

**NATIONAL REPORTS 2004 – 2005**

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**1. Main achievements since Berlin****1.1. Give a brief description of important developments, including legislative reforms**

Some of the main statutes regulating higher education in Finland were amended in 2004.

**Universities**

The Universities Act (645/1997) was amended on July 30th 2004. The amendment (715/2004) enacted a Bologna-compatible two-tier degree structure, with an obligatory Bachelors level (1st cycle) degree before Masters level (2nd cycle) degree in all fields except medicine and dentistry. The new Act makes it possible for universities to award official English degrees and degree titles.

The Government Decree on University Degrees (794/2004), which specifies the Universities Act, was issued on August 19th. Repealing 20 previous field-specific decrees, it detailed the two-tier degree structure and aims and structures for Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral degrees. ECTS-equivalent credit system was also enacted by the law. Official degree titles in Finnish, Swedish and English were determined.

The Act and Decree will come into force on August 1st 2005.

## Polytechnics

The Polytechnics Act was last amended on May 9th 2003 (351/2003). An amendment to the Act concerning polytechnic second-cycle degrees, is in preparation. By the amendment the polytechnic degree structure will be based on permanent legislation. At the moment, the second-cycle degrees are at their pilot phase based on experimental legislation. The bill will be submitted to Parliament in early 2005, and come into force on August 1, 2005.

The Government Decree on Polytechnics, specifying the Polytechnics Act, was amended in 2004. It enacted the application of ECTS-equivalent credit system in polytechnics, coming into effect on January 1, 2005.

## 2. National organisation

### **2.1. Give a short description of the structure of public authorities responsible for higher education, the main agencies/bodies in higher education and their competencies** (For example, do higher education institutions report to different ministries?)

There are altogether 20 universities and 29 polytechnics in Finland, which report to the Ministry of Education. In addition to this, there is one (1) university (The National Defense College) under the Ministry of Defense, and one (1) polytechnic (Police Polytechnic) under the Ministry of Interior.

Universities and polytechnics are steered by the Ministry of Education. The steering is based on mutually negotiated three-year performance agreements..

The universities have full autonomy in designing their own syllabi and curricula, in internal administration, and in admitting their students. University autonomy is stipulated in the Finnish Constitution. The autonomy of polytechnics is also endorsed by law.

### **2.2. Give a short description of the institutional structure** (For example, number of public/private universities/other HE institutions or numbers/percentage of students in public/private sector. To what extent are private and State higher education institutions covered by the same regulations?)

There 20 universities in Finland are all state-owned public institutions, governed by the Universities Act. University autonomy is stipulated in the Constitution. The 29 polytechnics are maintained mainly by municipalities, federations of municipalities or foundations. Polytechnics have autonomy in their internal matters. Privately maintained polytechnics are under the same legislation as publicly maintained higher education institutions.

### **2.3. Give a brief description of the structure which oversees the implementation of the Bologna Process in your country** (National Bologna group, thematic working groups, composition and activities, stakeholder involvement)

The main national policy objectives are defined in the National Development Plan for education and research 2003-2008, adopted by the Government on 4 December 2003. The objectives are further elaborated in the performance agreements between the Ministry of Education and the institutions. The Ministry of Education has the overall responsibility of overseeing the implementation of Bologna reforms in Finland. Implementing the Bologna-compatible university reform has been a top priority in the performance negotiations between

the Ministry and the institutions. All universities have received ear-marked funding to ensure high quality in their reform.

The Government EU sub-committee for Education monitors the Bologna process in general. The sub-committee consists of representatives from higher education institutions and social partners, other relevant ministries and the Ministry of Education.

In the university sector, a network of field-specific co-ordination groups has been created for the degree reform. There are altogether 22 field-specific co-ordination groups, which are mostly responsible for general discussion and coming up with nation-wide decisions in implementing the degree reform. The groups consist of representatives from all Finnish faculties in the academic field in question. Every group has selected a chairperson (usually a dean or a vice-rector) from one university. Their work is financed by the Ministry of Education. In the polytechnic sector, the Rectors' Council coordinates the work of field-specific working groups charged with the further development of polytechnic degrees. All the polytechnics have also appointed an ECTS coordinator.

Ad hoc working groups have also been set up, for themes such as international joint degrees (see question 11 below), qualifications framework, and quality assurance. Main stakeholders – institutions and students – are included in these working groups and social partners have been consulted also.

The Ministry of Education regularly arranges national thematic seminars for all interested parties. Furthermore, the Ministry maintains close contact with the above-mentioned field-specific co-ordination groups, institutions, students, and other relevant reference groups. The Ministry has also appointed Finland's national group of Bologna promoters.

### **3. Quality assurance**

The following questions have been included in the template at the request of the Working Group on Stocktaking.

#### ***3.1. National quality assurance systems should include a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.***

***Please specify the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.***

National quality assurance system of higher education consists of three elements: national higher education policy, national evaluations and quality assurance implemented at the level of individual higher education institutions.

1. Publicly funded higher education institutions are steered by the Ministry of Education. The universities are steered by the Act which determines the distribution of educational responsibilities between universities and by means of decrees issued for each field of study separately. Correspondingly, the polytechnics Act and Decree defines e.g. their status in the educational system, their teaching, degrees and evaluation. The university and polytechnic performance is monitored in annual performance negotiations with the Ministry of Education. Thus, the Ministry takes care of the quantitative evaluation of higher education institutions. As a part of a renewed national quality assurance system, the Ministry of Education will develop methods and criteria for the decisions on starting new programmes, ending programmes and evaluating existing programmes in special cases.

2. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is responsible for evaluating the quality of education and other activities in higher education institutions. To this end, it has organised institutional, programme and thematic evaluations, quality audits of polytechnic education, accreditation of professional courses and has selected the high-quality units (centres of excellence) in university and polytechnic education. In order to respond to the objectives set in the Berlin Communiqué, FINHEEC will start to audit the quality assurance systems of universities and polytechnics.

The Academy of Finland is responsible for reviews of the national research system, discipline evaluations, peer evaluations of project proposals submitted and evaluations of the impacts of research programmes.

3. The higher education institutions bear the main responsibility for the quality of their activities. Universities and polytechnics are currently developing quality assurance systems, which will cover all the institutional activities: education, research and societal services. According to legislation, higher education institutions are required to take part in the national evaluations. So far, every university has been evaluated institutionally, and most of them have taken part in the follow-up evaluations. All the polytechnics have been accredited by FINHEEC when the polytechnic sector was established during the 1990s. In addition to these institutional evaluations, every higher education institution has participated in several other types of evaluations mentioned above. In most cases international experts are used in external evaluations in both sectors.

***3.2. National quality assurance systems should include a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.***

***Describe the system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, if any.***

After consultations with the Ministry of Education and the universities and polytechnics, FINHEEC starts to audit the quality assurance systems of higher education institutions (HEIs). This approach has been chosen since auditing is seen to promote the independence and diversity of the HEIs and is a flexible evaluation tool showing confidence in the HEIs' own operation.

The audits will aim

- to evaluate how the HEI's quality assurance system works as a quality management and improvement tool
- to support the development of the HEI by providing feedback on the strengths and development challenges of the quality assurance system;
- to prove, through the description and evaluation of the HEI's quality assurance system, the functioning and credibility of the quality assurance system to the HEI's co-operation partners.

The HEI quality assurance systems will be evaluated from the perspective of quality assurance of degree-oriented education. The auditing criteria are based on three premises central to the functionality and development of the quality assurance systems: comprehensiveness, effectiveness and transparency. The audit criteria are set at three different levels which reflect the sophistication of the respective HEI's quality assurance system – which may be operating at a starting, developing or an advanced level.

The materials requested from the HEI for auditing purposes mainly comprise existing documentation and materials concerning the aims, procedures, division of work in quality

assurance and evidence indicating the effectiveness of quality assurance system.

For each institutional audit, FINHEEC will appoint an audit group which composes of five members representing HEIs, students and employers. The audit group will evaluate, on the basis of audit principles and criteria made explicit in advance, the fitness for purpose and efficiency of the quality assurance system, giving the HEI recommendations for the improvement of its quality assurance system. The audit report will include one of the two following conclusions: 1. The HEI passes the audit or, 2. The HEI's quality assurance system lacks some important elements, and therefore the HEI's quality assurance system calls for a re-audit.

In spring 2005 there will be two pilot audits, with the reports published in the autumn of 2005, while 2 to 4 audits will be made during the latter part of 2005.

### ***3.3. National quality assurance systems should include international participation, co-operation and networking.***

***Are international peers included in the governing board(s) of the quality assurance agency(ies)?***

FINHEEC's governing Council consists of 12 domestic experts representing the higher education institutions, students and working life. However, FINHEEC has integrated international experts as members in the external evaluation teams whenever this has been possible and in accordance with the aims and purpose of the evaluation. For example, out of 11 programme evaluations 6 have been international. The same applies to other types of evaluations. Furthermore, FINHEEC takes actively part in international evaluation networks.

FINHEEC is a member in the the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education and has participated in three joint projects. One of these projects was targeted to the mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies. In this connection, FINHEEC's activities were recognised by the Danish Evaluation Agency EVA. FINHEEC participates in different quality projects coordinated by ENQA. For example, FINHEEC's representative participated in the ENQA working group dealing with the peer review system for quality assurance agencies. Additionally, ENQA's secretariat is located in the close connection to FINHEEC.

At the national level, Finland has taken part in most OECD examinations and evaluations concerning higher education institutions and higher education policy.

Please add any general comments, reflections and/or explanations to the material on quality assurance in the stocktaking report.

## **4. The two-cycle degree system**

The two-cycle degree system is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

In Finland, emphasis has been on enhancing the quality of education and degrees in the degree reform. The Ministry of Education has directed extra funding to support the transfer to the new system.

## 5. Recognition of degrees and periods of study

Recognition of degrees and periods of study is covered by the stocktaking exercise. Please add any comments, reflections and/or explanations to the stocktaking report.

From a policy point of view a major reform is included in the new university degree legislation: validation of prior learning, including work-based learning will be facilitated. The Ministry of Education will set up a working group to ensure that higher education institutions have proper guidelines in recognition work in general.

## 6. Doctoral studies and research

### **6.1. Give a short description of the organisation of third cycle studies**

*(For example, direct access from the bachelor level, balance between organised courses, independent study and thesis)*

Masters (2nd cycle) degree grants formal eligibility for doctoral studies. Universities are responsible for the admission into third cycle studies. Doctoral studies typically take at least 4 years of full-time studies, which includes a publicly defended doctoral dissertation.

Traditionally most doctoral studies have been undertaken as independent study, but the proportion of organised courses has been increased steadily. A graduate school system was created in 1995. It has been expanded rapidly, and currently ca. 4500 doctoral students study in graduate schools. This number constitutes a majority of those doctoral students who are pursuing their degree actively. Last year a total of 1 400 doctoral degrees were awarded by Finnish universities. Most of the doctorates were awarded in the fields of sciences, medicine and technology.

In addition, Finnish universities can still confer licentiate degrees, which are optional pre-doctoral degrees taking c. two years of study after the master's degree. The number and proportion of licentiates is, however, decreasing.

### **6.2. What are the links between HE and research in your country?**

*(For example, what percentage of publicly-funded research is conducted within HE institutions?)*

Approximately 59,0% of publicly-funded research is being conducted at HEIs (2003).  
Approximately 19,5% of the total funding for research is being conducted at HEIs (2003).

The GDP share of public funding for research in was 1,0% (2004).

The GDP share of the total funding for research was 3,5% (2003).

## 7. Mobility of students and staff

### **7.1. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of students from as well as to your country** *(For instance funds devoted to mobility schemes, portability of student loans and grants, visa problems)*

Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), operating as a state agency under the Ministry of Education, is mostly responsible for promoting international mobility according to policy guidelines set. CIMO has been given extra ear-marked funding for promoting Finnish higher education abroad and also national funding to take care of EU mobility programmes.

Mobility from Finland:

The Finnish student grant and student loan are both fully portable.

Mobility to Finland:

Visa and residence permit regulations have been seen as a hindrance to some incoming degree students. The Ministry of Interior is currently preparing a bill to make the legislation more lenient.

No tuition fees are charged from Finnish or international degree students.

***7.2. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of students from as well as to your country***

The Government has set concrete goals for the internationalisation of Finnish higher education. The Ministry of Education rewards financially the HEIs most active in international cooperation, esp. in mobility. To increase the attractiveness of the Finnish HEIs the Ministry of Education has given ear-marked funding for higher education institutions for developing courses and programmes taught in foreign languages. National top-up funding has also been directed to institutions for better provision of Finnish For Foreigners and Swedish For Foreigners courses. There was a major increase in student mobility in the last academic year.

Different surveys and research projects concerning internationalisation in general, and mobility of students in particular, are continuously being conducted. The Ministry of Education is directing strategic funding to these projects.

The Government is currently preparing a national programme for immigration policy, and special attention to has been paid to higher education students. As another development, the Ministry of Interior is currently preparing a bill in order to make the immigration and residence legislation more lenient for students.

***7.3. Describe the main factors influencing mobility of teachers and staff from as well as to your country (For instance tenure of appointment, grant schemes, social security, visa problems)***

No systematic research has been conducted on the issue recently.

***7.4. Describe any special measures taken in your country to improve mobility of academic teachers and staff from as well as to your country***

A research project concerning mobility of researchers has been launched by the Ministry of education. Results of this project are expected in late 2005.

## **8. Higher education institutions and students**

***8.1. Describe aspects of autonomy of higher education institutions***

*Is autonomy determined/defined by law? To what extent can higher education institutions decide on internal organisation, staffing, new study programmes and financing?*

University autonomy is stipulated by the Constitution. This includes full autonomy in teaching and research, internal administration, and staffing. Polytechnic autonomy is

stipulated in the legislation concerning polytechnics.

Higher education institutions may also collect external funding freely, but they may not collect tuition fees, as all higher education leading to a degree must be free of charge for the student. A formula-based public funding mechanism is in use. The formula used differs between universities and polytechnics.

The Government decides on the fields of education an individual university can award degrees on. The Ministry decides on the study programmes of the polytechnics.

### ***8.2. Describe actions taken to ensure active participation from all partners in the process***

Participation of all partners (including social partners) is ensured through official structures, such as the Government EU sub-committee for education, which processes also Bologna issues. All working groups related to Bologna reforms include representation of students and institutions. Statements and comments about legal and other important official documents are always asked from students, institutions and social partners.

### ***8.3. How do students participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions and at the national level?***

*(For example, participation in University Governing Bodies, Academic Councils etc)*

On the national level, the Ministry of Education maintains regular contact with the national unions of students in both the university sector and the polytechnic sector. In addition, the national student unions regularly have representation in ministerial working groups and other comparable bodies.

In polytechnics, student representation in the board (highest decision-making organ) is stipulated in the Polytechnics Act. The exact number or proportion is not detailed in legislation. The maintaining organisation of the polytechnic decides over the composition of the board. The board in turn decides over the composition of lower-level administrative bodies.

Student representation in university administration is stipulated by law. The proportion of student representatives in administrative bodies is not fixed. The main condition set in the legislation is that no one group (professors, other staff, or students) may constitute a single majority. In universities, this applies to all three levels of administration: university senate (highest decision-making organ), faculty councils, and department steering-groups. Institutions may decide over the exact composition of its administrative bodies.

## **9. The social dimension of the Bologna Process**

### ***9.1. Describe measures which promote equality of access to higher education***

A regionally covering network on higher education institutions has been created in order to ensure access from all geographical areas in the country. A public student finance scheme has been developed in order to ensure equal possibilities to enter higher education regardless of the student's social or financial background. Affordable student housing is arranged by independent foundations. All higher education leading to a degree is free of charge for students. Special needs of the national linguistic minorities are taken into consideration in student selection and educational provision.

Access into higher education is wide, also from non-traditional paths: vocational secondary education provides eligibility for higher education. Higher education is provided to c. 65 % of the age cohort.

## **10. Developments in lifelong learning**

### ***10.1. What measures have been taken by your country to encourage higher education institutions in developing lifelong learning paths?***

The National Development Plan for 2003-2008, adopted by the Government, pays special attention to developing life-long learning opportunities. Open University and Open Polytechnic are being developed and their regional availability is being strengthened. The development of degree structure will also facilitate adult education and extension education. One development will be the further development of second-cycle, post-experience polytechnic degrees.

Virtual and open learning environments are being created by extra funding from the Ministry.

A recent change in legislation makes it possible for the employment authorities to fund also higher education for the unemployed in need of it.

### ***10.2. Describe any procedures at the national level for recognition of prior learning/flexible learning paths***

The university and polytechnic legislation makes it possible for higher education institutions to admit students without formal qualifications, in case the institution otherwise verifies the student's abilities.

The Ministry of Education will appoint a working group to prepare common guidelines for the institutions for the recognition of prior learning.

## **11. Contribution to the European dimension in higher education**

### ***11.1 Describe any legal obstacles identified by your country and any progress made in removing legal obstacles to the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and/or joint study programmes***

Ministry of Education has prepared, jointly with higher education institutions, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, Student Unions and Finnish ENIC/NARIC the "Recommendation for the development of international joint degrees and double degrees". This recommendation has been distributed widely and seminars and training events have been organised. Also, individual advice to the higher education institutions has been provided by the Finnish Centre for International Mobility and the Finnish ENIC/NARIC.

According to the new Government Decree on University Degrees 794/2004 (will enter into force on August 1, 2005) "education leading to a higher education degree may also be arranged in international co-operation".

All Finnish higher education qualifications, which have been taught and studied in a language other than Finnish or Swedish shall be given an English title in addition to the Finnish or Swedish title. These titles for university qualifications have been enumerated in

the Decree 794/2004. For polytechnics the English titles have been confirmed by the Ministry of Education.

**11.1.1. Describe the extent of integrated study programmes leading to joint degrees or double degrees**

There is no fully reliable data, but based on the information at the Ministry of Education and information received from the Centre for International Mobility CIMO as well as the Finnish ENIC/NARIC, almost all higher education institutions have developed or are planning to develop such programmes. Finnish HEIs have also actively (and successfully) applied to the ERASMUS MUNDUS programme.

**11.1.2. How have these programmes been organised? (joint admissions, mobility of students, joint exams, etc.)**

There is no detailed data, but it seems that the Recommendations by the Ministry of Education are being followed. Since the Recommendations are not very detailed, there are variations in practical organisation of the programmes.

Many higher education institutions have prepared their own policies for both the establishment and organisation of joint programmes.

**11.2. Describe any transnational co-operation that contributes to the European dimension in higher education**

The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) is responsible for various transnational projects in higher education. A Finnish-Russian Cross-Border University (CBU) project has been launched by the Ministry of Education, and a number of Finnish and Russian HEIs are taking part in it to build up joint master's programmes. Finnish partners are involved with three Erasmus Mundus marketing projects. All HEIs are, of course, involved in various international networks.

**11.3. Describe how curriculum development reflects the European dimension (For instance foreign language courses, European themes, orientation towards the European labour market)**

The institutions have complete autonomy in curriculum development. It is therefore rather difficult to give detailed answers on a national level. Information gathered from various sources, such as external evaluations, annual reports by the HEIs to the Ministry of Education, it would be fair to judge that HEIs have taken European dimension as one of the key elements in their curriculum development.

## 12. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

**12.1. Describe actions taken by your country to promote the attractiveness of the EHEA**

## 13. Concluding comments

**13.1. Give a description of your national Bologna strategies**

Our national Bologna strategy is mostly fulfilled. The actions taken are described in chapters above.

***13.2. Give an indication of the main challenges ahead for your country***

Perhaps the most important challenge is further internationalisation of Finnish higher education. This also includes increasing international attractiveness and competitiveness of Finnish HEIs. On the national level, special attention is being paid to shortening of graduation times especially in universities. Financing in general and funding formulae for higher education institutions are being developed.