



1. Introduction

One of the key strengths of the Finnish education system is the well-educated teaching staff. The Finnish skilled teachers are one of the most important factors also in their PISA success¹ and when it comes to retention of teachers Finland does well. This is one of the reasons why Finland was selected as a country case study for this project. The following country case study of Finland is the fourth and last within the framework of the project “Recruitment and Retention in the Education Sector – a matter of social dialogue” and aims to give an insight into the current situation in Finland with regards to recruitment and retention in the municipal sector. The private sector works differently and is not covered here.

The country case study is based on e-mail correspondences with representatives from the Finnish trade union OAJ (Trade Union of Education in Finland) and the employers’ organisation KT (Local Government employers) during the autumn 2012.

2. Teachers’ Education in Finland²

The majority of teacher students study at universities. In Finland subject specialist teachers have traditionally been educated at universities and they generally teach in secondary schools. The education of primary school teachers was transferred to the universities in the early 1970s, and that of kindergarten teachers in the mid-1990s.

¹ http://www.oph.fi/download/131532_Opettajat_Suomessa_2010.pdf

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http://www.oaj.fi/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/OAJ_INTERNET/01FI/05TIEDOTTEET/03JULKAISUT/OPEKOULUTUSENG.PDF

The teachers' education is given either in faculties of education or in subject faculties such as humanities, science, or theology. First, students take a bachelor's degree, which comprises 180 ECTS credits, and after that a 120 ECTS credit Master's degree. The complete 300 ECTS credit degree takes about five years. Students aiming at a career as a kindergarten teacher or a teacher of adult evening classes complete a three-year Bachelor's degree. Although this is sufficient qualification for these posts, many teachers carry on to do a Master's degree.

The degree programmes include a 60 ECTS credit professional competence element, which varies according to the type of teaching posts the students are aiming at. Depending on the teaching field, they may concentrate on early childhood and pre-school teaching, the core subjects taken by all primary school pupils (so-called multi-field studies), special education, or student counselling. The teachers' education also includes pedagogical studies, which incorporate teaching practice, as well as, for subject specialists, study of the subject to be taught. Teachers with a Master's degree have the option of continuing their studies at the doctoral level.

2.1 Financing the education system

The objective of Finnish education and cultural policy is to guarantee all people - irrespective of their ethnic origin, background or wealth - equal opportunities and rights to culture, free quality education, and prerequisites for full citizenship. In any educational, scientific, or cultural activity, sport, or youth work, the equality principle must be applied. All people must have equal access to services of consistent quality³.

In Finland everyone has the right to free basic education, including necessary equipment and text books, school transportation, where needed, and adequate free meals. Post-compulsory education is also free. This means that there are no tuition fees in general and vocational upper secondary education.⁴

Education in Finland is primarily co-financed by the government and local authorities. The Ministry of Education and Culture allocates government grants for basic, upper secondary, vocational. The Ministry also finances morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren and school transportation in pre-primary education.⁵

When compiling the state budget financing is discussed with the social partners. After the Ministry of Education and Culture has given their suggestion for the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Finance makes a suggestion. The social partners have an opportunity to give statements and they can try to influence all the time for example contacting the people who do the proposals and meeting with political parties.

The teachers' education is funded as part of university education. The core funding of universities comes from the state budget but also from the private sector. The majority of appropriations are allocated on the basis of a funding formula based on target num-

³ <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitus/hallitusohjelma/pdf/en334743.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/rahoitus/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/koulutuspolitiikka/rahoitus/?lang=en>

bers of Master's degrees and doctorates. Since there are no tuition fees for degree studies in Finnish universities, university-level teacher education is provided free of charge.⁶

3. Social Partners

JUKO (Negotiation Organisation Public Sector Professionals) is the main partner in the negotiations and OAJ is the largest of JUKO's member unions. This means that OAJ is in charge of the agreements regarding the teaching profession. The municipal collective agreement is negotiated between the OAJ and the Commission for Local Authority Employers. As a result the special agreement of education sector is signed in the name of JUKO.

The social partners in education in educational policy matters consist of the employers' organisation KT (Local government employers), the Government, KL (The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities), the National Board of Education, the Municipalities Union, the Regional State Administrative Agencies, and the trade union OAJ (Trade Union of Education in Finland) among others. About 95% of teachers belong to OAJ and the organisation has a powerful position in educational politics. They are usually asked to be a partner in all working groups at educational politics level. OAJ has members in education working groups established by ministries and is working together with other unions and parents unions, The Ombudsman for Children and The data Ombudsman. The social partners have done a guide about recruitment and retention and the main things and duties of employer and employee and the parties cooperate well together.⁷ OAJ comments that they try to work in the social dialogue in a way to improve teachers' qualifications and working conditions and to ensure a good salary. They try to find ways to keep the teachers' training quality high and to ensure the right amount of teachers needed are educated in order to avoid high unemployment. This is done by negotiation and team work with the social partners.

4. Recruitment of teachers

The recruitment process, in general when you work in the public sector, is based on Finnish law. The main rule is that all open positions must be announced public so everybody can apply. Exceptions apply if the recruitment concerns: a substitute teacher; open position where you hire for a while; a fired person can be taken back; a job offer for a person who works part time; a person is moved from one permanent job to another; or, if two organisations merge. Only teachers who have applied and are qualified can be chosen.

The employer must choose the most qualified for the position and do a comparison between all applicants. The employer must justify why he or she has chosen the specific candidate and why the candidate was better than others. In case a candidate feels dissat-

⁶ Councillor for Education, Armi Mikkola, Ministry of Education and Culture, Department for Education and Science Policy

⁷ shop.kuntatyöntajat.fi/uploads/vo_fin_all.pdf

ified with a rejection he or she has the option to appeal the decision. If you are the chosen candidate you must give the employer a medical doctrine and a criminal record to show you have not done any crimes that could be harmful in the work with children. The operations of the public sector are transparent, e.g. the salaries are public. When you work in a public-service employment relationship you must be employed on a permanent base according to Finnish law, if there are no legal reasons otherwise, and as such a permanent contract is the main rule.

Differences in the recruitment process occur when it is regarding teachers in universities or in the private sector. In such cases there are no open announcements; the chosen candidates are not public; and the employer can choose more freely between candidates as long as the law of gender equality and the Teaching Qualification Decree is respected.

5. Challenges for teachers' recruitment and retention

A long list of issues is identified by the OAJ representative as challenges to recruitment and retention. The current and previous (around year 1990) economic and financial crisis only made the issues more complicated. A listing of all the challenges will not give the overall picture justice as many things are done well in the educational sector as well. E.g. an extensive working career is quite safe in the municipal sector and the guaranteed minimum working terms.

The list of challenges includes teacher shortages; poor working conditions; poor chances to climb up the career ladder; increasing class sizes; stress in the sense there is not enough time to teach and meet the students, integration and special needed students; gender imbalance; and excessive workload. The main issues will be elaborated in the following sections.

5.1 Teacher shortages

One area of main concern regarding recruitment and retention is the lack of teachers in some areas, e.g. physical education and English. Moreover teacher shortages occur within kindergarten teachers, special teachers; and vocational training and education teachers in many areas. On the other hand there is an excess supply of religion and history teachers.

The issues are already a discussed topic between social partners. Universities have been given extra finances for the year 2012 in order to be able to take in more students specializing in kindergarten teaching and municipalities have offered class teachers the possibility to become a special teacher. In some areas this has worked but still it has not solved the issues entirely.

According to a report made by Kari Nissinen from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, the demand for class teachers will increase most, mainly due to the expected growth of age cohorts entering primary school. The high mobility of class teachers in the labour market also causes pressure to educate more teachers. More training will be needed

also for special class teachers due to the high number of unqualified teachers in charge at present. In secondary schools the demand for new teachers is highest in English, physical and health education and student counselling. In most other subjects the capacity of teacher training seems to be sufficient or could even be reduced. In vocational education the largest demand for new teachers was found in the field of social services and health care. In Swedish-speaking vocational schools the shortage of engineering, manufacturing and construction teachers stands out.⁸

The social dialogue is strong in Finland. The Ministry of Education and Culture (OKM) and Local Government Employers (KT) have carried out surveys independently to find out future needs regarding teachers in all levels. KT's survey shows that during the year 2012 most employees will be hired at health and education sector and 14 % of municipalities say their need to hire people at the education sector is growing.⁹ This is confirmed by the survey ordered by the Ministry of Education that showed Finland will need more than 20 % of class teachers until year 2025.¹⁰ Especially, in the area of vocational education and training, the teachers will soon reach the retirement age and this will cause an increased shortage in this particular field.

Both OAJ and KT find it very important that we have enough highly qualified teachers in all fields of education. The high retirement number will affect the need of teachers and attention to this should be paid in good time. It is in the interest of everybody that we have good teachers.

5.2 Attraction of teachers

When it comes to attracting teachers in Finland, the teaching profession is valued according to OAJ. The OAJ representative explains that Finland has many students who want to become a teacher. An on-going survey in Finland called 'Shifting pedagogical expertise - Expected future needs for teachers in terms of quality and quantity 2010-2012' shows that teachers stay wanted. The results of a survey made in June 2012 from the research and rating company EPSI Rating showed that Finnish teachers are the most satisfied workers among all the workers in Finland.¹¹ One of the reasons stated were that teachers felt their work was important for others and especially for children and teenagers. This positive feedback helps to carry on through the more difficult times. The social partners have done many things and especially they have tried to improve the status of teachers. However, the OAJ representative expresses concern of the fact that the economic situation might increase the number of pupils in the classes and that it will be necessary to integrate pupils with special needs without the necessary support. The cuts are a fact in all sectors not only in education.

A major concern is that the substantial cuts in the education sector now and in the coming three years might mean that a large number of teachers especially in the voca-

⁸ <http://ktl.jyu.fi/img/portal/21745/G043.pdf?cs=1326125091>

⁹ <http://www.kuntatyonantajat.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/julkaisut/Sivut/julkaisu.aspx?product=2012-008>

¹⁰ <http://ktl.jyu.fi/img/portal/21745/G043.pdf?cs=1326125091>

¹¹ <http://www.helsinkitimes.fi/news/index.php/finland/finland-news/domestic/2639-survey-employee-satisfaction-highest-in-schools>

tional education and training, adult education and polytechnic level will be denounced. This can affect the attraction to become a teacher.

5.3 Retention of teachers

Retention has not been a problem in Finland as the teaching profession is popular among Finns. Nevertheless, the area of retention needs attention and work, so it will not eventually become a problem.

The OAJ representative notes that society's demand for education rises all the time. During the good times teachers are wanted in business life also, but during the economic crisis they come back.

A lack of career opportunities is an issue that effect retention of teachers and that is why OAJ has started to raise awareness among social partners and has started to make a plan for different kinds of career opportunities at different school levels ranging from kindergarten to universities.

A good thing is that the national programme for teachers' continuing education (Osaava) was launched in May 2010 by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Osaava programme is targeted at those working in education and focus on teachers' opportunities and professional development.¹² The higher education teachers are not included in this programme and OAJ considers this as a big mistake which should be fixed. Both KT and OAJ find it very important that teachers and principals' professional development is well taken care of.

5.4 Quality of education

KT and OAJ agree that opportunities to get good quality education in Finland is still quite high, but the cuts may weaken this. The current rate that 100 basic education schools are shut down per year seems to continue annually. Other levels of education tend to have bigger units as well. Despite of all the support students get, Finland has many marginalized young people, who do not have anything else than basic education. At the moment there are 110.000 unemployed young people under 30 years of age who only have a basic education.

One reason for this is that the Finnish system does not have sufficiently means and persons to intervene, one reason is group size as well as lack of support and student welfare, lack of student counselling and lack of social services to families.

According to OAJ the problem in the field of vocational education and training is that funds have not been allocated to increase the number of teachers concurrently with rising number of students. Now when the number of students is decreasing, teachers' posts are also terminated.

¹² <http://ktl.jyu.fi/ktl/osaavaverme/mainenglish/whatis/osaava>

OAJ argues that all this has got an effect on competence and competitiveness. Major budget cuts are made by the government with regard to higher education and this makes it harder to be competitive and build a strong ground for new know-how and create new jobs at the same time.

6. The social dialogue and reforms

The social dialogue in Finland is active in all sections including collective agreements, educational politics, health and safety matters, and legal development. The social partners naturally engage in collective bargaining for the collective agreements and after the negotiations working groups are settled on selected topics that have arisen during the negotiations. The working groups will try to come up with solutions to these matters together.

The Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Board of Education and other national organisations cooperate regularly with employer and employee unions in all matters. It is common that there is a tripartite or bipartite negotiation with special advisors from different organisation to make a proposal and find an acceptable compromise. Sometimes the ministries make the suggestion by themselves and ask for comments from the social partners and vice versa the social partners make their own proposals for the ministry and try to lobby political parties. As an example, OAJ has done a proposal with parents association, principals association and the heads of educations association about how the basic education act should be changed and give teachers more power to punish students. The ministry will give their answer and own proposal in December 2012.

The Finnish government has established policy papers that influence teachers work and affect how attractive teachers' profession is and how interesting and attractive the teachers who already work as a teacher find their job. An example is The Government Programme agreed by the parties in the government. The action plan gives an overview of the main functions of the government. In the Programme of the current Government from 2011 a statement is made regarding education, science and cultural policy. Further, it states the goals set for the Finnish education system and measures to be done to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession. E.g. by developing working conditions, promotion of teachers' professional development, and keep an increased focus on special pedagogy, multiculturalism, and parent-teacher cooperation in relation to the teachers' education.¹³ When the parties represented in the government negotiate about the action plan all social partners have a possibility to influence the policies.

Another example of an established policy paper in favour of promoting recruitment and retention issues in the area of education is the Education and Research-Development plan. In this action plan education policy priorities are outlined in a five-year development plan within education and research. The social partners are given the possibility to influence the action plan and to attend hearings. The first draft of the action plan is also given to the social partners for them to give their opinion of which areas need changes.

¹³ <http://valtioneuvosto.fi/hallitus/hallitusohjelma/en.jsp>

Other policies in the context of the social dialogue are regarding improvements of work-life balance, working environment, how to hire part-time teachers, a job alternation leave and compensation among others¹⁴. There is often a base in Finnish law concerning these policies. For example Finland's Gender Equality Act lays down an obligation for employers to draw up a gender equality plan and accordingly the employer must take account of employees' ability to work and how stressful and hard the work is.¹⁵

¹⁴ <http://www.tyj.fi/default.asp?id=129>

¹⁵ <http://www.tyosuoja.fi/fi/workingfinland/>