



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
FINLAND

Tertiary admission systems - Questions and answers:

Jukka Haapamäki
Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

Questions and answers 1/3:

- Why are the number of students places so limited (especially in Finland and Sweden)?
 - The indicator “share of applicants to first degree tertiary education who are accepted” does not solely reflect a limitation in the number of available study places. It may also indicate that the available places are not being allocated efficiently to first-time students. This inefficiency stems from challenges in distributing a free public good (education) in a way that is optimal from a societal perspective (which may differ from what is best for individual students). Ultimately, this situation is shaped by the existence of a selective admission system.
 - For example in the case of Finland there are in total study places in higher education for 97 % of the age cohort that finishes secondary education under 20 years old. But only 75 % of those places go to first-time students. In the case of Finland, it is important to note that the provision of higher education was underdimensioned during the 2010s. As a result, there are currently more applicants than the size of the youth cohort alone would suggest.

Questions and answers 2/3:

- How to explain the proportion of applicants who are accepted but do not study (especially in Denmark, Norway and Finland)?
 - One reason is that accepted applicants may ultimately choose to enter working life if there is strong demand for labor. Other social commitments can also play a role—for example, the study place may be located in another region.
 - Additionally, all Nordic countries use a centralized application system, allowing applicants to apply to several study programs. The study places that are declined are often those at the bottom of the applicant's preference list. Students may have strong preferences for one particular programme at a particular institution and may choose to decline a study place and instead try to increase chances of admission next year (see next slide). In Finland the first-time quotas play a role.
 - International students may also have alternative study options in other countries.

Questions and answers 3/3:

- Is the extent of use of a gap year linked to low proportions of applicants accepted to enter tertiary programmes?
 - The popularity of gap years before starting higher education is partly due to the limited availability of places at higher education institutions. On the other hand, at least in Finland and Sweden, the large number of gap years is also linked to applicants wanting to get into a specific place of study. During gap years, students can improve their chances of getting into their desired program, for example by improving their results in the tests used in the application process.
 - There is broad cultural acceptance of taking a gap year before starting tertiary education in many Nordic countries.
 - The proportion of vocational education graduates who do not go directly to higher education is high in all Nordic countries. It would appear that in many OECD countries, the transition from vocational education to higher education is smoother than in the Nordic countries. Alternatively, it may be that in the Nordic countries, it is possible to transfer to higher education at a later stage.



Thank you!