



Report on the Finnish implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees

All Finnish universities and polytechnics are obliged by national decrees to issue a diploma supplement to their students. On the recommendation by the Ministry of Education all Finnish higher education institutions use the Diploma Supplement format for this. Most universities and polytechnics issue now Diploma Supplement automatically, free of charge and in English to all students on graduation.

There is close cooperation between the NARIC/ENIC office, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) and the Ministry of Education in the matters relating to the promotion of Diploma Supplement and ECTS.

Finland is finalising the ratification process of the Council of Europe and UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The ratification is expected to take place by the end of this year.

2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles

University degree structure was reformed in Finland in the beginning of the 1990s. In that reform bachelor's degree was introduced to almost all fields of study. Medical fields, technology and architecture did not adopt two-tier structure at that time. Bachelor's degree is at the moment clearly an intermediate degree in most fields, because it is not an obligatory phase before the Master's degree. Bachelor's degree does not seem to have any major relevance at the labour market.

The Government will give a bill to Parliament in autumn 2003 concerning reform of the university degree structure. The reform will come into force on August 1, 2005 and a two-tier degree structure with obligatory bachelor's degree will be introduced to all fields of study. There will be only one exception; it now seems that in the medical field some faculties will adopt a two-tier structure and some will retain the integrated model.

The Ministry has directed - and will continue to do so - earmarked funding for nationwide field-specific projects which facilitate the transfer to the new degree structure and promote universities' cooperation in implementing the reform.

At the moment, Finnish polytechnics can offer bachelor-level degrees in all fields, and postgraduate polytechnic degrees in certain fields. Postgraduate programmes are offered at this point on an experimental basis. The postgraduate polytechnic degrees are second-cycle, post-experience programmes, the extent of which is 60 to 90 ECTS credits. All the programmes underwent an

external evaluation before they were approved by the Government. The decision on the future degree structure of the polytechnics will probably be made by the end of 2004.

3. Establishment of a system of credits

Finland adopted a national credit system in the late 1970s. This system is used throughout the higher education and is based on student's work load: one credit refers to 40 hours of student's work.

This national credit system will be replaced by a system based directly on the ECTS from August 1, 2005 onwards, i.e. simultaneously with the university degree structure reform. The credit reform concerns both universities and polytechnics.

4. Promotion of mobility

International student and teacher exchanges are seen as a vital means of promoting internationalisation of higher education in Finland. The state students' financial aid is completely portable for studies abroad too. The Government gives additional national funding for the implementation of EU programmes to the National Agency and many universities and polytechnics offer top-up funding for their students who take part in international exchanges.

The Ministry of Education and the universities and polytechnics have agreed on target numbers for students exchanges in the three-year performance agreements. The targets are ambitious; every third Finnish higher education student should study at least part of his/her degree abroad. The best-performing universities and polytechnics are rewarded for their activities in international cooperation. One factor in the indicators used is the balance between incoming and outgoing students.

In late 2001, a national strategy for promoting further internationalisation of higher education was drawn by a joint working group of the Ministry, universities, polytechnics and students. In that strategy, a goal was set also for recruitment of foreign degree students to Finnish higher education institutions. The goal was set to doubling the number of foreign students by the year 2010. The implementation of this strategy has now begun.

All Finnish higher education institutions offer English-language programmes. In fact, Finland can boast a highest share of English-language degree programmes in Europe outside the English-speaking countries. There are also several English-language programmes aimed specifically for exchange students in all universities and polytechnics.

The Ministry of Education gives extra funding for universities and polytechnics to develop their English-language education in order to serve better both domestic and international students. Teaching of Finnish/Swedish for foreigners is available also, but needs clearly more funding in the future.

CIMO, the Centre for International Mobility was founded in the beginning of the 1990s to promote international cooperation between Finland and other countries. Thanks to CIMO's well-developed information services - electronic and printed - Finland can offer up-to-date information on study opportunities in Finnish higher education institutions. CIMO also advises Finnish students seeking information on studies abroad. (cimoinfo@cimo.fi or www.cimo.fi)

5. Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance

All Finnish universities and polytechnics are obliged by legislation to evaluate themselves and take part in external evaluations. The evaluation reports are public, and many of them are published in English. Students play an integral part in all evaluations. Most of the evaluations consist of self evaluation and a peer review with international experts.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) was set up in 1995 to assist the universities and polytechnics in evaluation matters. The Council also functions as an advisory body to the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation and quality assurance. All Finnish universities and polytechnics have been evaluated at the institutional level, and the Council has carried out several programme and thematic evaluations. (<http://www.kka.fi>)

The Council is a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the secretariat of ENQA is currently placed at the FINHEEC. The Council is engaged in several international projects at the Nordic, European and global level.

6. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education

Finnish universities and polytechnics take actively part in the EU education programmes. All of them have also other bi- and multilateral cooperation agreements with their European counterparts. Networking at the European level is seen as an asset for all partners in Finland, and universities and polytechnics are looking for new ways to deepen their relations with European higher education institutions. Many Finnish universities are active members in several regional or thematic European university networks.

Teaching and learning of foreign languages is vitally important for Finnish students. All Finnish higher education students have to require competence in both national languages plus competence in at least one foreign language. For this purpose, all students are offered studies in languages and cultures as part of their degree programmes. In addition to these minimum requirements, students may also include studies in further languages in their degrees.

7. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is in the essence of the Finnish national education policy as defined by the Government in the Development Plan for Education and Research for 1999 - 2003. Degree structures have been planned to be compatible at the national level, and individual learning paths have been made possible in higher education also. The credit system has made the modular structure possible and especially university students can combine work and studies fairly freely.

Open University and Open Polytechnic offer courses and modules for all interested people regardless of their educational background. Credits earned are transferable to regular higher education degree programmes. There are also special programmes for elderly people in the Open University.

Virtual open learning environments are being developed by universities and polytechnics. (<http://www.virtuaaliyliopisto.fi>)

New types of professionally oriented second-cycle degrees in polytechnics are also part of the latest lifelong learning developments. The university degree reform in 2005 will further enhance lifelong learning opportunities in higher education.

Information on all education and training possibilities in Finland (in Finnish) is offered now on one website (<http://www.opintoluotsi.fi>), which makes it easy for people to find a kind of education or training they need.

8. Higher education institutions and students

Finnish universities are state-owned institutions governed by the Universities Act. Universities' autonomy is stipulated in the Constitution. At the national level, universities are steered by the Ministry of Education, and the steering is based on the mutually negotiated three-year performance agreements. National decrees on university degrees leave the universities full autonomy in designing their own syllabi and curricula.

Students take part in university governance as defined in University Act and Decree. Students are involved at the national level in the planning phase of all major national reforms concerning university studies and other issues relevant to students.

Polytechnics are maintained mainly by municipalities, federations of municipalities or foundations. They have autonomy in their internal matters. The Polytechnic Act has just been reformed to give more autonomy for polytechnics in matters relating to education and r&d. Students are also involved in decision-making at polytechnics.

Both national student unions SYL (universities) and SAMOK (polytechnics) are active members of ESIB.

9. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

Education through foreign languages, information services on study opportunities, good student housing system available to foreign students all add up to the attractiveness of Finnish higher education. All universities and polytechnics have professional personnel to take care of incoming international students, and Finnish students unions are actively involved in this work.

The Ministry of Education has recently financed two studies concerning foreign degree students in Finland. The one deals with integration of foreign students to Finnish society and the other one deals specifically with foreign degree students in Finnish higher education institutions and the strategies and policies different institutions have on recruitment of foreign students. Both studies will be published in mid-September. The results will give the Government and the institutions in-depth knowledge of how the situation of foreign students could be promoted in Finland.

There are no tuition fees for domestic or foreign students in Finland.