IMMIGRANT EDUCATION IN FINLAND
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GENERAL PROVISIONS

The objective of immigrant education is to provide people moving to Finland with opportunities to function as equal members of Finnish society and guarantee immigrants the same educational opportunities as other Finns. A young immigrant of compulsory school age (aged 7–17) permanently residing in Finland has the right to the same basic education as Finns. The objective is to ensure that adult immigrants receive the education needed for working life and that they maintain their existing vocational skills, and for foreign qualifications, studies and work experience to act as the basis of the design and completion of education in Finland. Instruction in the Finnish or Swedish language is organized for immigrants of all ages. At the same time, they are also encouraged to maintain their own mother tongue and cultural identity. Immigrants may mean refugees, migrants, returnees and other foreigners and, in some cases, asylum seekers as well.
EQUALITY ACT

There is an Equality Act (L21/2004) in force in Finland. The purpose of this Act is to foster and safeguard equality in society. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, language, religion, beliefs, opinions, health, disability and sexual orientation. The Act applies to education as well as to working life.

THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

In Finland, children are subject to compulsory education. Children of compulsory school age are required to participate in basic education where the scope of the syllabus is nine years or they have to acquire the skills outlined in the comprehensive school syllabus in an alternative way.

Upon completion of basic education, they are eligible to study at a general upper secondary school or vocational institution. They can then continue their studies at polytechnics or universities. There are different ways in which adults can complete basic education or general upper secondary education. They may also complete vocational education and training through competence-based qualifications.

Finland has two national languages: Finnish and Swedish. Approximately 6% of the population speak Swedish as their mother tongue. Educational institutions in Finland use Finnish, Swedish and foreign languages as the language of instruction.

In Finland, the objective is for everyone to have equal opportunities in terms of education. Basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, university education and polytechnic education are provided free of charge. In basic education, school meals, materials, school transport and student welfare are also provided free of charge. Students at general upper secondary schools and vocational institutions are offered a free daily meal but they have to pay for materials.

Tuition fees at specialized schools (e.g. international schools) may be high. At universities, students pay a small membership fee to become members of the Student Union; in return, they receive reduced price health care services, meals and other student benefits, such as cheaper bus and train tickets and theatre tickets. At universities and polytechnics, materials and meals are paid for by the students.
PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Each child has the right to pre-school education, which generally starts one year prior to the commencement of compulsory education, i.e. in the year that the child has his/her sixth birthday. Each local authority is obliged to provide a pre-school place for each child entitled to pre-school education. The local authority decides where the education is to be organized. The alternatives are school, day-care centre or family day-care. The education is provided free of charge and pupils are entitled to the same social benefits as pupils in basic education. The minimum scope of pre-school education is 700 hours per year. A central task of the education is to promote children’s favourable growth, development and learning opportunities and to support development of the child’s personality.

It is possible to organize education for immigrant children of pre-school age in conjunction with other pre-school education, in the form of preparatory instruction for basic education or with a combination of these.

Further information:
• Municipal Social Administration and Local Education Department
BASIC EDUCATION

The scope of the basic education syllabus is nine years. Children permanently residing in Finland, including foreign nationals, are subject to compulsory education. Compulsory education means completion of the basic education syllabus. Compulsory education starts in the year when the child turns seven. It ends upon completion of the comprehensive school syllabus or 10 years after the beginning of compulsory education.

Usually, children coming from abroad are placed in a group that corresponds with their knowledge and skills. It is possible for the child to receive instruction in Finnish/Swedish according to a special syllabus for immigrants (see p. 11). Schools organize remedial instruction for immigrant children in different subjects according to their capabilities. Remedial instruction in different subjects may also be offered using the pupil’s mother tongue as the language of instruction. Local authorities can arrange teaching for immigrant children in their mother tongue as well.

In basic education and general upper secondary education, religion is taught according to the denomination to which the majority of pupils belong. The pupil has the right to instruction in his or her own religion if there are at least three pupils belonging to this denomination and if the parents ask for teaching to be arranged.

Pupils’ special dietary requirements are taken into consideration when planning school meals.

Basic education provides pupils with general education. Upon completion of basic education, they are eligible for secondary education: general upper secondary school or vocational education and training or to move directly into working life.

INSTRUCTION PREPARING FOR BASIC EDUCATION

Immigrant children of compulsory school age and pre-school age may be offered instruction preparing them for basic education. The objective is to support the pupils’ balanced development and integration into Finnish society and to give them the necessary skills to enable them to attend basic education.

In pre-school education, pupils are offered instruction in basic education subjects as outlined more precisely in the curriculum.

The education takes into consideration the fact that pupils are different in terms of age, learning capabilities and background.

VOLUNTARY ADDITIONAL BASIC EDUCATION

The local authority can arrange voluntary additional basic education for pupils after the basic education. The additional education lasts normally one year during which they can strengthen their readiness to attend vocational education or upper secondary school.
GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

General upper secondary education can be completed in 2–4 years and it ends with the matriculation examination. Immigrant students can take the test entitled “Finnish or Swedish as a second language” instead of the test in mother tongue intended for Finnish- or Swedish-speaking students.

In general upper secondary schools, materials are paid for by the students. Teaching, meals and student welfare are provided free of charge. Students’ special dietary requirements are taken into consideration. Students may be offered teaching in their own mother tongue and remedial instruction in different subjects. Religion is taught according to the same principles as for basic education (see p. 8).

All those who have completed the basic education syllabus or who have otherwise acquired corresponding skills are eligible for general upper secondary education. Students at general upper secondary schools, as well as at other schools where completion of the basic education syllabus is required, are selected through the joint application system. The schools select students on the basis of their previous study records. A student with a foreign certificate may apply for a place at general upper secondary school directly from the school in question through the joint application system. General upper secondary education can also be completed as an external student by taking exams.

Further information:
- Municipal Education Departments
- General upper secondary schools

FINNISH OR SWEDISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Instruction in Finnish or Swedish and instruction in students’ own mother tongue will reinforce their multicultural identity and build a foundation for functional bilingualism. This means that Finnish or Swedish is the primary language of instruction. At the same time, every effort is made to develop and support the student’s skills in his mother tongue. Immigrant students may be taught Finnish or Swedish as a second language in basic education or in general upper secondary education, provided that their Finnish or Swedish language skills are not as good as with those of native speakers in all areas of language proficiency.

In the curriculum, Finnish or Swedish as a second language is not an individual subject; it is one of the syllabi in the “Mother tongue and literature” subject. If the school does not offer instruction in Finnish or Swedish as a second language, the student will participate in mother tongue and literature classes and teaching is modified to meet the needs of each individual student. Instruction in a second language may be arranged as part of the instruction offered by the school, with the school’s remedial instruction resources or through a separate state subsidy. Teaching of Finnish or Swedish is not limited to language classes; all education offered at school will support it.

Further information:
- Municipal Education Departments
- Educational institutions
PREPARATORY EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Upon completion of basic education, young immigrants may prepare for further studies either in additional forms of basic education or in other preparatory groups. They may also participate in general education at adult education institutions. In addition, immigrants can participate in education preparing them for vocational upper secondary education and training (see p. 14).

Further information:
• Municipal Education Departments
• Educational institutions

BASIC EDUCATION AND GENERAL UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ADULTS

Basic education and general upper secondary education can also be completed as an adult at a general upper secondary school for adult students, at a folk high school or on a study programme for adults at a general upper secondary school for young people. It is possible to complete the basic education syllabus, the syllabi of different subjects or their components as courses or improve the grades in the basic education certificate. Students may also complete the general upper secondary school syllabus, the matriculation examination or its tests, general upper secondary school courses or improve the grades in the general upper secondary school certificate.

Education is intended for people over 18 years of age. At a general upper secondary school for adult students, the basic education syllabus can be completed in 2–3 years and the general upper secondary school syllabus in 2–4 years. At a folk high school, the basic education syllabus can be completed in one year. Places at educational institutions are applied for directly. Specific information and application times are available from educational institutions. Students have to pay for materials and for completing the syllabi of separate subjects but the completion of the entire syllabus is free of charge.

Further information:
• Municipal Education Departments
• General upper secondary schools for adult students
• Folk high schools

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Immigrants may study at vocational institutions and may complete a vocational qualification. The scope of the qualification is 120 credits and it can be completed in 3 years. Education is provided at vocational institutions, vocational adult education centres, folk high schools and in the form of apprenticeship training. Upon completion of their vocational qualifications, students are eligible to apply to universities and polytechnics.

The objective of vocational upper secondary education and training is to provide students with extensive general vocational education and training and the vocational expertise needed in working life. In addition to vocational studies, some general studies are also included in vocational education and training. General studies consist of teaching in languages, mathematics, physics and chemistry, social studies, business and working life skills and art and culture. All qualifications include a period of on-the-job training with a scope of at least six months. On-the-job training means guided studies at workplaces. Vocational education and training pays special attention to the needs of working life.
Students may apply for vocational upper secondary education and training once they have completed comprehensive school or equivalent education. In addition, those who have completed the matriculation examination may be accepted by vocational institutions. The duration of vocational education and training for those who have passed the matriculation examination is shorter. Students apply to vocational education and training through the joint application system. If the applicant does not have a certificate from a Finnish school, he/she can be selected by way of flexible selection (see "Joint Application System"). There is no age limit and foreign nationals can also be selected. Education providers may assess the applicant's language skills through a language test or interview. At the same time, the student's capability to cope with the studies is also assessed.

Immigrant education can be arranged flexibly. Immigrants can study Finnish or Swedish as a second language. These studies will replace studies in the mother tongue. Foreign language students can also take studies in their native language. At some vocational institutions, remedial instruction may be arranged for immigrants.

Vocational upper secondary education and training is provided free of charge as are school meals at vocational institutions. If the institution has student accommodation, it is provided free of charge for students. Materials are paid for by the students.

**PREPARATORY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Before vocational education, immigrants may participate in preparatory education and training. The scope of preparatory vocational education and training is 20–40 credits and the duration ranges from six months to one year. The objective of preparatory training is to improve the student's language skills, coping skills and other skills needed in vocational education and training. In preparatory training, students study Finnish or Swedish and mathematical and social subjects. At the same time, they get to know different professions and vocational education and training in general. Students are provided with an individual study plan.

Preparatory training is separate from the joint application system which means that applications should be directed to the institutions. Students are entitled to normal student financial aid and to school transport subsidy. If the preparatory training is included in the student’s integration plan, he/she may receive integration support instead of student financial aid.

**Further information:**

- Vocational institutions
- Municipal Education Departments
- Employment offices

**APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING**

Vocational education and training can also be completed in the form of apprenticeship training which includes theoretical studies at an institution and studying for a profession at a workplace. Apprenticeship training is an employment contract with a fixed duration between a student and an employer. The employer pays the student's wages during the period of instruction according to the collective labour agreement. The student has an individual study plan, which takes into consideration the goals of the studies and the student's background and situation in life.

Before starting apprenticeship training, immigrants may complete preparatory training or other remedial instruction to improve their language skills.

The same qualifications can be completed as apprenticeship training as at vocational institutions. The skills are demonstrated through competence-based qualifications. Students can also acquire further vocational education and training which means that they can complete vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. It is also possible to complete parts of qualifications. University degrees cannot be taken in the form of apprenticeship training.
Anyone aged 15 years or over can apply. In vocational upper secondary education and training, apprenticeship training takes 1–3 years. The duration of the training depends on the student’s previous education and work experience. Training for vocational and specialist vocational qualifications usually lasts 1–1.5 years. In certain circumstances, the employer may receive employment assistance for the student receiving apprenticeship training.

Assistance with applications for apprenticeship training is available from the employment office and the nearest organizer of apprenticeship training.

Further information:
• at www.oppisopimus.net
• Employment offices
• Vocational institutions

JOINT APPLICATION SYSTEM

The joint application system for vocational education and training and general upper secondary education applies to:
• general upper secondary schools
• vocational qualifications based on basic education
• those students who have completed the general upper secondary school syllabus or the matriculation examination and who are applying for vocational qualifications based on basic education
• some home economics programmes
• some programmes at folk high schools.

As part of the joint application to general upper secondary and vocational upper secondary schools, students can apply for admission to five different schools by filling out just one application form. The schools are listed in the order of preference, which cannot be changed once the application has been sent.

General upper secondary schools mainly select their students on the basis of study records, more precisely the grade average for certain subjects, from a comprehensive school or other corresponding syllabus. Entrance exams and aptitude tests may also be used. At some general upper secondary schools, other education, leisure activities or other additional information may be considered when selecting students.

When selecting students for vocational qualifications, students earn extra points if they have completed their basic or additional education during the year of application, for their study record, for their weighted grades (does not apply to students who have completed general upper secondary school), for their general work experience, if the school is their
first or second choice and for possible entrance exams or aptitude tests. In addition, applicants earn two extra points if they apply for training where less than 30% of the applicants, who had the school as their first choice, are of the same gender as the applicant.

The education provider may, in special circumstances, accept up to 30% of students for vocational education and training through a system called flexible selection regardless of their points score. Special circumstances may include, for example, difficulties completing certificates. If an applicant has a non-Finnish certificate, he/she should apply through the flexible selection procedure. In the joint application system, flexible selection is only applied to the applicant's first choice.

The education provider may also arrange a language test for those applicants whose mother tongue is other than the language of instruction.

The joint application form should be submitted to the Joint Application Service of the State Provincial Offices in the province where the applicant resides. The joint application process takes place twice a year, in the spring and in the autumn.

Fields not covered by the joint application system include dance, music and sports and those programmes providing instruction in a foreign language.

Further information:
- Koulutusopas (Education Guide) (in Finnish, with a summary in English) /Swedish version: Utbildningsguiden
- State Provincial Offices
- Application instructions for every province
- Instruction for joint application for vocational education and training and general upper secondary education (joint application in autumn) (in Finnish) /Swedish version: riksomfattande ansökningsanvisningar för gemensam ansökan till yrkes- och gymnasieutbildning (gemensam ansökan på hösten)
- at www.oph.fi (Opiskelijapalvelut => Hakeminen koulutukseen => Hakeminen ammatilliselle ja lukioon) (in Finnish) /Swedish version: www.utbildningsstyrelsen.fi (Studietjänster => Ansökan till utbildning => Ansökan till yrkes- och gymnasieutbildning) /English version: available in English
- at www.oph.fi/english => FNBE
- Sites in English => How to apply for education in Finland => General upper secondary and vocational upper secondary education
APPLICATIONS TO POLYTECHNICS

Polytechnic students complete higher education degrees with a professional emphasis. The education is practically oriented and includes the requirements and needs of working life. As full-time studies, polytechnic degrees take 3.5–4.5 years to complete.

Parts of polytechnic degrees can be completed at open polytechnics which do not have requirements for basic education. Adults are offered both education leading to a qualification and specialist studies. It is also possible to complete further qualifications at polytechnics.

Most polytechnics also arrange education leading to a qualification in English. Education in Swedish is offered at six polytechnics. Polytechnics may test the language skills of those applicants whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction in the study programme.

The general requirement for admission to polytechnics is completion of general or vocational upper secondary education or a corresponding international or foreign qualification. Students with vocational qualifications completed in less than three years are only eligible to apply for the field of their qualification. Polytechnics may also accept students without appropriate qualifications if they feel that the student possesses adequate skills and knowledge to start the studies. This means that the student applies for the programme separately from the intake quota. Applicants are selected solely on the basis of an entrance exam.

This way, students can apply for education even if their qualification does not have the grades indicating study records required for normal student selection. These qualifications may mean vocational qualifications completed through competence rests and foreign qualifications where the grades or certificates cannot be compared with Finnish ones.

APPLICATIONS TO POLYTECHNICS

Students apply to polytechnics through the joint national application system in March–April and September–October. Students apply to polytechnics throughout Finland using a single application form where they can state four preferences.

This way, students can apply for education even if their qualification does not have the grades indicating study records required for normal student selection. These qualifications may mean vocational qualifications completed through competence rests and foreign qualifications where the grades or certificates cannot be compared with Finnish ones.

ONE STUDY PLACE LEADING TO A HIGHER EDUCATION DEGREE DURING EACH ACADEMIC YEAR

An applicant may only accept one study place leading to a higher education degree during each academic year.

The academic year means the year (1 Aug – 31 July) in which the education begins. This does not prevent students from accepting another study place leading to a higher education degree during the same academic year. This does not apply to the Police College of Finland, the National Defence College or Åland Polytechnic.

Further information:

- Polytechnic applications offices and Applicant’s Guides

• The Finnish National Board of Education website at www.oph.fi under “Opiskelijapalvelut”, includes information in Finnish on how to apply for training and on student selection. Information in English is available at www.oph.fi under How to Apply for Education. The website also includes electronic versions of all the Applicant’s Guides published by the Finnish National Board of Education.

• Applications to polytechnics (in Finnish/Swedish) on the Internet at: www.amkhaku.fi

• Polytechnic websites are available at www.arene.fi (also in English).

• Information about open polytechnics is available at www.avoinamk.fi (in Finnish).
UNIVERSITIES

In Finland, the university sector consists of universities and art academies. The university qualifications structure is being reformed across nearly all fields on August 1st 2005 which means that, with a few exceptions, universities will be adopting a two-cycle degree structure. Students first complete their lower academic degree and then continue with the upper academic degree. The lower academic degree is known as the Bachelor’s Degree and the higher academic degree the Master’s Degree. In medicine and dentistry, the lower academic degree will not be adopted at present.

Open university instruction is open to all, regardless of their previous education. At an open university, students can complete university study programmes, become familiar with university studies or study in their leisure time. If a student applies and is accepted to a university as a full-time student, the credits obtained at the open university can be used as part of the degree (only applies to undergraduate degrees).

Universities have their own application forms. Times for applications vary between universities with most universities arranging the application process in the spring.

Student selection will be reformed in the near future. The universities are developing a national joint application system which will enable Internet applications in the future. Language requirements vary by university. Inquiries should be directed to the university in question.

Only one study place leading to a higher education degree in each academic year

Applicants may only accept one student place leading to a higher education degree in each academic year (1 Aug – 31 July). The objective is for as many people as possible to be accepted by a higher education institution. This does not apply to the Police College of Finland, Åland Polytechnic, the National Defence College or foreign higher education institutions.

Further information:

• Universities
• Yliopisto-opintoit – Universitetstudier (Guide on university education) (summary available in English)
• Yliopistojen valintaopas – Universitetsens urval (Guide on student selection at universities) (in Finnish/Swedish)
• at www.oph.fi (Opiskelijapalvelut => Hakeminen koulutukseen => Hakeminen yliopistoon) (in Finnish) (Swedish version: www.utbildningsstyrelsen.fi (Studietjänster => Ansökan till utbildning => Ansökan till universitet))
• at www.avoinyliopisto.fi (open universities) (also in English)
• at www.kesayliopistot.fi (Summer Universities) (also in English)
• at www.taydennyskoulutus.fi (Continuing education centres) (also in English)
FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

English-speaking educational institutions (basic education and general upper secondary schools) are the International School of Helsinki and the English School in Helsinki, the International School of Vantaa, the Espoo International Lower Secondary School and Espoo International Upper Secondary School, Tiuksi International School, Oulun International School and Vuoknmaa English School in Jyväskylä, and the International School Cygnaeus in Pori (forms 1–6).

Helsinki is also home to the French School, the Deutsche Schule (German School) and the Finnish-Russian School. Teaching in Russian is also available at the Finnish-Russian School of Eastern Finland in Imatra, Joensuu and Lappeenranta.

The International Baccalaureate degree can be completed at eleven different general upper secondary schools in Finland. The language of instruction is English.

At some schools, the entire vocational qualification can be completed in a foreign language.

Further information:
- Municipal educational administration
- Foreign language schools
- at www.oph.fi => opiskelijapalvelut
  (in Finnish, summaries available in English)

VOCATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Adults can improve their vocational skills too. It is possible to complete degrees at three different levels in adult education and training: vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications.

Vocational qualifications involve students demonstrating the skills and knowledge required in working life.

Further vocational qualifications involve students demonstrating the vocational skills that they will need for work in a specific field. Further vocational qualifications can be completed if students have acquired vocational qualifications in the relevant field, have completed supplementary or specialist studies and have worked in the field in question for at least three years.

Specialist vocational qualifications involve students demonstrating skills in more demanding tasks in the relevant field. Further vocational qualifications can be completed if students have acquired vocational qualifications in the field, have completed specialist studies and have worked in the field in question for at least five years. Adults can complete these qualifications with a competence-based qualification regardless of the way in which the vocational skills were acquired. Adults can also complete vocational qualifications at institutions by studying for three years.

Institutions organize competence-based qualifications and training to prepare students for the qualification or for some components. Competence-based qualifications are organized in conjunction with this training. Competence-based qualifications involve students demonstrating their vocational skills.
Preparatory training can be arranged as self-motivated education or as labour policy education, as apprenticeship training or as in-service training which is training organized by the employer. Students are awarded a certificate once they have satisfactorily demonstrated the level of skills stated in the qualification requirements.

The education provider and the student work together to create an individual study plan, which includes the skills demonstrations plan and the learning plan. As part of the individual study plan, the student’s need for guidance and support is also taken into consideration. For example, the student’s Finnish/Swedish language skills and knowledge of Finnish working life and society are checked. In addition, decisions on the comparability and recognition of foreign qualifications and statements comparing the foreign qualifications and studies are taken into consideration (see p. 31).

Immigrants may apply for vocational adult education and training. They can participate in competence-based qualifications and thus complete vocational qualifications. Vocational courses are also arranged specifically for immigrants. These courses usually cover labour policy education and students apply for these through employment offices. Higher education institutions organize continuing vocational education and training as well.

Further information:
- Vocational adult education centres
- Vocational institutions
- Information services at employment offices
- Aikuiskoululainosopimus (Guide on Adult Education) (in Finnish)
- at www.oph.fi/tutkintopalvelut (in Finnish)

Labour policy education for adults is education for people of working age. The objective is to improve people’s chances of staying on the job market or of returning to working life.

Labour policy education is mainly targeted at unemployed jobseekers and at people over 20 years of age who are at risk of being unemployed. Study programmes in labour policy education correspond to the content of instruction of self-motivated education. The objective of labour policy education is to provide the vocational skills needed in working life. That is why the education is versatile and practice-oriented and usually includes on-the-job learning. Usually, labour policy education completes or expands the vocational skills acquired earlier in life. The education usually leads to a vocational qualification or to a component of such a qualification.

Labour policy education may also include preparatory training which may, for instance, orientate students to specific fields or develop their computer skills or skills as job seekers. Preparatory training may also be in the form of language training for immigrants.

Labour policy education seeks to increase the likelihood of the long-term unemployed, older workers and those with reduced work capacity to start working. At the same time, the objective is to reduce marginalisation. Such education can be linked to other measures such as rehabilitation or supported employment. The objective is to find an individual education solution for everyone.

Labour policy education is organized at vocational adult education centres.
centres, other vocational institutions and higher education institutions. Private education providers may also arrange labour policy education.

Labour policy education is provided free of charge for participants and is funded by the Ministry of Labour. A student in labour policy education can receive education subsidy or labour market subsidy and maintenance allowance.

Applications for labour policy education are sent to employment offices. Applicants may fill out an electronic application form on the Ministry of Labour website or they can get the form from an employment office. The electronic application form is submitted via the Internet and the paper application form is hand-delivered to the employment office in the applicant’s region. The form should be filled out carefully. Applicants should give the most valid reasons possible as to why they need education on their application. These reasons have a major influence on the selection process.

Student selection is usually the responsibility of the employment office in the region where the education is to be organized. Selections are made on the basis of aptitude and the need for education. In addition, the programmes may have their own selection criteria. Some programmes are specifically targeted to a group such as the long-term unemployed, for example. Selections are made on the basis of applications and interviews. In some cases, aptitude tests and exams may be used, or there may be a period at the beginning of the programme where the most suitable students are selected.

Employment offices will notify applicants of the decision in writing. The education provider usually sends selected students an invitation to the programme as well. The invitation states the specific details of the beginning of the programme and other arrangements.

Further information:
• Employment offices
• at www.mol.fi (also in English)

INTEGRATION TRAINING FOR ADULT IMMIGRANTS

Integration training is arranged for adult immigrants who are subject to the Integration Act. Training usually lasts one year and consists of many courses. Most integration training is labour policy education (see above). Immigrants may also receive education subsidy when they are participating in a form of integration training other than labour policy education if there are valid reasons for doing so. The reason may be the large number of education providers in the region, for example. Decisions on this type of training (so-called comparable training) are made by the local employment office.

Integration training for immigrants includes instruction in Finnish or Swedish, social studies, everyday skills, cultural knowledge and guidance related to vocations and working life. A period of practical training at a workplace is often included in the training. Students’ capabilities to study are developed and an individual study plan and employment plan are designed during the training. It is also possible to receive remedial instruction in language studies and to use the services of an interpreter.

Further information:
• Employment offices
• Vocational adult education centres
• Vocational institutions
• Folk high schools
• Other educational institutions
LANGUAGE COURSES IN FINNISH AND SWEDISH

Many educational institutions organize Finnish and Swedish language courses for foreign students. Finnish and Swedish can be studied at vocational adult education centres, folk high schools, adult education centres, general upper secondary schools for adults, at language centres within higher education institutions and summer universities.

Courses offer many different levels and durations. Tuition fees also vary.

Further information:
• Educational institutions
• Information services at employment offices

OTHER TYPES OF EDUCATION FOR ADULT STUDENTS

There are many adult education institutions in Finland where it is possible to study on a programme leading to a qualification or as a recreational activity. At these institutions, courses take place during the daytime and in the evenings. These programmes are open to everyone and are usually not very expensive. For example, adult education centres and workers’ institutes in most municipalities offer the opportunity to study languages, music, arts and crafts, sports etc. At folk high schools and study centres, it is possible to complete basic education programmes and to participate in different types of preparatory courses. At summer universities, it is possible to complete academic and other studies. Summer universities organize instruction in many regions. At most adult education institutions, courses are also designed specifically for immigrants.

Further information:
• at www.koulutusnetti.fi (also in English)

RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN STUDIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

Recognition of qualifications means deciding what kind of competence is provided by a foreign degree or foreign studies for the labour market or further studies in Finland. In different situations, the decisions are made by different authorities.

The Finnish National Board of Education decides on eligibility for a post or position provided by a foreign qualification. A decision on recognition is required when applying for a post or position in the public sector.

The Finnish National Board of Education also provides advisory statements on foreign vocational qualifications. The statements do not give eligibility for a civil service post or position in Finland. It may help if the applicant is seeking work or the right to continue his/her studies in Finland. The statement outlines the contents and level of training and eligibility for further tasks that this brings.

Higher education institutions and educational institutions decide on eligibility for studies in Finland and on including foreign studies as part of a Finnish degree. If a student who has studied abroad wants to continue his/her studies in Finland, he/she has to contact the institution providing education in that particular field directly. People with a foreign vocational qualification may also demonstrate their vocational skills by completing a competence-based qualification (see p. 24).
FINANCIAL AID FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

Non-Finnish students may be granted student financial aid for studies in Finland if they live in Finland on a permanent basis for a purpose other than studying (e.g. work, family ties or remigration). Foreigners, who have come to Finland to study, are not entitled to receive Finnish financial aid for students.

Authorities in the field decide on granting rights to practice a profession. For example, the right to practice a profession is required of health care professionals and seafarers. In these fields, those working in the private sector are also required to have the right to practice a profession.

An employer in the private sector assesses the competence provided by a foreign qualification and decides whether or not to hire the person.

Further information:
• The website for the Directorate of Immigration at www.uvi.fi (also in English).

EU citizens and equivalent citizens (i.e. nationals of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) may study in Finland without a residence permit. Students from non-EU member states may work while they study in Finland. Students from non-EU member states may work within certain limits provided that they have a residence permit granted for study purposes if the work involves practical training included in the degree or if the amount of part-time work does not exceed 20 hours a week. Full-time employment may be undertaken during holidays when the educational institution does not arrange teaching as such; in practical terms, this is usually during the summer and Christmas vacations.

A fixed-term residence permit is granted for study purposes. If the studies last more than one year, the residence permit is usually granted for one year at a time. Students who have been granted a temporary residence permit cannot apply for a permanent residence permit if the student’s reasons for residing in Finland change and if he/she is granted a continuous residence permit, he/she may be granted a permanent residence permit after residing in Finland for four consecutive years with a continuous residence permit.

When students apply for a residence permit, they must show that their income is secured during the academic year in Finland. If foreigners have resided in Finland for four years with a continuous residence permit and have thus received a permanent residence permit, then they are entitled to receive student financial aid. For further information on student financial aid.

Further information:
• The website for the Directorate of Immigration at www.uvi.fi (also in English).

FINANCIAL AID FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

Foreign students are allowed to study at Finnish educational institutions. If the studies last less than three months, no residence permit is needed. Students can then complete their studies within the period of validity of their visa or while an agreement on the abolition of the visas is in force. If the studies last longer than three months, foreign students have to obtain a residence permit which may be granted for study purposes at a post-comprehensive-school educational institution where studies lead to a qualification or profession. Such institutions are mainly universities and vocational institutions.

EU citizens and equivalent citizens (i.e. nationals of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) may study in Finland without a residence permit. EU and equivalent citizens can work while they study in Finland. Students from non-EU member states may work within certain limits provided that they have a residence permit granted for study purposes if the work involves practical training included in the degree or if the amount of part-time work does not exceed 20 hours a week. Full-time employment may be undertaken during holidays when the educational institution does not arrange teaching as such; in practical terms, this is usually during the summer and Christmas vacations.

A fixed-term residence permit is granted for study purposes. If the studies last more than one year, the residence permit is usually granted for one year at a time. Students who have been granted a temporary residence permit cannot apply for a permanent residence permit if the student’s reasons for residing in Finland change and if he/she is granted a continuous residence permit, he/she may be granted a permanent residence permit after residing in Finland for four consecutive years with a continuous residence permit.

When students apply for a residence permit, they must show that their income is secured during the academic year in Finland. If foreigners have resided in Finland for four years with a continuous residence permit and have thus received a permanent residence permit, then they are entitled to receive student financial aid. For further information on student financial aid.

Further information:
• The website for the Directorate of Immigration at www.uvi.fi (also in English).
On the basis of the Aliens Act, foreigners are divided into three categories:

1) Citizens of the Nordic Countries
   Student financial aid may be granted if the student has submitted an Inter-Nordic Migration Form in his/her home country and if his/her residence in Finland has been registered according to § 5 of the Municipality or Residence Act (359/1994). If the student has been accepted by a Finnish educational institution before registering his/her residence in Finland and if he/she is not residing in Finland for other purposes, he/she is not eligible to receive student financial aid. If the student is accepted into a Finnish educational institution after he/she has registered his/her residence in Finland, he/she is eligible to receive student financial aid.

2) Citizens of EU member states, citizens of Liechtenstein and Switzerland and their families
   Student financial aid may be granted if the right of residence has been registered and if the purpose of residing in Finland is other than for studying. A person studying with a temporary residence permit (B) is not eligible to receive student financial aid.

3) Foreigners other than EU and equivalent citizens
   Student financial aid may be granted if the student has a permanent or continuous residence permit. The purpose of the residence permit must be other than for studying. A person studying with a temporary residence permit (B) is not eligible to receive student financial aid.

TESTING LANGUAGE SKILLS

NATIONAL CERTIFICATES OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The application for student financial aid is submitted to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA) or to the educational institution in question. In the case of the latter, the educational institution must decide on the basis of the student’s performance in the language test whether the student is eligible to receive student financial aid.

APPLYING FOR STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

The purpose of the language test is to determine the student’s language proficiency. The test is organized three times a year. In other languages, tests are organized twice a year. There is a charge for the test.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST FOR CITIZENSHIP APPLICATION

According to the new Nationality Act (359/2003), foreigners applying for Finnish citizenship must present an official certificate of satisfactory oral and written skills in the Finnish or Swedish language. In order to receive a certificate of Finnish or Swedish skills, applicants must complete a language proficiency test for the National Certificate of Language Proficiency equivalent to level three (intermediate level) or above or the National Language Examination with satisfactory oral and written skills.

Further information on certificates:

• at www.oph.fi => Turistinopelut => Yleiset kielitutkinnot OR Valtionhallinnon kielitutkinnot (in Finnish)
• at www.oph.fi => English => FNBE
• Sites in English => The National Certificate of Language Proficiency (in English)
• Aikuiskoulutusopas (Guide for Adult Education) (in Finnish)
• Employment offices
AUTHORITIES AND CONTACTS

At the Finnish National Board of Education, immigrant education is the responsibility of members of the Immigrant Education Workgroup.

Immigrants receive guidance on education from authorities on immigration and student exchange and from information services at employment offices. An international labour force counsellor is based at employment offices in the largest cities.

The Directorate of Immigration offers guidance to immigrants on issues related to residence permits and citizenship. The Social Insurance Institution (KELA) and its Centre for Student Financial Aid provide information on student financial aid.

THE SUMMER HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

The Summer High School Association organizes summer courses for young immigrants and children in their own mother tongue and culture. Courses last 7–10 days. A fee is payable and this includes accommodation and meals.

Young immigrants have their own general upper secondary school during the summer which lasts 1–2 weeks and where they get information on Finnish society and their career possibilities. Summer school includes accommodation and meals, excursions and leisure activities. A fee is charged for summer school.

THE CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY CIMO

The Centre for International Mobility (CIMO), which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, is an organization which offers services and expertise to promote the internationalisation of education, working life, youth activities and the cultural sector. The CIMO provides services for everyone who is interested in studying, practical training or youth exchanges abroad. Information on and support for internationalisation is available from CIMO.
publications, the CIMO website and information and counselling services.

CIMO’s Discover Finland website at http://finland.cimo.fi is aimed at foreigners who are planning to study or complete their practical training in Finland.

CIMO’s web service at www.maailmalle.net is targeted at young people and others interested in studying or working abroad. The website has information on the options available to different people to gain international experience. These experiences are available to comprehensive school pupils, people who are planning their studies or who have just graduated or are taking a year-long break from studying.

CIMO’s information service is open from Monday to Thursday between 12 and 16. The service is located in the Hakaniemi area of Helsinki at Hakaniemenkatu 2, 2nd floor, 00531 Helsinki.

Telephone enquiries are answered from Monday to Thursday from 10 to 12 and from 13 to 15, tel. 01080 6767. If calling from abroad, the number is +358 1080 6767. E-mail enquiries should be sent to cimoinfo@cimo.fi.

Centre for International Mobility CIMO
PO. Box 343
Street address: Hakaniemenkatu 2
00531 Helsinki
Tel. (09) 7747 7033
Fax (09) 7747 7064

www.cimo.fi

IMMIGRANT EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF
The Finnish National Board of Education has trained regional support staff with experience and knowledge of immigrant education and training. The support staff mainly provide services for teachers of immigrants. The list of support staff and their contact information is available from the Finnish National Board of Education.

Many municipalities also have their own contact person for immigrant education.

Further information:
Finnish National Board of Education