



EUROPEAN
ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION
OF ADULTS

Country Report on Adult Education in FINLAND

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Introduction

This Report covers the situation of Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Finland. It is divided into two sections. The section *Policy and Politics* gives an overview of the key policy currently in force, and also outlines the main legislation or political situation in the country. *Structure and Providers* gives a more detailed look at the organizational structures, and also outlines the main adult education providers, mainly looking at non-formal and informal learning.

We want to thank our members for their contributions to this reflection on the adult education situation in Finland as far as possible as of 2010/2011. Inevitably there will be new things emerging within the ever changing situation of adult education, but we believe the majority of the information provided will be relevant and useful for the foreseeable future. However, to keep the resource accurate and up to date we are open to suggestions to improve the texts. If you feel there is something you can add about your country please contact us via email at eaea-info@eaea.org.



Overview

Finland has a long history of participation and promotion of adult education; according to the Ministry of Education currently more than 1.7 million citizens participate in different types of adult education each year in a country of around 5.2 million people. More than half of this number is made up of the working age population, which is also a high figure in international terms.

The main emphasis of adult education is on further and continuing training designed to **upgrade and update competencies** and to **promote enjoyment**. This is based on the belief that general adult education responds to **adults' self-development needs**, offers learning opportunities catering for individual interests and preferences, and **develops citizenship** skills. [1]

Until the 1980s adult education was mainly associated with **liberal adult education institutions**, however since that point measures have been put in place to specifically target the expansion of **certificate-orientated education** and supplementary training. The system was also developed during the economic downturn during the 1990s which saw a drastic rise in unemployment and led to the increase in labour market training and also the polytechnic system. The **polytechnic** system aims to provide a wide range of study opportunities for working-age adults, including degrees and professional specialisation. [2]

Politics and Law

The **whole education system**, including vocational education and training and self-motivated adult education, **belongs to the Ministry of Education**, however the Ministry of Employment and the Economy is responsible for labour market training. The Government prepares a Government programme for the whole electoral period that deals with the development of education issues, even beyond the Ministry of Education's sector. In addition the Government adopts a development plan for the whole education system every four years. It has so far not been seen as necessary to devise a separate lifelong learning strategy. [3]

The Government term of 2007-2011 has so far seen a focus on the reform of adult education, including: implementing the **development program for liberal adult education**, improving **apprenticeship** training, enhancing the **competences of teaching staff** and supporting the employment and **integration of immigrants**. The reform of adult education encompasses vocational adult education and training, apprenticeship training, adult education provided by higher education institutions, labour market training for adults, and staff training. [4]



Future trends/key concerns/directions

The diversity of learning providers and widespread use of computers in libraries and homes facilitate a strong atmosphere of **independent and internet based learning** environments, allowing many to adopt a practice of lifelong learning **within their everyday lives**. However, this system is reliant on the **student seeking out learning actively**, which is partly a reflection on the **emphasis on self-motivation** and each individual's **freedom to choose**, which may limit those with less motivation. There is **growing research** in the field of adult education and inclusion in Finland however, with a strong belief that adult education should be accessible to all, and a concern with inclusion of minority groups. [5]

Some other key issues for the current and future years include strengthening learning in working life, **recognising skills** that have been acquired in different ways, facilitating opportunities to combine studies in a flexible way and enhancing adult education offered by higher education institutions. There is also an emphasis on making information, **guidance and counselling services** more effective in order to improve the relevance of adult education, increasing study opportunities for the population groups that are least represented in adult education, clarifying the benefit systems available for adult education, and expanding the funding base. This is partly achieved through a focus on on-going **training for the teachers of adult learners**, with programmes such as the VSOP (Knowledge and Competence in Non-Formal Adult Education), through the Finnish Adult Education Association. [6]

Structure overview

Overall the responsibility for **self motivated adult education** and its development rests with the **Ministry of Education**, with some issues also falling within the Department for Education and Science Policy - which had a Division for Adult Education and Training until the departmental changes made on the 7th of May 2010 - and the Ministry of Labour for labour market training. Some organisation and funding may come from companies and businesses in the form of in service training. Formal adult education comes primarily through the university system and vocational schools (which are government funded, students do not have to pay fees), whilst **non-formal learning is defined as not aiming towards qualifications or diplomas**.

In 2007 the Ministry of Education introduced a study voucher scheme. The **liberal education institutions receive study voucher subsidies** to enable them to significantly lower or totally compensate tuition fees for students belonging to specified target groups: **immigrants, the unemployed, pensioners and senior citizens, persons with special educational needs, and persons**



with no post-compulsory training. In summer universities, the voucher subsidy is used to support persons who have dropped out of university. In addition, the institutions can apply for subsidy from the National Board of Education for the development of suitable education provision. Together, the study voucher and development subsidy amount to around five per cent of public funding allocated to liberal adult education. [7]

Key Providers/Main institutions/Sources for Adult Education

‘Non-Formal’ Learning

There is a long tradition of **network of 'liberal' education centres** in Finland including adult education centres, **study centres, folk high schools**, physical education centres and **summer universities**. A common feature of these is that their objectives are **not set by external or ‘top down’ governing bodies** but are decided by the organisation within the institutions. These organisations usually include associations and foundations and may represent different ideological or views, but also base their decisions on **local cultural and educational needs**.

- Folk high schools

A nationwide system of schools, which provide one year study programmes and summer and weekend courses of varying lengths along with vocational training programs. Often these courses are focussed on **languages, social sciences, humanities** and the **arts**. A large proportion of the schools’ activities are usually non-formal studies, with some providing only non-formal or non certificate-orientated studies. The folk high schools are also a **large part of the Open University system**.

- Adult Education Centres or ‘workers’ institutes’

Municipal adult education centres where the emphasis of instruction is reliant on the needs of the locality, courses or subjects can be added at the request of students. Most of the courses provided are **language based**, arts subjects, or **music and crafts**. The courses are generally organised as evening classes, and is predominantly ‘study group’ based, or through short intensive courses. These courses are often run by part time teachers who are specialists in the subject they wish to teach.



- Physical education centres (**sports institutes**)

National and regional schools providing physical education and coaching for young people and adults, including **training for athletes**. a few also provide vocational training for physical education. Physical education in this sense may include for instance **sports or dance**, as well as athletics or gymnastic activities. [8]

Vocational Institutions and career-related training

Labour Market Training is provided through vocational adult education institutes and other higher education institutions and is financed through the Ministry of Labour. These can take the form of long or short courses, or **apprenticeships** and are also arranged with co-operation of companies to raise individual skill levels. The National Board of Education confirms the guidelines for these further and specialist qualifications, which is directed specifically towards adult learners. [9]

Vocational education and training (VET) has been regulated and directed through the idea of '**key competencies**', which in this case means the knowledge and skills students need for learning throughout their life time, coping with new situations, managing their futures and operating in a world of work in flux. It is seen that these skills are an important part of vocational competence; they reflect the individual's ability to deal with different situations and add to the vocational knowledge and citizenship skills needed. The key competencies in Finnish vocational qualifications are: learning to learn and problem solving, interaction and cooperation, aesthetics, communications and media skills, technology and IT, vocational ethic, health, safety and operational capacity, initiative and entrepreneurship, sustainable development, mathematics and natural sciences, and active citizenship and knowledge of cultures. These key competencies form part of the general studies which supplement vocational competence (core subjects), and form the basis of the **vocational skill requirements** and assessment criteria of the **vocational core curricula** which was revised in 2009. [10]

Universities

There are around 20 universities in Finland, all of which provide study opportunities for adults. This can be through short term or long term education (diplomas, undergraduate degrees, master's degrees and research), through the **Open University** education system or through employment training. University education is currently subsidised by the government (or more recently also opening up to private sponsors) which means that there are no fees for students.



Each University also has a **continuing education centre** which organises continuing education varying in form and duration, from short courses to specialisation studies. Continuing education is primarily meant for people with a university level first degree as additional training. These courses usually are subject to costs met by the students. [11]

The Open University system in Finland is operated throughout various institutions rather than one organisation, with many universities or institutions having a section of Open University within it. An interesting dimension to this is the addition of the **University of the Third Age**, targeted directly at older and elderly learners with little or no formal qualifications. It provides opportunity for self directed non-degree study, with activities including multidisciplinary lecture series, seminars, courses, IT teaching, distance teaching, online teaching, research, publishing, study groups and study-related travel. The emphasis is on learning with a dialogue between teacher and student, and the older student having an impact on the learning environment through their existing knowledge and experiences. [12]

e-learning

e-learning is taking an increasing role in Finnish adult education, and looks set to grow over the coming years. The Open University system does include online learning (although much of the teaching is still in a physical setting or via the television through collaboration with the national network YLE), however an important part of this effort is the **Finnish Virtual University (FVU)**. The FVU was created in 2001 as a collaborative initiative of all the universities in Finland and provides a collaborative forum for universities when developing their eLearning approach.

The FVU serves both regular students and lifelong learners and aims to act as a learning provider, an academic network, a technical service and a laboratory for the development of ICT-based education. Since 2001 research teams, often multidisciplinary and crossing over university boundaries, have developed tools and resources in order to advance learning and teaching in Web-based environments. [13]



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