

OAJ – The interest organization for teachers

The Trade Union of Education in Finland



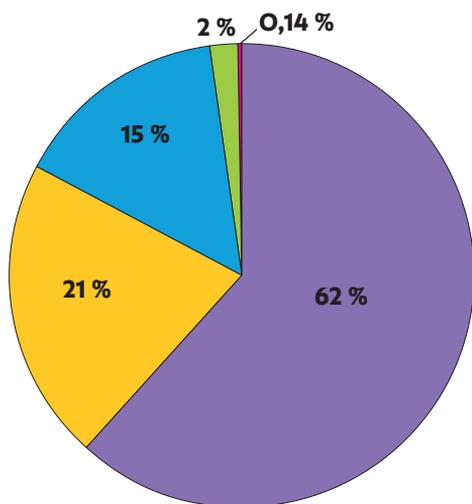
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OAJ – The Interest Organization for Teachers

OAJ has ca. 120,000 members



- Primary and secondary education
- Vocational education
- Early childhood education
- University lecturers
- Top officials and experts in the educational field

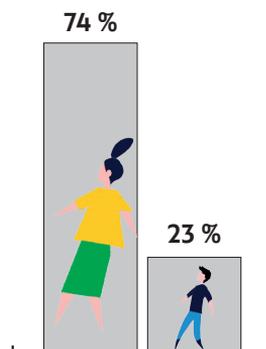
THE TRADE Union of Education in Finland, OAJ, is an independent trade union, not linked to any political party, with ca. 120,000 members. Every 9 out of 10 teachers in Finland is a OAJ member. OAJ is the sixth largest trade union in the country.

OAJ in its present form was founded in 1973. Since 1991, all teachers, from preschool teachers to university lecturers, have been eligible for membership of this all-embracing union. The membership also includes teacher student and retired teachers. The fact that all teachers belong to one union is exceptional.

Finland's first teachers' union was formed towards the end of the 19th century. In the early decades, teachers at different levels of the educational system had their own unions. The principal aim behind unionization was to strengthen solidarity among teachers and to develop school teaching and pedagogics.

The teachers' unions emerged as strong champions of teachers' rights. This progress coincided with the reform of the educational system introduced at that time in Finland: the transition from the system of parallel schools to nine-year comprehensive education. The training of classroom teachers was transferred to the universities. At the same time, the structure of the wage-negotiation system was agreed in the labour market. This also saw the various teacher organizations beginning to join forces.

Preponderance of women in teaching



1.1 OAJ – the largest member organization in AKAVA

TRADE UNIONS have a long tradition in Finland, and an influential role in the community. Over 70 per cent of Finns belong to one of the country's 70 or so trade unions.

Three central organizations represent the employee side in the Finnish labour market: SAK (Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions), STTK (The Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees) and Akava (Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland). OAJ is the largest member union of Akava, the central federation for highly educated employees and professionals.

Member organisations in Akava



Akava has 36 member unions and over 0.6 million members in total.



1.2 OAJ Conducts Negotiations on All Collective Agreements for the Education Sector

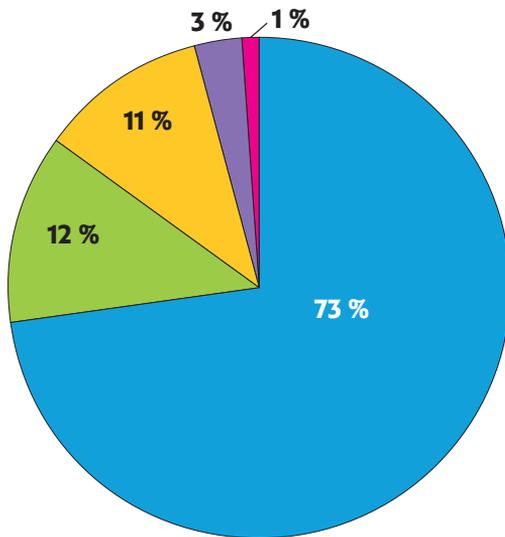
FINNISH LEGISLATION requires the employee and employer central federations mutually to agree several labour market-related matters. The Government may participate in collective bargaining by adjusting its taxation policies to the cost level of the concluded agreements, for example.

OAJ is the only employee organization to conduct negotiations on employment conditions concerning all teachers, such as salaries and working hours. In practice, its membership includes persons employed in pedagogic positions in the teaching, education and research sector. The agreements are concluded in the name of the Public Sector Negotiation Commission (JUKO).

OAJ negotiates on the national level with each employer group, and formulates universally binding, separate employment contracts. There are 12 agreement sectors in total. The terms of employment of each individual teacher group are agreed separately and vary from group to group.

OAJ also operates on the regional and local levels. The teacher associations and local union representatives agree on locally negotiable matters concerning salaries and other aspects of the teachers' situation and working conditions and ensure that agreements are upheld. Local shop stewards endeavour to resolve disputes concerning teachers' terms of employment. If some matter cannot be resolved, the OAJ Office offers support either to the shop steward or directly to the teacher.

The teachers OAJ represents by education sector



- Municipal collective agreement for the education sector (OVTES)
- General collective agreement for the municipal sector (KVTES) (kindergarten teachers)
- Private education sector, The Association of Finnish Independent Education employers, (14 universities, 50% universities of applied sciences and independent educational institutions)
- Private education sector, Avainta Employers (vocational education sector, adult education etc.)
- The State, eg. teaching personnel at schools for disabled

Most teachers in the different fields are local-authority employees, although OAJ members also work in state educational institutions, and in private schools and day-care centres.



1.3 OAJ – influential in Education Policy

ALL DECISIONS in educational policy affect the position and working conditions of teachers and the status of the teaching profession. OAJ actively influences educational policies, and plays its part in improving education nationally, regionally and locally.

OAJ exerts influence on educational legislation, the laying down of guidelines for educational policies, teacher training, the fundamental principles of teaching programmes and other educational issues concerning the content of teaching by maintaining close cooperation with Parliament, the Ministries, the National Board of Education, provincial departments of education, various teacher education institutes, and researchers at universities and other tertiary-education establishments.

The objective of its active involvement in educational policies is to consolidate the status of education and training in the community and to ensure sufficient financial and human resources for education. The aim is to promote the interests and status of teachers as part of the development of education, and to transfer the teachers' expertise and experience to social decision-making.

In support of these efforts, OAJ has established a wide cooperation network with various organizations engaged in work among children and young persons, and with parents' associations. It gives its opinion, offers statements, conducts research, and compiles reports and other publications for its members and political decision-makers in support of decisions concerning educational policies.

1.4 Advocating Teachers' Interests Internationally

OAJ ADVOCATES teachers' global interests as a member of Education International (EI), which is the largest single worldwide organization covering an individual sector.

On the European level, OAJ is an active member of ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education, which is the official social partner for education in the European Union. ETUCE influences EU decisions concerning the educational sector on a wide front. EI is, through ETUCE, also active on the European scene.

OAJ belongs to NLS, the Nordic Teachers' Council. Because of the similarities between the teachers' organizations in the Nordic Countries and their memberships, the cooperation extends to all matters to do with teaching.

OAJ is engaged in joint development projects in Africa aimed at consolidating the national activities and status of teachers in the target country. It is committed to the implementation of the "Education for All" initiative.

1.5 OAJ services to Members

OAJ MEMBERS are entitled to a number of additional services, financed by subscription.

- Consultation services on all questions related to teaching work are available to members.

The Office provides the services of experts on collective agreements, educational policy, the labour market and legal matters. Members belong to the Teachers' Unemployment Fund, which pays benefits in excess of the general unemployment benefit.

- Members are entitled to legal protection and liability insurance, covering legal costs incurred in work-related disputes.

- Members are covered by travel, leisure-time accident and luggage insurance.

- OAJ has reached agreement with a number of companies concerning special benefits for union members.

1.6 The “Opettaja” Magazine

OAJ PUBLISHES the “Opettaja” magazine (+/- 22 numbers/year), which all teachers receive as a membership bonus. Available also online: opettaja.fi. The “Opettaja” is sent to all Members of Parliament, to people who are influential in educational matters, and to public servants in the educational administrative sector.

1.7 Organizational Guidelines Laid Down by Teachers

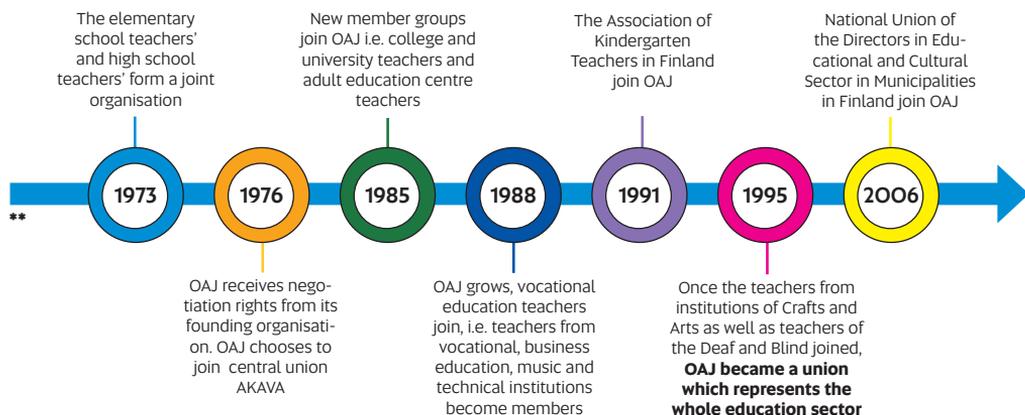
THE HIGHEST decision-making OAJ body is the Council. Its 150 members are elected by union vote for four years. The Council convenes annually for a spring and an autumn meeting and, if necessary, in connection with labour-market negotiations. The Executive Board meets once a month. All teacher groups are represented in the Council and in the Executive Board in proportion to their membership.

Several committees and working groups act as drafting bodies in OAJ’s decision-making process. The union is carrying out extensive training in organizational matters and the safeguarding of interests, aimed at consolidating the competence of local and regional organizations. In particular, young teachers are being trained with a view to activating their interest in union business. Different teacher groups maintain their own forums for discussion and decision-making, and their own pedagogic associations. They draft opinions for OAJ’s decision-making bodies and arrange seminars and training courses for their own members.

The Council elects the President of the union, who is in charge of operations and the office on a full-time basis.

OAJ’s activities are financed by subscription amounting to about 1.2 per cent of members’ gross salaries. Subscriptions to trade unions are tax-deductible in Finland.

History milestones



** 1877 Häme Elementary School's Benefactors Association
1893 Elementary School Teachers' Union

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