

INFORMAL COUNTRY REPORT

FINLAND

Report on the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, 2013

Below is a report from Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland on the three priority action areas. The report draws inter alia on the evaluation of Finland's national strategies for education for sustainable development that was conducted in 2012. The report includes also inputs from the Finnish National Board of Education.

a) To ensure that there is an education for sustainable development plan in every school by 2015

Finland has two separate but aligned strategies on ESD. They both set the same goal of having an ESD plan in every school by 2015. To this end schools have been provided with models, examples and practical support in drawing an SD plan. Also two separate certification schemes are available for schools; the Green Flag (internationally known as Eco-Schools, <http://www.vihrealippu.fi/vl/english>) and the sustainable development certification of educational establishments (<http://www.koulujaymparisto.fi/sivu.php?id=1820>).

According to the survey conducted in conjunction with the evaluation of the national ESD strategies (no official statistical data is available) roughly around 40 % of schools have an SD plan in place in Finland. Additionally 11 % is planning to make a SD plan. The plans are more common in larger schools with 300 pupils or more.

Based on the conducted survey, it seems that an ESD plan is a good leverage for integrating SD also to the local curricula. On the other hand it was also noted that practical SD work is and can be done effectively also without a specific SD plan. Among others local commitment to sustainable development, values of the society as a whole and inclusion of sustainable development in the national core curriculum were identified crucial for successful work in schools.

The Finnish National Board of Education has begun to prepare the new national core curriculum for basic and pre-primary education. The new curriculum will be based on the Decree on national objectives and distribution of teaching hours in basic education (422/2012), issued by the Government in June 2012. The renewed core curriculum will be completed by the end of 2014. New local curricula that are based on this core curriculum should be prepared by the beginning of school year 2016–2017. The preparation is carried out in working groups that focus on structure and objectives, conceptions of learning, support for learning and the different subjects taught in basic education. Each working group consists of educational officials, researchers and teachers. The preparation of the curriculum is interactive. All education providers can follow the preparation and give feedback at the different phases. They are also encouraged to involve pupils and their parents in the process. One of the main objectives of the renewal is the definition of educational values and principles so that they are based on supporting the versatile growth of pupils, strengthening their identities and utilizing interactive methods that promote sustainable development.

b) To promote the introduction of ESD into teacher education

Teacher education in Finland is provided by higher education institutions, namely universities and polytechnics. The polytechnics provide for the pedagogical teacher education of vocational educators.

Pre-school teachers, classroom teachers, subject teachers and special-education teachers have a degree from university. Both universities and polytechnics are independent in Finland, and they decide on their own curricula.

A survey of the introduction and relevance of sustainable development to teacher education was conducted in 2010 and its findings were reported in 2012 report to UNECE. Since then, sustainable development and its inclusion to the curricula has been part of the discussions between Ministry of Education and Culture and the Higher Education Institutions.

Based on the evaluation of the national ESD strategies in-service training was considered highly important. The National Board of Education finances, follows up and develops in-service training targeted for principals, teachers, study advisors and personnel responsible for support services in schools and institutions (except for personnel of higher education institutions). One of the focus areas for the training has for several years been sustainable development. This applies also to the in-service training of vocational educators. The amount of SD training provided for teachers has however been limited. Also other actors (incl. communities) provide for in-service training.

c) To reorient technical and vocational education and training in support of sustainable development and the transition to green economy

According to the evaluation of the Finnish national strategies on ESD (2012) it seems that the vocational education and training sector has performed well in the inclusion of sustainable development into education. Sustainable development is incorporated into all 52 upper secondary vocational qualifications (including a total of 120 different study programmes) as one of the key components of life-long learning. It means that student or candidate has the ability to act according to the principles of sustainable development in her/his profession.

It is considered that the close cooperation between vocational education sector and business is one of the reasons for success - the businesses demand knowledge on sustainable development. Another important factor is the practical approach to sustainable development of vocational education.

Some examples of recent projects:

- Aikuis-KEKE; Adult SD – contents, methods and criteria of sustainable development in adult education (2011-2012). The project aimed at improving the inclusion of sustainable development into vocational adult education by developing models and tools. The outcomes included process model of including sustainable development into various phases of vocational qualifications, pedagogical model of sustainable development and description of contents of sustainable development in various professions. The project was funded by the National Board of Education and it was coordinated by Hyria Education Ltd.
- Developing environmental knowledge in working life –project aims to promote the knowledge on environment of labor force and to support collaboration between working life and vocational education. The project will develop self-learning materials on environmental issues for real estate business, social and health sector, metals and engineering as well as sanitation and cleaning services. The materials will be produced in collaboration with the businesses and experts of each field. The project is funded by National Board of Education and coordinated by Sykli, Environmental School of Finland.