

Helsinki

Guide for 15–18-year-old newcomers in Helsinki



The logo for Helsinki, featuring the word "Helsinki" in a bold, black, sans-serif font inside a white speech bubble with a black outline.

Helsinki

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The information in this guide was revised in February 2026.

We reserve the right to make changes.

Up-to-date information:

hel.fi/en/childhood-and-education

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1. Welcome to Helsinki!

Are you and your family beginning a new journey in Helsinki? Whether you're preparing to relocate or have recently moved to the city, we aim to help you settle smoothly into your new home.

In Finland, students continue their education until age 18. After comprehensive school, pupils apply for upper secondary education. Our task at the Education Division is to make sure everyone finds a study place.

Our education is of high quality and there are plenty of options to choose from, which we introduce in detail later in this guide. In Finland we believe in life-long learning and equal opportunity. This means you don't have to decide on your career path right away - you can choose several paths along the way. A house builder can later apply to university and become a professor, and an engineer can apply to vocational education and become a baker.

This guide explains what you should consider and what steps you need to take to land a study place that suits you best. This depends on your age, what you've studied before, and how fluent you are in our local languages. If you need a hand with applying or deciding on the right study path, this guide will tell you who to contact. Our advisory services and study and careers advisers are happy to help.

We hope you enjoy your time here in Helsinki and find the path to your dream studies!

Best wishes,

Harri Korhonen

Head of Upper Secondary Education and Liberal Adult Education
Education Division
City of Helsinki

2. Before you apply

Before you apply to upper secondary education, there are a few things to consider first.

Depending on where you're from and how long you're planning to stay in Finland, you might need a visa, a residence permit, or EU registration.

School admission requirements can change based on your age and what type of studies you are applying to. So, consider your birth year, how well you know Finnish or Swedish, and what kind of education you have so far.

Please note that if you are a student from outside the EU, EEA or Schengen Area and starting your studies here after 1 August 2026, you may need to pay tuition. Check your school in Finland for more information.

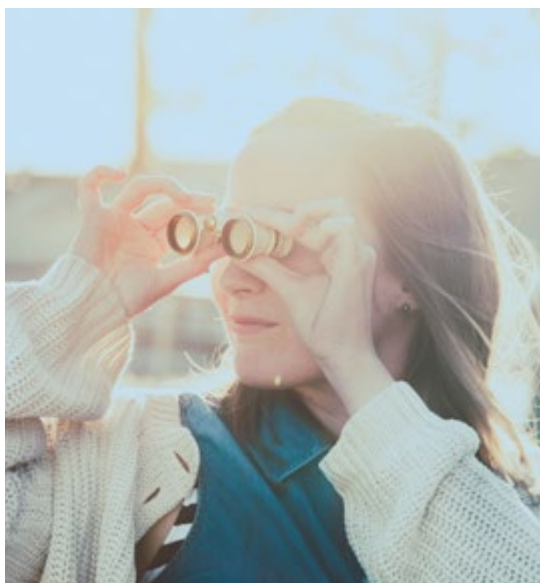
Becoming a Helsinki resident

If you are a citizen of a non-EU country, you should apply for a residence permit from Migri, the Finnish Immigration Service at migri.fi.

If you are a citizen of EU, Liechtenstein or Switzerland, a residence permit is not required, but you need a registration of the right of residence from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri).

Citizens of Nordic countries do not need to apply for a residence permit or register their right of residence.

If you are an exchange student studying in Finland for under 90 days, you only need a visa or an EU registration.



Applying for personal identity code

You will need a personal identity code soon after your arrival in Finland.

You can apply for school without a personal identity code, but you will need it when dealing with different authorities and when you request a municipality of residence.

How to apply:

Apply for a Finnish personal identity code online, and visit the Finnish Digital and Population Data Services Agency (DVV) in person within one month of applying.

Request a registration of your personal data and apply for a personal identity code online at dvv.fi.

Note that sometimes people get a personal identity code from the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) or the Finnish Tax Administration (Vero) instead of DVV.

A personal identity code is often called a social security number.

Your personal identity code is private information, and you should not give it to any other than trustworthy officials.

Municipality of residence

In simple terms, having a municipality of residence means that you are officially registered as living in a specific area in Finland. This registration gives you access to important services provided by the local government. These services include access to services such as study and careers guidance, healthcare, and cheaper public transportation for young people.

It also means that you have certain responsibilities, like attending school if you are of compulsory school age, under 18. After you have registered as a permanent resident of the municipality, we at the City of Helsinki are responsible to help you find a study place.

Admission criteria for school

The official school-leaving age in Finland is 18. This means that if you are 15 to 17 years old, you must go to school. Finding a place to study in Helsinki depends on three things:

1. Your language skills

It's good to know that we have two official languages in Finland: Finnish and Swedish. You can choose to integrate in either one. Similarly, most of our study options are in Finnish or Swedish. Knowing even a little Finnish or Swedish makes things easier, so we recommend you take on some language studies along the way.

If you do not know a local language, don't worry - there are a few options you can apply to.

2. Your year of birth

The right school option for you depends on your year of birth. This is because in the Finnish school system, around the age 15 to 16, pupils transition from comprehensive education to upper secondary education. The school options in these two levels (lower and upper secondary) are different:

- If you are under 16, you should go to **comprehensive education (lower secondary school grades 7 to 9)**.
- If you are 16 to 18, you should apply to **upper secondary education**.

This can be confusing, so don't hesitate to contact our guidance services and find out your correct study level.

3. Your previous education

If possible, for your own benefit we recommend you **complete comprehensive education** in your home country before moving to Helsinki.

Having completed comprehensive education (e.g. Finnish comprehensive school grades 1–9, from age 7 to 15) in Finland or in another country makes it easier to continue education in Finland. You need a school-leaving certificate to apply for upper secondary education. Without it, you need to apply on discretionary grounds.

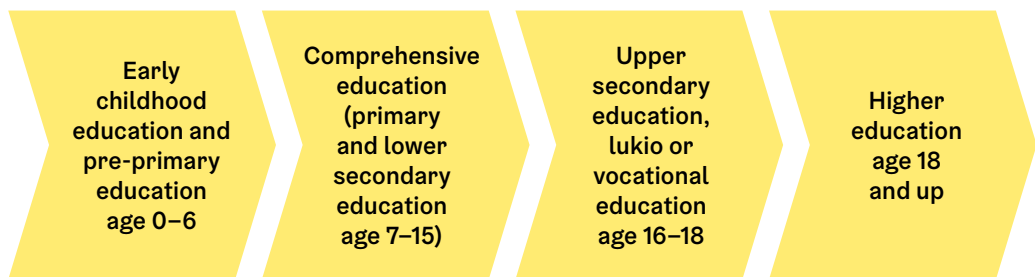
If you have not yet completed comprehensive school, there are programmes to supplement your comprehensive education degree. This might take a few years but can be worth it if you aim to settle in Finland permanently.



3. Your options and how to apply

First, we want to share a few words about the Finnish education system. It consists of:

- early childhood education for the little ones
- one year of pre-primary education for 6-year-olds
- comprehensive education (grades 1–6 primary education and grades 7–9 lower secondary), age 7 to 15
- upper secondary education
- higher education (universities and universities of applied sciences)



The Finnish education system

A unique thing in Finland is that we believe in life-long learning. One study path doesn't close the door to further education or changing a profession. This means you don't have to make up your mind about what to do for a living right away.

Denisa's story

“ I came to Finland when I was 12. I took part in preparatory education for a year before I went to my local school to study in Finnish. I want to be a nurse in the future, but I'm also interested in car mechanics, so I'm going to study both the matriculation examination and vocational training in the next 4 years. My guidance counsellor told me that it's possible that I'll work in many different fields in the future, so I don't have to figure it out just yet!

Study options if you are new to Finland and aged 15–18

Here’s a little summary of the options that we have in Finland and in Helsinki. They vary according to your age and Finnish or Swedish skills. Read further to find out which one suits you best.

Preparatory education (age 15-16)	Basic education for adults and ‘Nuorten suunta’ programme (age 17-)	TUVA/HUX – preparatory education for upper secondary qualification (age 16-18)
<p>For 15-16-year-olds with no Finnish or Swedish skills who have not yet completed comprehensive education.</p> <p>Usually, you practice your language skills for one year before continuing to upper secondary education.</p>	<p>For 16-17-year-olds and up who have completed comprehensive education but don’t know Finnish or Swedish.</p> <p>OR if you wish to supplement your studies and complete comprehensive education and a Finnish school-leaving certificate.</p> <p>(note: if you are 16, you need a school-leaving certificate to apply to the programme <i>Nuorten suunta</i>)</p>	<p>If you already have basic level skills in Finnish or Swedish but need to improve your language skills before upper secondary studies.</p> <p>OR if you are not sure which study path to take; general upper secondary (‘lukio’) or vocational studies. Tuva in Finnish, HUX in Swedish.</p>
General upper secondary education, lukio in Finnish (age 16-18)	Vocational education and training (age 16-18)	Combined lukio and vocational qualification
<p>Studies are academic and school-like. Admission is based on comprehensive school grades.</p> <p>You need good Finnish or Swedish skills to complete these studies, unless you apply to education in other languages.</p>	<p>Aims at a vocational qualification in a specific profession. Focus is on the practical skills with a strong link to the working life.</p> <p>You need sufficient Finnish or Swedish language skills to complete these studies.</p> <p>Possibility also for studying through apprenticeship.</p>	<p>You can even add <i>lukio</i> studies to your vocational qualification. You need good Finnish or Swedish skills and commitment to complete both. This is often referred to as a vocational general upper secondary school or double degree.</p>

When you need to improve your language skills or complete comprehensive school

Preparatory education (age 15–16)

If you do not yet have Finnish or Swedish skills, the best option for you is preparatory education. In practice, you spend a year learning Finnish or Swedish to ease off your transition to the new country. The year in a preparatory education class gives you the skills you need to continue in a regular Finnish or Swedish language classroom.

- If you are 15, your preparatory education is organised in a comprehensive school (with lower secondary school grades 7 to 9). Not every school has a preparatory class, so you will be assigned to a group closest to your home address or with good public transport connections.
- If you are 16, the right place for you is a preparatory programme organised by The Helsinki Vocational College, Stadin AO. The teaching is in Finnish.
- If you are 15–16 and wish to sign up for preparatory education in Swedish, contact your nearest Swedish-language comprehensive school. Find your nearest school at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

How to apply to preparatory education

To register for preparatory education in Finnish, you need to send an electronic application to the Helsinki Education Division. You should use the same application, whether you're 15 or 16 years old. Enrol by filling out the electronic application form at hel.fi/preparatory.

Swedish-speaking preparatory education is provided in your Swedish-speaking local school based on the home address. If you would like to integrate in Swedish, you can register for Swedish-language preparatory education by contacting the Swedish-speaking school in your area directly, once you've arrived in Helsinki. Find your nearest Swedish-speaking local school at hel.fi/schoolsearch.

Comprehensive Education for Adults (age 17 and up)

In comprehensive education for adults, you can:

- finish your uncompleted comprehensive school studies
- start learning Finnish or Swedish without any prior studies in the language.

If you are 17 – Nuorten suunta programme

In Konepaja Upper Secondary School for Adults, in a programme called 'Nuorten suunta', 17–18-year-olds can practice their Finnish skills before applying to upper secondary education or finish their comprehensive education degree. You can also apply if you are 16 and have already completed comprehensive school in your home country.

How to apply to Nuorten suunta

You can apply to this programme a few times a year. To apply to the 'Nuorten suunta' programme, you should send an online application. Check the details and find the online application form on the Nuorten suunta website.

The application form is in Finnish. If you need help sending the application form, you can be in touch with the Compulsory education team (*Oppivelvollisuustiimi* in Finnish), see the contact details on the 'Get in touch' page.

Maria's story

“ *My family moved here after I finished 9th grade in my home country. I wanted to apply for general upper secondary in Finnish or Swedish, but I had no skills in either language. I got into the Konepaja Upper Secondary School for Adults 'Nuorten suunta' group to study Finnish language for one year. At first it was really hard to learn a new language, but our teachers have been supportive. I hope to continue to 'lukio' next year.*

If you are 18 – comprehensive education for adults

If you have turned 18 but haven't yet completed your comprehensive school studies, you can supplement your studies or complete a whole degree in the following schools in Helsinki:

- Konepaja Upper Secondary School
- Eiran aikuislukio
- Töölön yhteiskoulun aikuislukio
- Helsingin aikuisopisto
- Suomen Diakoniaopisto
- Helsingfors arbis, the city's Swedish-language adult education centre arbis.

Before getting a place in these schools, they will invite you for language testing (*'tasotesti'* in Finnish, *'nivåtest'* in Swedish) to find out your level and to draft you a personal study plan.

How to apply to comprehensive education for adults

There are many educational institutions in Helsinki that offer comprehensive education for adults. You can apply year-round to most of them. Depending on the institution, you can start your studies a few times a year, usually in August and January. Check the school websites above for details and send in the online application.

TUVA or HUX – preparatory education for upper secondary qualification

This form of education is to help you get ready for upper secondary school. This program is for you if you:

- are 16–18 years old
- already know a little Finnish or Swedish (basic level) and want to get better before starting upper secondary school
- are unsure what to study next and need more time to decide

In your TUVA or HUX studies, you can also take classes from both general upper secondary ('lukio') and vocational schools. Once you feel ready and know what you want to study, you can move on to the next level.

If you want to study in Finnish, apply to TUVA, run by Stadin AO, The Helsinki Vocational College. If you want to study in Swedish, apply to HUX, provided by Prakticum in Helsinki.

Toni's story

“ *I used to live in Finland, but my family went to live abroad for work for many years. When we came back here, I was unsure what to do next. I am now taking an extra year in the TUVA programme to strengthen my skills and try and figure out what I want to study in the future.* ”

How to apply to TUVA and HUX

The TUVA Programme is offered in various branches of Stadin AO, The Helsinki Vocational College throughout Helsinki. You can apply to the TUVA Programme year-round by filling out the TUVA Programme application. Your language skills will be evaluated by the school before your enrolment. Find the application form and details on the Stadin AO's website at stadinao.hel.fi.

The HUX programme in Swedish is organised by Prakticum. You are eligible to apply if you have basic A2 level Swedish skills and have completed your comprehensive education. You can apply to HUX through the joint application that is organised yearly in February-March, or throughout the year.

Find the application form and details on the Prakticum's website at prakticum.fi.

When it's time to move on to upper secondary level

Once you have completed comprehensive education, it is time to move on to the next level: the upper secondary education.

Upper secondary education in Finland is divided into two branches:

General upper secondary school
(‘lukio’ in Finnish,
'gymnasium' in Swedish)

Vocational education and training (‘ammattikoulu’ in Finnish, ‘amis’ for short, ‘yrkesutbildning’ in Swedish)

Greta's story

“ *My family moved here from Oslo. I had no prior Finnish skills, but I had no idea I could continue my studies in Swedish! We moved mid-year and so I applied in the rolling application route and got a place in Töölö gymnasium. Norwegian and Swedish aren't the same language but there are a lot of similarities and I'm learning fast.*



General Upper Secondary School, 'lukio'

Lukio strengthens your general knowledge and study skills, providing you a good knowledge base for higher education studies.

The language of instruction in *lukio* is usually either Finnish or Swedish. In the Helsinki metropolitan area, there are a few schools that provide *lukio* education in other languages, too. All municipal *lukios* in Helsinki have a special emphasis, such as dance, science, or a language to deepen your knowledge according to your interests. Look for different general upper secondary schools at hel.fi/general-upper-secondary.

Lukio usually starts in the year you turn 16 and it takes two to four years to complete. To graduate from *lukio*, you need to complete the general upper secondary syllabus of 150 study credits and pass the National Matriculation Examination at the end of your studies. The matriculation examination gives you eligibility to apply to universities and universities of applied sciences.

Good to know: Universities in Finland give applicants extra points if you have good grades in the Finnish matriculation examination certificate from *lukio*.



Lukio in different languages

There are also lukios in the Helsinki metropolitan area where teaching is in a different language. Some of these are public schools, some private or state-owned.

Good to know: Private schools may have their own language policies and tuition fees, so be in touch with these schools directly to find out the details.

How to apply to lukio in different languages?

As a rule, applications for lukio education are submitted through the joint application process in the spring, and most places are filled at that time. Check the application methods on the schools' websites.

See the following page for a list of schools offering lukio in different languages in Helsinki, Vantaa, and Espoo. Education is available in English, French, German, and Russian (in spring 2026).

Lukio in English

In Helsinki, you can study entirely in English in two different lukio programs: English-language general upper secondary education or the IB program (The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program).

Compare below how the two differ from each other.

	English-language general upper secondary	IB program in English
For whom?	For those who don't have the language skills to study fully in Finnish or Swedish in lukio.	For those who want to study fully in English, and for children of internationally mobile families.
Are Finnish studies included?	Compulsory Finnish as a second language studies and matriculation examination test.	No compulsory Finnish studies included.
Can I continue my studies at a university in Finland or abroad with this certificate?	Yes. You can apply to universities in Finland or abroad with the matriculation examination certificate.	Yes. The IB diploma is an internationally standardised and recognised education.

English-language IB-schools

- Ressu IB World School, Helsinki
- Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu IB World School, Helsinki
- Etelä-Tapiolan lukio IB World School, Espoo
- Tikkurilan lukio IB World School, Vantaa
- Mattilidens Gymnasium IB World School, Espoo

English-language general upper secondary schools

- Helsinki Upper Secondary School of Languages
- Helsinki Upper Secondary School of Languages
- Aviapolis upper secondary school, Vantaa

Bilingual Finnish-English tracks

- Helsinki Upper Secondary School of Languages
- Helsinki Upper Secondary School of Languages
- Kulosaari Secondary School, Helsinki

Other English-language schools

- International School of Helsinki
- European School of Helsinki

German

- Deutsche Schule, Helsinki

French

- Lycée franco-finlandais d'Helsinki
- European School of Helsinki

Russian

- Финско-русская школа, Helsinki

Felix's story



I completed primary school in the UK and moved to Helsinki because my mother is Finnish and she wanted me to get to know my other home country. I applied to the IB World School program at Ressu IB World School through the joint application process and was accepted. This seemed like the best option because my Finnish language skills are not that great, and I plan to move back to the UK to study at university. As I have dual citizenship, I plan to do my military service before moving back, which is really exciting!

Vocational Education and Training

Choose vocational education and training if you want to graduate into a profession. In vocational education and training, you study professional skills in a specific field, of which there are plenty to choose from.

Stadin AO, Helsinki's own municipal vocational college, you can choose from a wide range of study fields. They have degrees from nursing to mechanics and from fashion to IT. Learn more at stadinao.fi

In vocational education, students work closely alongside the working life throughout their studies. Once you have completed a qualification, you can enter the job market, or study further and specialise in your field. Most of the study options are conducted in Finnish or Swedish.

For vocational training in Swedish, you can apply to Yrkesinstitutet Prakticum. Learn more at practicum.fi.

Vocational education in English

Erwan's story

“ I came here when I was 16. I thought I could start working in my family's barbershop but turned out I needed to do my upper secondary studies first. I went to Ohjaamo and they told me I could apply for vocational training qualification through apprenticeship. I'm on my way towards becoming a professional barber and continuing my family business. ”



Stadin AO, The Helsinki Vocational College has some study programmes fully in English:

- vocational qualification in Tourism Industry.
- vocational qualification in Restaurant and Catering Services
- vocational qualification in Media and Visual Expression, where you can specialise in game design and game graphics for English-speakers.

These programmes are not open for applications regularly, so keep an eye on the Stadin AO rolling admissions and the available study options.

Some private educational institutions in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area also offer vocational study and training opportunities either partly or fully in English.

English is, however, often used also as supporting language in vocational training, so it is not necessary for you to be perfectly fluent in Finnish or Swedish to apply for the vocational programmes. The schools will evaluate your language skills individually, if you meet the requirements to study in the vocational programme.

See next page for a list of vocational study programmes in the metropolitan area (Helsinki and close by municipalities).

Please note that most of these are private schools and only Stadin AO is by us, The City of Helsinki. The private schools may have their own admission and language policies. There might be more options than these, so we recommend you search online and ask schools directly for their options.



Vocational study programmes in English in Helsinki and in nearby cities

Helsinki

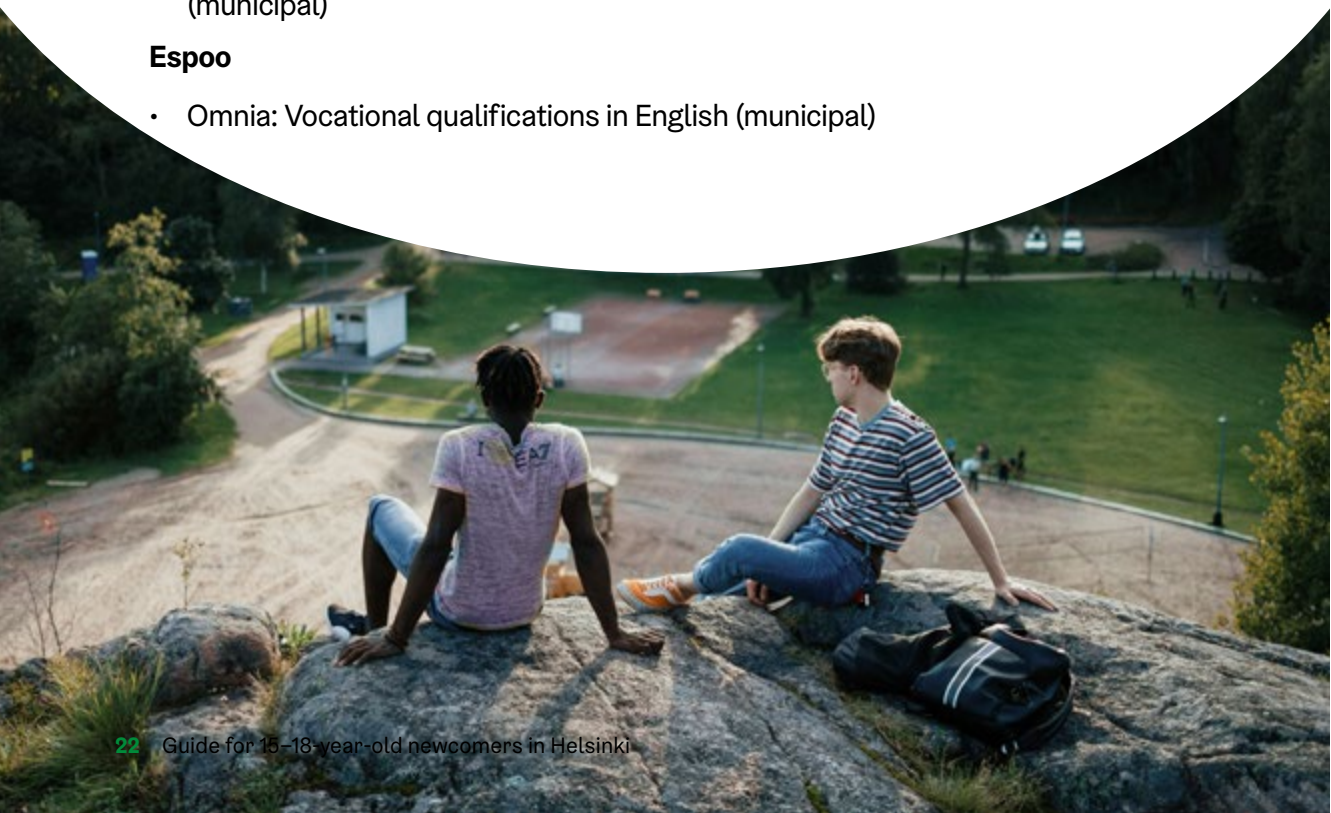
- Stadin AO (municipal)
Vocational Qualification in Tourism Industry
- Stadin AO: Vocational Qualification in Restaurant and Catering Services (municipal)
- Stadin AO: Vocational Qualification in Gaming Industry (municipal)
- Helsinki Business College (private)
English and bilingual Finnish-English vocational education and training in business
- Perho Liiketalousopisto (private)
English and bilingual Finnish-English vocational education and training in the restaurant and hospitality industry
- Taitotalo: Specialist vocational qualification, Further Vocational Qualification in Cleaning and Property Services (private)

Vantaa

- Varia (Vantaa Vocational College): Vocational qualifications in English (municipal)

Espoo

- Omnia: Vocational qualifications in English (municipal)



How to apply to lukio and vocational school

Main admission

In Finland, we have a nationwide application process for *lukios* and vocational schools. It is called *yhteishaku* or ‘joint application’, which is organised every year in the spring (February-March) and school starts the following August. If any way possible, apply in the main admission, as most of the seats will be filled in this admission.

Applications are submitted through the **Studyinfo** online service. You can look for different study programmes and open admissions at **studyinfo.fi**.

You can apply for upper secondary school if you have completed comprehensive education or a syllabus corresponding to comprehensive education.

Students are usually selected based on the grades in their school leaving certificate (comprehensive education). Some schools also have entrance exams or aptitude tests and may emphasise grades in specific school subjects.

You can also apply if you have studied education equivalent to a Finnish comprehensive school abroad. In this case, or if you don't have a school-leaving certificate, you can be admitted on **discretionary grounds**. If you apply on discretionary grounds, such as the following may be evaluated by the school:

- your language skills
- your prior grades and ability to successfully complete the studies
- if you are already living in Helsinki region or still planning to move to Helsinki

Rolling admissions for lukio

If there are seats left after the joint application round, you can apply for a school place in the rolling application round four times a year. The selection criteria are the same as in the main admission. As there are very few seats available, the competition is usually high, so bear in mind that there is no guarantee for a place. In some of the most popular programmes there seldom are any vacancies after the main admission.

You can apply to lukio in the rolling application process at **Studyinfo.fi**. All *lukios* use the same application form.

Find the rolling admission dates and link to the application form on the city website hel.fi/general-upper-secondary.

Rolling admissions for vocational education and TUVA or HUX programme

You can apply for vocational education and preparatory education for an upper secondary qualification (TUVA and HUX) throughout the year. You can also apply for apprenticeship training in the rolling admissions.

You should apply for vocational schools via the rolling application process if you did not apply or receive a study place in the joint application process.

In the rolling application process, the schools decide for themselves on their application periods, so they may vary between educational institutions and educations. Look for details on application periods and application instructions on the websites of the schools or from the **Studyinfo.fi** service.



4. Get in touch

If you want to know more about a school and its study programmes, contact the school's study coordinator or principal directly. If you need general guidance on study options or applying, contact the city's advisory services. The details on this page are from March 2026 and may vary.

Service	Who is it for?	Contact information
Compulsory education team	For 15–17-year-olds. Assistance and support from guidance counsellors on finding a school place.	Get in touch by email: oppivelvollisuustiimi@hel.fi
Ohjaamo Guidance Service	For 18–29-year-olds. Assistance and support for various issues for young adults without appointments.	Service point: Fredrikinkatu 48 open 12.00-16.00 By phone Mon-Fri at 9.00–15.00 +358 9 31025861 By email ohjaamo@hel.fi
Education Division's Advisory Services	For all Helsinki residents: Information on all municipal education services, including <i>lukios</i> and vocational education. You can get an interpreter if necessary.	Service point Työpajankatu 8 open on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10-12 and 13-15. By phone Mon-Fri 10-12, Mon-Fri 13-15 +358 9 310 44986 By email koulutusneuvonta@hel.fi
Stadin AO – Admissions services	For vocational education and TUVAs applicants. Visit or contact service advisors to learn about admissions.	Service point Teollisuuskatu 23 A 2 open Mon–Fri at 10.00-14.00. By phone Mon–Fri at 10–12 +358 9 310 89318 By email hakijapalvelut@edu.hel.fi
Konepaja upper secondary school for adults	For Nuorten sunta and adult basic education applicants.	konepaja.perusopetus@edu.hel.fi
Prakticum Admission Services	For vocational education and HUX applicants.	By phone +358 (0) 20 769 9700 prakticum.fi/for-sokande
Luckan	For 13–29-year-olds looking for Swedish language study options and integrating in Swedish.	Service point Yrjönkatu 27 open Mon–Fri at 11.00-17.00 By phone +358 40 485 9636 integration@luckan.fi unginfo.fi integration.luckan.fi/guidance



Helsinki

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