

2020-2021 Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Research Program for U.S. Teachers (Fulbright DA)

Finland Country Profile

Partner organization: [Fulbright Finland Foundation](#)

Eligible program dates: January-June, 2021 (program lengths can vary; departures to Finland should be scheduled between January 6 and 16, 2021).

Language requirement: None

Host institution: Applicants should keep an open mind about their placement with Finnish host universities. The Fulbright Finland Foundation works with various Finnish higher education institutions to identify appropriate host universities for the selected U.S. teachers.

Dependent Information: An allowance of \$2,000 per eligible dependent will be provided as part of the Fulbright DA grant.

If you have family members accompanying you to Finland, please read carefully the family related advice and tips from the Orientation Guide: www.fulbright.fi/guide-coming-finland/bringing-your-family-finland.

Guidance will be provided to teachers traveling to Finland with school-aged children, or younger children requiring daycare placement. Please note that whereas the public schools run by the municipalities do not charge fees, private foreign language schools may charge tuition. Daycare options and fees vary by municipality. More information can be found at: <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/living-in-finland/family/taking-care-of-a-child>.

Country Overview

Finland is the most sparsely populated country in the European Union with a population of 5.5 million (2018) spread over 338,145 square kilometers. The official languages are Finnish (spoken by 87.9%) and Swedish (5.2%). Sámi is the mother tongue of about 1,900 people, members of the indigenous Sámi people of northern Lapland. Finland was a province and then a grand duchy under Sweden from the 12th to the 19th centuries, and an autonomous grand duchy of Russia after 1809. It gained complete independence in 1917.

The Republic of Finland is a parliamentary democracy. The President is elected for a six-year term. Most executive power lies in the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister. Finland has the most gender equal parliament in Europe with 58 percent of the Ministers being women. The unicameral parliament has 200 members elected every four years. Finland has a multi-party system, and as no single party can usually gain a majority, parties must work with each other to form coalition governments.



The key features of Finland's modern welfare state are high quality education, promotion of equality, and a national social security and healthcare system - currently challenged by an aging population and the fluctuations of an export-driven economy. <https://finland.fi/facts-stats-and-info/finland-in-facts/>

Educational System Overview

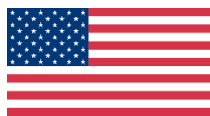
The Finnish education system is composed of a compulsory nine-year basic education, catering for all between the ages of seven and sixteen years, preceded by early childhood education and care and one year of pre-primary education. After basic education, students can continue their studies in upper secondary education by choosing either the general or vocational education track (or a combination of the two). The post-compulsory level is divided into general education and initial and further vocational education and training. According to the latest statistics (2017), about 53% of school-leavers continue in general upper secondary schools, while 41% attend vocational education and training.

Higher education is provided by universities and universities of applied sciences. Adult education is available at all levels. Most education in Finland is publicly funded. In basic education, school materials, school meals and commuting are provided free of charge. In upper secondary education, students pay for their books and transport. In addition, there is a well-developed system of study grants and loans. Financial aid can be awarded for full-time study in upper secondary education and in higher education.

The main objective of Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education. The structure of the education system reflects these principles. The system is highly permeable; that is, there are no dead-ends preventing progression to higher levels of education. The focus in education is on learning rather than testing. There are no national tests for pupils in basic education in Finland. Instead, teachers are responsible for assessment in their respective subjects on the basis of the objectives included in the curriculum. The only national examination, the matriculation examination, is held at the end of general upper secondary education. Commonly, admission to higher education is based on the results in the matriculation examination and entrance tests.

The administration in Finland is decentralized, which means that the education and training providers decide on how to apply the general goals and guidelines set at a national level. Most of the educational services are provided by municipalities or joint municipalities, especially in basic education and in upper secondary general schools. Municipal autonomy is a strongly respected principle in Finland that is based on the constitution. Besides municipal basic education schools, there are some state-owned schools and some private schools. Only 2 % of the children in basic education study in private schools. These private schools work according to the same common, national guidelines as the municipal schools. They are also publicly funded.

Early childhood education and care, pre-primary education, basic education, upper secondary general education and vocational education are governed by objectives set in legislation and by



national core curricula. Each municipality draws up a municipal curriculum based on the national core curriculum, while considering the needs of local children and families. Every school has its own curriculum, which it uses to develop its annual work plans for the school and for each teacher, as well as individual study plans for students. Through this process, teachers learn to view the operations of their school as a whole and commit to more than just their own class or subject. This develops their overall expertise, creating a better basis for inclusive practices. Students and their parents are also increasingly involved in school curriculum processes, and their needs and opinions do influence school practices.

Unlike many other countries, the teaching profession is highly valued and a popular field of study in Finland. In the Finnish society, teachers are trusted experts, who are seen as agents of change in the development of the curriculum, as well as the whole education system. Teachers have plenty of independence in planning their work, in implementing the national core curriculum, in shaping their lessons and in choosing their teaching methods and materials. Teachers are expected, not so much to transmit knowledge to students by ‘delivering’ the curriculum, but to guide the learning process and to strengthen their students’ “learning to learn” abilities and skills. They are also expected to cope with different kinds of learners and to provide adequate and on-time support to students with special needs.

Possible topics of interest to U.S. educators:

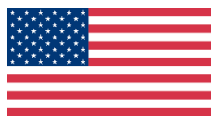
Focus on “Transversal Skills and Competencies” that Apply to All Subject Areas

The National Core Curricula for pre-primary education and for compulsory basic education reflects the fact that a changing society demands more and more transversal skills and competencies. In addition to having basic requirements for core subject matter, the curriculum has a list of “Transversal Competencies” that apply to all subject areas, including Thinking and Learning to Learn (T1); Cultural Competence, Interaction, and Self-Expression (T2); Taking Care of Oneself and Managing Daily Life (T3); Multiliteracy (T4); Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Competence (T5); Working Life Competence and Entrepreneurship (T6), and Participation, Involvement, and Building a Sustainable Future (T7).

<https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/new-national-core-curriculum-for-basic-education.pdf>

New Measures to Enhance Quality of Education and Learning Outcomes, and to make the Transition from Upper Secondary Education to Higher Education Smoother

The new National Core Curricula for general upper secondary school education was just published by the National Agency for Education in November 2019, and it will be implemented by the upper secondary schools by the fall of 2021. The new measures will include, for example, personalized and flexible study pathways and the provision of guidance and support as required by these; studies crossing subject boundaries; closer cooperation with higher education institutions; more international experiences; possibilities for students to improve skills needed in



working life through increased collaboration with the surrounding society; and more efforts to protect students from all bullying, violence, harassment and racism.

<https://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/5394394/11+most+important+changes.pdf/df474839-9c46-4040-b339-0dbfa1bc0eae/11+most+important+changes.pdf>

Trust as a Cornerstone in the Finnish Education System

In Finland, only about 10% of the applicants are accepted on average into teacher training programs. Prospective teachers undergo rigorous preparation and, once certified and graduated with master's degrees, are trusted by parents, school administrators, and others in the community, and given pedagogical autonomy on how to teach, what kind of educational materials to use, how to use innovative learning environments, assessment, etc. There are no mandated standardized tests in Finland, apart from one exam at the end of students' senior year in general upper secondary school. Students come to school on their own, there are no fences around the school yard, and there is great effort to empower students to influence their own learning.

Schools Promote Equality and Well-being of Students

One of the main principles of Finnish education is equality. One indication of that is that education is free at all levels from pre-primary education at the age of six to higher education. Education providers, which in most cases are municipalities, must also offer teaching materials, a warm nutritious meal every day, pupil health and welfare services, as well as transportation. Students typically receive a 15-minute unstructured break for every 45 minutes of instruction throughout the school day to promote alertness in the classroom. 70 percent of Finland's comprehensive schools have adopted a nationwide initiative to boost the physical activity of children, called Finnish Schools on the Move, and 90 percent of Finnish comprehensive schools are implementing an effective, research-informed program for countering bullying called KiVa.

<https://finland.fi/life-society/the-simple-strength-of-finnish-education/>
https://www.stat.fi/til/erop/2018/erop_2018_2019-06-19_tie_001_en.html

Other areas for Finnish-U.S. Collaboration

Since Finland is becoming more and more multicultural, Finnish teachers can learn lessons about intercultural learning and immigrant education in the U.S. One of the objectives in Finland is helping students to appreciate cultural diversity as part of the richness of life and as a source of creativity. Other key areas that Finnish and U.S. educators can work together on are the development of STEM education, introduction of more exploratory hands-on methods in science education, as well as use of new technology and learning environments in education. Finnish educators are also interested in innovative ideas in multi-disciplinary phenomenon-based learning, sustainable development and entrepreneurship education.



Useful links:

The Finnish National Agency for Education

www.oph.fi/english/

<http://www.oph.fi/english/publications>

The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland

<https://minedu.fi/en/education-system>

<http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/?lang=en>

<https://minedu.fi/en/koulutusjarjestelman-erityispiirteet> (Special features of the Finnish education system)

Upper secondary education reform

<https://minedu.fi/en/reform-of-general-upper-secondary-education>

<https://minedu.fi/documents/1410845/5394394/11+most+important+changes.pdf/df474839-9c46-4040-b339-0dbfa1bc0eae/11+most+important+changes.pdf>

Statistics: https://www.stat.fi/til/kou_en.html

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre: <https://karvi.fi/en/>

