Summary: Review and Barometer 2026 of the Field of Education and Research

This publication consists of two parts: a barometer survey and an industry review. The industry review presents selected highlights from various statistics, primarily those compiled by Statistics Finland (http://www.stat.fi) and the OECD (https://stats.oecd.org).

THE KEY RESULTS OF THE BAROMETER

General overview

The data for the barometer survey were collected through a questionnaire sent to private education and early childhood education and care providers. Each organisation received one link. Representatives were asked to assess past and future developments (positive, unchanged or negative) against specified criteria. The balance figure was calculated by subtracting the share of negative assessments from the share of positive assessments. It therefore expresses the percentage-point difference between positive and negative assessments. This time, responses were received from 127 organisations (approximately 25 per cent) between 14 and 28 October 2026.

In addition to the themes discussed below, the barometer survey explored cooperation within the sector and with the wider world of work, the need for student intake places, recruitment difficulties, investments and education exports.

The sector's general outlook is seen as having deteriorated over the past 12 months considerably more often than it is seen as having improved. However, half of respondents consider the general outlook to have remained unchanged. The outlook for the next 12 months remains negative, with expectations pointing to a clear deterioration.

Number of students

Over the past 12 months, almost as many organisations have seen an increase in student or child numbers as have seen a decrease. Numbers increased in 36 per cent of organisations and remained unchanged in 29 per cent. Student numbers have generally increased only in higher education. In general education, pupil and student numbers appear to have remained broadly unchanged.

Over the next 12 months, student and child numbers are expected to increase in 33 per cent of organisations and remain unchanged in 49 per cent. In liberal adult education, student numbers are even expected to decline. Higher education providers continue to expect rising student numbers.

Funding

Overall, funding appears to have increased more often than it has decreased. Of respondents, 43 per cent report that total funding remained unchanged and 33 per cent that it increased. In vocational education and training, early childhood education and care, and liberal adult education, more respondents report a decrease in funding than an increase.

More respondents than before expect funding to decrease over the next 12 months, particularly in general education, vocational education and training, and liberal adult education. As a result, the overall balance figure is also lower than a year earlier, turning negative.

Number of employees

Of respondents, 22 per cent report that their staff numbers increased over the past 12 months, while 26 per cent report a decrease. Growth has been more pronounced in higher education institutions. In basic education in the arts, the decline in staff numbers appears at least to have stopped. In liberal adult education and vocational education and training, staff numbers appear to have continued to decline, while in early childhood education and care the trend has generally turned downwards.

Overall, expectations of a decline in staff numbers over the next 12 months are becoming more widespread. This is particularly the case in basic education in the arts and general education, and to a lesser extent in universities of applied sciences. In vocational education and training and liberal adult education, the decline is expected to continue. Universities and early childhood education and care providers anticipate very modest growth.

The number of international staff has increased over the past 12 months across all types of education, with the exception of general education, where it has remained broadly unchanged. The increase has been particularly pronounced in higher education.

The number of international staff is expected to continue to grow over the next 12 months, especially in higher education. In other types of education, the number is expected to remain broadly unchanged, except in general and vocational education, where a slight decrease is anticipated.

Financial situation

Of respondents, 56 per cent reported a surplus in their latest financial statements, 19 per cent broke even and 25 per cent reported a deficit. The share reporting a deficit has fallen by 10 percentage points, while the share reporting a surplus has risen by 15 percentage points. Surpluses have predominated across all forms of education.

Respondents are slightly more pessimistic about the financial result for the current financial year. Expectations are weaker than actual results across all forms of education except university education and basic education in the arts. Expectations are also deteriorating in all forms of education except universities.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE INDUSTRY REVIEW

The industry review highlights the latest statistical information on topics including education providers, funding and staff, students, access to education, study progress, graduate employment, educational attainment, and research, development and innovation (RDI). It concludes by highlighting five recent studies on education and research.

At the end of 2025, there were 837 education providers operating 3,045 educational institutions. Education employed 189,000 people, accounting for 7.3 per cent of all employed persons. Private education providers employ approximately one third of the education workforce.

Public expenditure on education currently amounts to approximately 5.5 per cent of gross domestic product and approximately 10 per cent of total public expenditure. Just under 1.4 million students participated in education leading to a qualification or degree in 2025. The number of foreign students has been growing, reaching 139,600 in 2025 (10 per cent of all students).

Based on the statistics, it can be estimated that more than 2.3 million Finns participate in education annually as students pursuing qualifications or degrees and as adult learners. If education provided by other organisations and more informal forms of learning, such as individual lectures, are included, more than half of Finns participate in education each year.

Of those who completed comprehensive school in 2024, 0.5 per cent did not apply for further education immediately afterwards, and 7 per cent did not continue in education leading to a qualification or degree. Of those who passed the matriculation examination in spring 2024, 77 per cent applied for a place in further education. However, 66.5 per cent did not continue in education leading to a qualification or degree in the year they passed the matriculation examination. In the 2023/2024 academic year, 5.8 per cent of students discontinued their studies without immediately continuing in education leading to a qualification or degree.

At the end of 2025, 3,654,800 people aged 15 or over had completed a qualification beyond basic education, representing 75 per cent of that population. According to Eurostat, 28.1 per cent of people aged 25–64 in Finland participated in education or training during the four weeks preceding the survey in 2025.

Research expenditure in higher education institutions has increased more than two and a half times since the start of the millennium. Growth slowed between 2010 and 2016 but resumed in 2017. In 2024, research expenditure in higher education institutions exceeded EUR 2.1 billion. Of this funding, 45 per cent came from the state budget and 53 per cent from other external sources.

Total research and development expenditure amounted to EUR 8.9 billion in 2024, equivalent to 3.2 per cent of GDP. Public funding is projected to reach EUR 3.12 billion in 2026. Its share of GDP would rise to 1.08 per cent in 2026 (with a target of 1.2 per cent in 2030). Of enterprises, 58 per cent reported engaging in innovation activity in 2022–2024.