

SUMMARY BY SALPAUS FURTHER EDUCATION

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1 OFFICIAL BODIES IN CHARGE OF DEVELOPING ADULT EDUCATION IN FINLAND

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) is the national agency in charge of development of education in Finland. It is working under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

FNBE is responsible for the development of pre-primary education and basic education, general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, formal adult education and training, liberal adult education (incl. folk high schools, study centres, summer universities) and extracurricular basic education in arts. It is also responsible for the development of morning and afternoon activities as well as voluntary additional classes in basic education, special needs education, and immigrant education and training.

The FNBE was founded in 1991 when two of its predecessors were merged, namely the National Board of General Education and the National Board of Vocational Education. A major administrative part of the former Boards was abolished in the reorganisation of central level educational governance in the 1990s. The main areas of operation: development of education evaluation of education information services educational services.

The Ministry of Education promotes culture and learning. Within the Finnish Government, the Ministry of Education is responsible for developing educational, science, cultural, sport and youth policies and international cooperation in these fields. The Ministry creates favourable conditions for education, know-how, lifelong learning, creativity, civic participation, and well-being. The Ministry directs Finnish educational and cultural policy. The Finnish Government consists of 13 ministries. Each ministry is responsible for the preparation of matters and for the proper functioning of administration within its remit. Within the Government, the Ministry of Education is responsible for developing education, science, cultural, sport and youth policies, and international cooperation in these fields.

There are two ministers at the Ministry of Education: the Minister of Education and Science is responsible for matters relating to education and research and the Minister of Culture for matters relating to culture, sports, youth, copyright, student financial aid, and church affairs. The Ministry develops conditions for education, know-how, lifelong learning, creativity and citizens' social participation and well-being. The values underlying this vast sector are civilisation, welfare, democracy and creativity. Other important principles in the Ministry's operations are expertise, responsibility, openness and future-orientation. At the Ministry of Education, adult education comes under the Division for Adult Education and Training, which handles matters relating to general and vocational adult education, liberal adult education and the promotion of education policy built on the lifelong learning principle.

Adult Education Council The Adult Education Council is an expert body assisting the Ministry of Education; its members are appointed by the Council of State for a three-year term at a time. The Adult Education Council follows development and research of Finnish and international adult education and

training. In addition, the Council encourages co-operation between adult education and training organisations and co-operation between them and the rest of the education and training sector and society at large. The Council contributes to performance evaluation and development of adult education and training policy and adult education and training provision, issuing statements and taking initiatives. The Council of State appoints the Chairman and the other members of the Adult Education Council for a three-year term. The current term is between 1.4.2006-31.3.2009. After hearing the Adult Education Council the Ministry of Education appoints a full-time Secretary General for the Council. The Subcommittee prepares the meetings of the Adult Education Council of Finland and all the matters that are dealt with in the meetings.

2 GENERAL INFORMATION ON ADULT EDUCATION IN FINLAND

Adult education and training is available at all levels and largely financed by the government. Adult education policy is designed to provide a wide range of study opportunities for the adult population. Finland offers excellent conditions for lifelong learning. 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. 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. The annual number of participants in adult education and training is 1.7 million, which makes half of the working age population. This is a very high figure in international terms. The aim is to raise the participation rate in adult education and training to 60% by 2008. The challenges facing adult education in the future will be to respond to the constant ageing of population and to growing multiculturalism, to motivate adults to study, to improve the learning-to-learn skills among the poorly educated and trained, and especially to ensure equity and equality.

The aim is to enhance the knowledge and skills of the adult population, to increase educational opportunities for groups that are under-represented in adult learning, and to promote equality and active citizenship. According to the Adult Education Committee the strategy of adult education and training should be built on four principles in the future: Self-improvement will form part of the lives of a growing number of citizens, as work communities evolve towards learning organisations. Adult education and training will provide trained work force for all job categories and all vocations and professions. Adult education and training will develop teaching and learning methods and content, providing quality opportunities for people to develop themselves both in qualifying and liberal education. Adult education and training will maintain and strengthen participatory democracy, prevent exclusion and support active citizenship.

Finance and administration Parliament passes legislation concerning adult education and training and decides on the resources allocated to it in the state budget. The Ministry of Education prepares legislation and government resolutions concerning education and culture and steers activities in its sector. The Ministry has the overall responsibility for education policy and for self-motivated adult education. In

Finland adult education is seen to comprise self-motivated studies, labour market training and in-service training. The Ministry of Education is responsible for self-motivated education and the labour administration for labour market training geared to enhance the operation of the labour market and to reduce unemployment. The aims of in-service training, which is mainly purchased by companies and public sector organisations, relate to business economics and productivity. Adult education organisations are run by the government, local authorities, municipal consortia, private associations, foundations and companies. Education and training leading to qualifications is financed by the public administration, except university degree education, which is totally government-financed. Training leading to further and specialist qualifications is mostly publicly funded but may charge moderate fees. About half of liberal adult education costs are covered by the government and the rest mostly comes from student fees and from the maintaining organisations. The purpose of state funding is to guarantee the largest possible provision without burdening the students with high fees. Adult education and training receives 12-13% of the appropriations allocated through the Ministry of Education main class in the state budget. Almost half of this funding is channelled to vocational training and one fifth to liberal education. Employers purchase staff-development training from adult education institutions and firms. The labour administration also purchases a great deal of different training for unemployed people and for those at risk of unemployment.

Adult education system Adult education and training is provided by some 800 institutions in Finland; some of them are specialised adult education providers. 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. Certificate-oriented education is regulated nationally. The qualifications in vocational adult and education and training are mainly taken in the form of competence-based qualifications. Adult students may demonstrate their vocational skills in competence tests regardless of how and where they have acquired the skills. The requirements of the qualifications determine the vocational skills to be demonstrated in order to acquire the qualification certificate. They also define the elements constituting the qualification and the methods of demonstrating the vocational skills. There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: upper secondary vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. The upper secondary vocational qualifications completed in the form of competence-based qualifications correspond to those taken in vocational education and training intended for young people. The further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications are primarily intended for adults – mainly for persons skilled in different fields to demonstrate their practical competence and vocational skills. Participation in a test is subject to a fee. Taking part in competence tests does not require any formal preparation; however, many participants acquire preparatory training, in which they are provided with individual learning programmes.

Curriculum The Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education regulate certificate-oriented adult education, i.e. education leading to qualifications. The Ministry of Education confirms the qualifications structure, which includes the titles of qualifications. The National Board of Education is in

turn responsible for drawing up national core curricula and requirements of vocational qualifications. These national core curricula and guidelines and their qualification requirements form the basis for the skills required in each individual qualification. Adult students irrespective of their backgrounds can take part in the competence tests organized according to the same principles throughout the country.

For information on competence-based qualifications, please go to

<http://www.edu.fi/julkaisut/competencequa.pdf>

A great variety of aims Adults can study for qualifications or parts of qualifications in open instruction (such as Open University and open polytechnic) and attend training preparing for competence-based qualifications. An important part of adult education consists of further and continuing training designed to upgrade and update competencies. General adult education responds to adults' self-development needs, offers learning opportunities catering for mature learners' own interests and preferences, and develops citizenship skills.

The purpose of vocational adult training is to maintain and enhance competencies and promote employment. In language tests, adults can demonstrate their proficiency in nine languages. Liberal education institutions offer courses in subjects relating to citizenship skills and society and in different crafts and subjects on a recreational basis. There are advisory organisations, which arrange courses relating to various hobbies.

Studies and degrees in adult education Educational establishments arrange education and training intended for adults at all levels of the education system. It may lead to qualifications or relate to general self-development. Efforts have been made to make the provision as flexible as possible in order to enable adults to study alongside work. Adults can study for general education certificates and take the matriculation examination. In vocational training, there are competence-based qualifications specifically intended for adults.

3 POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Adult education offers citizens the opportunity to obtain education and complete qualifications at any stage of life. During the last few decades, adult education has become an increasingly important part of the national education planning and policy. Educational provision has increased and diversified along with development of financial aid for adult students. The 1980's were a period of development for vocational adult education. In the 1990's, working life and the labour market have changed rapidly and the standards of work assignments have risen. Consequently, lifelong learning has become an important principle, defining the education policy. In general, participation in education and training is high in Finland, and learning is held in high esteem by the population. Correspondingly, the number of adult education institutions is relatively large compared with the population: adult education is provided by approximately 1,000 institutions under the educational administration. Some of them provide education and training only

for mature students, but the majority caters for both young and adult students. Adult education and training is also organised in universities and polytechnics as well as in workplaces (in-service training).

Finnish adult education and training have traditionally been divided into two main areas: general adult education and vocational adult education and training. Parliament passes laws concerning adult education and training and decides on appropriations for adult education and training within the framework of the state budget. The Government enacts decrees specifying the laws and defines the general principles of educational planning and development in a five-year development plan for Education and Research. The act (630/1998) issued on vocational education, effective as from the beginning of 1999, governs the organisation of curriculum based upper vocational education and training for both young and adult students. The act (631/1998) governing vocational adult education provides for the upper secondary vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications taken in competence tests irrespective of the method of acquiring the vocational skills, as well as for the preparatory training for these tests. This act was amended in 2006 with an additional clause on the personalization of the process of competence-based qualifications. The new legislation also includes the separate act (632/1998) governing liberal adult education. The Act determines that the purpose of liberal adult education is to support the development of individuals and the realization of democracy and equality on the basis of the principle of lifelong learning. The act (668/1994) on the General Language Proficiency Tests provides citizens with the opportunity to test their language skills through language proficiency tests.

In addition to the laws passed by the Parliament, the National Board of Education gives decrees on issues that guide adult education with obligation to comply. Latest of those decrees is the one on **personalisation of the process of competence-based qualification** which will be effective as of 1 March 2007.

Information on the Finnish education system

http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/041DN/041_FI_EN.pdf

<http://www.oph.fi/english/frontpage.asp?path=447>

<http://www.edu.fi/english/frontpage.asp?path=500>

4 ASSESSMENT OF VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE

Finnish adult education has undergone a drastic development in the past twenty years from the practise of assessing individual skills and by giving grades/marks to assessing the candidate's vocational competence as a whole. The current trend is to assess the candidate's competence in relation to the vocational competence requirements of each qualification. Assessment is documented over a lengthy period of time. Assessment data is gathered (according to the individual assessment plan) by means of portfolios, written materials such as reports, essays and reviews, self assessment, customer feedback,

documented assessment discussion with employer, work samples, photos, videos, research and development projects or plans, observing the student at work and other possible documentation on the candidate's vocational competence.

A recent development is a nationwide project AiHe (Personalisation of Adult Learning) under the National Board of Education which has concentrated on improving the quality and effectiveness of preparatory training and completion of competence-based qualifications (CBQ). The guiding principle for personalising CBQ activities and acquisition of vocational skills is a customer-focused approach. Personalisation starts as soon as a prospective candidate makes the first contact and ends once the candidate has completed a qualification or an individual qualification module. Personalisation means taking the guidance, counselling and instruction needs of each individual candidate and/or student into account and using any personal support measures that they may need when taking competence tests and/or acquiring the vocational skills required for the tests in compliance with the Requirements of the Competence-based Qualification.

Personalisation is defined in terms of three concrete working phases:

1. personalisation when applying as a candidate/student;
2. personalisation when planning and implementing competence tests; and
3. personalisation during preparatory training to acquire the required vocational skills.

Personalisation during the application phase means all those measures used to establish an applicant's previously acquired competence and other starting points, the qualification being aimed at and training needs as well as needs for guidance and special support measures. Information, counselling and guidance activities involve all necessary co-operation partners.

Competence is identified by making diverse use of various methods appropriate for the field. Based on identification of competence, assessors evaluate the extent to which an individual would be:

- eligible for direct recognition of proven competence based on the documents presented by the individual;
- guided to take a suitable qualification or its individual module(s) directly without preparatory training; or
- guided to acquire the required vocational skills through preparatory training.

This also involves determining the arrangements required to enable the adult learner to complete a qualification or its module(s) and any possible needs for guidance and personal support measures.

Personalised completion of a qualification follows the vocational skills requirements, targets and criteria of assessment and methods of demonstrating vocational skills as determined in the relevant Requirements of the Competence-based Qualification. Any previously demonstrated competence approved by assessors must also be recognised as a full or partial performance in the qualification.

Personalisation of acquisition of the required vocational skills and planning and implementation of learning takes into account the adult's circumstances, previously acquired competence, identified learning needs and opportunities for on-the-job learning. In addition, personalisation involves selecting training arrangements, learning environments, teaching and assessment methods and guidance measures appropriate for each student.

Based on experiences gained during the pilots in the AiHe project, qualification and training services suitable for adults are being further developed in regional network-based co-operation. As a result of development work, provisions covering personalisation have been included within the Vocational Adult Education Act (631/1998).

Personalisation of the competence-based qualification process also requires development of interactive relationships between different parties. In addition to the traditional teacher/student relationship, the competence test system includes many different relationships, such as those between the educational institution and the workplace, the candidate and assessors from the world of work and the educational institution.

Today the statutes require that assessment is done by tripartite representation, i.e. competence assessment is done by a teacher, a representative with employee status and a representative with employer status.

5 MAIN CHALLENGES AND CRITIQUE TO IMPROVE EXISTING ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Looking from the Finnish point of view, the main challenges in adult education at present are concerned with the personalisation process, i.e. how we can identify competences of adult learners which have been acquired non-formally or informally and how assessment of these competences can be done and what criteria is being used. This is crucial as the personalisation aims at customising the qualification process to the candidate's needs and it cannot be done unless we have tools and methods of recognising the competence/skill and then a tool for assessing it. The problem arises even more when we guide immigrant students towards qualifications. We need more information on cultural issues and the education system of each country and then we need tools to compare requirements and assessment procedures in different working cultures.

Salpaus Further Education project team discussed the needs and challenges of assessment in the Finnish perspective and below you will find the most important questions or targets for future development in the current project as well as in the whole personalisation process.

Key questions / challenges for developing adult education and assessment in the Finnish perspective:

1. How to make competence “visible”? How to assess competence which is not “visible”, such as people skills?
2. Who can assess competence? How to train assessors? How to involve the working life more in the assessment? The competences of an assessor whether they are teachers or workplace assessors must be determined and they must all be aware of criteria and tools, methods of assessment and they must build a common understanding of key competences (must know, good to know, nice to know).
3. Assessment targets and criteria: transparency of the criteria
4. Development of self assessment methods and of training is self assessment skills
5. Personalisation process: assessment of candidates/students with learning difficulties, immigrant students
6. Documentation: Does documentation serve assessment or vice versa?
7. Validation of assessment; development of qualitative methods
8. Informing the working life of the qualification system
9. Development of cooperation with qualification committees