Education system

Finland
described and compared with the Dutch system
This document contains information on the education system in Finland. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Finland for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

Disclaimer
We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.

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Education system Finland

Primary and lower secondary education

- Ylioppilastutkintotodistus/Studentexamenbevis (general upper secondary education) 3 years
- Ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/Yrkehögskoleexamen/Bachelor (polytechnics) 3-4 years
- Kandidaatti/Kandidat/Bachelor (universities) 3 years
- Maisteri/Magister/Master (universities) 2 years
- Lisensiaatti/licentiat (universities) 2 years
- Tohtori/Doktor (universities) 2-4 years

Postgraduate

- Ylempi ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/Högre yrkeshögskoleexamen/Master (polytechnics) 1-1½ years
- Ammatillinen perustutkinto/yrkessinirkitad grundexamen (secondary vocational/further vocational qualifications) 3 years
- Kandidaatti/Kandidat/Bachelor (universities) 3 years
- Maisteri/Magister/Master (universities) 2 years
- Lisensiaatti/licentiat (universities) 2 years
- Tohtori/Doktor (universities) 2-4 years

Duration of education
### Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications with corresponding levels in the national and European qualification frameworks. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the corresponding levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree or qualification and FINQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
<th>Dutch equivalent and NLQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ammatillinen perustutkinto/Yrkesinriktad grundexamen</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>MBO diploma at qualification level 2, 3 or 4</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ylioppilastutkintotodistus/Studentexamenbevis/Matriculation Examination Certificate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>VWO diploma</td>
<td>4+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandidaatti/Kandidat/Bachelor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>WO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/yrkeshögskoleexamen/Bachelor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>HBO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maisteri/Magister/Master</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>WO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ylempi ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/Högre yrkeshögskoleexamen/Master</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>HBO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB**
- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- The **EQF/NLQF level** is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person’s knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [the Dutch education system](#).
- The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB) evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates
the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.
Introduction

Finland, officially the Republic of Finland (Suomen Tasavalta), is a Nordic country.

The Finnish Parliament creates the laws relating to education and determines general education policy, which is implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Opetus- ja kulttuurijäsenliö/Undervisnings- och kultursministeriet) at central government level. Almost all levels of education, from primary school to higher education, are run and supervised by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Educational programmes relating to national security fall under the responsibility of other ministries.

Finland is a bilingual country: both Finnish and Swedish are spoken, which means that there are Finnish, Swedish and bilingual educational institutions. In this description we use Finnish and Swedish terms.

Compulsory education in Finland lasts for 9 years, for children aged 7-16.

The academic year is usually made up of an autumn semester that generally runs from August/September to December, and a winter/spring semester lasting from January until May/June.

Primary and secondary education

Finland has a 9-year programme of compulsory basic education. Post-compulsory education is provided by general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions. Upper secondary education programmes can be either exclusively general or vocational.

General upper secondary institutions provide a 3-year general education curriculum. At the end of general upper secondary education, pupils are given the Lukion päästötodistus. Virtually all students who complete the general upper secondary school curriculum will also take the national matriculation examination (ylioppilastutkinto/studentexamen). Pupils may take part in three different examination sessions over a period of 18 months. Pupils complete exams in a minimum of four subjects, one of which is compulsory (the pupil’s native language).

Candidates choose three additional compulsory exams from four other subjects: the other (non-native) language, a foreign language, mathematics, and general studies. The latter examination contains questions from several sub-categories: religion and ethics, psychology and philosophy, history and social studies, physics, chemistry, biology and geography. Pupils who pass the matriculation examination
are awarded the Matriculation Examination Certificate (Ylioppilastuskontohdostus/Studentexamensbevis), which fulfils the general requirements for admission to higher education. Upper secondary vocational qualifications give general eligibility for higher education.

Vocational institutions provide 3-year programmes, leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications (ammatillinen perustutkinto/yrkasinniktad grundexamen). Vocational adult education and training comprises vocational qualifications (ammatillinen perustutkinto/yrkasinniktad grundexamen), further vocational qualifications (ammattitutkinto/yrkesexamina) and specialist vocational qualifications (erikoismattitutkinto/specialyrkesexamina). In the adult education system these qualifications are taken as competence-based qualifications. All of the above mentioned qualifications grant access to higher education in Finland.

Currently, there are 53 vocational upper secondary qualifications, comprising of 119 study programmes and some 300 further vocational qualifications (which qualify for the vocational skills required of professionals in the field) as well as specialist vocational qualifications on offer (qualifying for the most demanding tasks in the field). Students who successfully complete vocational upper secondary education are awarded a tutkintotodistus/examenbevis, which fulfils the general requirements for admission to higher education. The ammattikirja/yrkeshandbok can be given to the graduates at any of the above-mentioned vocational qualifications, however, not all graduates receive this document. The ammattikirja/yrkeshandbok complements but does not replace official degree certificates.

In terms of level, the Ylioppilastutkintotodistus/Studentexamensbevis (Matriculation Examination Certificate) (FINQF level 4/EQF level 4) is comparable to a VWO diploma. See the description of FINQF levels.

In terms of level, the Ammatillinen perustutkinto/Yrkesinriktad grundexamen is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 2, 3 or 4, depending on the programme orientation.
Admission to higher education

The universities and polytechnics select their students independently and are limited to fixed numbers of students for each specialisation, determined in the negotiations with the Ministry of Education and Culture. All specialisations are subject to a quota. Given that the number of candidates is higher than the number of available places, universities and polytechnics apply a range of selection criteria. Selection is usually based on prior study results and an entrance examination.

Pupils who complete the matriculation examination are awarded the Ylioppilastutkintotodistus / Studentexamenbevis, which fulfils the general requirements for admission to higher education.

General eligibility for higher education (universities and polytechnics) is given by the Matriculation Examination Certificate and the upper secondary vocational qualification. These qualifications require at least 12 years of schooling. Equivalent foreign qualifications also give general eligibility for higher education.

Higher education

Finland has a binary higher education system, consisting of universities and polytechnics or universities of applied sciences (in Finnish: ammattikorkeakoulu, abbreviated to AMK), which are institutions of higher professional education. Universities are owned by the state; polytechnics fall under national and local authorities. The traditional university sector consists of the universities and art academies. All institutions in this traditional sector conduct research and issue degrees up to PhD level. The polytechnics provide higher professional education, and issue degrees at bachelor’s and master’s level.

From 1995 onward higher education in Finland has undergone major changes in connection with the bachelor’s-master’s degree structure. The degrees awarded before 1995 are fully comparable to the degrees corresponding to the new degree structure and they also give the same academic and professional rights.

The degree system prior to 1995

Before 1995 the degree system comprised the following degrees:

- Kandidaatin tutkinto (second-cycle, master-level degrees)
- Lisensiaatin tutkinto (third-cycle, pre-doctorate degree)
- Tohtorin tutkinto (third-cycle, Doctor’s degree)

The one-tier master-level programme incorporated studies at bachelor level and had a duration of 5 years. An independent bachelor-level degree did not exist prior to 1995.
The degree system from 1995 onward

The new degree system (148/1995) comprised the following degrees:
- Kandidaatin tutkinto (first-cycle, bachelor-level degree)
- Maisterin tutkinto (second-cycle, master-level degree)
- Lisensiaatin tutkinto (third-cycle, pre-doctorate degree)
- Tohtorin tutkinto (third-cycle, doctor's degree)

The name of the master-level degree was thus changed to maisterin tutkinto and the bachelor-level degree was named kandidaatin tutkinto. Under this legislation, it was not compulsory for a student to have a bachelor-level degree before starting studies toward the master-level degree. Students were also able to pursue a 5-year one-tier master-level programme, incorporating bachelor-level studies.

The current degree system was introduced in 2005 (794/2004). The reform established a two-tier degree structure with an obligatory first-cycle (bachelor-level) degree in all fields of study except for (veterinary) medicine and dentistry.

University education

There are 16 universities in Finland, pertaining to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Ten of these universities are multidisciplinary; the remaining six are specialist institutions: one of which is in the field of economics and business, two are in technical sciences (engineering and architecture) and three are art academies.

Higher education in the military field is provided by the National Defence College operating within the Ministry of Defence sector.

Initial degree

A university bachelor’s degree is usually called kandidaatti/kandidat. Exceptions are the oikeusnotaari/rättsnotarie (Law) and the farmaseutti/farmaseut (Pharmacy). The designated English translation for all these degrees is bachelor’s degree, the most common degrees being the Bachelor of Arts of Bachelor of Science. The nominal duration of these programmes is 3 years.

In terms of level, the Kandidaatti/Kandidat/Bachelor (FiNQF level 6/EQF level 6) is comparable to a WO bachelor’s degree in a similar specialisation. See the description of FiNQF levels.

Second degree

Graduates of the kandidaatti can continue studying at graduate level at a university for their second-cycle degree. The duration of these programmes is 2
years. The second-cycle degree is usually called maisteri/magister. Other second-cycle degrees are diploma-insinööri/diplomingenjör (technology), proviisori/provisor (pharmacy) and arkitekti (architecture). The designated English translation is Master’s degree, the most common being the Master of Arts or the Master of Science. The second-cycle university degree title in the fields of (veterinary) medicine and dentistry is lisensiaatti/licentiat, the English denomination being Licentiate.

Some master’s programmes award a professional qualification, such as:
- Law: oikeustieteen maisteri/juris magister
- Pharmacy: proviisori/provisor
- Engineering and Architecture: arkitehti/arkitekt, diplomi-insinööri/diplomingenjör and maisema-arkkitehti/landskapsarkitekt
- Medicine: lääketieteen lisensiaatti/medicine licentiate
- Dentistry: hammaslääketieteen lisensiaatti/odontologie licentiate
- Veterinary Science: eläinlääketieteen lisensiaatti/veterinärmedicine licentiate
- Military, Navy and Airforce: upseeri/officer

In terms of level, the Maisteri/Magister/Master (FiNQF level 7/EQF level 7) is comparable to a WO master’s degree in a similar specialisation. See the description of FiNQF levels.

Following a selection process, maisteri/magister graduates can continue to study at Finnish universities for a lisensiaatti/licentiat or tohtori/doctor.

PhDs take a minimum of 4 years to complete, and are the highest degree awarded by universities. The pre-doctorate degree of lisensiaatti/licentiate (Licentiate) may be taken before the Doctor’s degree and in general takes 2 years of full-time study to complete.

Higher professional education

Higher professional education is provided at ammattikorkeakoulu’s/ yrkeshögskola’s (institutions known as ‘polytechnics' in English). The Polytechnics Act and the accompanying Decree from 2003 govern polytechnic education. Finland currently has a total of 25 polytechnics, and admission is granted by means of the national joint admissions system.

After completing studies at a polytechnic, students are awarded a ‘polytechnic degree’ (ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/yrkeshögskoleexamen) indicating the discipline studied: ‘sosiaali- ja terveysalan ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/yrkeshögskoleexamen inom hälsosociala området’ (polytechnic
degree in health care and social work). The name of the diploma is stated on the certificate, followed by the letters AMK/YH: sairaanhoitaja AMK/sjuksköterska YH (Bachelor of Nursing). Polytechnics award degrees at two levels.

**Initial degree**

Programmes culminating in an initial degree (Bachelor) take 3 to 4 years (180-240 ECTS) and involve a work placement and bachelor’s paper/final project. A bachelor’s degree from a polytechnic grants general eligibility to second-cycle/master-level university programmes, following additional university selection procedures.

In terms of level, the Ammattikorkeakoulututkinto/Yrkehögskoleexamen (FiNQF level 6/EQF level 6) is comparable to an HBO bachelor’s degree in a similar specialisation. See the description of FiNQF levels.

**Second degree**

Since 2005, more and more polytechnics have been offering 1- to 1½-year master’s programmes (60-90 ECTS). Eligibility for second-cycle polytechnic degrees is granted by a relevant first-cycle degree with at least 3 years of relevant work or artistic experience. The programmes are available in the following fields: humanities and education; culture and arts; business administration; social sciences; business administration and management; natural sciences; technology and communication; marine technology; natural resources and environment; social services; healthcare and sport studies; beauty and cosmetics; tourism and hospitality. Polytechnic master’s programmes conclude with a master’s thesis or final project.

In terms of level, the Ylempi ammattikorkeakoulunjatkolaututkinto/Högre yrkeshögskoleexamen (FiNQF level 7/EQF level 7) is comparable to an HBO master’s degree in a similar specialisation. See the description of FiNQF levels.
Assessment systems

Higher education institutions are independent in their assessment systems and grading. Most universities and polytechnics use a grading scale from 0 to 5, where 5 is the highest grade and 0 a failing grade. Verbal assessment may be expressed in the qualifications below, but different terminology may also be used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical grade</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kiiteettävä</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Erittäin hyvä</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hyvä</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Erittäin tyydyttävä</td>
<td>Quite satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tyydyttävä</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Hylätty</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following grading system applies to the upper secondary matriculation examinations (Ylioppilastutkinto):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical grade</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Laudatur (L)</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Eximia cum laude approbatur (E)</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Magna cum laude approbatur (M)</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cum laude approbatur (C)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>24 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lubenter approbatur (B)</td>
<td>Quite satisfactory</td>
<td>20 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Approbatur (A)</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>11 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Improbatur (I)</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the introduction of the bachelor’s/master’s degree structure, Finnish higher education programmes were based on a study load of 40 points (opintopiste/studiepoäng) per year.

In order to promote international recognition of Finnish higher education programmes, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS) was introduced in 2005 with 60 credits per year.

More information on the ECTS system is available in the [ECTS Users’ Guide](#) issued by the European Commission.
**Bologna process**

The bachelor’s-master’s degree structure has been legally established for all university programmes since 1 August 2005. The system was introduced gradually.

Information on the current situation can be found on the official [website](#) of the European Higher Education Area.

**Qualification frameworks**


More information can be found on the [website](#) of the Finnish National Board of Education, featuring information on the FiNQF and its levels.

The [website](#) of the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) also gives information on the FiNQF levels attached to Finnish higher education.

**Quality assurance and accreditation**

Accreditation of higher education in Finland is regulated at institutional level. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is an independent body, established in 1995, that assists higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters related to evaluation and accreditation.

FINHEEC has been conducting audits of the quality assurance (QA) systems of higher education institutes (HEIs) since 2005. The audit is valid for 6 years. The HEIs audited to date are shown in the audit register on the FINHEEC [website](#).

Finland has no institutional ranking system.

**International treaties**

Finland signed the Lisbon Convention in 1998, and ratified it in 2004.

**Diploma Supplement**

Since 2005, every higher education certificate is accompanied by a Diploma Supplement, as stipulated in higher education legislation.

More information on the Diploma Supplement is available on the Finnish [website](#) of Europass and on the [website](#) of the European Commission.
Composition of file

Secondary education qualifications comprise a certificate of either general or vocational secondary education and an accompanying list of marks, possibly supplemented by the matriculation examination certificate with list of marks.

Higher education certificates have multiple pages: a certificate awarding the degree and/or title, a list of marks stating examination results, and possibly a separate overview of subjects.

Overview of higher education institutions

- Website of the Finnish Ministry of Education, with an overview of universities.
- Website of the Finnish Ministry of Education, with an overview of universities of applied sciences.

Useful websites

- Website of the Finnish National Board of Education, which is also the Finnish ENIC/NARIC.
- Website of the Centre for International Mobility, CIMO.
- Website of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.
- Website of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC).