EQUITY IN EDUCATION THEMATIC REVIEW

FINLAND

COUNTRY NOTE

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LIST OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:

1. that co-ordination of day care and pre-primary education should be more fully developed. To this end both national and local discussion should take place to assess the state of coordination, and to ensure consistency between the two practices to determine if children who might benefit are being excluded.

2. that an investigation be undertaken of the background of those children who do not participate in the pre-primary year of education, and in the light of that information consideration should be given to options for ensuring that all those who could benefit from the pre-primary year of education do so.

3. that the Ministry of Education commission a study of the variation across municipalities in equity practices, including the availability of support such as special needs teachers, classroom assistants, social workers and psychologists.

4. that the Ministry of Education should actively monitor and sustain the virtuous circle which supports the high quality and equity of basic schooling in Finland.

5. that the Ministry of Education establish a working group of individuals from basic education, upper secondary general education, and secondary vocational education, to examine how the good equity practices of basic education could be extended into upper secondary education.

6. that in the light of the Ministry of Education's own evaluation and our findings, the Ministry should now develop proposals for reform designed to significantly enhance the effectiveness of vocational guidance and counselling.

7. that the Ministry of Education undertake a comprehensive review of options for the reform of vocational education, with a view to determining which reforms would be most effective, particularly in enhancing the status of vocational education, giving particular attention to the option of a better integration of vocational and academic tracks.

8. that the forthcoming OECD review visit which will look at tertiary education should give particular attention to:

   - access to tertiary education from upper secondary and vocational education;

   - how the expansion of tertiary education in Finland, including the institutional differentiation can be harnessed to the cause of equity;

   - drop-out from tertiary education, and variability in drop-out rates between institutions.

9. that the Ministry of Education convene a working group, including municipality representatives and those familiar with local immigrant programmes, to examine second language instruction, to explore whether national guidelines for language instruction and other programmes for new immigrants would be helpful, and if so to develop these guidelines.

10. that the Ministry of Education consider options for making the process of policy-making more soundly based on evidence including the options of:

    – institutionally, creating an office responsible for data analysis and evaluation, for dissemination of results to interested participants, and for maintaining relationships with Statistics Finland and other statistical agencies;

    – procedurally, establishing in the template for new policy documents a standard section entitled 'research and data' which should describe the evidence bearing on the policy proposals set out in the documents.

11. that the wide variety of second-chance programmes in Finland be carefully evaluated.

12. that, as part of fuller regional economic planning in Finland, account should be taken of educational issues and interests, initially through the inclusion of the Minister for Education in the inter-Ministerial committee responsible for regional economic development.

13. that Finland establishes funding priorities among the different levels of schooling and the programmes it supports, taking full account of equity as well as other objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The OECD thematic review of equity in education

This country note was prepared as part of the OECD thematic review of equity in education across member countries. The review aims to assist countries in developing and implementing effective policies for equity in education. It examines the contribution of different phases of education to lifetime equity and inequity and looks, in particular, at socio-economic, ethnic, regional and gender issues. The thematic review is primarily concerned with equality of opportunity while recognising that relative equality of outcomes is often used as an indicator of equality of opportunity. The exercise is designed to examine equity over the lifecycle, recognising that inequities emerging early in life may be either magnified or diminished by later experience.

The thematic review involves four separate strands of work. Each participating country prepares an *analytical report* on equity in education; *country visits* by teams of experts take place in a subset of participating countries, leading to the preparation of *country notes* such as this one; and a *statistical profile* of all OECD countries, in respect of educational equity, is prepared. All four strands of work feed into the preparation of a *final comparative report*.

The analytical reports describe each country's context and current equity situation, provide a profile of equity in education, examine causes and explanations, and explore the effectiveness of existing policies and potential policy solutions to problems. Each report is supported by data, where they exist, on a specified range of indicators of participation, attainment and labour market outcomes by ethnicity, region, socio-economic status and gender, alongside data taken from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the International Adult Learning Study (IALS).

Five of the participant countries - Finland, Hungary, Norway, Spain and Sweden – have opted for a country visit. The object of these visits is to assess policy through the exploration of the perspectives of different stakeholders and through the observation of practice in specific institutional contexts. This involves the participation of a team of experts able to conduct an in-depth examination of policy and practice and to prepare a country note containing policy recommendations. The note which follows is the country note for Finland.

The OECD will prepare a final comparative report on the countries involved set in the wider context of OECD countries. Drawing on the analytical reports, the country notes and other strands of work, this report will aim to draw general policy lessons about how to improve equity in education. Much existing OECD work on education bears on equity issues and the final report will make full use of this substantial corpus of work. It will draw, in particular, on the results of previous thematic reviews – early childhood education, transition from school to work and adult learning – and on the results of the various PISA studies.

1.2 The visit to Finland and the approach to the country note

In advance of our visit, we agreed with the Finnish authorities that our visit should, alongside a broad overview of equity issues in Finnish education, give particular attention to:

- the transition to upper secondary education, and dropout at that stage of education;
- the education of immigrants;
- education in rural areas, particularly the issue of school population decline.

The OECD review team undertook a visit of 10 days, from April 11 - 21, 2005. The details of the visit, including the specific schools and programmes observed, are contained in Annex A. We concentrated our visits to the Helsinki region, partly for logistical reasons, and partly because this region has experienced the greatest effect of immigrants, one of the groups we were asked to examined. In addition, we spent two days visiting schools in Kuusamo, a municipality with a population of about 17,500 people close to the Arctic Circle and the Russian border. This represented one example of the many small rural municipalities in Finland, most of which have been declining in population and enrolment in the past 30 years. In particular, this visit allowed us to investigate the complex relationships between education and rural economic development, a topic to which we return in Chapter 5.

Our report is based on what we learnt during the visit alongside the evidence set out in the Country Analytical Report and other documentary evidence we gathered along the way. A first draft of this Note was submitted to the Finnish authorities in October 2005, and the text revised in the light of the comments received.

This main author for this country note was the rapporteur for the exercise, Norton Grubb. The other experts on the team, Hanna Marit Jahr, Josef Neumüller and Simon Field, also contributed to the writing and the team as a whole take responsibility for the final text.

1.3 The context of equity in Finland

Equity in education has been a concern of almost all countries, whether developed, transitional, or in the process of developing. Inequality in education — whether inequality is measured by differences in measures of learning like test scores, measures of educational attainment like years completed, or more abstract conceptions like opportunity — is partly an issue of equity, or its close synonym fairness. Countries differ in the extent to which they value fairness and equity, to be sure, but more than most countries Finland seems to consider equality of both status and opportunity — key elements in equity — important. As the County Analytical Report stated this, “One explanation for Finland’s success in such international comparisons is the general consensus in Finland concerning the importance of equity in education”; similarly, a recent review conducted by the Board of Education concluded that “the country has purposefully aimed to preserve and safeguard an education system based on equality and on the philosophy of lifelong learning” (Nyyssölä, 2005). It therefore makes an especially interesting country to study in the OECD Review of Equity in Education, since it provides a broader range of practices intended to enhance equity than many other countries.

However, equity in education is more than an issue of fairness and distributive justice. In the current period, when many countries are trying to develop their human resources as one element in enhancing growth and international competitiveness, unequal education implies that human potential is being wasted, that some individuals do not have the competencies to perform well in a modern society. This is both a social and an individual problem. From a social standpoint large numbers of under-educated individuals

fail to contribute to national prosperity and may generate social costs — either directly through welfare costs or through their indirect impact on social problems - especially in a country with a generous welfare state like Finland. From an individual standpoint, a lack of adequate schooling and school-based competencies usually leads to lower earnings, higher levels of unemployment, and the many correlates of poor economic conditions including family instability, worse health, greater stresses of several kinds, lower levels of political participation, and a general inability to participate in the richness of a modern society. To be sure, Finland has relatively low levels of poverty by the standards of other developed countries — indeed, it has the lowest incidence of poverty of all the countries analyzed by the Luxembourg Income Study[1] — but there is little question that, in Finland as in most other developed countries, a low level of education is a crucial determinant of being poor.

In addition, educational inequality and its many consequences are almost never completely random. They usually affect some groups more than others, and group inequality may be more serious than inequality that can be attributed to random elements, or to individual attributes like energy, motivation, and ambition that are thought to be randomly distributed within the population. The groups affected by educational inequality also vary among countries: in many countries, especially developing countries, girls have much less access to education than do boys; children of lower income or socio-economic status usually fare less well than their middle-income or middle-class peers; racial and ethnic minorities, or immigrants, may suffer lower levels of schooling; and there may be urban/rural or regional differences that matter. In Finland, the groups for which educational inequality is a problem include immigrants, the subject of Chapter 7 below; individuals in rural areas, one of the subjects of Chapter 5; and children of lower socio-economic status.[2] The differences between boys and girls are largely in favour of girls, except that (as in most developed countries) girls are slightly under-represented in technical subjects at the university level (though over-represented in some stereotypically male areas like law and medicine); otherwise, if there is a gender problem if Finland, it is that boys are more prone to misbehaving ("boys are more wild", as one girl put it) and to dropping out. The indigenous population, the Sami people of the far north, constitute a tiny population within the country — about 0.03% of the total population — and therefore we have not focused on their very particular conditions, except insofar as we examine urban-rural differences and the problems of economic development (in Chapter 5).

Before describing the education system in Finland, a few facts about its economic conditions help understand some of the conditions for education. Finland is in the middle of OECD countries in its GDP per capita, ranking 17th of 30 countries (OECD 2004, Table X2.1). Its unemployment rate of around 10% in mid-2005 is somewhat high by European standards, and the youth unemployment rate of over 20% is even higher; as we will see, this has created problems for young people who go into secondary vocational education. Furthermore, Finland had a serious recession in the early 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union, its most important trading partner, caused exports to drop sharply. Finland has now recovered, by finding new trading partners and investing in research that paid off with the creation of Nokia and other

[1] According the relative poverty measures generated by the Luxembourg Income Study, the proportion of the population that was poor in 2000 was 5.4% and of children was even lower, 2.8%; see www.lisproject.org/keyfigures/povertytable.htm.

[2] This is not the place to review the causal mechanisms underlying the effects of family background on schooling. In the research in progress of the rapporteur, using a U.S. data set (NELS88) with extraordinarily rich data, family background has many different influences on various schooling outcomes, but parental education (suggesting the role of parents as teachers) and parental aspirations for their children are two of the most important; parental occupation is also highly significant, but family income is not. In Finnish research, family background is often measured by parental education or occupation; see Kivinen and Rinne (1995) and Asplund and Leijola (2005), the principal research summaries that we have relied on. In this Note we will refer somewhat vaguely to "socio-economic status" and sometimes to family income or education levels, since we do not have enough Finnish data to disentangle the many different efforts of family life.

high-technology companies. However, the memory of the 1990s is still part of its collective memory, even among teenagers who were quite young during this economic downturn.

In addition, even while Finland is an objective sense a prosperous country and has recovered from its earlier recession, there is a sense among virtually all educators that social problems have increased, resulting in more students with special needs. Most have included problems in families as one of the causes, citing increasing divorce rates; others blame, in vague ways, the pressures and pace of modern life. Certainly Finland is no longer the relatively rural, placid country at the far edge of Europe that it was thirty years ago; it is highly integrated into the global economy and global culture, with all that entails. Relative prosperity has not insulated Finland from the problems of modern life, and many of these show up most forcefully as special needs in schools.

Finland's overall tax rate — about 49.2% of GDP — is relatively high among these countries, generating substantial revenue for a variety of government activities, especially its strong welfare state whose influence on education we describe throughout this Note. However, expenditures for education are not particularly high: in 2001 it spent 3.9% of its GDP on primary and secondary education, just above the OECD country average of 3.6% (OECD 2004, Table B4.1, p. 249). As a result, Finland has not accomplished its remarkable showing on PISA, IALS, and other indicators of educational success simply by spending more than other countries; rather, it has spent its resources for schooling in careful ways that we outline in Chapter 3.

The basic structure of the Finnish education system is outlined in Annex 3. This is a diagram that is used throughout Finland to describe the system, though we have added the probabilities of transition from one stage to another, to the extent we were able to discover these figures. Before age 6, children may be in day care; however, day care is never considered part of education, even though the approach in Finland — sometimes called "educare" (OECD, 2001) — explicitly combines elements of child development and education with care of children while their mothers work. Then a pre-primary or preschool year at age 6 is voluntary, though 96% of all children attend pre-primary education.

Basic or comprehensive education, grades 1 through 9, comprises the years of compulsory schooling. This is the level where some of the most remarkable efforts to enhance equity have taken place, as we describe in Chapter 3. Then a crucial transition takes place, one that depends largely on the grades earned in comprehensive education as well as on some entrance examinations. Admission to general upper secondary schools is competitive, and different schools have different reputations and therefore entrance requirements. Upper secondary schools may be specialized to some degree, particularly in urbanized areas; for example there are schools emphasizing fine arts, science and technology. About 55% of students leaving comprehensive education go on to general upper secondary schooling; 37% go on to secondary vocational education, and in general they are students whose grades are too low to be competitive for general upper secondary education. A small number — approximately 3% — attend a tenth year of the comprehensive schools. This is one of the many second-chance mechanisms in the Finnish system (more fully described in Chapter 4); these students are given an extra year to improve their exam scores, make a vocational choice, or otherwise get back into the mainstream of upper secondary schooling rather than go to work. Finally, about 5% of those completing comprehensive education leave schooling at this stage.

Both general upper secondary education and secondary vocational education take about three years, though upper secondary students may take two to four years and vocational students can enrol in work experience and further vocational programmes before going to work. Normally, students in general upper secondary take a matriculation exam, for competitive entrance to either a university or a polytechnic. (Polytechnics provide a professionally orientated bachelor's degree. Universities, in addition to bachelor's degrees of 3 years, offer a 5 year curriculum that is more likely to be in a conventional academic discipline,

and ends in a master's degree.[3]) Prior to 1998, the vocational track could not lead to tertiary education; however, this practice was changed, and in theory it is possible for any vocational student to enter either a university or, more likely, a polytechnic. Completion of a 3-year vocational qualification is enough to give eligibility for further studies; matriculation exam is not a requirement for VET students. Indeed, vocational education is often described to students as a particularly appropriate route into the polytechnic. In practice, however, 35% of general secondary students go to university, and 45% to polytechnics, whereas these figures for vocational students are 1 - 2% and 15% respectively. So, while the conversion of secondary vocational education from a "terminal" education stage to one with the possibility of further progression is surely more equitable, the possibilities for gaining access to polytechnics from vocational education are now quite small, and to universities almost non-existent. Moreover, while there are some signs of improvements in access to polytechnics, the reverse is true of universities: in universities, the share of VET background students of all new entrants has decreased from 3.9% in 2000/01 to 3% in 2003/04, whereas in polytechnics their proportion has increased from 22% to 29% (the increase, however, is mostly due to adult education.

In addition, Annex 3 allows for movement within tertiary education, from the university to polytechnic for those who find that their interests or taste for more education change, or for polytechnic students who aspire to a higher degree. But again, by and large these transfers work in only one direction, "downward": while xx percent of those starting university transfer to polytechnics, only xx% of those starting in polytechnics manage to transfer to a university.

In many ways, this system of education dates only from the early 1970s, and represents many efforts to develop a more equitable and inclusive structure. Both day care and pre-primary education have become rights for all families, and the supply has expanded. The earlier elementary education included two parallel tracks starting in grade 5; this was replaced by the unitary comprehensive system in grades 1 through 9, without any internal tracking or streaming. In 1985 a system of ability grouping was abolished in comprehensive education, and in 1995 groupings of students were made more flexible and heterogeneous; as a result there is no internal tracking or streaming in comprehensive education. All students have access to upper secondary education in either general or vocational education, and since 1998 this has been a right. The ability of vocational students to apply to universities and polytechnics eliminated one of the "dead-ends" in the system, and creating polytechnics in the early 1990s expanded access to higher education.

Overall, then, Annex 3 describes an education structure without any "dead-ends", or levels from which it is impossible to continue moving upward. This is certainly one element of an equitable schooling system, since terminal programmes are likely to trap certain groups of students — particular those of lower socio-economic status, or immigrants or racial minorities, or sometimes women pursuing non-traditional occupations — at lower levels of schooling. However, the existence of **potential** paths of mobility is only half the battle, since these pathways mean little if the probability of using them is low. In addition, there is less streaming in the system because of the creation of comprehensive schools. Nonetheless, there remain some points where inequality is structured into the system; we will return to this topic in Chapter 4, in considering transitions and access in the Finnish system.

[3] In this Note we do not give much attention to the structure of tertiary education, particularly because there will be a forthcoming OECD review of tertiary education. In the past there has been a formal OECD review of polytechnics (OECD, 2003), which generally praised these institutions for providing greater access to tertiary education in ways that support the economy. In addition, Grubb and Sweet (2005) cited the polytechnics as one of the best illustrations of diversifying tertiary education with potential benefits for equity, for employment, for regional research and economic development, and for new forms of public service that universities often don't provide.

The relative equity of the Finnish system became clearly apparent with the publication of the PISA results of 2000. On a combined reading literacy scale, Finland scored the highest, by a substantial margin. The variation in reading scores was lower than all but a few other countries (Japan, Spain, and Mexico, all countries with much lower averages) and students at the fifth and tenth percentiles scored higher than in any other country except Korea. On the math scale, only Korea did better in a statistical sense, and no other country had a smaller variation; in science, Finland was third only to Japan and Korea, and again had the smallest variation of any country (OECD 2001, Figures 2.4, 2.5, Tables 2.3a, 3.1, 3.3). Furthermore, the effects of socio-economic status on reading scores were lower than any countries except Iceland, Japan, and Korea (Table 8.1). These results were generally repeated for the 2003 PISA results, so the first set of results was not flukes. Other results confirm the relative equity of the Finnish system. In the International Adult Literacy Survey, Finland was at or close to the top on prose, document, and quantitative literacy measures, though the dispersion of scores was high because of differences between younger Finns going through a relatively equitable system, and older Finns who attended schools that were more highly tracked, lacked many opportunities in upper secondary and tertiary areas, and was even more differentiated between urban and rural areas (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000). Finland also has a relatively high upper secondary graduation rate from upper secondary education, while in many countries low graduation rates both harm individuals substantially in the labour market and preclude going on to tertiary education. Of course not all competencies are assessed in the various PISA, IEA and adult literacy surveys – softer skills such as social skills, innovativeness and citizenship are harder to test and not easy to compare across countries. Later in this report we also raise some concerns about upper secondary education. But on the measures which are comparable, outcomes in basic schooling, and in adult literacy are as high-scoring and egalitarian as any country in the world.[4] The puzzle for us was to determine why this is so.

Moreover, equity in basic schooling does appear to have supported equity in society. In some countries worrying evidence has emerged of the way in which the expansion of post-compulsory education has reduced social mobility, because it provides the tools for better-off parents to hand on their own advantages to their children. In Finland, by contrast, a recent study concludes that intergenerational mobility has increased, particularly for cohorts born in the early 1950s and later. This increase is attributable partly to a 'diminished effect of parents' incomes on the ultimate schooling level of their children' (Pekkala and Lucas, 2005.) This is a striking achievement, although we should note that the rapid expansion of tertiary education in the 1990s is too recent a phenomenon to have much bearing on this finding – which primarily concerns longer term changes in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Throughout our visit, we were impressed by the dedication and the openness of the teachers and principals with whom we talked. Most educators in Finland are aware of the PISA results, and they thought it intriguing that Finland should be part of a multi-country study of inequality. They participated actively in trying to construct explanations for what we saw; while some of our questions baffled them,[5] and they did

[4] Note the results of the European Group of Research on Equity of Educational Systems (2003), which has attempted to put together a large numbers of indicators of inequality for European countries. The overall indicator it has devised ranks Finland first among European countries (Table 2, p. 99).

[5] The members of the team of course brought with them the assumptions of their own educational systems, and sometimes these were incomprehensible in the Finnish setting. For example, Josef Neumüller from Austria was surprised at how little apprenticeship there is; but Finland like most countries has never had a dual system of schooling including apprenticeship. Norton Grubb from the U.S. was surprised by the responsibility of municipalities for both education and social services, but his questions about what would guarantee the competence of municipal government were incomprehensible to the Finns, with their serious, consensual approach to governing. In Finland questions about whether families would move among municipalities to escape high tax rates — so-called Tiebout mobility — were also incomprehensible to the Finns, although there is now quite a lot of debate in Finland about the concentration of population in a few growth areas.

not always have answers to quantitative questions, they were certainly open and forthright in their responses.

We were also impressed by the breadth of Finnish education. To be sure, there is substantial recognition of the economic value of schooling, and plenty of rhetoric about the need to prepare students for jobs in the Knowledge Economy — views that in some countries have led to a highly vocationalised and utilitarian approach to schooling (Grubb and Lazerson, 2004; Grubb, 2004). But in Finland education is by design a much broader effort: the guidelines for early childhood programmes stress developing all the competencies of the small child; comprehensive schools include a wide variety of sports, outdoor activities, exchanges with other schools and other countries, drama productions, snow sculptures and — in a country where music is a national pastime — music in many forms. In general upper secondary schooling, the compulsory courses include religion/ethics, philosophy, music, visual arts, and physical education, along with the usual academic subjects, and many schools have a wide variety of elective courses as well. The only exception to the breadth of schooling comes in vocational education, a subject to which we return in Chapter 4.

We were also amazed by the state of school buildings. The schools we visited were uniformly well-maintained, light, airy places, with some thought given to the way space is used in schooling. The best of them, particularly one upper secondary school in Kuusamo, reflect the well-known Finnish sense of design: this school was wonderfully designed, with inviting spaces for students and faculty to meet, well-designed and light-filled classrooms, personal spaces like offices, and a good deal of art by both students and professionals since, as the principal stated, "students learn from things other than classes". We can't prove, of course, that well-designed buildings improve the quality of education or promote equity in outcomes,[6] but such appealing buildings symbolize a commitment to students, to schools as pleasant places to be, and to educational experiences that depend on more than direct instruction.

Finally, we were consistently charmed by the Finnish students. They are even-tempered and self-possessed, perhaps reflecting some national characteristics. They seemed happy to talk with strangers, in a foreign language, about their schooling, its pluses and minuses, and about their plans for the future. In the classes we observed, they were attentive and diligent. Although there have been complaints from teachers about increasing discipline problems,[7] we saw no evidence of this in the schools we visited, aside from the usual boisterous behaviour of adolescent boys — though of course our observations were somewhat artificial. All in all, we suspect that the behaviour of students themselves and the culture the Finns have developed around schooling is part of the reason for the country's strong educational system: School is a serious place, and requires attentiveness and diligence; but school is also a pleasant place where children are surrounded by caring and competent and respectful adults, where students experience a broad variety of activities — music and art, visits to museums and field trips, sports and outdoor activities — and learn a great many things in addition to the standard academic subjects. This creates an environment that brings out the best in students, and is surely part of the reason for the strong results of Finnish education.

1.4 The structure of this report

The remainder of this report analyzes different aspects of the Finnish education system, In Chapter 2 we review some aspects of the Finnish political culture and legal framework that are important for the treatment of equity. Chapter 3 reviews basic or comprehensive schooling, from grades 1 through 9, and

[6] However, there is a literature in the U.S. confirming the beneficial effects on learning of such physical conditions as natural light and adequate space; see Ortiz (2004) and the work of the National Clearinghouse on Educational Facilities.

[7] The Trade Union of Educators has published reports of a survey of teachers, suggesting perceptions of increasing discipline problems.

presents our analysis of the mechanisms — varied, but interdependent and united by a common vision — that explain the equitable results of this level of schooling. Indeed, Finland has developed a way of preventing students from falling behind that is quite impressive, and that could serve as a model for other countries.

Chapter 4 examines schooling after comprehensive education, focusing particularly on the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary, and then the subsequent transition to tertiary education. Here the mechanisms of equity present in basic education are less obvious, and many elements of these transitions — competitive examinations, selective admissions, and a divide between general (or academic) education and vocational education — create the conditions for greater inequality.

Chapter 5 then summarizes a number of mechanisms used in Finland to enhance equity, some of which are drawn from Chapters 3 and 4 and some of which — the role of early childhood education, the great variety of second-chance programmes, the efforts to equalize resources including the resources in urban versus rural areas, and the special issues in data collection and analysis — are new. We also summarize in this chapter the many ways in which the education system benefits from a generous welfare state.

Chapter 6 is concerned with equity in funding. Some of these issues are well-known in Finland, like the problem of equalizing resources across wealthier and poorer municipalities. Others are less well-recognized, because they emerge from other policy decisions in which equity has not been explicitly addressed or acknowledged. In particular, all countries — even prosperous countries like Finland — face constraints on national budgets for social programmes, and the decisions to expand subsidies in one area — like tertiary education — may require cuts (or prevent increases) in other areas, like basic education. The question of who pays for what kinds of education strikes us as central to a number of issues. If these issues are not addressed and resolved explicitly, there are potentially negative consequences.

Chapter 7 examines the experiences and programme for one particular group — immigrants, a group that is currently quite small (representing about 3% of the population) but could increase substantially in the future.

Finally, Chapter 8 presents a series of conclusions and policy recommendations for Finland to consider, drawn from throughout the report. While some of these points are critical of current practices, we should remember that Finland has accomplished a great deal in its education system, that its efforts to enhance equity are among the strongest of any country in the world, and that the challenges we identify are, by and large, those that few countries have managed to resolve successfully. The case of Finland is particularly interesting, then, both for the guidance it provides other countries about approaches to equality, and for its value in identifying equity issues that have been the most resistant to solution.

2. THE POLITICAL CULTURE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Our purpose in this chapter is not to review the institutional details of the political situation in Finland, but rather to highlight those elements that seem important to equity in schooling. Five topics in particular seem particularly relevant: the general political culture of principle and consensus; the importance of a strong welfare state; the federal structure in Finland, with a national or state government delegating a great deal of money and authority to municipality governments with a great deal of authority; the "soft touch" approach to regulation; and the emphasis on institution-building rather than market-like mechanisms.

2.1 Political culture

Finland appears to us — and to the Finns themselves — to have a particular approach to democratic practice. Rather than being based on interest group politics — in which various interest groups battle one another for advantage and political favours — democratic practice in Finland tends to establish basic principles and then try to follow them. Rather than battling among interest groups, political life proceeds more by generating consensus about appropriate actions; as the Country Report described this, "the development of the Finnish comprehensive school has rested on a broad cultural and political consensus about the main lines of national education policy". As another reflection of the politics of consensus, municipal councils are quite large; the council in Kuusamo, a municipality of less than 20,000 people, included 41 individuals. All political parties are included, and the wide representation of views means that the municipal council itself is an appropriate forum for generating consensus. At the school level, around half of schools have their own school boards, with teachers, students, the principal a staff member, and parents represented, and these too operate by consensus. Once consensus has been established, it seems to be relatively stable, rather than political decisions being remade every time there is a change in government; one principal noted that "everything is steady", so that new board members or new principals do not cause major changes. So, unlike the wild fluctuations in educational policy apparent in many other countries, the relative stability of policy has allowed consistent development of education. For example, the practices in comprehensive education that we discuss in Chapter 3 have developed over 30 years, something that would not be possible in a less stable political culture.

One of the principles underlying politics is certainly the value of education, which emerged in the nineteenth century when education was important for individuals to be able to read the Bible. Finland reached a literacy rate of 98% in the 19th century, though this was based largely on the efforts of the church and of the family (Country Report, §1.1). In addition, during the early years of the Finnish Republic before the machinery of government was well-established, faculty members at the University of Helsinki played important roles in planning the nature of the Finnish state; this gave the university and education in general great stature, both for its role in nation-building and as a route of upward mobility. Repeatedly we were told of the importance of education and its priority in the country's spending, and various surveys confirm the satisfaction of most Finns and most young people with the state of the schools (Country Report, §1.3).

Equity and relative equality are other important principles. There seem to be several ways in which Finns conceive of equity. One, illustrated best in comprehensive schooling, is the notion that everyone should have roughly the same education, with diligent efforts (outlined in Chapter 3) to reinforce equality. A second approach has been to establish rights; for example, day care and pre-primary education are rights, and the representatives of students groups regard tertiary education, independence from parents, and therefore public financial support for tertiary education as rights. Finally, there is considerable discussion about equality of opportunity in education, though we were unable to have any extensive discussions about

how equal opportunity might be conceived and measured, given that there are many different conceptions.[8] However, eliminating barriers to education like income, location, and immigrant status is one of the conceptions of equal opportunity; as the Development Plan of the Ministry of Education (2004) states:

Everyone should have an equal right to participate in education according to their abilities and special needs and to develop themselves [regardless] of their financial standing. It is the responsibility of the public authorities to guarantee opportunities for all, irrespective of their age, place or residence, language and economic standing, to participate in high-standard education and training.

2.2 A strong welfare state

As another reflection of the value of equity, the Finns have constructed a strong welfare state, an example of the more general pattern of Nordic countries (Esping-Anderson, 1990). We did not examine the welfare state itself — that would be a subject for another country review — but we did note the many important ways in which a strong welfare state supports equity in Finnish education.[9] It prevents certain barriers to education, like chronic bad health, or housing shortages that require families to move consistently and create instability in schooling. In addition when students have problems in schools, interdisciplinary teams — described in grater detail in the next chapter — can draw on the resources not just of different educators, but also of social workers, representatives of the health and mental health systems, and other supports as necessary. A third major contribution from the welfare state is the variety of support for students in tertiary education (and even some in upper secondary education), so that the costs of education are borne partly by education providers and partly by various agencies of the welfare state. In Finland, it seems to be widely accepted that equity in education requires both educational solutions and supportive non-educational policies. In countries with less well-developed welfare states, educational institutions face challenges, particularly those related to the varying family backgrounds of students, without being able to rely on the resources of such a welfare state.

2.3 The structure of national and municipal government

Finland has a federal system of government with a national and municipal layer. Its 432 municipalities range in size from Helsinki, with over half a million people, to municipalities of as little as 100 people or so in rural areas; most are in the range of 2,000 to 8,000 people. Municipalities levy their own taxes; most of their revenues seem to come from income taxes, at rates varying from 16% to 21%, averaging 18.3%. They also received grants from the national government, designed to equalize the resources among wealthier and poorer municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for providing education as well as a wide variety of social programmes including health, public housing, familial services, and other social services. As a result the Finnish system of federalism is highly decentralised, with municipal governments having a great deal of authority and discretion.

For education, the national government provides about 57% of total revenues, with the other 43% coming from local revenues. In addition, municipal governments receive grants from the national government for health and social welfare programmes. However, these grants can be spent in any way a

[8] Conceptions of equity are surely country-specific and historical, and therefore it becomes difficult to characterize a country's approach to equity. For one of the most thorough investigation of conceptions of equity in a country, see Pole (1978) for the U.S.; see also the five conceptions of equity outlines by the European Group (2003), Table 1. There are also philosophical conception of equity that vary substantially; see, for example, Gutman (1987).

[9] Most analyses of welfare states ignore education completely. One important analyst, Esping-Anderson (1990), clearly views education as part of a broader conception of a state concerned with the welfare of its citizens, but neither he nor any other welfare state theorists of whom we are aware integrate education and the welfare state. For some efforts along these lines for the U.S., see Grubb and Lazerson (2004), Ch. 9.

municipality chooses, so any municipality can decide to spend more or less on education, more or less on health, more or less on social services, within its overall budget constraint. In practice, this means that municipalities control the various sources of revenue that support both education and other social services; multi-disciplinary teams, described in greater detail in the next chapter, can readily draw upon non-educational resources.

To be sure, the great reliance on municipalities to make decisions means that there may be substantial variations in the services provided among municipalities. The presence of so many small municipalities means that there may be diseconomies of small size, including a lack of broad educational offerings in small towns. Indeed, there is some concern at the ministry level that there are too many small municipalities, and there have been various proposals for consolidation and cooperation. However, there is strong local resistance to consolidation since towns want to keep their independence and their identities, and consolidation means some loss of a town's identity; except in the creation of area vocational schools, there hasn't been much success with cooperation or consolidation. We will return to this point, particularly when we note that some kinds of policies — language policies for immigrants, for example — may vary widely. In addition, municipalities are probably not able to cope with certain large problems, especially economic development in rural areas, a topic of Chapter 5. So — while we think that the reliance on municipal governance is one of the strengths of the Finnish system — there are certain areas where it causes problems.

2.4 The "soft touch" approach to regulation and institutional approaches to improvement

An earlier OECD report on early childhood programmes (OECD, 2001) referred to a Finnish "soft touch" approach to regulation, and we think this an apt description. In general, Finland relies on the competence of municipalities and local schools, rather than imposing an elaborate structure of requirements to make sure that local governments are doing their jobs. One clear example is the national core curriculum, which specifies broad guidelines but then leaves the interpretation of these guidelines and the specific approaches to pedagogy to local teachers, relying on their professional judgement. Another example is the Finnish approach to testing. In many countries, standardized tests have been used to measure the "quality" of local schools with incentives for high-performing schools and penalties for schools scoring poorly; we might characterize this as "hard-touch" regulation, where low-performing schools are subject to sanctions as well as the humiliation of being identified as low-performing (a tactic sometimes called "naming and shaming"). In Finland, however, standardized tests are used in a very different way: about 100 schools are randomly selected to take tests intended to monitor the quality of education, and municipalities can "buy into" these tests for their own purposes. However, at both the national and the municipal levels, tests are used only for diagnosis and improvement; the results are not made public at school level, as they are in regimes of "naming and shaming".[10] Information is published on other types of aggregate differences – such as rural-urban and gender differences.

Instead of "hard-touch" regulation, Finland places a greater emphasis on improving the capacity of local schools to respond to educational challenges, as we will see in the next chapter in particular. These are in effect institutional approaches to improving education — that is, approaches to educational improvement that stress direct improvements to the quality of institutions. Finland has largely rejected market-like mechanisms — for example, encouraging parental choice among schools, of which publicizing test scores would be an element, or the creation of a large sector of private schools and universities that compete with public schooling.[11] The institutional approach stresses consistent efforts to improve the

[10] We understand that there has been a recent legal challenge to this approach in Finland.

[11] The local authorities must assign a school place to each pupil in compulsory education age, and the vast majority go to those schools. However pupils may also apply to other schools, and those schools may admit them if there is capacity and at the discretion of the education provider.

quality of schools, from adequate funding for buildings (mentioned above) to high-quality preparation of teachers to the creation of conditions within schools — small schools, small classes, and a variety of support — that facilitate high-quality instruction. One result is that variation in quality among schools is relatively low, reflected for example in low variation among schools in PISA scores, and similarly there have been efforts to keep the quality of universities relatively uniform.

The various dimensions of Finland's political structure and culture we have reviewed in this section will continue to come up in subsequent analyses. One of the consistent features of the Finnish educational system is that equity is not a question of one specific practice or another, but of a complex of practices interacting with and facilitating each other. In this complex of practices, the political and legal framework for schooling proves to be exceedingly important.

3. COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION IN FINLAND: THE MULTIPLE MECHANISMS OF ENHANCING EQUITY

In Finland, basic or comprehensive education encompasses grades 1 through 9. At this level equity has been interpreted as equal access to an equal education, meaning that there is a national framework specifying what all children should learn in grades 1 to 9, along with a series of practices that reinforce equality of outcomes, and a lack of streaming or tracking. In comprehensive education one can most easily see a unique Finnish approach to equity, in the sense of interventions used when students are falling behind their peers or behind grade-level norms. These practices are, as far as we can tell, quite unique, though several of them could be more widely adopted in other countries. Furthermore, these have been developed in a relatively short period of time, since the early 1970s when a highly streamed elementary system was replaced by comprehensive schooling, and without very high expenditures.

The Finns are well aware of the PISA results, and there has been some effort within the country to understand why outcomes are so equitable. The most prevalent narrative we heard gives credit to high teacher quality, a standard curriculum, the incorporation of various welfare services, and an overall commitment to equality. In addition, a report co-sponsored by OECD and the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Jyväskylä noted that the PISA results have been both a source of "great joy" and a "somewhat puzzling experience". It attributes the PISA results to a web of interconnected factors including high levels of interests and engagement in reading, stimulated by comprehensive schools as well as libraries; communication between parents and teachers about social issues and cultural events; the goal of equalization in comprehensive schools; small among-school variation in quality, and therefore relatively equal opportunities to learn; strong teacher preparation; curricular flexibility and pedagogical freedom; and multiple supports for individual schools (Valijarvi *et al.*, 2002).

3.1 Equity practices in comprehensive education

However, we want to stress a set of interlocking and relatively consistent practices that we think are responsible for relatively equitable performance in comprehensive or basic education. The first line of attack against inequality is the teacher himself or herself, who is responsible for identifying students falling behind their peers or their grade norms. Then the teacher works with such students one-on-one, or sometimes in groups of 2 to 4, to correct the particular problem in a particular subject that students experience. This happens sometimes after school, sometimes before school — depending on schedules and bus timetables — and sometimes during the lunch period. It may often take place during the school day, since a good deal of class time is typically involved in small-group work and individual work, freeing the teacher to work intensively with some students.

The second line of attack is the teacher's assistant — sometimes called a school assistant since she or he works with several teachers within a school. This person is not fully trained as a teacher, but someone with a year of tertiary education, who works under the direction of teachers. Sometimes the assistant sits beside a student, providing answers to questions and motivation for those whose attention flags — a practice sometimes called "push-in" in the U.S., but rarely used. Sometimes the teacher's assistant works one-on-one, or in small groups at other times. But — unlike a large number of tutoring programmes — the teacher's assistant is always working directly under the teacher's direction, on the material of the regular class, and on specific topics on which students need help.

The third line of attack is the special needs teacher. This is a teacher credentialed for the comprehensive school (grades 1 through 9), but with one year's additional preparation in various learning problems and special education. Again, in consultation with the teacher, the special needs teacher works one-on-one or in small groups, with students who have not been adequately helped by the first two lines of attack. The special needs teachers usually concentrate on language (Finnish or Swedish) and on math. We

stress that, while the special needs teacher is credentialed to teach special education, the two are distinct. Special **education** includes about 1.8% of student with severe disabilities, who attend special schools, and another 4.4% with less serious disabilities who are mainstreamed; both these groups are specifically diagnosed. A third group — about 17% of pupils according to Ministry officials, or roughly 20% by local estimates — are special **needs** students who are not specifically diagnosed but simply need additional help to keep up. This third group is the focus of special needs teachers.

A fourth approach is the multi-disciplinary team, for students whose weak progress is associated with wider home or social problems. The team consists of the teacher, the special needs teacher, the school's counsellor, and several individuals from outside the school — a psychologist, a social worker from the department of social services, representatives of the health and mental health systems as necessary, individuals from the public housing system if that seems to be part of the problem. The multi-disciplinary team therefore has access to a much broader array of services and supports, especially those of the welfare state, and through the members of the team the school has the ability to identify and correct any problem that is beyond the ability of the school itself to address. One of the underlying ideas is that if non-school problems can be solved by other professionals, then teachers are free to concentrate on instruction.

Overall, these approaches to minimizing students falling behind display two features: intensification, or providing more time by more instructors; and alternative approaches (rather than "more of the same"), particularly in efforts of special needs teachers and the multi-disciplinary teams. But they do so in consistent ways, working with the classroom teacher on the specific subjects students are having trouble with, rather than relying on a grab-bag of after-school programmes and tutoring efforts randomly distributed by grade levels and subjects.

Certain features of the Finnish education system and its welfare state facilitate this multi-layered approach. Schools are small — often around 200 students in a primary school, only rarely more than 300 — so that other personnel like school counsellors, special needs teacher, school assistants, and the principal can come to know all students and participate in monitoring their progress and behaviour. Children are surrounded by adults who know them well, and the large, anomic schools found in other countries are virtually unknown.

In addition, there is much greater stability of students and teachers in the Finnish system. Teachers do not move around schools a great deal, as they do in some countries, partly because the differences among schools — among "bad" schools, usually in urban areas, and "good" schools to which teachers try to move — are not that great. Most schools try to keep teachers with the same group of students for several years — sometimes 2, 3, or even 6 years, often depending on the preferences of teachers. Even in lower secondary education (grades 7 - 9), when students have a variety of teachers for different subjects, there is a "class teacher" who stays with a class for all three years, and takes responsibility for monitoring the progress of students in that class. There is less mobility among students too, partly because families do not experience the housing problems that might contribute to movement among low-income students. In addition, parents are apparently reluctant to move during the school year, respecting the student's need for stability over their own locational preferences. Stability and continuity contribute to teachers knowing students better, again facilitating the identification of any learning problems.

Teacher training is also thorough. There are, to be sure, some uncredentialed teachers, about 13% of those in Finnish-speaking schools and 22% in Swedish schools, many of them in rural areas. (A concentration of uncredentialed teachers in districts with low-income students is not the dominant pattern.) To become credentialed, class teachers, who mainly teach in grades 1-6, must be admitted to teacher training programmes within universities, in a competitive selection process where only about 10% of applicants gain entrance. Then candidates earn the equivalent of master's degrees, –typically a 5-year course of study, studying both the variety of disciplines taught in grades 1 - 9 as well as pedagogical

courses. Teaching practice is interspersed with classroom practice, in a series of internships - placements with different pedagogical problems — typically one period in each of the four years of preparation, in either a local school or a university-sponsored teacher-training school. One principle of teacher preparation is that experience in the classroom, guided by a mentor-teacher, provides new teachers with the ability to cope with a variety of classroom issues, from students performing at different levels to the special needs of immigrant children to more difficult cases of foetal alcohol syndrome or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder requiring evaluation by special education. Another is that teachers are prepared to become independent professionals, with judgment and expertise in both subject matter and pedagogical alternatives, rather than automatons delivering a teacher-proofed curriculum; as the Ministry of Education explained the purpose of pedagogical studies, "their aim is to produce teaching professionals who are able to develop their own work and their working community".[12] It's hard to imagine teachers serving such a crucial role in addressing unequal progress without this intensive preparation.

Very similar principles apply to the training of specialist subject teachers who teach in the upper grades of basic education and in upper secondary education Pedagogical studies and classroom preparation is also included in the training of these teachers.

Indeed, the Finns have created a virtuous circle surrounding teaching. High status and good working conditions — small classes, adequate support from counsellors and special needs teachers, a voice in school decisions, low levels of discipline problems, high levels of professional autonomy — create large pools of applicants, leading to highly selective and intensive teacher preparation programmes. This in turn leads to success in the early years of teaching, relative stability of the teacher workforce, and success in teaching (of which the PISA results are only one example), and a continuation of the high status of teaching. Indeed, the profession of teacher is now the most popular among upper secondary students, even more popular than careers in IT, medicine, corporations (Country Report §1.4) All of this has occurred without high salaries — teacher salaries in 2000 ranked 17th out of 29 OECD countries, for example (OECD 2002, Chart D6.1). The continuation of this virtual circle depends on several interlocking factors including strong teacher preparation and good working conditions, so this is not easily achieved. But its benefits for students, and specifically for equity in schooling, are powerful.

Finally, the involvement of the strong Finnish welfare state is crucial to the success of education, in several ways. Nowhere did we hear of students unable to attend because of chronic health problems; these are the responsibility of a comprehensive health system. Students with mental health problems, or family troubles, have the resources of the mental health and social welfare system. Public housing takes care of housing needs, reducing the mobility of students. Good quality school lunches are provided free of charge. The ability of multi-disciplinary teams to call on the resources of the welfare state as well as the educational system comes from a special governance structure: block grants for both education and social services are allocated to municipalities, with responsibilities for a wide array of social programmes including schooling. Therefore municipalities command all the resources necessary for these teams, and the mix of educational and non-educational resources necessary to support any one student comes from the same source. In contrast, the coordination of multiple services is difficult to achieve in many countries, sometimes because they have weak welfare states and sometimes because the services that are complementary to education are provided by other agencies, with independent budgets and other priorities, and the required coordination is lacking. The Finns take it as obvious that both high-quality schooling and co-ordination with non-school services are necessary for equity.

[12] Armi Mikkola, "Teacher Training in Finland", Ministry of Education, Aug. 8, 2004. There are a number of documents stressing the professional autonomy of teachers, including some by the Trade Union of Education ("The Teacher's Professional Ethics" and "Ethical Opinions"), the Ministry of Education ("Teacher Education Development Program" and other briefing materials), and the universities providing teacher education.

These various components of the Finnish efforts are self-reinforcing, in obvious ways. Teachers couldn't provide such individual attention to students' progress if they didn't have strong preparation, or if classes were too large. They couldn't count on the reinforcements of school assistants, special needs teachers, or counsellors if those positions were not provided. Schools couldn't rely on the resources of health and mental health services, housing, and social welfare if there weren't a strong welfare state with flexible allocation of resources from municipalities, and multi-disciplinary teams could not function if teachers did not initially identify students in need of greater support. And of course it helps enormously that Finland is a country with a low level of inequality to begin with, second only to Denmark among the countries in the Luxembourg Income Study. But of course Finland has taken steps to minimize the extent of income inequality, both through an active welfare state as well as a culture that seems to discourage large inequalities in earnings.

To be sure, these intertwining mechanisms of equity do not always work as envisaged. Schools with lower levels of fiscal support complain about having fewer special needs teachers, or having to share counsellors among schools. Rural schools often have problems maintaining these mechanisms of equity, because their populations have been declining and schools closing, and because they may lack funding. As we will see in the next chapter, the extension of these equity mechanisms to upper-secondary and tertiary education is generally lacking. But these forms of incomplete implementation should not undermine our central conclusion: Finnish comprehensive education has devised a more consistent and comprehensive approach to preventing students from falling behind than any other country we know of.

One indicator of the success of Finnish practices is, of course, the PISA findings. Another is that virtually everyone completes lower-secondary education — around 99% of the cohort. Nationally, only about 50-90 pupils drop out and 200-300 pass the compulsory education age without successfully completing their education. Furthermore, after grade 9 a small number (3%) go on to year ten in comprehensive education, but the vast majority go on to upper secondary education of some sort, and only 5% drop out. In this sense — that virtually everyone completes lower secondary schooling — the Finnish system is remarkably equitable.

However, the comprehensive schools have not managed to eliminate inequality. Inequality among students and among schools is small relative to other countries, but it still isn't negligible. In the PISA results, students at the 75th percentile scored 622 on an 800-point scale, 126 points higher than those at the 25th percentile; those at the 90th percentile scored 242 points higher than those at the 10th percentile. In an assessment of the national curriculum, the differences in subject-specific tests between the first and the fourth quartile of schools ranged from 13 to 21 percentage points (Country Report, §7.2). Furthermore, the usual causes of inequality persist: those scoring lower than others tend to have parents with lower levels of education, lower levels of income, lower measures of socio-economic status in general, are more likely to be immigrant, and are more likely to live in rural areas.[13] Therefore some students have an advantage over others in the competitive process of applying to upper secondary education, and — as we shall see in the next chapter — the relatively equitable approach to schooling in comprehensive education is substantially weakened as we examine higher levels of schooling,

[13] See for example the analysis of family background in the PISA reports, and Asplund and Leijola (2005), which summarizes a large literature (mostly in Finnish) about the effects of family background; see also an older report, Kivinen and Rinne (1995).

4. TRANSITION, ACCESS, AND SELECTION: UPPER SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

As students progress up the Finnish system of education, the mechanisms for reducing inequality that are so powerful in comprehensive education fade, and other processes that create inequality become more important. This happens particularly at two stages: at the transition from comprehensive school to upper-secondary education; and at the transition from upper secondary education into tertiary education. We examine each of these in turn.

We also have concerns about equity within tertiary education, which we outline briefly. As part of a subsequent examination of tertiary education in Finland to be carried out by OECD, Finland has recently completed a background report on tertiary education, and a country visit is now being planned. Against this background we have chosen in this report simply to highlight a set of concerns to inform the more detailed investigation in the subsequent OECD study.

4.1 The transition to upper secondary education

In theory, if a country created "perfect" equality among groups of students by the end of grade 9, then it might be justified in worrying less about inequality at subsequent levels of schooling.[14] However, as we noted at the end of the pervious chapter, schooling in Finland at the end of grade 9 is not completely equal or equitable, even though it is substantially more equal than in other countries. Then a number of factors assure that the process of transition between years 9 and 10 is not equitable, and that further inequities are created through upper secondary education.

When students are in lower secondary school (Grades 7 - 9), they typically take a course in guidance and counselling, which usually meets about once a week for an hour or so. This class is taught by a school counsellor, who is also part of the multidisciplinary team and is available in various other informal ways to students; she is usually a certificated teacher with one additional year devoted to studies in careers and counselling. Students meet in groups for general information sessions, and also meet with counsellors one-on-one or in small groups to discuss their specific interests. The purpose of such guidance and counselling is prepare students to make well-informed choices at the end of lower-secondary schooling; students learn both about occupational alternatives and about the schooling options open to students to reach those occupations, so they can make preliminary choices about the schooling-occupation paths they take after comprehensive school. But students argued to us that the quality and adequacy of these counselling classes varied enormously. Some students said they were adequately prepared, but others feel that the decisions that had to be made at the end of grade 9 came without much warning; as one said, "We were just in a couple of classes, and then we had to decide". Our concern, then, is that guidance and counselling vary enough, in both the quantity of support provided and perhaps in the quality of counselling efforts, so that some students are left unprepared to make rational decisions about the next phase of their schooling.

In 2003, Finland published a major evaluation of educational guidance and counselling. This report concluded that there were serious shortcomings regarding access to educational guidance and counselling. The report found that adequate support is not available to all students, that monitoring of the guidance systems was weak, and that there was inadequate support for potential drop-outs from school, social

[14] There's a similar hope sometimes expressed by advocates of early childhood education: If strong ECE could equalize the school readiness of all children, then it would not be necessary to worry about equity issues after that since students could make their own choices wisely and would advance their schooling based on their own motivation, ambition, and preferences. The contrary model, to which we subscribe, is that in a society in which inequality is pervasive and takes many forms, there need to be continuous policies to assure equity, rather than policies that end at a distinct point.

workers or psychologists (Numminen and Kasurinen, 2003). Our own informal examination chimes with the conclusions of this evaluation. The national board of education has we understand started, with effect from 2003, a development project to implement reforms in this area, and we would strongly encourage them in doing so.

In addition, the transition to upper-secondary involves, in the first instance, a "choice" between two very different sub-systems of secondary education. Those who go into general upper secondary education are prepared in a wide variety of academic subjects, as well as a broad array of other subjects and activities. As Annex 3 clarifies, about 3 – 4% of these students drop out before completing grade 12; 35% go on to university, and 45% go on to a polytechnic.

The alternative is to 'choose' secondary vocational education, where the current system was introduced in reforms implemented between 1999 and 2001. It was explained to us that these reforms were intended to extend the range of the qualifications, while also increasing on-the-job learning and improving the correspondence of education to working life requirements. Vocational qualifications can be completed in the form of institutional (school-based) education and training, apprenticeship training or as competence-based qualifications. On-the-job learning is based on a written contract between the employer and the education provider, and is only pursued when it is judged that the employer has facilities adequate to provide the necessary training. The vocational programmes include 120 credits: 90 credits of vocational studies, 20 credits of general studies, and 10 credits of elective studies. All vocational qualifications include at least 20 credits of on-the-job learning. A Finnish credit represents 40 hours of work, including both contact teaching and independent study. Studies generally take three years. Around half of the VET providers offer the option of taking the whole upper secondary syllabus.

Students "choosing" secondary vocational education are more likely than general upper secondary students to drop out before completion, and 10% of them do so without entering any alternative type of training or education — and dropouts are particularly likely to have a difficult time in the labour market. (We were informed that dropout rates in vocational education were falling, but we have not seen the data). Often, apparently, students are not admitted to the vocational field of study they want, so they find themselves in an area for which they have little interest, again contributing to dropping out. (For some popular subjects, such as 'Health and Social Services' and 'Leisure and Physical Education' there are more than two applicants for every place). Only 15% of vocational students go on to polytechnics, and 1 - 2% manage to get into universities. Our impression, gained from visits to institutions and talking to staff and students – is that the jobs for which vocational education prepares its students are entry-level jobs with relatively mediocre prospects for advancement; they tend to be in occupations associated with the older jobs of the Industrial Revolution and the newer jobs in the service economy — like workers in hotels and restaurants, cosmetologists and beauticians, health care aides, nursing assistants, bus and truck drivers, construction workers, plumbers, carpenters and mechanics — rather than the knowledge-based jobs associated with the Knowledge Economy.

The Ministry's view is that our impression is erroneous, since as they put it, "the qualifications cover all the sectors from health care to technology, from social services to ITC, media and art fields". However we have seen no quantitative evidence to support the view that a substantial percentage of vocational students are being trained for knowledge-based, or high-status jobs.

The prospects of vocational education are made even worse by the fact that high unemployment (8% countrywide) is even higher (about 22%, according to OECD figures) for young people under 25, so that 18-19 year olds completing vocational programmes face difficulties in finding jobs, and the match between jobs they do find and the areas they have studied is not particularly high. At the end of 2003, the average unemployment rate for those who had obtained their vocational qualifications between 2000 and 31.7.2003 was 16%. About 50% of these young people were employed, about 12% studied full-time, 10% studied

alongside work for another diploma and 12% were otherwise occupied (e.g. national service, maternity or sick leave, and training not subordinate to the educational administration). Unemployment rates for those with vocational qualifications were in fact lower than for those with general upper secondary education, but much higher than for those with polytechnic or university qualifications. As a result, the earnings benefits compared to those who have just completed comprehensive education are small, and become negative with experience (Country Report, §5.3; Asplund and Leijola, 2005). Instead of working, many of them spend the next period of time completing compulsory national services, or trying to accumulate experience in labour markets that will help them in finding an "adult" job when they become old enough. We suspect, given the period of delay between completing a vocational programme and access to an "adult" job, that the proportion of vocational students who find work in the area for which they have been trained is relatively low, and this would also undercut the economic benefits of such programmes. Although we were subsequently assured that the information is available, the informants we met in Finland did not appear to know the proportion of vocational students finding related employment, so this kind of data may not be regularly generated for diagnostic purposes — for example to see if there are fields where students are more likely to be employed in the area for which they have been trained, and relatively close to the time they graduate.

Overall, then, students at the end of grade 9 have a "choice" between a high-status general option providing a variety of subjects and permitting realistic access to both university and polytechnics, and a low-status option with few prospects for tertiary education, mediocre employment prospects, and highly limited curriculum.[15] Ministry officials assured us that vocational programmes were not low status and did not necessarily lead to low status jobs. We were also assured that there were positive evaluations available in Finnish of the vocational education system. Clearly we are in no position to assess such evaluations. However it was clear to us that vocational education is indeed low status in the eyes of prospective students: one group of students said it was for "dummies", and another claimed it was for "lazy people"; another student said that "everyone who goes there will become a car repairer". Vocational education suffers from another problem: students who choose that route must choose a specific occupational area. Many students said that they were simply not ready to make an occupational choice, and for this reason alone would opt for general upper secondary. While it is possible to change the occupational area after starting, this may delay graduation. All in all, the mediocre prospects of vocational education, and the difficulty of choosing an occupation at such an early age, make it a distinctly second-class form of schooling.

Admissions to general upper secondary education come through a competitive process in which grades in comprehensive education are important; in addition, some competitive schools require an entrance examination. Such selection mechanisms are virtually always affected by different aspects of family background, including the effects of higher parental aspirations and better knowledge of tertiary education. The biggest difference is between students getting into general upper secondary (55% of all grade 9 students) versus the remaining 37% of students who have no choice except to go to vocational education (or to go to year ten, as 3% of students do, or drop out, which happens to about 5%. But even within the group that gains entry to general upper secondary education, there is substantial variation in the quality and reputation of different secondary schools, with some requiring very high marks (like a school we visited in Helsinki, with an average score of 9 on a scale of 4 to 10) while others have much lower standards. Finnish data confirm that parental education in particular affects learning; while equality in access to upper secondary school has improved, socio-economic background and parental education in particular continues to influence the outcomes (Asplund and Leijola, 2005) — except perhaps when a municipality has only one upper secondary school (Country Report, §7.3).

[15] The difference between general and vocational education is decidedly not caused by funding, since the funding per student in vocational education is 7 616 euros compared to 4 444 euros in general upper secondary education; see Tihonen (2005).

Unfortunately, the inequalities that arise in upper secondary education are all too familiar from other countries. Competitive selection mechanisms in upper secondary education — in contrast to the practice in comprehensive schooling, where students generally attend their neighbourhood schools and a more nearly likely to be allocated randomly to different schools [16]— are prevalent in many countries and create one form of inequality. The sharp differences between high-status academic programmes and low-status vocational programmes have been replicated in most countries, except for Germany, Austria, and Denmark where dual systems combine school-based learning and serious work-based learning (or apprenticeships).

Finally, the mechanisms of promoting equity that are prominent in comprehensive schooling — the support given to students falling behind by teachers, school assistants, special needs teachers, and multidisciplinary teams — appear to be much less present in upper-secondary schooling. In vocational upper secondary education provision is by law made for those with disabilities. However in general upper secondary education the lack of special needs education has been recognised as a problem. The Development Plan for 2003-08 states that "the need for special-needs education will be studied and legislative measures will be taken, if necessary." We would encourage this scrutiny. We did meet one special-needs teacher working in a school which incorporated both a general upper secondary and a vocational school at the same site, a rare example. In practice she worked largely with the vocational students when they fell behind in their coursework, although she also worked with a couple of academic students. While her efforts were modelled on practices in comprehensive education, she knew of no other upper-secondary special needs teacher, and her own position was threatened by budget constraints. There is not to our knowledge any overall information about the use of school assistants, special-needs teachers, or multi-disciplinary teams in upper secondary schools, though there is clear need for them because of dropout rates, especially from vocational education. While there are some second-chance programmes for dropouts reviewed in Chapter 5, in general their prospects in the current labour market are poor.

Recently there have been some projects, funded by European Social Fund monies, to reduce the dropout rate. These have concentrated on personal counselling; smaller groups; using more practical approaches; and using teaching methods that take into account the learning difficulties of students; and using multi-professional teams called "student support teams". In many ways, these look like the practices of comprehensive schools. What is unclear to us is how widespread these projects are and why they are funded from ESF funds instead of normal grant funds. At the very least, however, these projects suggest that the idea of extending the support services of comprehensive schools to upper secondary has already been established.

Overall, then, the transition from comprehensive schooling into upper secondary education marks a point where relative equality among students, enhanced by the wide variety of practices documented in Chapter 2, gives way to much more inequitable schooling, usually lacking the mechanisms of equity prominent in comprehensive education, and caused by competitive entrance procedures and the wide gulf between academic programmes and low-status vocational programmes. In the final chapter of this Note, we will make a series of recommendations designed to address these various sources of inequality.

4.2 The transition to tertiary education

When students complete upper secondary education, they again confront a point of choice, where they can choose among universities; polytechnics, created in the early 1990s to provide greater options in tertiary education and to aggregate a large number of small, low-status vocational programmes that

[16] The PISA data confirm that there are lower inter-school differences in Finland than in any other country; see OECD (2001), Figure 2.5. This could not be possible if there were strong differences in family background among schools, from which we infer that Finnish comprehensive schools are much more similar to one another than those in most other OECD countries.

suffered from small scale and varying quality (OECD, 2003; Grubb and Sweet, 2005); employment, not necessarily a strong option in an economy with high youth unemployment; fulfilling mandatory national services; or trying to gain experience in the labour market. There are also various second-chance options that we will outline in Chapter 5.

As with the transition to upper secondary schooling, the transition to tertiary education is affected by different types of inequalities. We heard fewer complaints about inadequate guidance and counselling, compared to that provided in lower secondary schooling[17] However we understand that the national evaluation of guidance counselling published in 2002 criticised the adequacy of guidance in both vocational and general upper secondary schools. Admission to universities and polytechnics is partly based on a matriculation exam taken in year 12, (alongside entrance tests and sometimes other criteria) and these are again the kind of competitive admissions processes that usually favour students of higher socio-economic status. Furthermore, many students enrol in private classes to prepare for these exams; this of course requires money, and favours students from higher-income families. So it is not surprising that well-known effects of family background show up in the admissions rates to universities and to polytechnics. As Asplund and Leijola (2005) summarized the literature, students from families with higher incomes and higher parental education levels are more likely to enrol in tertiary education.[18] Furthermore, the university is the much preferred option, with polytechnics a second choice for those with poor results in matriculation and university entrance examinations; roughly, then students from well-educated white collar families end up in universities, while polytechnics are more likely to be attended by students from working-class families. We have already mentioned the different rates of access to universities by students from secondary general rather than vocational programmes, which are themselves affected by family background. Finally, we are concerned with differential rates of dropping out of tertiary institutions: the rate of dropping out of 5-year degrees in universities is about 25%, according to OECD statistics; but we were told that the rate of dropping out of polytechnics is more substantial. This is a situation in which higher-status students are more successful in gaining admission to universities — with higher completion rates, greater prospects in the labour market, and options to go on to post-graduate and professional education — rather than to polytechnics with their higher dropout rates, lower rewards in the labour market, and relatively fewer options to move into professional education.

One question related to equity that always arises in tertiary education is the issue of financial support for students. While there are countries with strong traditions of parents paying for their offspring's tertiary education — the U.S., for example — Finland (alongside a number of other countries) are not among them. Indeed, the representatives of students organizations with whom we met insisted that individuals be considered independent of their parents at age 18, so that any fiscal mechanism that linked students to their parents — for example, relying on parental contributions to pay for tertiary education, or varying student support according the income of parents — was anathema. Others argued that their parents were not necessarily knowledgeable; as one said, "I would never ask my mom for guidance about my studies — she doesn't know how the current system works". Fortunately, Finnish students can rely on a large number of different subsidies including free tuition from the education sector; subsidized health and mental care from health providers; subsidized housing, meals, and transportation from various other Ministries; and general income support from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The grant ranges from 22 to 259 euros a

[17] However, the national questionnaire completed by Finland for the OECD study of career information, guidance and counselling identified a lack of adequate career services as partly responsible for longer transition times into tertiary education and longer completion times; see Kasurinen and Vuorinen (2002), p. 17. (There was no country visit to Finland, however.) In addition, the Ministry of Education's (2004) plans for 2003 - 08 include improving the quality and availability of guidance counselling (see p. 38).

[18] The background report for the OECD review of tertiary education also presents some similar statistics on the effects of parental education on tertiary enrolment; see *OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Finland* (2005).

month, depending on student income, age, and housing and marital status. The housing supplement is 80 per cent of a moderate rent, with a maximum of 252 euros a month after recent reforms. The student loan is a normal bank loan guaranteed by the State. The loan bears interest at the market rate and the monthly sum is up to a maximum of 300 euros per month. Indeed, the variety of subsidies, the result of a tertiary education system located within a welfare state, was both amazing and bewildering. This system of support, with small variations, covers all post-compulsory education, not just tertiary education.

But while the level and variety of subsidies seemed remarkable to some in the visiting team, student representatives felt that they are inadequate and should be increased. They cited numerous cases — apparently a majority — of students who have to work in order to afford university or polytechnic, with some of them dropping out as a result of working too much. According to a Statistics Finland Survey, over half of students in higher education were working, 40% of them full-time. About half the student workers considered that the work was related to and supported their studies. (There is, as far as we could find out, no systematic research confirming the negative effects of low subsidies and excessive work.) Several of them described a flexible pattern of interspersing work and study, rather than thinking of university studies as a precursor to work. This is similar to developments in other countries and suggests a new stage of life, between adolescence and adulthood, with some of the characteristics of each. Whether intermittent work and schooling is beneficial to students over the long run, or whether it is due to preferences or to economic necessity, are unknown, and might be a question for the forthcoming OECD review of tertiary education to consider.

On the one hand, the amount of these subsidies is clearly helpful to equity, since low-income students need not worry about having to come up with the resources that students in other countries do. On the other hand, the size of these subsidies is troublesome because most students come from middle-and upper-income families, and providing public subsidies to well-off families is not helpful to equity. (We do recognize, of course, that linking students to their family incomes is precisely what students wanting independence from parents do not want.) So the equity effects of free tuition and substantial subsidies are troubling

As we have mentioned before, we do not intend in this Note to examine tertiary education in any detail, or make extensive recommendations, partly because our visits precluded us from visiting tertiary institutions, and partly because a fuller OECD review of tertiary education will be taking place later in 2005. However, we want to put five issues related to equity in tertiary education on the agenda for Finns to consider, and for the OECD review to examine. One is the nature of dropping out, and how it is affected by various factors including family background, immigrant status, or the need (or desire) to work excessive hours. A second is potentially related to drop-out: the kinds of student support and monitoring that are so prominent in comprehensive education, and that dwindle in upper secondary schools, appear to be almost non-existent in universities and polytechnics, where counselling is marginalized, there is not enough tutoring, not enough monitoring of progress, and apparently inadequate access to mental health programmes. For example, those students who resisted any notion of making them dependent on their parents still wanted a better system of guidance and counselling, to turn to for advice and comfort in difficult periods. A third issue is, of course, the magnitude of total subsidies by income group or other measure of family background — to investigate our suspicion that these subsidies go predominantly to middle- and upper-income families.

Fourth, a more complex issue involves the equity effects of creating polytechnics in the early 1990s. One rationale for creating these non-university alternative was the equity rationale, that they would open up access to tertiary education to “non-traditional” students who would otherwise have no access: students whose parents did not attend college; low-income students, particularly those from rural areas who could not afford to leave home; immigrant students; and a variety of students discouraged by the large sizes of universities and their overly-abstract curriculum, and who might feel more at home in smaller and more

practical polytechnics. However, whether the creation of polytechnics has in fact increased access from these groups is an empirical issue, rather than one whose answer can be assumed, since it is possible that the expansion of polytechnics simply provided more places for middle-income students. In England, for example, the expansion of tertiary education did increase the access of "new students" into tertiary education, since the proportion of students from the bottom three social classes attending university increased from 1.5% to 18.2% between 1940 and 2000. But the proportion from the top three social classes increased from 8.4% to 47.8%, so the absolute difference in attendance rates increased over this period; overall the steady expansion of higher education has benefited higher classes substantially more than lower classes (Chevalier and Conlon, 2003, Table 1). Similarly in Finland, one would expect that the elimination of streaming in comprehensive schooling, the expansion of upper secondary schooling, and the expansion of both universities and polytechnics would have reduced the effect of family background on children's economic and social status; however, there is so far little evidence to shed light on such developments, and many of the effects seem to have been reduced only by trivial amounts (Asplund and Leijola, 2005). Our point is that expanding tertiary education while simultaneously differentiating it may not lead to equitable outcomes, unless the process of access and selection is also made equitable.

Finally, there have been proposals in Finland to create a top tier of universities to compete with some of the major international universities— Oxford and Cambridge, Harvard and Stanford, the French *Grandes Ecoles*. This proposal, similar to the recent proposal to create elite *Spitzenuniversitaeten* in Germany, is a way of further subdividing the tertiary education system, much as the creation of polytechnics was earlier. But both the Finns and the OECD review should consider carefully what such elite universities would do to equity. Our own guess — based on what happens in countries like Great Britain, the U.S., and Australia, which effectively have a top tier of research universities with a second tier of less prestigious, less selective, and less economically rewarding "regional" or "comprehensive" universities — is that the elite universities would draw students of higher socio-economic status, leaving the less-prestigious universities with "weaker" and more non-traditional students, higher dropouts, and lower status all around. The decision to constrain the differences among universities, as Germany has done, or to expand the variety of universities, as the English-speaking countries have done, is a social choice with powerful implications for equity. In the spirit of the Finnish preference for equity, deliberation, and decision-making by consensus, Finland should not further fragment its tertiary system unless it has carefully considered the equity effects and potential mechanisms of enhancing equity within a differentiated structure.

Overall, then, the high levels of equality promoted within comprehensive education do not extend to upper secondary and to tertiary education. The transitions themselves create equity problems, the practices within these sectors are less supportive, and the result is that familiar inequalities — by social class, by immigrant status, and by regions of the country — become stronger.[19] So efforts to enhance equity need to be consistently applied as students continue moving up an educational system, rather than being applied only at lower levels.

[19] See generally Asplund and Leijola (2005). Our hypothesis, for which we could not find the appropriate data, is that the variation in learning expands from age 15 (the PISA data) to age 18 (the end of upper secondary schooling) to the early and middle 20s. Such comparisons would need to apply standardized assessments like PISA to cross-sections of older populations, so as to compensate for the changing composition of students at higher levels of education.

5. TOOLS TO ADDRRESS EQUITY ISSUES SYSTEMATICALLY

By now it should be clear that Finland has developed a variety of mechanisms to create greater equity in its schools, particularly in comprehensive education. In this section, however, we try to be more precise about the variety of equity mechanisms that Finland has pursued including some — early childhood education, second-chance programmes, urban/rural differences, and the roles of data and evaluation— that have been only briefly mentioned in prior chapters, and well as others that we have already described.

5.1 Early childhood education: The day care/pre-primary split

Children usually come to formal schooling with substantial differences — in their cognitive abilities like their mastery of language and vocabulary, their ability to read, their conceptions of number and spatial relations, their knowledge of the world — as well as non-cognitive abilities like the ability to get along with others, their motivation for working in new and unfamiliar environments, and their self-confidence. Like so many such differences, many of these are related to family background, approaches to parenting, and perhaps community norms, but regardless of their sources they mean that educators have to contend with inequality right from the first days and weeks of schooling. In response, many countries have turned to pre-school programmes or early childhood education (ECE), to prepare children more equitably for the early years of schooling. Indeed, a vast literature has accumulated about the effectiveness of such programmes— summarized, for example, in an OECD (2003) review of early-childhood policies, including those in Finland. So the tactic of addressing inequalities early on, before they manifest themselves in formal schooling, has become common.

Finland too has taken this approach, though in two disconnected ways. Within the education system, a pre-primary year was established as free of charge from 2001 for 5 and 6 year-olds,[20] to prepare them for first grade. This year is voluntary, but every child has a right to pre-primary education; about 96% of students enter this year.[21] Although one avowed purpose is school readiness, pre-primary education does not look at all like a narrowly-constructed school readiness programme; the national curriculum includes a very wide variety of cognitive and school-like activities, but also the social and emotional capacities required to work well in any social setting, small and large motor skills, art and music, and general knowledge of the wider world including various field trips. Pre-primary classes are taught by fully-credentialed teachers, with greater emphasis in their training programmes on early childhood development. An OECD review (2003) was impressed with the quality of these programmes. In general, primary school teachers agree that they improve school readiness of all children, and that they are one of the important mechanisms for making sure all children come to school with adequate command of Finnish language and customs and socialization to school norms.

Given that only 4% of 6-year olds do not participate, what difference would it make if this year were compulsory? It might only increase participation marginally, but it would send a clear message that this pre-primary year is being treated as an essential preparation for later schooling, rather than as something which children can do without. Currently there is a risk that some of the 4% who do not participate are disadvantaged in some way, or perhaps are simply unaware of the educational advantages of the pre-primary year, and will have trouble catching up later. For immigrants – who may grow in number — early childhood education is a particularly effective way of introducing the Finnish language.

At the same time another set of programmes for children 5 and under are supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. These are usually referred to as day care or child care, with an approach that the

[20] First grade normally begins in August of the calendar year of a child's 7th birthday.

[21] This figure has grown substantially in recent years; as recently as 1999 the Ministry of Education reported this to be 75%.

Finns call “educare” — that is, they are intended to have educational effects on children in addition to providing care while their parents work. Again, the national guidelines are admirably broad in the kinds of competencies they are intended to develop, and the OECD review of 2003 considered them some of the best forms of day care in the world. Like the pre-primary year, day care is voluntary, but every family has a right to subsidized day care between the ages of 3 and 5, so that family income should not be a barrier to attending. About one half of all children under school age make use of municipal day care services. At the end of 2003, 27.5% of one year olds were in some kind of day-care, rising to 62% at age 3 and 73% at age 5. Three quarters of all children in day care are in full-time care. Well over 90% of the provision is municipal rather than private. The anecdotal evidence is that immigrants (and especially Roma) are less likely to attend; children in rural areas are less likely to attend; and low-income children are less likely to attend, or are likely to attend family day care, a much less structured and less explicitly educational approach to caring for children.

There is, then, little question that both components of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Finland — both pre-primary education and day care — are of high quality, and available on equitable terms. Officially, education and day-care form part of an integrated whole. The explanatory brochure from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health states that “ECEC, pre-school education as part of it and basic education form an integrated entity progressing consistently in terms of children’s development…Upbringing at home and in ECEC forms the foundation for lifelong learning. ECEC in Finland is seen as a whole comprising the intertwining dimensions of care, education and teaching.” We support these sentiments, but the integration did not seem to be applied in local practice. In the primary schools we visited, teachers and principals had limited knowledge of local day care programmes. They often asserted that there should be linkages, partly because some pre-primary education (up to 94%, by some estimates) is provided within day care facilities, or in close proximity, and they claimed that the ECEC teachers may create their own linkages at the school level. But these responses were vague: no one gave any details about what kinds of cooperation might or should take place; no one from the education side could articulate any formal policy on linkages; and the hesitant responses betrayed a lack of familiarity with day care. This is somewhat at odds with the formal requirement in the National Core Curriculum for pre-school education, which states that the co-operation between other forms of ECEC and basic education is one of the aspects to be covered by the local curriculum.

The lack of any linkages on the ground at local level is important for several reasons, many of them already clearly well-recognised by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health itself as in the quotations above. One is that, if Finland wants to use ECEC to minimize the differences among children when they start school, then starting at age 6, in pre-primary programmes, is probably too late. Most countries have started their ECEC efforts much earlier, at age 3 and 4, and many are now expanding their programmes for those aged 0-3. In Finland a parallel approach would require using the capacities of the child care system. We are particularly concerned that the children who most need ECEC to prepare them for schools — low-SES children, immigrant children, and some children in rural areas — may not be in child care, and then may not enrol in pre-primary education either. A policy that more explicitly relied on ECEC as an initial mechanism of equity would try to ensure that the children most needing early socialization are in both day care and pre-primary education.

In addition, since day care and pre-primary education are formally different, handled through two different Ministries, two sets of policies, and two different teacher credentialing requirements, there may be a problem for children in transitioning from day care at age 5 to pre-primary education at age 6. It seems possible that the lack of coordination – at least as far as we have observed at local level - means that there are some competencies stressed in pre-primary education and grade 1 that are not being explicitly included in day care programmes, disrupting a desirable continuum of approaches and again contributing to transition problems. We were not scheduled to observe any local day care programmes, and unfortunately did not meet representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. It is possible that better

information about coordination is available from such individuals. But our concern is that the lack of any apparent coordination between day care and education – particularly at local level – could undermine the potential of ECEC policies to equalize school readiness.

5.2 The equity approach in comprehensive education: Its consistency and extension to upper secondary

We have already discussed in Chapter 3 the basic equity approach within comprehensive education — the use of four different levels of potential intervention when pupils fall behind, by the teacher, the teacher or school assistants, the special needs teacher, and multi-disciplinary teams, all supported by small classes, small schools, strong teacher preparation, and the unique approach of municipal funding. We were impressed by this basic approach, by its flexibility in response to a variety of needs, the ability of schools to intervene as soon as any problem becomes apparent (rather than waiting until any problems become magnified), by the integration of this process into the ordinary structure of the school rather than creating a set of independent (and potentially ineffective) pullout programmes, and by its ability to draw on a variety of school and non-school resources.

The question for other countries is whether they can borrow or adapt some elements of this approach to students falling behind. However, for Finland the challenge is to investigate how consistently this basic model has been adopted in all schools. We heard enough complaints about problems — about schools without special needs teachers, or having to share counsellors with too many other schools, or rural schools who could not attract enough qualified teachers — that we suspect some variation in the extent to which this basic and widely-accepted approach has been implemented. If that is true, it is likely that the schools with inadequate implementation also have more immigrant, or low-income, or rural students in them. These are possibilities which we did not have the evidence to confirm, but we think that equity would benefit from an effort to examine these patterns carefully and empirically, and then to create remedies if our suppositions are correct.

In addition, an issue for Finland to consider is whether the equity approach so widely used in comprehensive schools could be extended to higher levels of the education system — certainly to general upper-secondary education, and to vocational education in particular where there seem to be many students with special needs, but also to tertiary education. The adoption of the basic equity approach to upper-secondary schools is already in place, at least in small ways; it would require additional personnel and additional funding to extend it to all of upper secondary, but at least the basic approach has been well-articulated. The adaptation to tertiary education, in both universities and polytechnics, might be more difficult, since these students are independent in ways that upper secondary students are not. But again the question we pose is whether such a system — of diagnosing students who fall behind, and then providing a variety of immediate support, both academic and non-academic — might work in tertiary education and reduce dropout rates.

An educational system that adopted a basic equity approach and implemented it consistently, from early childhood education to university, would be a marvel, and a genuine improvement on what we can see in any country. The powerful advantage that Finland has is that it is already familiar with the requirements of this approach, and could more readily than any other country extend it to other levels of schooling.

5.3 The variety of second-chance programmes

In addition to its equity efforts in the “mainstream” institutions of the education system — pre-primary, comprehensive education, upper secondary, and tertiary education — Finland has also created a wide variety of second-chance programmes. In theory these allow individuals who fall out of mainstream

programmes, for any reason at all, to make their way back into the educational mainstream or to find an alternative route into employment. Some form of upward mobility is always possible, rather than being precluded either by the lack of second-chance programmes or by the creation of "terminal" programmes (as secondary vocational education used to be). There remain serious questions about how well these second-chance programmes work, but at least the country is fully committed to the principle of providing second chances.

The second-chance programmes that we observed or learned about — no doubt there are others — include the following:

For students who complete the ninth grade with inadequate test scores to enter general upper secondary, or who cannot get into a vocational programme of their choice, an option exists to take a tenth year in the comprehensive school. During that year students can work on improving their grades and scores, or try to find an occupational area that interests them. Potentially, then, the tenth year provides them another chance — though not yet a last chance — to improve their academic abilities, develop their plans for subsequent schooling and life, or change their attitudes toward schooling, with all the supports available in comprehensive school including counsellors, special needs teachers, and multi-disciplinary teams. Furthermore, year 10 does not require a transition to a new and unfamiliar institution, but instead allows students to continue working with teachers and others who already know them. The year 10 option therefore appears to have some advantages over other options. Of the cohort (1607 persons) leaving 10th year in 2002, 35% (40% of boys and 29% of girls) were studying in general upper secondary schools and 48% (46% of boys and 51% of girls) vocational upper secondary education at the end of the same year. 3% were working, 2% unemployed and the rest in some other form of activity.

The Youth Participation Project is targeted at young people experiencing difficulties in the final stages of comprehensive education (Country Report, §8.2). The 39 local projects develop methods of early identification of problems; guidance, during transition stages; and cooperation among education authorities, social workers, youth workers, and positions in employment, creating a kind of network of concern and support around young people. Some of these mechanisms appear similar to the practices followed in comprehensive schooling, though taken past ninth grade. An evaluation of the Project was launched in 2004, but there are as yet no clear indications of the effectiveness of the exercise.

For secondary students who are profoundly alienated from conventional schooling, there are so-called workshop programmes in which they can enrol, offered in most municipalities. These are programmes, formally part of the education system but often operated by non-governmental organizations, which provide students with work-related projects rather than the usual classroom learning. The rhetoric supporting them is full of references to "learning by doing" rather than classroom learning, and it seems clear that the students in such programmes are unwilling or unable, perhaps because of learning disorders, to sit through conventional instruction in conventional classrooms. In theory these programmes can lead to a vocational qualification — a part of the *Näyttökoe* competence-based qualification system — which is supposed to provide advantages in finding employment. We were told that individuals without either an educational credential or one of these vocational qualifications would stand virtually no chance in the labour market because of the high rates of youth unemployment; apparently even unskilled and unpleasant jobs (cleaning jobs, for example) cannot be obtained without some kind of qualification. In this sense, then, workshop programmes can provide entrance into the labour market that such individuals would otherwise be denied.

However, we have certain concerns about the workshop programmes, and again the effectiveness of these programmes is unclear. The counselling in these programmes appears to be variable, and the participation of social workers is apparently inadequate. While one goal is to get these students into work placements and internships, this doesn't appear to be very successful; as one counsellor noted, "these

students here need too much support" to be placed in real jobs. The rhetoric about "learning by doing" may be attractive, and it presumably appeals to ideas from John Dewey. But this rhetoric also hides a resistance to any form of academic or book-based learning, and may mask a kind of anti-intellectualism. Most seriously, it misconstrues Dewey's own argument, which called for integrating classroom-based "knowing" and experience-based "doing" — "knowing **and** doing", not "learning **by** doing"; as he wrote, "Leaning by doing does not, of course, mean the substitution of manual occupations of handwork for textbook studying" (Dewey and Dewey, 1915, p. 74). This implies that "doing" alone — the kind of activity that takes place in vocational shops and labs — should never displace learning of the conventional academic kind. The programme we visited struck us like a secondary vocational programme with all academic content removed, with relatively elementary (if fun) projects substituted for work-like projects. Our suspicion is that these programmes help to keep students out of the labour market and out of trouble until they are old enough to find unskilled work, but we're concerned that the students from such programmes may still not be prepared for the labour market. However information about the effectiveness of such efforts is limited — particularly about what students do when they leave workshop programmes — is lacking. Without better evidence we can't be sure that they accomplish anything more.

For students who have completed secondary vocational programmes, but who are still not employable, there are apprenticeship programmes to provide them with experience in the occupations for which they have been training. This approach is among other things a way of providing labour market experience, in a job market that often requires both educational credentials and work experience. These are also exceptions to the general pattern in Finland of providing relatively few apprenticeships. In these cases employers have offered a number of work placements. If these work experiences are successful from both the employer's and the student's perspective, then the individual will be hired. We were told that 80% of individuals in such apprenticeship programmes were hired, a figure that seems quite high. Again, these second-chance apprenticeship programmes have real promise, but their effectiveness remains unclear.

Adults have a variety of second-chance options. They can enrol in secondary vocational schools, and graduate just as regular-age students can, with options then to go into employment or (less likely) a polytechnic. They can instead enrol in an adult school and complete programmes that lead to one or another of the *Näyttökoe* qualifications. Adult schools exist in great profusion and variety: some are operated by municipalities, some by non-governmental organizations (including Adulta, an NGO that is attempting to create a multi-national approach to adult education); some are for the long-term unemployed, and some are self-initiated, for those who want to improve their employment. All of them have the possibility of earning qualifications under the *Näyttökoe* system.

A variety of labour market programmes are offered by the Ministry of Labour. These are typically intended to return unemployed individuals to the labour market as quickly as possible, so the emphasis is typically on short programmes, in occupations that require little training. Many of these are provided by adult education centres, and they often include on-the-job practice. While there are claims that they improve employment (Country Report, §5.5), we did not examine the evaluation evidence directly. We did not visit any such programmes, and therefore cannot not say much about how they operate. However, we are somewhat sceptical that short labour market programmes can have much effect since they have been found ineffective in many countries (Grubb and Ryan, 1996).

One conclusion, then, is that Finland offers a great profusion of second-chance programmes, for a variety of individuals at different stages of their lives and different stages of educational completion and non-completion. This is, of course, a great help to equity goals since these programmes can potentially return individuals to the mainstream of either education or employment. However, we were consistently concerned about whether these programmes are effective or not. It may be that we did not get to hear of all the evaluations, but on the evidence before us, it struck us that the evaluation programme was inadequate. Some of the initiatives (like labour market programmes) seem too short; others (like the workshop and

apprenticeship programmes) eliminate the academic education that may be necessary for the long run. The *Näyttökoe* qualifications system is crucial to many of these programmes, but aside from limited anecdotal evidence — about particular occupations or specific employers now requiring such qualifications — no one could point to general evidence about whether these qualifications actually provide any advantage in employment.[22] We will return to the issues of data and evaluation in a subsequent section of this chapter, but to serve the interests of equity second-chance programmes must both exist and be effective.

5.4 Urban/rural differences and the need for economic development

One form of inequality in Finland that emerges persistently is that between relatively urban municipalities in the south, and rural areas located toward the north (Country Report, §7.2). Out –migration from rural areas, in combination with national demographic changes which are reducing the school-age population, has meant school closures in rural areas; for example Kuusamo once had 30 comprehensive schools and now has only 10, with several more due to be closed in the coming years. With declining numbers of schools, students have to travel longer distances to school; while there has been experimentation with sophisticated distance education methods, everyone agrees that personal contact is necessary for the social elements of schooling to take place, and so the possibility of relying only on distance methods is not attractive. In addition, students have fewer choices when the numbers and variety of secondary schools decline. This problem becomes even more difficult at the tertiary level, and in response to this problem, Finland has developed a regional network of more than 50 institutions, many of them with sub-campuses or branches in other towns. Despite this, students in remote areas are commonly forced to move away from home for both polytechnic and university education. Finally, small and remote municipalities often have problems recruiting teachers and other personnel, and they are more likely to have to use uncredentialed teachers. There is apparently a funding factor allocating somewhat more money to sparsely-populated communities, though it does no more than mitigate these pressures in rural areas.

These are problems that educational institutions by themselves cannot resolve. Instead, some form of economic development is necessary, to keep rural populations stable. One approach is to try to increase tourism in the more beautiful areas, where there are winter sports like skiing and summer activities like canoeing. One can certainly attempt to lure business that could locate anywhere, like certain forms of computer business including programming, telephone call centres, and the like. There's no question that there has been some diversification of the economic base in some small communities, and the conventional sources of employment — logging, some raising of livestock, some agriculture — have been supplemented by newer forms of businesses.

However, the demand for tourism is limited —and the possibilities for luring "footloose" sectors to remote northern areas are also limited, and every municipality seems to be chasing the same few employers. But our major point is that the problems of economic development — of relocating employment from urban to rural areas, or trying to find new economic activities that can take advantage of rural areas' natural advantages — should not be the responsibility of individual municipalities, each competing with every other rural municipality. This should instead be a national responsibility, with national efforts to figure out what businesses might relocate to rural areas, with the creation of subsidies for relocating if that is thought necessary, and for coordinating economic development across communities. For example, it may be that not every existing community can be saved, if some of them have already

[22] There's a general tendency in qualifications systems to ignore the crucial issue of why qualifications should enhance employment. In one conception of qualifications, they act to coordinate the demands of employers, the curriculum provided by education and training, and the expectations of students (Grubb and Lazerson, Ch. 7). However, many countries' systems of qualifications have failed to consider whether employers will use them, and so their effectiveness for individuals often breaks down; when qualifications seem unrelated to the nature of work, then charges of "credentialism" become common.

become too small, or are too remote, or lack any potential economic base whatsoever; one possible element of a national economic development strategy might be to distinguish municipalities with some promise from those that have very little. And then education policy would need to be part of any economic development strategy, both for defensive reasons — that is, communities with low-quality schools will be unable to attract new residents, or will lose existing residents at a greater rate — and for more pro-active reasons, for example by creating forms of education that might lure certain businesses to a remote area. For example, the location of polytechnics and universities has been used to shore up some declining communities.

The Government has a Ministerial Working Group on Administration and Regional Development, chaired by the Minister of Regional and Municipal Affairs. Other members are the Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior and Coordinate Minister for Finance. However the Minister of Education is not a member – the Ministry of Education has its own Regional Strategy for 2003-2013. In principle these arrangements should be delivering a co-ordinated approach to regional economic development – although it is not clear how far specifically economic development will be addressed by the working group, or how its activities are to be co-ordinated with the provision of educational services. Despite these formal arrangements at national level, it was not clear to us what practical co-ordination arrangements were in hand to plan regional economic development - and at the local level no one could provide any examples of cooperation with economic development activities. There is a national organization of municipalities that could in theory provide its members with information and advice about these issues, and help them coordinate economic development and education policy, but it doesn't appear to do anything in the area of economic development.

Our fear is that, if unregulated markets are left to follow their "natural" course, many more of these rural and remote communities will continue to decline, with serious and essentially unavoidable consequences for the education of the children who live there. When we turn to recommendations, in Chapter 8, we will return to this problem.

5.5 Data analysis and evaluation

Data collection and its analysis, including the evaluation of whether specific programmes are effective, do not directly teach children the competencies they need or reduce inequalities among them. But data analysis can identify where there are equity problems that are not being resolved, or where certain programmes are more effective than others, and can therefore be part of the larger process of reducing inequality. Finland is generally thought to have an effective system of data, through Statistics Finland, that collects information on every individual, with a single identification number, creating the ability to pull together all kinds of information about parents, their income and employment, numbers of children, residential location and relocation, the education of children, receipt of other social services, and the like; and these data are available over time, in theory enabling longitudinal analysis of important issues.

However, in our visits to schools, our discussions with Ministry and union officials in Helsinki, and our talks with several researchers, we were surprised at how few answers we received to statistical questions — questions like where a school's students go after leaving, what the employment rates are from vocational programmes, what the economic benefits are associated with the *Näyttökoe* qualifications, what proportion of a programme's students are immigrants or low income, how many students were left unserved by existing programmes. In many cases educators had limited information, and they often stressed the difficulties of obtaining data. Of course that is often true, because of the complexities of education, the effects of family background, the complexities of selection and self-selection, and other well-known data collection and statistical problems. But data analysis and research exist to solve these kinds of complex problems; our impression on the basis of our discussions in Finland is that much more could usefully be done to this end.

The same issue exists for programme evaluation. For example, the second-chance programmes we describe above are good examples of well-intentioned efforts that have taken particular (and largely reasonable) approaches to integrating individuals back into the educational and economic mainstream. But whether they work as intended is an empirical issue, one that can be resolved only with carefully-designed evaluations that consider the complex effects of various causes; the entire area of educational evaluation has developed precisely to address these evidentiary issues. Such empirical approaches are particularly important because small interventions have been found to be ineffective in many countries, particularly short-term labour market programmes (Grubb and Ryan, 1996). But we were unable to learn about the effectiveness of the Finnish programmes, and we have concluded that programme evaluation could be better developed in Finland.

The lack of data analysis and evaluation is particularly unfortunate because Finland is a country where such information would be quite valuable indeed. The Finnish attitude of using information (like test scores) to improve programmes — rather than to engage in "blaming and shaming", or to close programmes, or to ignore data in favour of more overtly political decisions as is true in many countries — creates an environment in which data analysis and evaluation would be particularly useful in enhancing equity. Again, we will return to this issue in our recommendations in Chapter 8.

We will review other mechanisms for addressing equity issues systematically in the following two chapters, one on funding and the other on the treatment of immigrant students. Overall, one conclusion is that Finland has developed, in one way or another, a large variety of approaches to promoting equity in education. What is less clear is how systematic and effective these efforts are.

6. FAIRNESS IN FUNDING

The issues of funding are often thought to be central to equity because, if funding is inequitable (or is simply absent for some students), then the educational resources that money can buy are likely to be inequitable as well, and outcomes will be inequitable. In fact, the link between funding and outcomes is not necessarily as tight as this simple approach suggests; research in both the U.S. and England has failed to find a close relationship between spending per pupil and outcomes (largely measured by test scores), and certainly the PISA results are not closely related to patterns of school resources that require high spending (OECD 2001, Table 8.5). Indeed, Finland is prime example of a country that has managed to produce strong results without high levels of spending: spending per pupil in primary education in 2000 was about at the OECD average, and substantially lower than other Nordic countries; spending per pupil in upper secondary and in tertiary education was actually lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2003, Tables B1.1, p. 197).[23] Spending is necessary, but it is not sufficient since it may be wasted in many different ways; what is necessary in addition is that money be spent on those resources that are effective in enhancing learning.[24] One interpretation of the Finnish results, therefore, is that the country has managed to generate a vision of how to spend money relatively effectively — particularly in the approach to learning best developed in comprehensive education described in Chapter 2, in the "virtuous circle" of high-quality teaching, and perhaps in its high-quality early childhood programmes.

Still, even if money is not sufficient to guarantee strong outcomes, a lack of funding is probably detrimental to effectiveness — and indeed we heard many complaints from schools with inadequate funding for special-needs teachers and counsellors in particular, and from tertiary students who complained about inadequate levels of support. In this chapter, then, we examine four funding issues: the variation in spending across municipalities; the levels of support for tertiary education; changes in the levels of funding across different parts of the education system, and the implications for equity; and finally the most difficult question of all: who will pay for education when its overall costs are increasing.

6.1 Spending differences across municipalities

For primary and secondary education, 43% of revenues come from municipality taxes, and 57% comes from the national government. Most municipal taxes are income taxes, levied at average rates varying from 16% to 21%. Municipalities vary in the income levels of their residents, of course, so there are wealthy municipalities able to raise more revenue for schooling (and other social programmes) and poorer municipalities. In order to equalize these differences to some extent, the national government allows municipalities of above-average income levels to keep 60% of revenues above the average, with the remaining 40% reallocated to lower-income municipalities, who are then guaranteed at least 90% of the national average.[25] In addition, there are additional factors for municipalities with low population density; there's more funding where there is teaching in Swedish or Sami; and limited funds are earmarked for

[23] Spending in lower secondary education was, however, about 20% higher than the OECD average, largely because of a very low pupil-teacher ratio of 10:6.

[24] See the review of the enormous U.S. literature, and the attempt to develop an "improved" approach to school finance considering the way money is spent, in Grubb, Huerta, and Goe (2005). For similar findings for England see Dearden *et al.* (2000). Other countries appear not to have developed this line of research.

[25] Again, we did not obtain enough technical detail about funding formulas to answer all our questions. In federal systems like Finland's, recipient municipalities usually respond to formulas in various unintended ways. These formulas create disincentives for high-income municipalities to raise additional taxes (since they lose 40% of any additional taxes levied); they may also discourage low-income municipalities from raising additional taxes since they will be funded at the 90% level regardless of their own tax rates. However, no one mentioned these kinds of disincentives, and whether they work as the formulas suggest is unclear.

municipalities with high proportions of immigrants. These funding mechanisms therefore create greater equity in funding across municipalities than would be possible by relying entirely on municipal funding.

Municipalities spend widely varying amounts per pupil or student. According to a press release issued by the National Board of Education expenditure per pupil in basic education varied from 3 740 euros in Marttila (a small rural municipality in Southern Finland) to over 15 240 euros in Houtskär (a small municipality in the archipelago). Variation in expenditure may reflect a mix of (a) variations in the costs of provision (for example because small rural schools cost more per pupil), (b) variations in the efficiency with which resources are used, and (c) variations in the quantity and quality of educational provision. There were complaints that isolated rural communities like Kuusamo, with a lower tax base, had less to spend than wealthy municipalities like Helsinki or others in the well-developed south and west of the country. Despite the evidence from PISA that differences between schools in outcomes are relatively small, there could be some significant differences in the outcomes, at the municipality level associated with differences in resource inputs. We are particularly concerned whether differences among municipalities may be responsible for differences in the ways equity — and particularly the comprehensive school approaches described in Chapter 3 — is implemented throughout Finland.

6.2 Performance-based funding for vocational education

The Ministry of Education has introduced a performance-based funding system for vocational education, intended to improve the effectiveness of these programmes (Tihonen, 2005). It works by providing core funding and then adding funds based on placement in employment (40%), enrolment in further education (15%), retention (15%), graduation (13%), teacher qualifications (11%), and staff development (6%). Funding is also adjusted to reflect the level of youth unemployment in the region. Overall, the national subsidy covers 57% of total funding, with the remaining 43% coming from local revenues.

The performance-based funding system seems to us to be relatively well-structured,[26] though we do not know how well it has worked to improve the quality of vocational education. However, from an equity standpoint there are several generic problems with performance-based funding. One is that it contains incentives for programmes to "cream", or accept only the most able individuals, particularly to the extent that funding is contingent on enrolment in further education and graduation. A second is that, particularly since funding is based partly on employment rates, the formula directs more funds to regions with low unemployment rates, and programmes in high-unemployment areas might receive less funding even if they are more effective in reducing unemployment or more necessary to local economies. This also means that the funding patterns appropriate for regional economic development — with more funding in rural isolated areas — may be hampered by performance-based funding. We recommend that the Ministry consider these potential equity effects in assessing the structure of performance-based funding.

6.3 Support for tertiary and upper secondary education

In many developed countries, governments support schooling through the end of secondary education or until the end of compulsory attendance, and then tertiary education must be funded at least in part by students and their families, through tuition fees and support of living costs. Where this happens, then the possibility of inequitable access by low-income students, whose parents can't afford to subsidize tertiary education, is always an issue, and the amounts of grants, loans, and tax subsidies from government are the subjects of intense political battles.

[26] Our information comes largely from a briefing by Mika Tammilehto, "The Performance-Based Financing of VET in Finland", Ministry of Education, Vocational Education Division, 11 February 2005.

However, the tradition in the Nordic countries has been to provide access to tertiary education free of tuition fees. In addition, Finland provides — through the social welfare system, not through the education system — various other supports for the costs of living away from home during tertiary education, including subsidized health and mental health care, partially subsidized meals, housing, and transportation costs. The total subsidy to tertiary students, from the different sources of support, appears quite generous — at least from the perspective of countries charging tuition fees.

However, the representatives of student groups (one for university students and one for polytechnic students) have argued that support is still inadequate. Particularly in high-cost Helsinki, total support is apparently inadequate to pay the costs of food and housing, and so students who cannot or will not rely on parent subsidies must find employment. This in turn slows students' progress toward their degrees, and causes some of them to drop out. Presumably, these problems are more serious for low-income than for middle-income and upper-income students. In addition, Finland has a loan programme available to all tertiary students, where students pay 1% interest during the period they are in university or polytechnic, the loan is guaranteed by the government and students repay loans at market interest rates. However we were told that students are reluctant to take out such loans since they are concerned about their ability to repay them. This is where their memories of poor economic conditions in the early 1990s are particularly powerful, in addition to their understanding of higher unemployment rates.

One related factor is the comparatively long time which Finnish students in tertiary education take to complete their degrees. One strand of current reform efforts – in the shape of new legislation under debate in Finland - will be to provide financial incentives for early completion. Another strand, also in the new legislation, is to improve guidance and counselling. We were certainly told by students that some students drop out because of inadequate or inaccurate counselling

Clearly, then, students themselves perceive an equity problem in the amount of support they receive. However, it is unclear what the shortfall in support for living costs is, or how many students work excessive hours, or how much of dropout appears to be due to financial problems rather than other causes. In effect, a complex dilemma has emerged because of the interaction of several elements. Students want independence and full support from the government; there has been expansion of tertiary education, faster than the increases in funding, so that there is decreased funding per student, an increased student/teacher ratio, and lower levels of student support. Then the problem of who should pay has no elegant solution. Increasing tuition fees for parents to pay violates students' perceived rights of independence, and would violate equity principles without a system of grants; increased support by government might lead to reduced support elsewhere in the system, and less equity; and requiring students to pay, either through existing loans or through an Australian type of income-contingent tax, is contrary to their desires for rights to complete support.

A related problem is that — despite students' desires to be independent of their parents — the high subsidies to tertiary students go overwhelmingly to middle-and upper-income students. The support for tertiary education is in essence a subsidy from the range of Finnish citizens, from poor to rich, to a select group of individuals at the higher end of the income distribution. Furthermore, the expansion of benefits to tertiary students would exacerbate further the redistribution from the average citizen to middle-and upper-income students; and if the expansion of tertiary education continues, this is also likely to further this inegalitarian redistribution. This raises the question of equity and whether students at this age should be viewed as still dependents of their parents or as fully independent.

This equity problem of free tuition cannot be viewed in isolation. There are countervailing arguments. In Finland, income taxes are strongly progressive, with a maximum rate of around 65%, much higher than in countries such as the US or the UK which do impose tuition fees. This means that a large proportion of the additional earnings of graduates are redistributed back to public funds, and the equity problem of free

tertiary tuition is mitigated, if not removed relative to other countries with lower income taxes. Moreover, strongly progressive income taxes as in Finland can be an inefficient mix with tuition fees. Full or near-full tuition fees would mean that students bear most of the costs of tertiary education, but reap few of the benefits after income tax. This outcome would be redistributive and equitable, but it could provide inadequate incentives for participation in tertiary education. Finally, from a political point of view, free tertiary tuition may help to shore up middle class support for progressive income taxes and the public services it pays for, and therefore for equity in society, precisely because free tuition does tend to benefit the middle classes.

6.4 Funding across the education system

The sense that public funding for education is limited, and cannot continue to grow as it has in the past 30 years, is widespread among developed countries. Part of this is due to the successful expansion of education, driven in part by the belief that expanded education will drive economic growth and the perceived need of many countries to expand schooling as a way of competing with other countries, responding to the apparent occupational demands of the Knowledge Economy, and responding to the demands of parents and students for upward mobility. Since 1980, funding per pupil in basic education, and in tertiary education has risen by around 50%. However over the same period while the numbers of students in basic education has been relatively stable, the number of university and polytechnic students has roughly doubled. As a result, while funding of basic education has increased from around 1.7 billion euros in 1980 to 3 billion euros in 2003 (at constant prices in 2003 Euros), spending on tertiary education has rocketed, with government funding of universities trebling to 1.2 billion over the same period, and student support costs more than trebling to around 0.7 billion euros. Current plans to continue to increase tertiary participation means that expenditure on tertiary education will continue to rise unless there are changes in funding mechanisms.

With these patterns of expansion, government support for comprehensive schooling — where equity mechanisms are the most powerful — has declined in relative terms (though not necessarily in absolute terms), compared to funding in upper secondary and tertiary education, where the inequalities outlined in Chapter 4 become more important. In this sense, we are concerned that funding patterns in Finland across the entire system of education have become more inequitable over time. Of course, there are various complications that might invalidate this conclusion; for example, spending on pre-primary education and child care has also gone up, with potentially equalizing effects, and spending for second-chance programmes has also increased since many of these programmes are relatively new. But overall, we are concerned that overall funding patterns in the wide area of education, training, and early childhood programmes have become more inequitable over time. These changing patterns are in effect social choices, though we suspect that they have occurred inadvertently, as the national government has responded to pressures for more tertiary education without always considering what the effects might be elsewhere in the education system.

6.5 Who shall pay? Equity and the priorities for government funding

Finland, like many other countries, is now in a position where simply increasing tax rates to increase government funding does not seem like an attractive option. Nor can any country count on a windfall to rescue it from painful funding decisions. We suspect, therefore, that Finland will have to face hard choices in the coming years, and these may include looking for alternative revenue sources to support aspects of education and training.

We perceive the current situation as one in which many groups want more government support, but no one is willing to say where funding should come from other than to say that this is the central government's responsibility. Educators at the local level need more funding for personnel like special

needs teachers and counsellors, who are crucial to equity efforts. In rural areas there are not enough qualified teachers, and presumably additional pay might be necessary; similar complaints emerged about funding in high-cost areas like Helsinki, where there is no provision for higher salaries despite much higher living costs. Everyone agrees that there are more special needs of every kind than there used to be, and the projections are that immigration will increase, involving higher costs for special programmes (described in the next chapter). Student representatives want more funding for living costs, but they were unable to say where that might come from. The teachers' union wants more funding for salaries, but they seemed perplexed by the question of where additional funding would come from. Both these groups expressed great faith that more education would pay off in the future; this seems to imply that current education should be funded by government bonds, to be repaid by future generations who are presumably made better off by current investments in education. However, none of the groups wanting more funding from bonds. So we were left with the impression that, while everyone wants more funding — and we ourselves are sympathetic to many of these desires, and our recommendations for the extension of equity in the final chapter will require additional revenues — none of the participants seemed willing to confront the hard questions of how additional funds are to be generated.

We should point out that there are many more potential sources of revenues than Finland has seriously considered. Future decisions about education and equity might require the country to consider expanding the variety of funding sources. In particular, if we take a benefit approach to taxation, then those who benefit might reasonably pay for at least some fraction of the public benefits they receive. This might involve, for example, some of the following possibilities:

Parents certainly benefit when their students get into tertiary education, and so they might contribute more through tuition fees, with corresponding grants to make sure that low-income students are still able to attend. It is, of course, no secret that the Nordic countries have strenuously resisted the idea of higher tuition fees, and students are particularly opposed to be considered dependents. We won't try to resolve this issue here, partly because of the forthcoming OECD review of higher education; but we will note that this is one of several areas where Finland might consider alternative sources of revenue.

Students benefit from tertiary education in the form of higher earnings and increased employment, particularly if they complete programmes. Therefore they might pay some of the costs, for example in the forms of special taxes levied against their future (and higher) earnings, as Australia's Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) does. This is, strictly speaking, another form of a loan, and loans have not been popular with tertiary students partly because of the uncertainties Finland experienced in the early 1990s. However, HECS-type repayment systems can be designed so that they don't impose overly-serious burdens on students who go into low-paying occupations, or who suffer from recessions or economic dislocations,

Employers now benefit from various forms of vocational and professional education, and they sometimes make their own specific demands on the educational system. For example, the secondary vocational programme in Kuusamo was persuaded to develop a plumbing programme for local contractors, responsiveness to employers being one element of both vocational and polytechnic education. However, we were surprised to learn that employers make few contributions to local vocational or professional programmes, either directly or in the form of equipment, materials, or internship opportunities. As part of strengthening upper secondary vocational programmes, for example, it might be possible to require (as in the German and Austrian systems) or encourage (as in Anglo-American systems) employers and their federations to contribute, though general taxes, pay-or-play provisions,[27] or cooperative agreements. As a

[27] Pay-or-play provisions require employers either to provide support for education and training ("playing") or to contribute to a funding to support education and training ("paying"). Under some conditions they can integrate employers into the larger community of education and training providers, with benefits for all, see, for example, the description of Quebec's pay-or-play system in adult education (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/31/1940299.pdf).

further example, the expansion of apprenticeships and internships is certainly a way of making improvements in the current secondary vocational programme, and also of improving the quality of guidance and counselling about subsequent employment; these are practices where employers might contribute more. Other examples might affect adult education; for example, it might be possible to charge employers for work-related retraining in adult education facilities. While the development of a different culture around employer participation would be a lengthy process, the Finnish political system, with its inclusion of various interested groups and its preference for consensus, seems perfectly suited to tackle such possibilities.

If education is regarded as an investment, some kinds of school expenditures might be funded through bond financing, to be repaid by future generations. Often, for example, long-lived resources are supported by bonds including buildings, equipment (including equipment for vocational classes), perhaps the creation of computer networks. Supporting current expenditures from bond funding requires great faith in the potential for education to increase economic growth, and the evidence about the contribution of education to economic growth is not strong enough for us to recommend this tactic (e.g., Wolf, 2002; Grubb and Lazerson, 2004, Ch. 7). But bond finance could in some circumstances make great sense, and help alleviate the demands on central government revenue.

Overall, there are more potential sources of funding for education, and for extending provisions related to equity in education, than Finland has considered. If Finland continues to face limitations in what the central government can fund, then weighing the possibilities for using some of these alternative sources is one possible solution. Otherwise, we fear than the continued expansion of education will come at the expense of the equity mechanisms already in place.

7. THE EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND

Although immigrants are a small proportion of the population of Finland, numbers are rising, particularly following the expansion of the EU, and so we were asked to examine the mechanisms of equity that apply to immigrant groups. Currently, 2.9% of the population was born outside Finland, and 2.3% are speakers of a language other than Finnish or Swedish. The largest number of immigrants comes from Russia, and many of these are ethnic Finns who have been living on the other side of a constantly-changing border; the second-largest group comes from Estonia, and have a linguistic and ethnic background linked to that of Finns. The third largest group comes from Sweden. The fourth largest group comes from Somalia, certainly a very different country climatically, racially, and economically. However, these and many other smaller groups share the usual immigrant problems of language, relative poverty, and cultural isolation. Furthermore the Finnish government believes that immigration is likely to increase, particularly as more countries join the European Union, so it is crucial to have a sound policy in place for the integration of immigrants. As other countries have discovered, immigrant issues do not just take care of themselves; they require coherent policies, preferably in place before new waves of immigrants take place.

In general, immigrants come to the urban areas in the south and west of Finland, so we examined programmes there. In general, we were impressed both with the goals and the variety of programmes available to immigrants. One goal includes bilingualism and biculturalism: while it is important to learn Finnish and Finnish values, there is a great variety of mother-tongue teaching so that immigrants do not lose their original language. Similarly multi-culturalism is encouraged, so that immigrants do not give up their own values and cultures. In cases where immigrant values conflict with Finnish values, there seems to be an attempt to develop a workable compromise. For example, one principal noted that Muslim dress for girls sometimes affected their ability to participate in school activities, but that there had been a compromise involving less restrictive but still appropriate clothing.

For adults, special programmes include language programmes, courses in Finnish society and culture, and basic skills when appropriate, as well as access to a wide range of vocational programmes in adult education. In addition, 6 months (soon to be one year) of preparatory vocational training is provided to immigrants incorporating Finnish language and customs; guidance and some courses in a student's native language; remedial instruction if necessary; support groups of students; tutors; a personal study plan; and mother tongue teaching (see also OECD, 2001, Box 1). There are also special labour market programmes for immigrants, largely for individuals over 20.

For students in schools, there is an earmarked allocation from the central government to municipalities, to be used for additional immigrant education (one of the few such earmarked grants). This may be used for Finnish as a Second Language as well as mother-tongue teachers. Many immigrants also have Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Of course immigrant students in comprehensive education are part of the mechanisms of equity we described in Chapter 3, so there are both general and specific programmes from which they benefit. In urban areas there are some schools taught in the foreign languages of immigrants — Russian, Estonian, and English — as well as schools in languages (German and French) that students would like to learn. If there are problems in participation, they seem to be that immigrant participation in day care and pre-primary education are relatively low.

Overall, therefore, the special programmes for immigrants appear quite strong. However, in one area we noted an inconsistency that could become more worrisome if the number of immigrants increases. Because of the enormous importance of municipalities in making decisions about education and social policies, the approach to language education is a municipal decision, and therefore varies among the many municipalities, large and small. But the effectiveness of different approaches to language education, and of language education for school children including many different forms of bilingual education, is a subject that has been the subject of great debate, experimentation, and evaluation in other countries. This strikes us

as an area where the central government could play a role, if not in establishing a policy about which approaches to language education to use, then at least in informing municipalities about alternative approaches and what is known about effectiveness. This is similar, at least conceptually, the role that the central government might play in ensuring that all mechanisms of equity are implemented uniformly and effectively.

Evidently, the government itself feels that efforts on behalf of immigrants have been inadequate. The five-year plan for 2003 – 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2004) outlines a series of measures to be improved over this period, including expanding preparatory vocational education, increasing entry into general upper secondary education and tertiary education, increased vocational training for school leavers, and extended language teaching and cultural education for immigrants.

We note that Finland faces a serious challenge in the Roma population, sometimes called gypsies (Country Report, §8.5). The problems include serious problems at home, high rates of absenteeism, high rates of placement in special education, serious conflict between family values and school values, low use of day care and pre-primary education, and a lack of classes in the Romany language. Some of these are issues common to other immigrant groups, but others — especially the prevalence of learning difficulties, and absenteeism due to family activities — are particularly difficult with Roma children. We note that the National Board of Education has supported special projects to grapple with the Roma problem, and is launching a new development project. We might point out, however, that many countries in Europe have a Roma minority population, and so international efforts to develop solutions might be more effective than individual countries confronting these issues one by one. The World Bank, the Soros Foundation, and the Council of Europe are all active in the field, particularly through the World Bank ‘decade of the Roma’.

Finally, we note that that have been many efforts in Finland to assure the integration of immigrants into the labour market, to prevent discrimination, and to promote the hiring of immigrants. All of these help prevent the development of immigrants groups who are low-income and isolated, and in turn would benefit their children. But the efforts of labour policy and education policy do not seem to be connected, for example, a recent report on immigration fails to mention education even once (SORAINEN, 2004). We wonder, therefore, whether labour policy and education policy could be better integrated, just as we have recommended that economic development and education be more closely connected.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, we have been extremely impressed with the mechanisms of equity we have observed in Finland. The procedures for making sure that students do not fall behind in comprehensive education, the subject of Chapter 3, are perhaps the most noteworthy. They represent, as far as we know, a unique practice among all countries, and could be taken as a model or vision by many other countries concerned with this particular source of inequality. The policies that contribute to this approach — small classes, small schools, inviting buildings, strong teacher preparation and the "virtuous circle" of high-quality teachers, the stability of both teachers and students, the active participation of the welfare state — are also admirable, and clarify the ways in which such practices contribute not only to overall high levels of learning, but to minimizing the variation in learning. We are quite sure that high-quality day care and pre-primary education also contribute to greater equity in school readiness, even though we are concerned with the coordination between the two. The ability of schools and universities to draw on the resources of the larger welfare state, particularly through interdisciplinary teams and later through the variety of subsidies to tertiary students, is also a mechanism of fostering equity that is absent in many countries, particularly those with weak welfare states. The abandonment of "terminal" programmes that block further educational possibilities, as secondary vocational used to be, and the creation of various second-chance programmes are also admirable equity efforts. There appears to be substantial attention given to immigrants, a group often badly ignored in other countries, as well as to other groups that often suffer in schooling — specifically girls, who are now doing better than boys in most respects, and the indigenous Sami people, who appear to be the focus of some national pride and attention.[28]

So none of our more critical comments and recommendations should be interpreted as saying that Finland's approach to equity is seriously deficient; on the contrary, we think it is one of the most advanced countries in the world in this respect. Our recommendations in this section are intended more to identify where the equity principles that seem so important to Finland have not been consistently advanced, and to suggest areas where practices already undertaken might be extended. In addition, we outline some areas where new national discussions and possible changes in policy might extend equity, particularly in areas where we suspect that future developments will present more challenges.

The Ministry of Education's own Development Plan for 2003-8[29] gives substantial attention to equity issues, and we would support this emphasis. Many of the issues we have raised in this report, although not all of them, are also addressed in that Plan. Our hope is that this report provides useful support to the Ministry in its own efforts to develop its equity agenda.

8.1 Day care and pre-primary education

Starting before the years of formal schooling, there is little doubt that Finland has high-quality programmes of both day care and pre-primary education, and that both are now part of an overall strategy

[28] We were unable to learn much about the Sami people, who comprise only 0.03% of the population; but like immigrants there appear to be a variety of special programs for the particular conditions of their lives and communities.

[29] Among its other recommendations, the Ministry's (2004) Development Plan includes proposals to take general and vocational education simultaneously; to improve contacts between comprehensive schooling and vocational education; to decreased the dropout rate from vocational education through counselling and guidance, remedial and special needs teaching, and work-based learning; to reduce differences in learning and reinforce remedial teaching, special needs teaching, and supportive services; to participate in regional development and even out access regional differences in the supply of tertiary education; to improve guidance and counselling; to extend preparatory vocational education for immigrants from 6 months to one year, and to provide additional support for entry to upper secondary education.

for equalizing the substantial differences that young children bring to primary schooling. However, there remain two areas of concern. One is the level of participation in both day care and pre-primary education among groups — low-SES children, immigrants, and some rural children — who might benefit. The second is the puzzling lack of coordination between day care and education, which strikes us as potentially counter-productive. We are also concerned about the potential for the purpose of day care to be disconnected from the purpose of pre-primary education, since there is so little institutionalized discussion between the two levels (as distinct from local informal discussions, which may or may not take place). In this case day care facilities may not be doing a good a job as they could be in preparing young children for both the cognitive and non-cognitive demands of subsequent schooling.

We believe that a process of coordinating day care and pre-primary education should be instituted, starting at the national level with discussions between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and then extending to discussions at the municipal level, and finally to the level of day care programmes in local communities and the nearby pre-primary programmes. The first task of these discussions would be ascertain what the state of coordination now is, since we were unable to determine much about this; to determine if indeed certain children who might benefit are being excluded, for one reason or another; and to explore the consistency of purposes and content between the two practices. These discussions might in turn lead to different practices either in day care, in pre-primary education, or in both.

It is possible, of course, that such discussions might lead only to minor changes in current practices, and that the lack of coordination in practice is not as serious as we think. But the tactic of equalizing school readiness is so important, and the information about coordination was so sparse, that we consider this an area of potential improvement.

Recommendation 1. We recommend that co-ordination of day care and pre-primary education should be more fully developed. To this end both national and local discussion should take place to assess the state of coordination, to ensure consistency between the two practices and to determine if children who might benefit are being excluded.

In addition we have noted that 96% of 6 year olds participate in the pre-primary year of education. Participation at this level will inevitably mean that teachers of pupils in the first primary year will tend to plan their teaching on the assumption that pupils have experienced the pre-primary year, and we do have a concern that the 4% who do not participate may miss out on a useful experience, and place themselves at risk of falling behind in later years. We believe this risk needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 2. We recommend that that an investigation be undertaken of the background of those children who do not participate in the pre-primary year of education, and in the light of that information consideration should be given to options for ensuring that all those who could benefit from the pre-primary year of education do so.

8.2 The consistency of equity efforts in comprehensive education

In general we think that the provision of education and other social services by municipalities is one of the strengths of the Finish approach. We do note, however, that equity (and indeed quality) in comprehensive schooling depends on a number of related practices, including a “virtuous circle” in teaching, and it is crucial not to let any of these practices and conditions weaken. In particular, while decentralized provision by municipalities is one of the strengths of the existing system, decentralization does bring the risks of unevenness or inequity in applying certain desirable policies, and we are concerned that the basic equity approach of comprehensive education may not be evenly implemented in all municipalities. We note that the Provincial State Offices have a role in evaluating educational services in municipalities, but we remain concerned about, for example, variations in the availability of teacher or

school assistants, special-needs teachers, and counsellors, and we know that the distribution of fully-qualified teachers is uneven among municipalities.

Any variation among municipalities can be corrected only by the national government. A study of the variation across municipalities in the equity practices we have discussed would therefore be helpful. If such inequalities exist, then a variety of remedies are possible including a revision in the equalizing formulas that fund municipalities, perhaps an increase in earmarked grants for equity-related expenditures like special-needs teachers, or even just advice to local municipalities on how best to achieve equity in comprehensive education. But our concern is that the equity efforts in comprehensive schools, as good as they are in theory, may be unevenly distributed in practice.

Recommendation 3. We recommend that the Ministry of Education commission a study of the variation across municipalities in equity practices, including the availability of support such as special needs teachers, classroom assistants, social workers and psychologists.[30]

Over the longer run we are concerned that the combination of practices necessary to maintain equity be sustained. The current equity efforts, as we understand them, result from a multitude of interrelated practices: not only teachers able to intervene when students fall behind, but also supports like school assistants, special needs teachers, and multi-disciplinary groups; not only extensive teacher training, but also a virtuous circle that heightens the quality of teachers; not only teacher training emphasizing autonomous professionals, but also small classes and small schools; not only substantial resources from education, but also non-educational resources through multi-disciplinary teams. This is a complex of practices has emerged over time, but it must be maintained since any weakness in one component will undermine other practices. Here too there is a monitoring role for central government to play, in examining whether the multiple conditions necessary for equitable practice are being maintained.

Recommendation 4. We recommend that the Ministry of Education should actively monitor and sustain the virtuous circle which supports the high quality and equity of basic schooling in Finland.

8.3 Extending equity efforts to upper secondary education

As powerful as the equity efforts in comprehensive education are, they appear to be much less used in upper secondary education, either general or vocational. There are, as we understand it, two kinds of consequences: students from general education moving into vocational education, perhaps as they get into academic trouble; and students (especially vocational students) dropping out before the completion of grade 12. But the same techniques that work in comprehensive education should work as well in upper secondary: early identification of students falling behind, with one-on-one or small-group instruction to correct any problems; the potential for using teacher assistants, special-needs teachers, or multi-disciplinary teams to address more deeply-rooted problems; the creation of conditions in which teachers and other personnel can readily see when students are lagging. The projects funded by European Social Funds, intended to reduce dropouts, strike us as steps in the right direction; perhaps it remains only to adopt these practices for all of upper secondary schooling.

The Ministry of Education should therefore establish a working group of individuals from comprehensive education, upper secondary general education, and secondary vocational education, to examine the possibilities for extending these various equity practices. Then any conclusions and

[30] We note that a report by the Finnish Education Evaluation Council, published since our visit has addressed some of these issues – including the provision of special support to pupils and special education. The report concluded that one third of Finland's upper secondary schools provide no special education, although it is clearly necessary (Composite news bulletin, August 2005, Ministry of Education, Finland).

recommendations from the working group could be conveyed to the municipality and school level, through pilot programmes, expanded general or earmarked funding, or simply through information and technical assistance to local schools.

We suspect that some equity practices would have to be modified to fit the conditions of upper secondary schools. For example, special-needs teachers might have to be differentiated by subject; multi-disciplinary teams might have to include a different variety of non-school personnel, including counsellors familiar with a range of problems related to adolescent health and mental health, sexuality, family conflicts, and other issues "typical" of adolescents though not younger students. But the basic approach of the comprehensive schools seems sufficiently flexible that its extension could be worked out, and in the process help to reduce drop-back and drop-out in upper-secondary education.

Recommendation 5. We recommend that the Ministry of Education establish a working group of individuals from basic education, upper secondary general education, and secondary vocational education, to examine how the good equity practices of basic education could be extended into upper secondary education.

8.4 Guidance and counselling and the transition to upper secondary and tertiary education

Consistently we heard complaints about the quality of guidance and counselling, in both helping students make decisions about upper-secondary programmes, and in helping them make the transition to tertiary education. Despite some consistent approaches — particularly guidance and counselling "courses" in both lower and upper secondary — evidently many students feel unprepared to make the choices they must make at the end of lower secondary and upper secondary.

We were not in a position to make a thorough examination of guidance and counselling. However our own informal impressions were critical, and consistent with Finland's own review. But we suspect that, as in so many other countries, guidance and counselling are relatively peripheral to other instructional activities of the schools; that the time spent varies a great deal but is often trivial; and that a variety of more active or project-based methods of exploring alternative careers and educational options are rarely used— for example, visiting universities and polytechnics as well as places of employment, interviewing members of the community and labour force, creating educational and occupational plans from an early stage, using work experience and internships to provide direct experience of workplaces, and having mentors responsible for helping students examine post-schooling options.

We note and welcome the commitment given to improving guidance and counselling in the Development Plan and that one Million euros has been committed to this improvement in the years 2004-5. Given the potential damage caused – particularly to equity – by any weaknesses in the area of guidance and counselling we believe that action in this area is urgent. We hope that the Ministry's proposals will take account of the OECD international comparative study (OECD 2004a, 2004b), and ensure that a more effective guidance and counselling system is in place. Options for reform could include better co-ordination of efforts undertaken by schools themselves, including the more active approaches just mentioned; perhaps the coordination of efforts that are now scattered through schools, labour market programmes, and other efforts; the creation of free-standing guidance and counselling programmes accessible to all students and non-students, like the one Great Britain used to have in its Careers Services.

Recommendation 6. We recommend that in the light of the Ministry of Education's own evaluation and our findings, the Ministry should now develop proposals for reform designed to significantly enhance the effectiveness of vocational guidance and counselling.

8.5 The division between general upper secondary and vocational education: Strategies for improving vocational education

The current differences between general upper secondary schooling, with competitive admissions, and vocational education, which prepares for low-status jobs and requires an early commitment to an occupation, contribute to increasing inequality after comprehensive schooling. This is, to be sure, a problem that arises in virtually all countries except those that have followed the dual system developed in Austria and Germany, but the fact that it is widespread should not diminish the fact that it violates the Finnish commitment to equity. The only solution we see is to narrow the status gap between the general and the vocational route.

As we look at vocational practices in different countries, there are only a few alternatives to consider. One is simply to abandon vocational education at the secondary level, to provide general education for all students (thereby allowing all of them to keep their options open), and to postpone vocational education until tertiary education, to take place in polytechnics at higher levels of sophistication, when students are more mature and more likely to be hired. This is in effect the solution in the U.S. and in England, where there is almost no serious vocational education in secondary schools anymore. However in those two countries a relatively large proportion of the cohort drops out at the end of compulsory education.

A second similar alternative would be to follow the Norwegian approach, in which all students have a right to upper secondary education, and students are allowed to choose vocational education only after a foundation year in vocational studies in which they learn about occupational options — avoiding the current problem where so many lower secondary students are unsure of what occupation to enter.

A third solution is to make a series of marginal improvements to existing vocational programmes. These might include greater incorporation of academic content; better connections with employers, including greater use of internships or work experience; adequate provision so that students can find the occupational programme they want, rather than being shunted into an area they have not chosen; and an upgrading of the kinds of jobs for which secondary programmes prepare students, so that fewer of them are in low-skilled, entry-level positions. The problem of students being unprepared to make occupational choices at the end of year 9 could be addressed by making year 10 a year of exploration among a variety of occupational areas. For example, Denmark has “taster” courses and some schools in the U.S. have “exploratories” in year 9 or 10 where students have a series of 6 - 8 week “explorations” in different occupational areas; the period of exploration would then be followed by a choice of one occupational area for years 11 and 12. This is perhaps the easiest solution to develop and implement, but it suffers from the danger that it might not adequately diminish the differentials between the general and the vocational tracks.

A fourth option, of course, is to develop some version of the German dual system. But many countries have tried this approach, or parts of it, and most of them have failed. The institutional structures required for the German system to work include at the least strong unions and employer associations, to participate in tripartite planning around apprenticeships; government power to require that firms provide sufficient numbers of apprenticeships; adequate government control of wages, to be able to set relatively low apprenticeship-level wages and substantially higher wages for those completing apprenticeships; a mechanism to guarantee that apprenticeships focus on learning, and are not converted into low-skilled routine work; and a complex system of qualifications to determine when apprenticeships can become journeymen. It seems to us that many of these changes would be difficult within Finland, so this alternative should be considered only if the country is willing to go through a protracted period of development.

The fifth and final option is to return to an idea that was tried in Finland in the 1990s, one that has been the subject of experimentation in other Anglo-American countries: efforts to integrate vocational preparation with general or academic instruction. The Finnish Upper Secondary Pilot Project begun in

1992 was intended to develop "closer contacts between academic/general and vocational education according to changes in working life and society", building on the idea that many jobs in the Knowledge Economy require a combination of academic education and vocational application (Numminen, 2001; Numminen and Virolainen, 1996; Virolainen, 1996). The Pilot Projects worked by giving students greater ability to put their own programmes together, by choosing courses at both general upper secondary schools and in vocational schools; they also serve to change teaching in various ways and to encourage more cooperation among schools and among teachers. Not surprisingly, however, there was initially some resistance to the experiment, and it lasted too short a period of time to assess its potential. As of 1999 only one third of students took advantage of this option, and many took only minor amounts of coursework in schools other than their own. Only 7% of vocational students earned a double qualification — a matriculation examination and a vocational diploma. A more serious limitation, at least to us, is that this approach put the burden on **students** for developing their courses of study, and it's difficult to know how they could do this in a system with weak counselling and guidance. The Pilot Projects were finally ended in the early 2000s, apparently under political pressure from general upper secondary schools threatened that these "combination" programmes might undermine their academic programmes. In our reading of the evidence, they were ended prematurely, since schools with pilot programmes were just starting to develop the forms of cooperation and alternative instruction that this approach might foster.

The integrated approach strikes us as a strong alternative to the other ways of reforming vocational education. The idea of cooperation between institutions is included in the current legislation. The aim is that the education provider designs its education and training together with other local institutions so that vocational students can also include study modules from other fields and from general upper secondary school in their qualification and vice versa. Clearly there are already some elements of integration in current arrangements in terms of the way in which vocational courses blend in some more general academic elements, and in the fact that many of the vocational training institutions also offer the general upper secondary curriculum – but this could go much further. Depending on the municipality there may be various options for a student to combine studies from taking just one or a couple courses to completing both qualifications simultaneously.

In developing this approach it is neither necessary nor appropriate to place the burden on **students** to formulate integrated study plans; the alternative, as in U.S. approaches, is for **schools** to develop integrated programmes, with the active cooperation of both academic and occupational instructors, being careful to choose occupations, curriculum, applications and projects where the combination of academic material and vocational applications is substantial. There are many specific approaches to such integration, some of which have been extensively implemented and evaluated (Lasonen and Young, 1998; Grubb 1995; National Research Council 2003, Ch. 7), and therefore extensive experience on which Finland might build.

Recommendation 7. We recommend that the Ministry of Education undertake a comprehensive review of options for the reform of vocational education, with a view to determining which reforms would be most effective, particularly in enhancing the status of vocational education, giving particular attention to the option of a better integration of vocational and academic tracks.

Such changes could serve not only serve the purpose of enhancing equity, but also improving the ability of secondary vocational education to prepare students for jobs in a changing economy. And, with a more serious commitment to academic content, reforms might finally realize the goal of developing vocational programmes as serious routes into either tertiary education or employment.

8.6 Tertiary education: Access, transition and completion

As we have mentioned several times, we did not give enough attention to tertiary education to make many concrete recommendations, and a forthcoming OECD review will examine the tertiary sector more

closely. Therefore we confine ourselves to identifying three issues related to equity that we hope will be seriously considered by the OECD review, as well as by the Finnish Ministry of Education in its deliberations about tertiary education.

The first of these involves the transition from upper secondary to tertiary education. As is true in many countries, this stage and the process of competitive admissions replicates many inequalities of family background. General upper secondary education, with disproportionate numbers of students of higher socio-economic status, seems to provide a much easier route to universities and polytechnics than does vocational education. Within each kind of secondary education, there are advantages arising from family background, with immigrant students and also those from rural areas less likely to gain access to tertiary education. The solutions presumably lie in equity-related improvements in upper secondary education, including the extension of equity policies to upper secondary, improved guidance and counselling, and narrowing the gap between general and vocational tracks. But the first stage is to identify more precisely the nature of access differences to tertiary education, and we leave this as a problem for the forthcoming OECD study to examine.

Second, the expansion of tertiary education — as happened in Finland starting in the 1980s — is normally viewed as a way of enhancing access and equity, as "new students" — students whose parents did not go to tertiary education, lower-income students, immigrants, and the like — have greater chances at tertiary enrolment. However, when expansion is accompanied by differentiation — in Finland, the differentiation of universities from polytechnics — then the results are more complex. Access can be either more equitable — if, for example, a higher proportion of low-SES students gain access to both university and polytechnics than would have before expansion — or less equitable if low-SES students are directed from universities to lower-status polytechnics. Which (or what combination) of these possibilities is true is an empirical issue, and requires statistical analysis.[31] Again, we recommend that the forthcoming OECD study examine this issue more carefully.

Finally, we are concerned about evidence that completion rates from tertiary education programmes vary, and potentially in inequitable ways. Polytechnics have lower rates of completion than universities. It might make sense for the government to look again at the funding system for polytechnics, since the current arrangements, which link funding to enrolments but not to completion, provide limited incentives for institutions to ensure completion. Within each sector we are concerned that — as in other countries — lower-SES students, "new students", and those forced to take on too much employment, have lower rates of completion than others. These factors mean that any measures taken to encourage completions should not provide a perverse incentive to the institution to avoid taking students, such as those described, who will need more support if they are to complete. Again, this is a topic that merits greater attention in the future.

Recommendation 8. We recommend that the forthcoming OECD review visit which will look at tertiary education should give particular attention to:

- access to tertiary education from upper secondary and vocational education;
- how the expansion of tertiary education in Finland, including the institutional differentiation can be harnessed to the cause of equity;
- drop-out from tertiary education, and variability in drop-out rates between institutions.

[31] In addition to Chevalier and Conlon (2003) for the U.K., see Rouse (1995, 1998) for the U.S.

8.7 Preparing for increases in immigrants

As mentioned in Chapter 7, we were generally impressed with the variety of programmes provided for immigrants. But we do think that the current variation among municipalities in approaches to second-language instruction may work to the disadvantage of immigrants in some parts of Finland. We believe that a working group should be convened, including the participation of municipality representatives and those familiar with local immigrant programmes, first to diagnose whether the problem is serious to warrant some correction, and — if so — to devise a national framework or guidelines for language instruction and other programmes for new immigrants. In general we think that the "soft touch" approach to regulation and its reliance on local expertise rather than centralized regulation works well in Finland, so we do not envision a series of requirements imposed by the national government on municipalities and local schools. But we do think it appropriate to develop a coherent and national policy framework for language education, and we suspect this is an area where municipalities might welcome the grater expertise that the national government can muster.

Recommendation 9. We recommend that the Ministry of Education convene a working group, including municipality representatives and those familiar with local immigrant programmes, to examine second language instruction, to explore whether national guidelines for language instruction and other programmes for new immigrants would be helpful, and if so to develop these guidelines.

8.8 Improvements in data and evaluation

Formally speaking, arrangements are in place for providing relevant data to policy-makers and practitioners. The Ministry of Education and Statistics Finland agree annually on the statistical data to be produced for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of education and training. The Ministry and the National Board publish many analytic studies, typically on web sites, and we were informed that the data are widely used at the Ministry for monitoring and decision-making.

Despite these arrangements, we found it difficult to obtain basic statistical information during our visit — for example, on funding patterns, flows of students, rates of completion versus dropout, employment and other economic benefits from different types of schooling, the consequences of different second-chance programmes, although we managed to obtain more information, by roundabout routes, at later stages. We are not quite sure whether we met the wrong people and therefore simply failed to learn about existing data and evaluation, or whether such analysis — including programme evaluation — is inadequate. We do think that because of the culture surrounding education, the Finns would make good use of data and analysis for improving education rather than blaming participants.

Recommendation 10. We recommend that the Ministry of Education consider options for making the process of policy-making more soundly based on evidence including the options of:

institutionally, to clarify and reinforce responsibility for data analysis and evaluation, for dissemination of results to interested participants, and for maintaining relationships with Statistics Finland and other statistical agencies and the linkage of all these activities with policy-making;

procedurally, to establish in the template for new policy documents a standard section entitled 'research and data' which should describe the evidence bearing on the policy proposals set out in the documents.

We are particularly concerned that the wide variety of second-chance programmes be carefully evaluated. These are difficult to evaluate, because the students in them are selected in some way or another — they are, after all, individuals who have not done well in conventional programmes — and they may be highly self-selected as well, since only individuals with certain levels of motivation and ambition may

enrol in such programmes. These are well-known problems in evaluation research, and there are ways to resolve them. But without such evaluation, it is impossible to know whether or not the complex of second-chance programmes works to the benefit of its students, and to the overall equity of the Finnish system. Again, after our visit, we were told that many evaluations exist, but we saw little concrete evidence.

Recommendation 11. We recommend that the wide variety of second-chance programmes in Finland be carefully evaluated.

8.9 The need for an integrated economic development/education policy

We cannot see how the problems experienced by schools in isolated and rural areas — declining populations, school closures, teacher shortages, inadequate funding — can be resolved simply through education policies. Instead, some form of economic development is necessary, to provide an appropriate economic base to rural communities and to stabilize their populations. Because we cannot see how this is now being done except by municipalities on their own, we recommend that an arm of central government begin the process of formulating regional economic development policies to include education. We are aware of the Ministerial committee on this issue – but we have not seen any outcome of their work, and we note that the education Minister is not included. It seems to us that a regional economic development plan would need to include local educators, since a strong education system, or the expansion of certain forms of education (polytechnics, for example) might be part of any economic development strategy; vocational education might be necessary, and we believe that the effects on regional allocations of performance-based funding for vocational education should be examined. Until Finland takes this step, we fear that rural schools will continue to decline relative to urban schools, to the detriment of the children in them.

Recommendation 12. We recommend that, as part of fuller regional economic planning in Finland, account should be taken of educational issues and interests, initially through the inclusion of the Minister for Education in the inter-Ministerial committee responsible for regional economic development.

8.10 Setting national priorities for areas of state support

The final recommendation is in many ways the most difficult. As we clarified in Chapter 6, there are many demands on education, by many participants, and they now exceed the funds available. In the future it will be necessary for Finland to establish priorities among the different levels of schooling and the programmes that it supports, and — consistent with the Finnish approach stressing participation and consensus in political decisions — we think it better that the priorities be established deliberately rather than accidentally. Otherwise what is too likely to happen, we fear, is that tertiary education will continue to expand; funding for equity efforts in comprehensive schooling will fall (in relative if not absolute terms), or at least fail to keep pace with what most educators see as growing needs; the potential expansion and elaboration of day care will not be funded; the extension of equity mechanisms to upper secondary will be neglected; and the system as a whole will become less and less equitable.

In setting priorities for national funding, it may also be necessary to look to other sources of revenue, as we outlined in Chapter 6, particularly to beneficiaries like parents and students who are not poor, and to employers. This is consistent with one conception of equity in taxation, the principle that those who benefit should pay at least part of the costs.[32] And if the resulting funds can be used to free up resources to support equity elsewhere in the system, then equity principles are doubly served.

[32] The other equity approach to taxation is ability to pay, which is already embedded in Finland's progressive tax structure.

We are not sure of the appropriate forum in which a discussion of national priorities for state support can take place. But we have been impressed with the political process in Finland, with its deliberations and preference for consensus, and we are quite sure that the Finns themselves can create the appropriate forum. Our role is simply to point out that, in the absence of deliberate discussions of national priorities and ways to fund them, the accidental outcomes are likely to be less equitable.

Recommendation 13. We recommend that Finland establishes funding priorities among the different levels of schooling and the programmes it supports, taking full account of equity as well as other objectives.

8.11 Conclusion

Many of our recommendations in this chapter have taken the same form: for the Ministry of Education, or some other Ministry or deliberative body, to convene, weigh the evidence, and come up with solutions. These might then be followed by local pilot programmes to develop workable approaches, and then put into practice nation-wide over a period of time — just as comprehensive education was developed over a relatively long period of steady development. In other cases — particularly recommendations 3, 9, and 12 — we are concerned that the many municipalities, generally a strength of the Finnish governance system, may create differences among municipalities that are too large, requiring the national government to intervene in the name of equity.

We recognise that some of our recommendations would cost money (although some might also save money). We have not attempted to cost these recommendations, partly because we are often proposing an initial exercise to define the scope of reform, and partly because we ourselves lack the technical tools to undertake a costing. However we do recognise that some of our recommendations may be seen as desirable, but not currently affordable. That said, we note that additional resources have been found over recent years for certain priorities, notably expanding participation in tertiary education. Our simple wish is that the objective of equity be given sufficient priority when decisions are taken regarding the competing demands on the education budget.

Overall, Finland has made remarkable progress, especially since the early 1970s, in enhancing equity. The basic structure of the education system has been transformed, so that there is much less streaming; virtually no “dead ends” or terminal forms of schooling; a greater commitment to early childhood education (both day care and pre-primary education) to equalize school readiness; an expansion of tertiary education; and many second-chance options. The educational practices enhancing equity have been well-developed, particularly in comprehensive schooling, and these practices could be readily extended to other levels. The contributions of the strong welfare state are also remarkable, especially in providing supportive services complementary to schooling, in the formation of multi-disciplinary teams, and in supporting students in tertiary education. Our recommendations are intended to point out areas where some of these practices could be extended further and made more uniform, fulfilling the commitment to equity that is so much a part of Finland’s core principles.

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ANNEX 1: OECD REVIEW TEAM

Mr. W. Norton Grubb (Rapporteur)	Professor and the David Gardner Chair in Higher Education, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, United States
Ms. Hanna Marit Jahr	Counsellor for Education in the Mission of Norway to the EU
Mr. Josef Neumüller	Head of Department for International Relations, Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
Mr. Simon Field	Education and Training Policy Division, Directorate for Education (EDU), OECD, Paris, France

ANNEX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

12 to 21 April 2005

Tuesday 12 April – Helsinki

10.00 – 11.00 ***Meeting in the Ministry of Education***

Mr Arvo Jäppinen, Director General, Department for Education and Science Policy
Mr Osmo Lampinen, Counsellor for Education, Polytechnic Division

11.00 – 12.00 ***Meeting with Minister of Education and Science***

Ms Tuula Haatainen

13.00 – 16.00 ***Meeting with the civil servants from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Finance and National Board of Education***

Ministry of Education:
Mr Osmo Lampinen, Counsellor of Education
Mr Jari Rajanen, Counsellor of Education
Ms Ulla Numminen, Senior Civil Servant
Ms Tarja Riihimäki, Cousellor for Education
Mr Jorma Ahola, Cousellor for Education
Ms Anne-Mari Pyökäri, Senior Adviser
Ms Armi Mikkola, Cousellor for Education
Ms Virpi Hiltunen, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Labour:
Mr Seppo Larmo, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health:
Ms Anna-Leena Anttalainen, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Finance:
Ms Sinikka Wuolijoki, Special Government Adviser

Statistics Finland:
Ms Aila Repo, Senior Research Officer

Wednesday 13 April – Helsinki

Visit to the City of Helsinki: Multicultural Education and School Visits

09.00 – 10.00 ***Helsinki City Education Department***

Ms Katri Kuukka, Educational Consultant

10.30 – 12.00 ***School Visit to Åshöjden Comprehensive School, upper stage (age group 13-15, Swedish school)***

Ms Kerstin Meinander, Principal

13.15 – 15.00 ***School Visit to Vesala Comprehensive school, upper stage (age group 13 - 15)***

Mr Lauri Halla, Principal

15.30 – 16.30 ***Meeting with the representatives of tertiary education institutes***

Mr Kaj Malm, Confederation of Polytechnic Rectors
Mr Tapio Markkanen, Confederation of University Rectors

Thursday 14 April – Helsinki

09.00 – 10.00 ***Visit to the Confederation of Finnish Industries***

Mr Christoffer Taxell, President

10.30 – 11.30 ***Meeting with the Representatives of Student Organisations***

The Union of Finnish Polytechnic Students – SAMOK:
Ms Petra Nysten, Chairperson
Ms Marika Nordlund, Secretary of Social Affairs

The National Union of Students in Finland:
Mr Arttu Laasonen, President
Mr Niko Kyynäräinen, Member of the Board, Social Affairs
Ms Anna-Maria Rajala, Member of the Board, Educational Affairs

The Union of Finnish Upper Secondary School Students:
Ms Milla Halme, Vice-President

The Federation of Vocational Trainers - SAKKI:
Ms Miia Järvi, Secretary of Education and Social Affairs

13.00 - 15.00 ***Introduction and Visit to so called Work Shops and Discussion with the students and Teachers***

Ms Eija Ahola, Director, City of Vantaa
Ms Laila Bröcker, Planner
Mr Janne Marjaniemi, National Confederation of Workshops

15.30 – 17.00 ***Visit to the Institute for Further Education***

Mr Simo Susiluoto, Director

Friday 15 April – Helsinki

09.00 – 11.00 ***Seminar with the Education Researchers***

Mr Sakari Ahola, University of Turku
Mr Jouni Välijärvi University of Jyväskylä
Mr Juha Hedman, University of Turku
Ms Rita Asplund, University of Helsinki

11.45 – 13.15 ***Meeting with the representatives of Employee Organisations***

Mr Petri Lempinen, Education Adviser, The Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees
Mr Jari Pekka-Jyrkänne, Senior Adviser, The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions

13.45 – 15.30 ***Meeting with the representatives of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Suomen Kuntaliitto)***

Ms Lieselotte Eskelinen, Senior Adviser
Mr Juha Henrikson, Senior Adviser
Ms Inkeri Toikka, Senior Adviser
Mr Gustav Wikström, Senior Adviser

Monday 18 April – Kuusamo

Local Programme in Kuusamo

Tuesday 19 April – Kuusamo & Helsinki

16.30 – 17.30 ***Meeting with the Representatives of Central Board for Education***

Mr Reijo Laukkanen, Counsellor of Education

Wednesday 20 April – Hämeenlinna

08.30 – 13.30 ***Visit to Department of Teacher Education of Tampere University (class teacher education)***

Ms Eija Syrjäläinen, Professor
Mr Vesa Toivonen, Principal of the Hämeenlinna Teacher Training School

15.30 – 17.00 ***Visit to Trade Union of Education (OAJ)***

Ms Marjatta Melto, Special Adviser
Ms Airi Jaro, Special Adviser
Mr Matti Lahtinen, Development Manager

Thursday 21 April – Helsinki

09.00 – 10.00 ***Visit to Ressu upper secondary school***

Ari Huovinen, Rector

10.30 – 12.00 ***Preliminary comments and wrapping up in the Ministry of Education***

Ministry of Education:
Mr Arvo Jäppinen, Director General
Mr Osmo Lampinen, Counsellor of Education
Mr Jari Rajanen, Counsellor of Education
Ms Ulla Numminen, Senior civil servant
Ms Tarja Riihimäki, Counsellor for education
Mr Jorma Ahola, Counsellor for Education

Ms Anne-Mari Pyökäri, Senior Adviser
Ms Armi Mikkola, Counsellor for Education
Ms Virpi Hiltunen, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Labour:
Ms Teija Felt, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health:
Ms Anna-Leena Anttalainen, Senior Adviser

Ministry of Finance:
Ms Sinikka Wuolijoki, Special Government Adviser

ANNEX 3: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN FINLAND