Distribution of Responsibilities

Adult learning covers vocational training and general education as well as formal, non-formal and informal learning. In practice an adult learner is one who is 25 or over. Adult learner can be a student at all levels from primary to tertiary education.

The tasks of adult education policy are to ensure the availability and competence of the labour force, provide educational opportunities for the entire adult population, and strengthen social cohesion and equality. Adult education policy supports efforts to extend working life, raise the employment rate, improve productivity, enhance multiculturalism and implement the conditions for lifelong learning. In addition, adult education alleviates the effects of the recession.

Adult education is designed to provide study opportunities for adults. It encompasses self-motivated education, staff training and labour market training. Different institutions arrange a great variety of courses and programmes for adults at all levels of formal education, and the provision of liberal adult education is extensive.

Over 7 per cent of the Ministry of Education’s main title of expenditure is allocated to adult education. Of this total, about 40 per cent is allocated to vocational adult education and training and apprenticeship training, one fourth goes to adult education provided by higher education institutions, a fifth to liberal adult education, and about 5 per cent to developing adult education and continuing education for teaching staff.

With the exception of further and specialist vocational qualifications, adult education and training leading to qualifications is provided free of charge. The government also subsidises other forms of education and training intended for adults in order to keep student fees at a reasonable level.

Developments and Current Policy Priorities

Finland has a long history of participation and promotion of adult education. The increased provision
of adult education and training has been influenced by changes in society, such as an increase in the standards required for work assignments, the change in the economic structure and migration from rural to urban areas. Adult education and training has significantly provided for improving employment opportunities.

In the same time the whole vocational education is in a big change. One of the central objectives of the vocational education reform is that unnecessary overlaps in education will be eliminated. The barriers between vocational education for young people and adults will be removed and the provision of education, its funding and steering will be merged into a coherent package under the Ministry of Education and Culture. This means, for example, that the present separate Vocational Education and Training Act and Vocational Adult Education act will be unified into one new act. The central starting point of the new law is learning-outcome and customer-oriented approach.

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.

**Participation in adult education**

During the last two decades, participation in adult education and training has more than doubled. More than three million people participated in adult education or training at some point in their lives, which equals to 85 per cent of the adult population. According to an latest adult education data collection (released early 2018) the rate of participation in adult education and training by persons aged 18 – 64 years was 50 per cent, 1.6 million people. Women are still more active than men in both general and vocational studies.

**Main providers**

The Finnish adult education and training system is the result of a historical process. It is not the result of consistent decisions for effecting structural changes, but each adult education organisation has emerged to satisfy specific educational needs. 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.

**General adult education and ‘Non-Formal´ Learning**

General adult education comprises general upper secondary schools for adults and liberal adult education. General upper secondary schools for adults are institutions mainly intended for gainfully employed adults, who wish to complete basic education or general upper secondary education syllabi or parts of these. Liberal adult education offers non-formal (non-certificate-oriented) studies, which provide adults with opportunities to develop themselves without qualification- or occupation-specific aims. Educational institutions offering liberal adult education are: folk high schools, adult education centres, study centres, summer universities and sports institutes.

There is a long tradition of network of 'liberal' education centres in Finland including adult education centres, study centres, folk high schools, sports 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

**General and interest-oriented institutions:**

- General upper secondary schools for adults, (Finnish: aikuislukio Swedish: vuxengymnasium)
- Folk high schools, (Finnish: kansanopisto Swedish: folkhögskola)
- Adult education centres, (Finnish: kansalaisopisto, Swedish: medborgarinstut)
- Study centres, (Finnish: opintokeskus, Swedish: studiecentral)
- Sports institutes (Finnish: liikunnan koulutuskeskus Swedish: idrottsutbildningscenter)
- Institutions providing basic art education, like music institutions (Finnish: musiikkioppilaitos Swedish: musikläroanstalt)
- Summer universities, (Finnish: kesäyliopisto Swedish: sommaruniversitet)

**Vocational Institutions and career-related training**

Vocational adult education and training can be divided into upper secondary and additional vocational education and training. The education or training may be either certificate-oriented or non-formal. Upper secondary vocational education and training is certificate-oriented, whereas additional vocational training may be either. Apprenticeship training is a primarily work-based form of providing VET carried out under the supervision of a workplace instructor and based on the student´s stated competence need.

Educational institutions and other corresponding education providers involved in adult education and training may be divided into the following groups:

**Vocational:**

- Institutions providing vocational education and training
- Vocational adult education centres, (Finnish: ammatillinen aikuiskoulutuskeskus Swedish: yrkesutbildningscentrum)
- Continuing education centres of universities
- Polytechnics
- Home economics counselling organisations
- Organisations for crafts and design

**Others:**

- Commercial organisations
Main types of Provision

Provision to Raise Achievement in Basic Skills

General Upper Secondary Schools for Adult Students

The term “general upper secondary school for adult students” refers to institutions providing basic and general upper secondary education for adults. Upper secondary schools for adults, (Finnish: aikuislukio, Swedish: vuxengymnasium) are either separate institutions or adult education units operating linked to institutions providing education for young people. They also offer the opportunity to complete the matriculation examination and individual subject syllabi. In addition, it is possible to improve the grades of subjects completed earlier. There are upper secondary schools for adults in approximately 40 municipalities. Where required, individual upper secondary schools for adults may also specialise in specific courses or in the instruction of specific adult target groups. General upper secondary schools for adults also provide other educational services for a fee.

Basic education and general upper secondary education for adults are also organised by some folk high schools, (Finnish: kansanopisto, Swedish: folkhögskola). Summer universities (Finnish: kesäyliopisto, Swedish: sommaruniversitetet), specific “summer upper secondary schools” and some other educational institutions may also organise teaching of the basic and general upper secondary education syllabi. However, the possible accreditation of the courses they provide is decided by the education provider concerned.

Competence-based qualifications

Even the competence-based qualifications comprise only vocational units, it is possible to include common units into the student’s personal competence development plan in order to improve the reading literacy and numeracy skills.

Liberal adult education institutions offer literacy and language training for immigrants

A new flexible training model is launched for immigrants as of 2018. Adult education centres, folk high schools, learning centres and summer universities provide the training. The new training model builds on literacy training and language studies in Finnish or Swedish. These studies can then be combined with other, more practice-oriented studies. The training is free of charge for the individuals when it is included in their integration plans. Other immigrants can get study vouchers to help them join the training.

The new training model gives different kinds of liberal adult educational institutions a stronger role in the integration of immigrants. The new training meets the needs of those who are currently attending literacy training. It also reaches out to immigrants who currently are excluded from training.

The action is part of the reform of literacy training for immigrants. The Ministry of Education and Culture takes up the responsibility for literacy training for immigrants as of 2018. An annual appropriation of EUR 5 million has been reserved for the implementation of the proposal. The Government’s goal is to accelerate immigrants’ transition to training and working life.
Provision to Achieve a Recognised Qualification during Adulthood

Competence-based Qualifications

The competence-based qualification system provides adults with a flexible way of demonstrating, renewing and maintaining their vocational skills, or of qualifying for a new profession when their work tasks change. It is a specific benefit of this system that it enables national and qualitative recognition of an individual’s vocational competencies, regardless of whether they were acquired through work experience, studies or other activities. The competence-based qualification system recognises competencies acquired in a variety of ways.

Vocational upper secondary qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications can be completed as competence-based qualifications. A vocational upper secondary qualification can also be completed through vocational upper secondary education and training. A competence-based qualification is completed by demonstrating vocational skills, as defined in the requirements for a competence-based qualification, at workplaces in actual work tasks.

Key principles of the competence-based qualification system include

1. tripartite cooperation: close cooperation between employers, employees and teachers in deciding on the structure of the qualification and when preparing the Qualification Requirements, planning, arranging and assessing competence-based qualifications.

2. independence of qualifications from the manner in which the vocational skills were acquired

3. completion of the qualification or qualification module by demonstrating vocational skills at competence tests

4. personalisation

There are three levels of competence-based qualifications:

The vocational upper secondary qualification demonstrates the knowledge and skills required for achieving vocational skills. A further vocational qualification constitutes a demonstration of the vocational skills required from a professional employee in the field in question. The specialist vocational qualification bears testimony to the holder’s ability to complete the most demanding work tasks in the field.

The scope of vocational qualifications is 180 competence points, further vocational qualifications 120, 150 or 180 and specialist vocational qualifications 160, 180 or 210 competence points. The Ministry of Education and Culture decides on the qualification structure and on the scope of qualifications.

Working life committees are responsible for the organisation and supervision of competence-based qualifications. They are statutory bodies of elected officials, appointed by the Finnish National Agency for Education to manage a public duty. Working life committee members handle this task temporarily in three years periods, in addition to their regular duties. A maximum of nine members may be appointed to each working life committee, who must represent employers, employees, teachers and, if self-employment is common within the sector in question, independent self-employed professionals.
There are 40 working life committees. Each working life committee is responsible for either one or more competence-based qualifications.

**Provision Targeting the Transition to the Labour Market**

**Vocational labour market training**

The goal of vocational labour market training often is to complete a vocational qualification, a further or a specialist vocational qualification, or a vocational qualification module. In addition, further or continuing education is also organised in many sectors. Free vocational labour market training is provided at vocational adult education centres, higher education institutions and private educational institutions.

The ministry of education and culture is responsible for the implementation, quality and funding of the labour market training leading to qualification. Student selection to labour market training is the responsibility of public employment and business services (TE Services).

**Who is vocational labour market training for?**

Vocational labour market training is primarily intended for adults who are unemployed or at risk of losing their jobs and who have completed their compulsory education.

Vocational labour market training may be used to support a student who has dropped out in completing a higher education qualification. In that case, the student must be able to prove that he or she dropped out more than a year ago. Full-time studies must be completed in 12–24 months. The time depends on the qualification to be completed and on whether the educational institution is a university of applied sciences or a university.

Entrepreneurial career coaching and entrepreneur training are provided for those who are thinking about starting, or planning to start, their own business. Starting a business can be flexibly combined with entrepreneur training.

TE Offices often plan and provide vocational education and training in partnership with employers (joint purchase education and training). Those planning to start a business, or an entrepreneur with his or her employees and hired employees working in the company may take part in the training.

**Provision of Liberal (Popular) Adult Education**

The purpose of liberal adult education is, on the basis of the principle of lifelong learning, to support the all-round development of individuals’ personalities and the ability of individuals to function in communities, as well as to promote the realisation of democracy, equality, and pluralism in Finnish society.

Liberal adult education is mainly meant for the adult population. People of all ages and social backgrounds come to study at the institutions. The majority of students at summer universities and adult education centres are women for whom personal development is an important part of life. Institutions also offer courses for children and young people.

Liberal adult education institutions are also important providers of education for adult immigrants. According to a 2015 survey, 80% of the institutions had immigrant students. Liberal adult education institutions provide integration education for immigrants. Adults from immigrant backgrounds also take courses that are open for everyone alongside members of the native population.
Liberal adult education institutions also offer training for young immigrants. Immigrants under 25 years of age and immigrants aged between 16 and 17 who have arrived without a guardian are special groups.

**Folk High Schools**

Folk high schools organize general education programmes (e.g. in arts, languages, education or theology) at 87 campuses. Studies are full-time and last for a whole academic year. During the year, students can revise school subjects, study special fields and try out new ways of learning.

Many students attend folk high schools to prepare for higher education and to take open university courses that may be useful for university studies later on.

Folk high schools provide vocational training and basic education courses alongside liberal adult education courses. They also provide courses complementing basic education (“Year Ten”) that aim to improve grades from comprehensive school.

Folk high schools are boarding schools. Living in student residences and studying in small groups give studies a sense of community. At folk high schools, students can improve themselves and their workplace skills, grow independent and make friends. A folk high school may also be a suitable place for people who want to complete basic education or are planning to go on to higher education, and for those on sabbatical leave.

Folk high schools can be divided into four groups according to their background organisations: non-political (Grundtvigian), Christian, civil society based and folk high schools with special education.

**Adult Education Centres**

Adult education centres are the biggest adult education institution by the number of students in Finland. Teaching is offered in all municipalities, and one of the main principles of operation is to bring education close to the people. Activities usually take place in locations owned by the municipality – for example, at schools and leisure centres.

The courses offered usually include courses on arts, crafts, music, language and literature, home economics, sports, ICT, and social studies. Courses are offered for all age groups.

In addition to liberal adult education, adult education centres offer open university studies and tailored courses for clients such as municipalities and companies.

**Study Centres**

Study centres are third-sector (voluntary) institutions that are run by non-governmental organisations, political parties and trade unions.

The activities are mostly meant for volunteers and active participants in the organisations. The training takes place in the form of courses, lectures, seminars and study clubs, which facilitate peer learning. Teaching mainly takes place in the evenings or during weekends, often at facilities owned by the organisation.

Study centres offer a wide range of education opportunities that support democracy and active citizenship and help participants play a full and active part in society, particularly at grassroots level.

Training is organised flexibly in different parts of the country, depending on where the students are.
An increasing amount of learning takes place online. This helps education providers respond to the education needs that arise in less time.

**Summer Universities**

Summer universities are regional institutions that mainly operate in cities. They have 31 permanent offices, and education is organized in 110 localities. Their activities mainly consist of offering open university courses and responding to the regional education and skills development needs. Summer university courses provide opportunities for both personal and professional development.

The region’s highly educated population is an important target group. Nevertheless, the courses are open for all, regardless of age and educational background. Teaching takes place year-round in the form of courses, and is short-term.

Summer universities are in close cooperation with institutions of higher education as well as other kinds of institutions. They offer many multidisciplinary programmes in, for example, culture, arts, Finnish language and culture, European studies, education, environmental research, health sciences, and social sciences.

In addition to that, summer universities also offer continuing education courses, public lectures, regional seminars, and culture events, as well as university education for senior citizens (University of the Third Age).

**Sports Institutes**

Sports institutes provide education that improves the sports participation, well-being, and health of the whole population. Some of the sports institutes are state-level institutions, and others are regional.

Most of the liberal adult education courses are 3-5 day exercise courses, sports camps for children and young people, or courses for families.

The institutes also offer semester-long basic courses in physical education that aim to strengthen participants’ sports and instruction skills, encourage an active lifestyle, and prepare participants for further studies in sports.

In addition, sports institutions also provide training to sports clubs and associations, coaching activities, basic and further vocational training and courses for companies.

**Other Types of Publicly Subsidised Provision for Adult Learners**

All main types of publicly subsidiced provisions for adult learners have been described above.

**Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning**

There is no one single system for validation in Finland but different validation procedures are applied in all the different sectors of education (except primary education). In general upper secondary education the option is little used and there are no guidelines as to how validation should be carried out. The option is stated in the legislation.
In all other sectors (VET and HE) validation arrangements are implemented and typically cover the four stages of validation (identification, documentation, assessment and certification). The VET qualifications are modular and units of qualifications are awarded in increasing numbers. In VET (both IVET and CVET) there are national standards (qualification requirements) and the validation arrangements are well defined in laws, decrees and other policies. The VET sector applies a competence-based approach and the qualification requirements are defined in terms of learning outcomes.

Validation in the VET sector is working well and the numbers of participants are increasing. The statistics cover only the CVET (Competence based qualifications) and there are more than 100 000 individual learners registered in the system, and the number is growing.

Validation arrangements in the higher education sector are relatively young in comparison with the VET sector. However, most of the curricula are described in terms of learning outcomes, the validation methodologies are continuously developing and validation is increasing in popularity as it is relatively well known among the students. New initiatives and projects promoting and developing validation arrangements are carried out in different areas of higher education.

General upper secondary education

In the General upper secondary education Act (629/1998 §23) (Lukiolaki) it is stated that the student has a right to have competences assessed and recognised that are relevant to the general upper secondary curriculum of the general upper secondary school. The education provider is responsible for planning and organising the assessment procedures needed to verify competences. This option is not widely used.

Validation of non-formal and informal learning in the competence-based qualifications system

In adult education the competence-based qualifications (CBQ) system offers an opportunity for adults to obtain upper secondary, further and specialist vocational qualifications based on the principle that full and partial competence-based qualifications can be awarded regardless of how and where the competences and knowledge have been acquired. Recognition of prior learning is at the very core of this system and, in principle, candidates can obtain such qualifications without any formal training at all. This means that there are no requirements to complete a certain amount of studies and the requirements are described in terms of learning outcomes. The competence-based qualifications system also offers by law and in practice each and every candidate an individualisation plan at the following three stages: application for competence-based qualifications and for preparatory training, acquisition of the required vocational skills, and completion of qualifications. The plan takes into account the candidates’ personal circumstances, including the relevant learning acquired through informal and non-formal means, such as through work or interests. Training providers are responsible for guiding candidates through this process.

Higher education

The Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014, 37 §) (Ammattikorkeakoululaki) and the Universities Act (558/2009, 44 §) (Yliopistolaki) state that a student may - in accordance with the decision of the higher education institution - have his/her prior studies credited for, when studying for a degree or specialisation studies. In addition, a student may have prior learning demonstrated in some other manner substituted for studies belonging to a degree or specialisation studies syllabus or counted towards a degree or specialisation studies. In universities, there is no upper limit for the number of credits that can be gained through validation. However, the final thesis cannot be replaced
by validation.