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FINNISH COUNTRY REPORT

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Finnish liberal education system and organizations

There are a total of 313 Finnish liberal adult education institutions: 187 are adult education centres, 80 folk high schools, 12 study centres, 20 summer universities and 11 plus 3 physical education centres.

A newcomer in this field is Peruskansan Sivistysliitto established by the Finns Party with its study centre Pekasus, which started its activities at the beginning of 2015. Some educational institutions have merged, above all among liberal adult education centres.

The [Finnish Adult Education Association](#) (FAEA) is an umbrella organization for eight member organizations which are Bildningsalliansen r.f., [Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres](#) KOL, [Finnish Folk High School Association](#), [Association of Study Centres](#) (Opintokeskukset), [KVS Foundation](#), [Svenska Folkskolans vänner](#) SFV, [Summer Universities in Finland](#) and the [Association of Physical Education Centres](#).

In the FAEA office the chairperson, Aaro Harju, is working part-time, and there is a planning officer, Leena Saloheimo, working full time. The office is located in Helsinki at Annankatu where the nationwide organisations for adult education centres, folk high schools and SFV have their offices. The number of the personnel of the organisations of the field is diminishing - some 20 persons work for FAEA's member associations all together.

[Bildningsalliansen](#) acts as an interest organisation for non-formal adult education in the Swedish speaking part of Finland. Its affiliates are all adult education centres with Swedish as their working language, most Swedish language folk high schools, the SFV Bildning (study centre), the Vasa and Hangö summer universities and institutes for physical education. Henrika Nordin is acting director until 30.6.2016 when Ulrica Taylor is back from her leave of absence. Johanni Larjanko is also working at the office in Helsinki. The office has moved to Helsinki and the address is Bildningsalliansen, Georgsgatan 18, 00120 Helsingfors (up til 30.6.2016).

A new government and a new Minister of Education

Parliamentary elections were held in Finland in April 2015. After the elections a government was formed by the Centre Party, the National Coalition Party and the Finns Party. The weak economic situation that has persisted since the year 2008 and the public debt conditioned the policies and programs of the new government. The government is making significant cuts in funding in all sectors except defence. Along with cuts and savings the government strives to enhance particular target areas to which it directs funding.

Savings in the educational field have upset people in Finland as they have been used to placing confidence in the power of education, and to having sufficient resources allocated for this. By now nothing is “sacred”. The whole educational field is the target of structural and functional change as well as an object for saving. The coming years will show how the changes will succeed and what gains or damages will follow from the government’s measures.

At the Ministry of Education and Culture the former adult education policy section was divided into two: the liberal adult education affairs were placed with the general education, and the vocational adult education affairs with the vocational education. Liberal adult education has been assigned the role of a bystander in the government’s alignments in other respects, too. The Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA) has initiated discussions with politicians requesting that a parliamentary committee for adult education be established to draw up policy guidelines for the status and core functions of liberal adult education in future.

Also the Finnish National Board of Education will be going through changes when it along with the Centre for International Mobility CIMO, and the Finnish Matriculation Examination Board are going to be merged into one government office in 2017. At this stage it is still uncertain whether there will be one officer solely assigned for adult education. If not, this would be a further weakening of the conditions for liberal adult education.

A new decree about liberal adult education will take effect on 1 January 2016, which will affect the criteria on which funding is based. The work has been done in cooperation between ministry officials and actors in the adult education field during the years 2012-2015. The actors in the adult education field appear to be quite happy with the new basis for the funding. The structural changes that the former government planned to introduce were withdrawn and they are no longer relevant since the new government took office. It is however likely that the current government will wish to introduce structural changes and not only in the educational field. It is likely that also funding is going to be reduced.

Reform of the Liberal Adult Education Act

Changes to the Liberal Adult Education Act were passed by Parliament in early 2015. The act is a so-called financial act, and it will take effect on 1 January 2016. The core content of the act and an accompanying decree are:

Financial predictability: from the beginning of 2016, the financial model for adult education centres, folk high schools and study centres will be changed, making performance quota the basis for their funding. There is a fixed quota of 90 per cent for folk high schools and adult education centres, in addition to which there is a yearly fluctuating part.

Grading financing levels: adult education centres have formerly received an increase of 15 per cent in densely populated municipalities. This will be replaced by a unit-based funding. For the folk high schools the calculation of the unit-based funding will be simplified but changes will not be made to the amounts.

The relation between governmental grants and state subsidies: Subsidies that have been discretionary will be included in governmental grants, wishing thereby to secure governmental support for the educational institutions in the future.

Integration education for immigrants

Some 28 000 asylum seekers have arrived in Finland this year by the beginning of November. The number is significant as there were only some 3 500 seeking asylum last year. Organisations and some liberal adult education institutions have reacted swiftly to the situation and they have assisted authorities in receiving asylum seekers, as well as launching education for them.

The Finnish Adult Education Association is at present collecting comprehensive information about immigrant training in the 313 adult educational institutions. As far as we know by now there are immigrants receiving integration education in 83 percent of the educational institutions. Training is provided within the frame of:

- liberal adult education
- adult education as an employment policy measure
- other employment policy training
- commissioned education
- professional training
- general education
- education for minor asylum seekers

According to a survey, the total number of immigrant students attending education arranged as liberal adult education was at present some 55 000. Among them some 40 000 participated in integration education whereas some 15 000 students participated in general education.

16 folk high schools have entered an agreement with the Ministry of Interior about a scheme to support minor asylum seekers (aged 16-17) who have arrived on their own, with supported housing and education. This programme called "NUTUKKA" has been developed in cooperation between the Ministry of Interior, the Finnish Folk High School Association, and several folk high schools. 327 asylum seekers are now enrolled in this education. By the end of the year the number might raise to close to 500 youngsters.

In three folk high schools there are also reception centres / group housing for an average of 400 asylum seekers.

The greatest challenge for the education of immigrants is the funding of this education.

The Swedish-speaking actors within liberal adult education consider that integration and inclusion in Swedish is important in bilingual regions and in areas with a significant Swedish speaking population. It is vital for somebody who has recently arrived in a bilingual region to know both national languages, as this will enhance their possibilities for employment.

In 2014, a committee set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture with representatives of educational authorities and liberal adult education organisations considered that the financing of voluntary education for immigrants and integration plans issued by the employment office or municipal authorities should be handled separately and that they should be allocated extra funding. It was proposed that full governmental grants should be provided for voluntary integration education carried out within the liberal adult education as part of the official education system. The additional costs pertaining to this would be some five million euros according to the 2014 price level.

Recent publications made by FAEA

Leena Saloheimo: Vapaa sivistystyön opintoseteliauvustusten käyttö vuosina 2010 ja 2011. Opetushallitus 2014. (How funding for study vouchers has been used in adult education during 2010 and 2011. Finnish National Board of Education 2014)

Leena Saloheimo: Vapaan sivistystyön palvelurakennetta. Oppilaitosten koulutustarjonta. VST 2015. (The service structure in liberal adult education. Education provided by the institutions. Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA) 2015)

Jenni Päätäri: Selvitys vapaan sivistystyön opintosetelikurssien hyödyistä ja vaikuttuksista. VST 2015. (Assessment of benefits and effects of study voucher courses of liberal adult education. Finnish Adult Education Association (FAEA) 2015)

Assessment and validation

The Finnish Adult Education Association has made a proposal to the [Finnish Education Evaluation Centre](#) that an assessment should be made in the near future about the education of specific groups in liberal adult education. The assessment would provide a base for the further development of this education.

Projects

One of the main issues for the future of the liberal adult education centres is to meet the challenges of the superior numbers of the aging students compared with the few young students. In the city of Espoo, for example, the adult education centre has in a systematic way started to increase courses designed for young residents. The adult education centre acts in cooperation with upper secondary schools in Espoo so that students may make use of some courses they have attended in the adult education centre for their upper secondary education. Curricula for young people are launched twice a year. Courses tailored for young people cover among others working life skills, information technology and handicraft. In addition, the adult education centre also carried out a quality and development project "Young Ones", financed by the Finnish National Board of Education. It comprised studies about young people's factual educational needs, the creation of a networking model for youth workers and the development of a virtual space for young people.

One affiliate of the Finnish Adult Education Association, Kansanvalistusseura (KVS), The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation, has produced videos with Erasmus funding. Denmark was also part of this project. The KVS video productions aim at developing the national and international distribution of Finnish and European learning and teaching innovations. In 2013 KVS produced a collection of six short TV spots on learning environments, teaching and adult education in Finland. In 2014 KVS produced additional videos on

multiculturalism, management of educational institutions and curriculum development. The videos are available at [KV Vimeo channel](#). In 2015 KVS' video productions continue with learning stories from five European countries. The project 'Live & Learn' is coordinated by KVS and funded by Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

Bildningsalliansen's projects focus on digital participation, sustainable development and validation. During the period 2013-2016 Bildningsalliansen carry out projects in these focal areas both at national and Nordic level.

Liberal Education Research

The Finnish Adult Education Association (Vapaa Sivistystyö ry), promotes and coordinates cooperation among agents involved in liberal adult education research in Finland. An agreement has been made among three universities (Itä-Suomen yliopisto / University of Eastern Finland, Tampereen yliopisto / University of Tampere and Åbo Akademi / Åbo Akademi University). The practical research work is done in the universities. The researchers are students preparing a PhD in liberal adult education, involving university students as well as teachers and rectors of liberal adult education institutions. There is a separate [web site](#) for this research. The 6th Nordic Conference for Adult Education and Learning was held on 25-28 March 2015 in Tampere. The theme of the conference was Adult Education and the Planetary Condition, organised by the University of Tampere and Åbo Akademi University. The Finnish Adult Education Association was a cooperating organiser.

Social Commitment to Sustainable Development

In Finland a social commitment has been made "[Finland as we want it in 2050](#)" where organisations in different societal sectors and individual citizens may present their own commitments to action. The national federations affiliated to the Finnish Adult Education Association have made such commitments. This idea is now being spread among educational institutions. They have been motivated to draw up commitments to sustainable development and to adopt sustainable development programmes and tools in their activities.

Other issues



The greatest theoretical promoter and defender of adult education in recent times, doctor Seppo Niemelä has passed away in August 2015. He developed an educational pedagogy adapted to liberal adult education institutions, he wrote and talked in support of liberal adult education and active citizenship and he also cherished Nordic cooperation in this field.