EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK | COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

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Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic:
Finland

Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Pre-existing resources in the education system have facilitated areas of Finland's response. Strong stakeholder relationships enabled the government to engage teachers, parents, students and experts in valuable discussions about emergency measures and their experiences, in order to inform future responses and strengthen the trust required for system actors to collaborate effectively. As Finland works to balance short-term responsiveness with ongoing strategic aims, priorities evolve. In particular, ensuring that emergency solutions to tertiary selection mechanisms do not exacerbate pre-existing delays in labour market entry or inhibit efforts to raise attainment rates will be critical. In the longer term, experience of these solutions may usefully inform future discussions around the highly selective admissions process currently in place.

This snapshot presents information originally published as part of the **Education Policy Outlook: Finland (2020),** available at: www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Finland-2020.pdf

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The Finnish education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 16 March, Finland announced the closure of primary, secondary and tertiary level institutions from 18 March; ECEC and pre-primary settings remained open, as did basic education for certain students. Finland resumed contact teaching in ECEC, primary and lower secondary education from 14 May, and recommended that upper secondary, vocational, tertiary and other educational institutions remain closed for the semester. Initial responses in light of the work of the *Education Policy Outlook* in 2020 in the context of this pandemic are:

1. **Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** Education providers were encouraged to employ local solutions to meet each student's needs; the central administration offered support and guidance. The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) collated resources to support online education, and developed an online information hub to guide teachers to adapt normal good practice. The Device for All campaign (2015), encouraging private sector companies to donate laptops to students, was expanded; EDUFI and the Association of Finnish Municipalities identified recipients. Complementing online learning, in collaboration and consultation with a community of teachers, the Finnish National Broadcasting Company launched a special service to disseminate educational resources and introduced some dedicated programming. In vocational education and training (VET), the modular qualification structure and flexible entry and exit points enabled the vast majority of students to continue learning and certification requirements to be arranged flexibly. To maintain transitions to tertiary education, national matriculation examinations in some subjects were brought forward, condensing the examination period to one week, immediately prior to school closures. Finnish universities agreed that traditional entrance examinations could not take place; institutions introduced replacement procedures. The joint examination for the universities of applied sciences was cancelled; students will be admitted based on previous grades and/or online selection mechanisms. Similar measures will be employed where relevant in upper secondary institutions.

2. **Strengthening the internal world of the student**: Finland continued to provide early childhood care and pre-primary education for all, requesting parents to keep children at home whenever possible. According to a municipal survey, participation became around 25% of the normal rate. Student welfare services were maintained, and in-person support remained in schools for those unable to access remote provision.

3. **Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** Schools were authorised to provide contact teaching for students with special educational needs or fragile home environments, if required. From April, Finland also allowed contact teaching for students of an immigrant background enrolled in preparatory education. School meals continued for those engaged in contact teaching. Many municipalities provided meals for other students considered in need, through delivery or distribution, in co-operation with local authorities and student welfare services.

4. **Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level**: An online national parents' evening gave parents an opportunity to discuss learning, well-being and collaboration between the school and home. OKM, with the participation of Finland's Prime Minister, held a virtual question and answer session for children. OKM also commissioned a multi-disciplinary research team to explore the effects of the crisis on young people; the synthesis report includes recommendations that inform Finland's ongoing response. OKM has maintained ongoing dialogue with social partners prior to and during school closures.

5. **Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** Teachers were expected to monitor students' daily participation in learning and record performance data as normal. EDUFI provided guidelines for assessment, focusing on regular formative assessment. FINEEC launched an evaluation across the system with recommendations informing measures employed during reopening. Student associations in the VET sector conducted a survey on the impact on VET students.

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Table 1

Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)		Finland	Average	Min	Max
Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)					
1	Index of self-efficacy	-0.03	0.01	-0.61	0.36
2	Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work	91.8%	81.5%	23.5%	96.5%
Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)					
3	Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching	19.0%	17.7%	5.3%	39.0%
4	Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas	74.9%	77.9%	64.7%	86.5%

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures announced or introduced **before 14 May 2020**.

For more information visit: http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/

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