

Finland: Access to Guidance Counsellors and One-Stop Guidance Centres

Facilitating easy access to trustworthy and understandable labour market information, and ensuring that advice is made available from guidance professionals.

Since 1970, career education has been embedded in the Finnish education system and its core curriculum. In Finland, students in grades 7-9 (ages 13-16) are required to complete 76 hours of compulsory career education. Career education is treated as, and has similar status to, general education subjects such as mathematics or history. The national core curriculum promotes a whole school approach to career education. Within the core curricula, the acquisition of career management skills is an explicit objective for learning, so all teachers, regardless of subject, have to identify how they integrate these skills into their instruction.

In January 2021, new legislation was approved to extend compulsory education to 12 years in Finland. As part of this legislation, education must also be continuous - eliminating the possibility of taking a “gap year”, and school guidance counsellors are required to follow up and ensure that students who finish lower-secondary education at 16 are applying to and enrolling in upper-secondary general or vocational education.

In Finland, school guidance counsellors serve as full-time, salaried staff members, whose qualifications are legally defined by the state. They oversee the mandatory career education compulsory hours, coordinate partnerships and work agreements with employers, and provide individual career guidance to students. Currently, the ratio of students to guidance counsellors in Finland is about 250 to 1, which is in line with Finland’s parliamentary recommendations.

In addition to guidance counsellors, Finland has offered ‘one-stop guidance centres’ since 2015. These centres are shared offices, co-funded by and coordinated with municipal, youth education, employment, social and health authorities. Centre practitioners are employed by their different organisations and come together under one roof for a cross-disciplinary service. The centres provide support to people under 30 years of age going through life transitions and are designed to allow users to find the services or combination of services they need in one location. These cross-sectoral services are also available online.

Students who do not continue in education after upper-secondary school – whether because they decided not to continue onto higher education, or because they decided to take a gap year to improve their candidacies for university admissions - are entitled to make immediate use of the career services provided from their municipality’s one-stop guidance centre for 12 months after leaving school. The main body responsible for this guidance entitlement is the municipality, so students can approach either the school from which they graduated or their municipality’s one-stop-centre for guidance. The entitlement is part of a national policy to support the transition from upper-secondary education to tertiary education.