Overview of Higher Education (Finland)

Bloomsbury Education and Childhood Studies Article Template

Section	Higher Education
Article topic	Overview
Country	Finland
Author 1	Jaakko Kauko
Author 1 affiliation	Jaakko Kauko is Professor at Tampere University, Finland
Author 2	
Author 2 affiliation	
Date created	12/2019
Length	1,532

Keywords

Higher Education Institution, University, University of Applied Science, Funding, Policy, Internationalization, Government, Accreditation, Audit, Student mobility

Glossary terms

UAS, University/Universities of Applied Sciences. The (research) universities and UAS constitute the higher education system together. This dual system was created in 1995 when the UAS were upgraded from vocational institutes, and new institutions were established. UAS are called ‘vocational higher education institutions’ (*ammattikorkeakoulu*) in Finnish. Until recently, the official translation was ‘polytechnic’. UAS grant first-cycle and second-cycle higher education degrees. As of 2018, UAS do not have the right to grant third-cycle degrees.

HE structure

At the beginning of 2019, Finland has 13 universities, research-intensive higher education institutions (HEI) functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition, the National Defence University is under the Ministry of Defence. Two universities are private foundations (Aalto University, Tampere University), and 12 are public legal entities. There are 23 Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) under the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Police College under the Ministry of the Interior, and the Högskolan på Åland under the Åland regional administration. The UAS under the Ministry of Education are limited companies but are mainly owned by the municipalities. All universities and UAS receive almost all their funding from the state.

National strategic framework

The government program is the top-level steering policy document for higher education. Until 2016, parallel plans were drafted, first focusing on higher education, and then on the whole education sector (Kauko 2011; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2012). Even before the abandonment of these more specific education plans, researchers noted that it was government program that was dominant (Kauko 2011; Kallunki et al. 2015). The government program may also include some specific projects addressing higher education (e.g. ‘Key projects’ in the Strategic Programme (2015))

of PM Juha Sipilä's government). As HEIs receive most of their funding from the state, an important strategic decision concerns the models of funding indicators and how yearly strategic funding is distributed according to political aims (e.g. Ministry of Education and Culture 2018).

Student ages

The different student cohorts in HEIs have remained fairly stable during 2000–2017. Based on information from Vipunen, the national database (2018), those under 25 constitute the largest age group in university bachelor's and master's studies (58,141 of 133,609 in 2017), while those over 40 constitute the largest age group in the tertiary cycle (7,195 in 2017 of 18,521 pursuing a doctoral or a licentiate degree) (Figures 1–2). In UAS, those under 25 also constitute the largest age cohort of bachelor's and master's students (63,772 of 143,519), but the student body is generally younger than in the universities (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Number of master's and bachelor's students from different age cohorts in 2000-2017 (universities)

(Source: Vipunen 2018)

Figure 2: Number of licentiate and doctoral students from different age cohorts in 2000-2017 (universities)

(Source: Vipunen 2018)

Figure 3: Number of bachelor's and master's students from different age cohorts in 2001-2017 (UAS)

(Source: Vipunen 2018)

Hierarchy of HE rankings

There are no national ranking systems and no ranking hierarchies for universities or UAS in Finland. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (2018) is responsible for auditing HEI quality systems, and issues thematic analyses on different subjects. The Academy of Finland issues a biannual report, the latest from 2018 (Suomen Akatemia 2018), which is not a ranking but a general analysis of science and research. Many universities participate in various international rankings and some scholars have attempted to draft rankings of Finnish universities (e.g. Kivinen et al. 2011).

Government role

The existing private HEIs were nationalized in the 1970s because of the increasing pressure of growing age cohorts (Pernaa 2007; Autio 1993: 462). Private foundation status was again made possible by the University Law (Yliopistolaki 2009), following suggestions from the OECD (Kauko and Diogo 2011). In 2019, two universities are legally private foundations; the rest are public. The UAS were corporatized in 2014, but they rely on government funding, are non-profit, and the vast majority of shares is owned by municipalities.

HEIs enjoy autonomy, but they are closely connected with the state, relying on government funding. The universities have been increasingly connected with the state since the 1960s and 1970s (Kivinen et al. 1993; Lampinen 2003). The UAS were established in 1995. The existence of funding indicators and the idea of management by results raised immediate concerns about university autonomy among scholars when it was introduced in the 1990s (e.g. Nyssölä and Saarinen 1997). Various research has tracked how it has changed university and academic behavior (e.g. Treuthardt 2005; Rekilä 2006; Kivistö 2007) and how governments have been able to firmly steer the universities (Välimaa 2010; Kauko 2013; Kallunki et al. 2015).

HE policies

Summarizing previous research, the history of the higher education system can be roughly divided into three periods. The first period, until the 1960s, consisted of an elite system where higher education in universities in core urban areas was available for the few. The period between the 1960s and 1990s saw an expanding higher education system, where universities were increasingly understood as policy tools for societal and regional equality and economic growth. In the third period, starting from the 1990s, the higher education system was affected by enhanced international cooperation and influences, global New Public Management trends, marketization, the boost in global competition discourses, and a more complex and expanded system through the establishment of UAS (Lampinen 2003; Kivinen et al. 1993; Rinne 2010). The period after the 2009 law (Välimaa 2010) has intensified the emphasis on marketization and education export (Kauko and Medvedeva 2016; Schatz 2016). Some authors regard it as a new era of neoliberal higher education in Finland (Rinne 2010). Kauko (2013) has argued that the historically recurring policy themes have been the importance of regional policy, the silent influences deriving from international cooperation, the boost in innovation-driven and technological research, and the difficulties in combining resource and policy negotiations at different levels.

A policy trend in the 2010s has been the recurring changes in the funding formula for HEIs. The role of publications and external funding became very important after the 2009 law, and will, according to a Ministry working group suggestion, determine 14% of future government university funding. The universities have also experienced an incremental growth in strategy-based funding, which, it is suggested, comprises 15% of total funding and can be coupled with government policy aims. These trends are repeated on a smaller scale in UAS (Ministry of Education and Culture 2018a). A recent change – since 2015 – has been the requirement to collect tuition fees from students from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area, based on a pilot project from 2009 (Kauko and Diogo 2011; Kauko and Medvedeva 2016).

The Ministry of Education and Culture (2018b) has an ongoing process of vision work for higher education in 2030, which is to finish at the end of 2019. The interim report set concrete targets: 50% of young people completing a higher education degree, and funding for research and development of 4% of GDP. There is also an explicit goal of reducing the number of HEIs and increasing their effectiveness.

Accreditation

Finnish quality assurance of HEIs is based on auditing rather than accreditation. However, business schools can also favor accreditations valued in the discipline (Hanken 2018). The law requires HEIs to conduct self-evaluation and to submit to external evaluation (Ammattikorkeakoululaki 2014/932, §62; Yliopistolaki 2009/558, §87). The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FEEC), which is responsible for HEI auditing, and its operations are regulated by law (Laki Kansallisesta koulutuksen arviointikeskuksesta 1295/2013). The FEEC has passed the ENQA external evaluation and is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Almost all auditing in Finland is conducted by the FEEC. Currently, all universities have successfully passed a FEEC audit, and all UAS have passed or are being audited (FEEC 2018).

The FEEC audits focus on issues such as HEI quality systems, policy, and practice. It further scrutinizes quality management in education and research, and societal impact. The quality systems in three degree programs are also scrutinized in more detail. An evaluation of the overall quality

system is produced. Each audit target is graded on the following scale: absent; emerging; developing; and advanced. If none of the targets is graded absent and the overall evaluation is higher than emerging, the audit may be passed. Another option is to have a re-audit in two to three years. An external team of experts conducts the audit based on set stages and material provided by the HEI, and collected during the process (FEEC 2018).

HE mobility and internationalization

Generally in the internationalization of policies, Finnish research has discussed how the dominant EU and OECD discourses seem to set the agenda for global competition in Finnish higher education, and how Finland's education reforms have followed in their slipstream (Rinne et al. 2004; Niukko 2006; Nokkala 2007; Kallo 2009; Kauko and Varjo 2008; Saarinen 2008; Välimaa 2010). Finland has also succeeded in influencing these international organizations' agendas in the Bologna process (Kauko 2011) and within the EU to varying degrees (Moisio 2014), while remaining aligned with the general OECD discourse (Naumanen and Rinne 2008).

Student inbound mobility has increased during 2007–2017 from 8,414 to 10,445 (3.5% of the total number of students) and outbound from 8,232 to 9,551 (3.2% of the total number of students). In 2017, the largest shares of students come from Europe (79%) and Asia (15%), which are also the most popular mobility targets for Finnish students (69% and 17% respectively). The general direction in both inbound and outbound traffic is westward. In 2017, the single largest inbound countries were Vietnam (2,447), Russia (2,560), China (1,609), Nepal (1,110), and India (770). In 2017, the top-five countries for outbound Finnish students were the UK (2,089), Sweden (1,996), Estonia (1,214), the Netherlands (604), and the United States (474) (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018). In practice, master programs face different problems due to lack of cohesion between normative ideas, planning and practices (Medvedeva 2018).

Further reading and online resources

- Description of the audit procedure: <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/audits-quality-systems/>
- Finnish National Agency for Education, higher education mobility in Finland: http://www.cimo.fi/services/statistics/international_mobility_of_students
- Ministry of Education and Culture, Higher Education and Science: <https://minedu.fi/en/higher-education-and-research>
- Steering, financing and agreements of higher education institutions, science agencies and research institutes: <https://minedu.fi/en/steering-financing-and-agreements>
- Vipunen – Education Statistics Finland: <https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/>

References

Ammattikorkeakoululaki [The law on Universities of Applied Science], 932/2014, 2014, Available at <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2014/20140932> [accessed 20.12.2018]. 14 November 2014.

Autio, V.-M. (1993), *Opetusministeriön historia VI. Suurjärjestelmien aika koittaa. 1966–1980* [A History of the Ministry of Education VI. Dawn of the Grand Systems.], Helsinki: Opetusministeriö, FEEC 2018a, Audit register for higher education institutions, <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/audits-quality-systems/audit-register/> [accessed 18 December 2018].

FEEC 2018b, 'Audits of quality systems 2012-2018', <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/audits-quality-systems/> [Accessed 18 December 2018].

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (2018), 'Higher education', <https://karvi.fi/en/higher-education/> [Accessed December 17 2018].

Finnish National Agency for Education (2018), 'Higher Education, International mobility of students', http://www.cimo.fi/services/statistics/international_mobility_of_students [Accessed 18 December 2018].

Hanken (2018, 'Accreditations and Rankings', <https://www.hanken.fi/en/about-hanken/hanken/accreditations-and-rankings> [Accessed 18 December 2018].

Kallo, J. (2009), *OECD Education Policy. A comparative and historical study focusing on the thematic reviews of tertiary education*, Research in Educational Sciences 45, Helsinki: FERA.

Kallunki, J., Koriseva, S. and Saarela, H. (2015), 'Suomalaista yliopistopolitiikkaa ohjaavat perustelut tuloksellisuuden aikakaudella' [Arguments guiding Finnish higher education policy in the age of efficiency], *Kasvatus ja Aika*, 3/2015, 117-133.

Kauko J. (2013), 'Dynamics in higher education politics: A theoretical model', *Higher Education*, 65(2): 193–206.

Kauko, J. and Varjo, J. (2008), 'Age of indicators: Changes in the Finnish education policy agenda', *European educational research journal*, 7 (2), 219–231.

Kivinen, O., Hedman, J. and Kaipainen, P. (2011), 'From rankings to ratings: An input-output analysis of productivity of research and teaching by disciplines', in Callaos J., Chu, H-W., Lesso, W., Savoie, M. J., Welsh, F., and Zinn C.D. (eds), *The 2nd International Multi-Conference on Complexity, Informatics and Cybernetics, Proceedings Volume II, March 27th-30th, 2011*, Florida: International Institute of Informatics and Systemics, 268–273.

Laki Kansallisesta koulutuksen arviointikeskuksesta 1295/2013, 2013 [The Law on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre], Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2013/2013129530> [accessed 20.12.2018]. December 2013.

Ministry of Education and Culture (2018), *Luovuutta, dynamiikkaa ja toimintamahdollisuuksia. Ehdotus ammattikorkeakoulujen ja yliopistojen rahoitusmalleiksi vuodesta 2021 alkaen* [Creativity, Dynamics, and Opportunities: A Suggestion for the Funding Model for Universities of Applied Sciences and Universities from 2021], Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö.

Ministry of Education and Culture (2018a), 'Steering, financing and agreements of higher education institutions, science agencies and research institutes', <https://minedu.fi/en/steering-financing-and-agreements> [Accessed 17 December 2018].

Ministry of Education and Culture (2018b), 'Vision for higher education and research in 2030', <https://minedu.fi/en/vision-2030> [accessed 20.12.2018].

Moisio, J. (2014), *Understanding the Significance of EU Higher Education Policy Cooperation in Finnish Higher Education Policy*, Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Naumanen, P. and Rinne, R. (2008), 'Eurooppalainen koulutuspolitiikka ja Suomen linjaukset [The European politics of education and Finnish policies]', in Rinne, R., Jögi, L., Leppänen, R., Korppas, M., and Klemelä, K. (eds.), *Suomalainen ja virolainen koulutus ja EU:n uusi koulutuspolitiikka*, Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnan julkaisuja A:208., Turku: Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden laitos.

Niukko, S. (2006), "Yhteistyötä ilman riskejä"? OECD:n rooli Suomen koulutuspolitiikassa. ["Cooperation at no risk"? The role of the OECD in Finnish education policy], Turku: Turun yliopisto.

Nokkala, T. (2007), *Constructing the Ideal University. The internationalisation of higher education in the competitive knowledge society*, Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis 681, Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Nyyssölä, K. and Saarinen, T. (1997), 'Korkeakoulut talutushihnasta juoksunaruun [Higher Education: From a Short Leash to a Longer One]', in Nyyssölä, K. and Saarinen, T. (eds), *Näkökulmia korkeakoulujen tuloksellisuuteen, Koulutussosiologian tutkimuskeskuksen raportti 41*, Turku: Turun yliopisto, Koulutussosiologian tutkimuskeskus, 223–226.

Medvedeva, A. (2018), University Internationalization and International Master's Programs, Helsinki Studies in Education, Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Faculty of Educational Sciences, <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-4322-8> [accessed 20.12.2018].

Pernaa, V. (2007), 'Sivistyspolitiikan suurjärjestelmien rakentaminen [Building the Grand Systems of Education Policy]', in Pernaa, V., and Tiitta, A. (eds), *Sivistyksen ja tiedon Suomi, Suomen eduskunta 100 vuotta*, Helsinki: Edita, 9–144.

Rinne, R. (2010), 'The Nordic University Model from a Comparative and Historical Perspective', in Kauko, J., Rinne, R. and Kynkäänniemi, H. (eds), *Restructuring the Truth of Schooling – Essays on Discursive Practices in the Sociology and Politics of Education, A Festschrift for Hannu Simola*, Research in Educational Sciences 48, Turku: FERA, 85–112.

Rinne, R., Kallo, J. and Hokka, S. (2004), 'Liian innokas mukautumaan? OECD:n koulutuspolitiikka ja Suomen vastauksia' [Too eager to comply? The OECD education policy and Finnish answers], *Kasvatus*, 35 (4), 34–54.

Saarinen, T. (2008), 'Whose Quality? Social actors in the interface of transnational and national higher education policy', *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 29 (3), 179–193.

Schatz, M. (2016), 'Education as Finland's hottest export? ', *A multi-faceted case study on Finnish national education export policies*, <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/161277> [accessed 20.12.2018].

Suomen Akatemia (2018), *Tieteen tila 2018* [The state of research and science.], Helsinki: Academy of Finland.

Vipunen (2018), 'Education Statistics Finland', : <https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/> [Accessed December 18 2018].

Välimaa, J. (2010), 'The corporatization of national universities in Finland', in Pusser, B. et al. (eds), *Universities and the Public Sphere: Knowledge Creation and state Building in the Era of Globalization*, New York: Routledge Press, 101–119.

Yliopistolaki 558/2009, 2009 [The University Law], available at:
<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2009/20090558> [accessed 20.12.2018]. 24 July 2009.