

Template for national differences – Finland

Education:

- When did the universities shut down?

March 18, 2020. This was very prompt and covered all Higher Education Institutions i.e. 14 Universities and 24 Universities of Applied Sciences. Municipalities gave these orders based on temporary legislative amendments. Rectors' Conferences in respective sectors agreed on the general lines of this close-down, but final solutions and details were left to individual organisations. The main goal of the measures was to guarantee the safety of students and staff in a situation where the nature of the spreading virus and COVID was not well known.

- When did reopening start?

May 14, 2020. This meant that the premises were not closed anymore by legislation and implementing orders, but all education was conducted in distant modes all spring. When the autumn term started, some of the courses cancelled in the spring were organized (in laboratories etc.), but the vast majority of courses and lectures take place in distant modes. The University sector and The Universities of Applied Sciences sector have agreed on some principles in the respective sectors, but autonomous organisations have applied individual solutions in organising education.

Students in disciplines including e.g. lab, technology and individual teaching (like performing arts) modes suffer from postponed learning opportunities. We do have evidence on decreased wellbeing of the students, especially of the freshmen cohort.

- What have been the national demands?

In the **Spring 2020** Higher Education institutions had to close their education facilities and were allowed to continue doing research, especially in critical fields.

This was interpreted very narrowly and almost all research in the premises of HEIs was cut down. It was stated that research can be conducted anywhere, which is not true for all disciplines in all phases of a project. All education continued throughout the spring and summer in distant learning mode, and a vast majority of internships and summer jobs in universities and in industries were cancelled.

- What was done in terms of digital teaching?

Digital tools already in use were utilized - emphasis was in Teams, Skype and Zoom and educational platforms within universities. The fast IT connections between HEIs and all national educational facilities were strengthened by the national high-performance computing center CSC in collaboration with Nordic peers (i.e. FUNET was strengthened with the help of NORDUNET). Actual digital HEI system was in the making already before the COVID-pandemic and is still in the preparatory phase.

- How has student well-being been?

This has been studied both by the Ministry of Education and Culture, by the scientific community and by HEIs themselves. Reference data exists from many years.

In a survey induced by the MoEC and conducted by a university with student organisations, focus was especially on students changing from secondary to tertiary education this year have more symptoms (depression, sadness, anxiety, loneliness) and more severe symptoms than before. There is a website containing the data, but unfortunately thus far it's available only in Finnish (fresh results). Swedish version is in preparation.

HEIs have provided more resources for student services and the Government has provided additional funding for strengthening measures to support students both in their studies and in questions related to well-being and life in general.

Student exchange programmes have been mostly on hold, which has affected both mental, social and economic wellbeing of students. We also have a non-Finnish community in the HEIs and some of these international students are suffering from the situation immensely.

- What have been the reactions from faculty?

Based on individual discussions: A wide variety of reactions. Some are relieved with having the option to work from home, some are stressed with not seeing the students and with the technical flexibility expected from every tom, dick and harry.

HEIs do follow the situation among staff and personnel. There are plans to collect data and to conduct surveys on personnel (in addition to the student population) as well.

Science:

- When did institutes/labs shut down?

The schedule was the same as in education, see above.

There was variation in the degree of shutdown nationally, as in the spring the national COVID situation varied a great deal between municipalities. The greater Helsinki area was more intensively affected than the rest of the country. HEIs in the North could apply somewhat more liberal practices than those in the capital area (where 25 % of the population live).

- What was done in terms of research labs?

Some HEIs closed down all research on campus, some continued. One of the biggest obstacles was that students had to step down from research requiring laboratories or other technical facilities. Courses were either cancelled (special courses) or rescheduled, summer jobs in the labs were cancelled and many graduate students had severe problems in conducting their projects (with animal models, tissue cultures etc.).

- What have some of the most important challenges been?

In addition to what is already described above, a specific case is higher education and research in performing arts, which is mostly based on a need for face to face mode activity and individual contacts between teachers and students. It has been challenging also for student orchestras (in the Sibelius Academy of the Art University), for theatre productions (in the Theatre Academy), for primary education teacher education at schools and alike to continue their work in the current situation. Some of this has been possible to cover by digital means.

International modes of operation have suffered a great deal, when mobility has almost totally ceased.

Health authorities:

- What has their role been during the crisis?

The main source of information for the government - but also for citizens and the media - has been The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health with the National Authority Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has drawn the conclusions together with other Ministries and has helped the Government to formulate a base for decisions.

Funding:

- When did funding for Corona research start?

Investments were made throughout the spring. In addition to the European funding efforts ministerial administrative branches had their own initiatives. The Academy of Finland shifted existing not yet allocated resources to COVID research, the Government allocated more funding directly into COVID via the Academy and directly to the National Authority, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. IT Center for Science, CSC Ltd, provided the researcher community and also e.g. the Bank of Finland with dedicated supercomputing resources for free (paid by the Ministry of Education and Culture). The Government also saw the need to fund research in any discipline that has to do with the ongoing pandemic and that will in longer term guarantee better crisis preparedness and security of supply. Business Finland has supported private industries, but this has not been directed towards R&I.

- Decision 26.5.2020 “Call for applications: special funding for research on COVID-19 epidemic and the mitigation of its effects”
 - Funding 2020-2021 (8,45 M€)
 - <https://www.aka.fi/en/about-us/media/press-releases/2020/academy-of-finland-announces-funding-decisions-on-special-call-for-covid-19-research/>
- Decision 24.6.2020 “Special funding for research into COVID-19 vaccines and pharmaceutical development”
 - Funding period 2020-2022(10 M€)
 - <https://www.aka.fi/en/about-us/media/press-releases/2020/academy-of-finland-grants-10m-for-covid-19-vaccine-and-drug-development-projects/>
- Decision soon “Nordic Health Data Research Projects on COVID-19”
 - MNOK 5,5 M€, out of which Academy of Finland 0,5 M€
- The Strategic Research Council SRC) has proposed for the government a new theme Pandemics as a societal challenge. After the government decision is made, SRC will open the funding calls for consortia.
- It is possible to redirect research within the purpose referred to in the funding decision
- If the research needs to be redirected so much that it is no longer covered by the original purpose, the Academy may accept a change in the purpose.
- Academy funding granted for other purposes could be used immediately for research related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus or the covid-19 epidemic and its effects
- Also research infrastructures could direct their work towards COVID-19

- How was the hastily generated Corona research funded and initiated?

See above.

- How has it been coordinated nationally?

Most of the decisions have been prepared in co-ordinated manner between the Ministries, in permanent secretaries’ networks and in daily collaboration between the civil servants.

- What has been the role of private enterprises?

They are participating in the research projects, but otherwise the role has not been prominent. The health sector industries in Finland are not as prominent as in e.g. Denmark and Sweden. SMEs do have efforts on COVID related products and services, but they are not major research contributors in this situation.

- What themes have the projects revolved around?

Thus far mostly vaccines, medication, social and health impacts of the crisis, the Economy. Funding decisions have not yet been done in all the funding instruments, some of the instruments have a much wider coverage over the disciplines than the ones first put up. We are sure to see not that obvious COVID related research projects in some of the funding decisions.

Policy advisory:

- In what ways has research contributed to the national political decision making?

The aforementioned permanent secretaries' network had a panel of scientists to provide an evidence base for the work. The panel was nominated based on suggestions from the researcher community. Direct assignments to specific projects have been set on topics like the Economy, safety of adults in re-opened schools, surveys to students graduating from the secondary education institutions in spring 2020 on their experiences, expectations and wellbeing etc.

- How has the weight distribution been between research/policy?

There has been lots of detailed information available. Both scientific research results as well as surveys have been used to support the Government's decision making. The decisions, however, are naturally political (not scientific) and not always perceived as such in the public. The dialogue between the Government and researchers has been very active, though and the information has been used in decision making.

Private sector

- What effects have the developments had in the private sector?

The Confederation of Finnish Industries served as a platform for Finnish enterprises in their common post-Corona future related work. The spirit in the private sector is very positive and expectations for new types of consumer behavior have been well perceived. Recovery is seen as a huge possibility and companies direct their high hopes towards increasing R&I intensity in a way that serves the resilience increasing purposes of green and digital transition.

Big enterprises help SMEs by buying their services and products in R&I.

Business Finland, the national innovation funding organization, has seen an increase in the requests for industrial R&I funding during the pandemic.