, the results of their work and work experience. The amount of a teacher's teaching duties and the possibility to accumulate extra hours has an impact on the salary, as well as additional duties. Employers can also pay a personal bonus on the basis of the outcomes of the individual teacher's work.

WORKING TIME IS

MAINLY BASED ON TEACHING DUTIES

Most teachers' working hours are based on teaching duties. The teaching duties vary between 16 and 24 weekly 45-minute lessons according to the type of institution and subject. At vocational institutions, the teachers commonly have an annual teaching duty. In some vocational fields the teachers have overall working hours. Comparing internationally, the number of teaching hours in

Finland is below the OECD average.

There are 185–195 school days in a year. Teachers are not obligated to be at school on those days when they have no lessons or other particular duties.

In addition to teaching, the tasks of teachers include planning of instruction and pre- and post-class work. Furthermore, the school's internal development tasks and cooperation with colleagues, homes and other partners, such as staff in pupil and social welfare services, the local family counselling clinic, the police, business life, form an integrated part of teaching work. For this type of activities an allocation of three hours of work has been determined in the collective agreement for teachers in

basic education and three hours in two weeks for teachers in general upper secondary education.

TEACHERS' CAREERS

Teachers in Finland generally have many opportunities to develop their professionalism. However, in

terms of promotion, the teaching career in Finland is flat. The only career move is to apply for a principal's post. In some municipalities teachers may be appointed coordinating or specialist teachers in their subject.

Continuing education is compulsory for teachers. In general education teachers are obliged to participate in training for a minimum of 3 days per year. There is no formal link between continuing

RATIO OF TEACHERS' SALARIES TO EARNINGS FOR FULL-TIME, FULL-YEAR WORKERS WITH TERTIARY EDUCATION AGED 25–64 IN 2010.

	PRIMARY EDUCATION	LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION	UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION
Australia	0.92	0.92	0.92
Austria	0.58	0.62	0.64
Canada	1.05	1.05	1.05
Denmark	0.87	0.87	1.01
England	0.99	1.09	1.09
Finland	0.89	0.98	1.10
France	0.73	0.79	0.80
Germany	0.88	0.97	1.05
Iceland	0.50	0.50	0.61
Ireland	0.82	0.82	0.82
Israel	0.85	0.87	0.92
Italy	0.57	0.60	0.64
Korea	1.31	1.30	1.30
Netherlands	0.70	0.84	0.84
New Zealand	0.98	1.01	1.03
Norway	0.66	0.66	0.70
Portugal	1.19	1.19	1.19
Scotland	0.95	0.95	0.95
Spain	1.21	1.35	1.38
Sweden	0.79	0.81	0.86
United States	0.67	0.69	0.72
OECD average	0.82	0.85	0.90
EU21 average	0.81	0.85	0.90

OECD: Education at a Glance 2012

education and promotion. Teachers have the right to participate in this obligatory training with full salary benefits.

The education providers carry primary responsibility for continuing teacher education. Teachers themselves have, however, been given greater responsibility for developing their professional skills and expertise. More and more attention is being paid to self-motivated continuing education. Local authorities support it within their financial limits and with financial support from the State.

The State is primarily responsible for continuing education that is important for implementing education policy and which promotes its aims. Education providers and teachers are supported by government funding in terms of reforms significant to education policy.

The retirement age alternates between 60 and 65 years. The pension replacement rate ranges from 60 to 66 per cent. ●