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BIG CHANGES TO BE EXPECTED IN FINNISH LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION

The Finnish educational field is in the midst of great transformations. Universities and polytechnics have been reformed. Now the time has come to general and vocational education at institute level. Along with it, the financing and structure of liberal adult education will also be reformed.

Presently, the number of the Finnish liberal adult education institutions is 313, and it consists of 187 (mostly municipal) adult education centres, 80 folk high schools, 20 summer universities, 14 physical education institutions, and 12 study association based study centres. One million individual students participate in liberal adult education yearly. Most of the folk high schools and sports institutions also offer vocational education.

Reform of Liberal Adult Education Financing and Structure

On 25 March 2014 the Government issued a decision about the implementation of a structural policy programme, as part of the public economic plan. The decision also included a strategy for the funding and structure of liberal adult education.

Following up on this decision, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a committee, on 18 December 2013, to consider the structure and financing of liberal adult education. The committee was assigned the task to inquire into and present proposals for the structural development of liberal adult education institutions, to look into the need to reform the financial basis for adult education centres, folk high schools, summer universities and study centres and also the need for funding institutions of distant- and multiform-learning. Moreover, the committee should propose legislative change and also evaluate the cost effects of the proposed changes.

The committee presented its report to the Minister of Education Krista Kiuru on 11 December 2014. In brief, the following proposals were presented in the report:

- 1) Structural reform: the structural reform of the liberal adult education will be implemented by the institutions' administrators. The Ministry of Education and Culture will inquire into what possibilities the administrators have to finance and maintain the educational institutions when faced with reduced financial support from the state and municipalities during coming years. If the financial means are not sufficient the Ministry of Education and Culture may cancel the licence of the institution for liberal adult education in spring 2016. The structural changes will take effect on 1 January 2017.

- 2) 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.
- 3) 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
- 4) 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.
- 5) Funding of education for immigrant integration in liberal adult education: the committee 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 they should be allocated extra funding. It is 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.



The structure and financing committee with Minister of Education Krista Kiuru

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. What has been presented above forms the core content of the act and an accompanying decree. A separate act was passed reforming the administration of liberal adult education institutions and required licences. This reform takes effect on 1 January 2017.

Cuts in Governmental Grants and Subsidies

On 25 March 2014 the government decided that also the public funding of liberal adult education should be cut to achieve savings of 33 million euros. The government indicated that this would be achieved by cutting governmental grants and subsidies by 18,5 million euros. The remaining 14,5 million euros would be

obtained by municipalities' cuts in their subsidies to adult education centres and summer universities. Other adult education institutions do not get municipal subsidies.

Based on a submission from the Ministry of Education and Culture the Government subsequently specified that the 18.5 million cuts in the governmental grants would be implemented so that 10 million euros would be cut in 2015 and 8.5 million euros in 2017. The factual cut budgeted for 2015 was 8 473 000 or 5 per cent of the governmental grant for liberal adult education, because an index increase will be paid for 2015. In 2017 the cut will be 4 - 5 percentage points dependent on the payment of index increases.

At the same time, the municipalities cut down on their subsidies for adult education centres and summer universities. Other liberal adult education institutions do not get municipal subsidies.

The public economy, that is, the state and municipal economies, are in such a bad shape that educational institutions must be prepared for additional cuts in the coming years. This is a strain on the educational institutions' economy and it decreases the availability of education. It is, however, a release that the educational institutions no longer have to perform so called additional hours in order to secure the calculated governmental grant. The 90 per cent quota offers continuity in planning the curriculum and helps securing quality.

Governmental Message to Educational Institutions

The Government and the Ministry of Education and Culture have, in connection with the structural reform of education, given clear indications that also liberal adult education should partake in the structural and financial reform of the Finnish education system. The goal is to reduce the number of administrators and to create bigger liberal adult education entities.

Cuts in governmental grants penalize all players in liberal adult education. It will be particularly hard on small entities as they have less room of manoeuvre than bigger players have.

The government puts increasing emphasis on the vocational nature of liberal adult education. It compares adult education centres and folk high schools with other educational institutions and emphasises their formal nature, although the education is not primarily oriented towards a degree.

The institutions have to sort out how they, during coming years, will cope with decreasing public grants while simultaneously meeting new educational challenges concerning sustainable development, technology use, distant learning, globalisation, multiculturalism, integration of immigrants, the validation of learning and many other aspects of societal change.



Parliamentary Elections on 19 April 2015

The liberal adult education organisations have drawn up guidelines that they presented to all political parties last autumn. The purpose was to secure the economic preconditions for liberal adult education institutions during the coming years, as well as to convey the message to decision-makers about how well suited liberal adult education institutions are to solve challenging societal questions, such as educating school drop-outs, managing language, cultural and integration education as well as offering life-long learning facilities to the growing senior population. The organisations have placed particular focus on the forthcoming governmental program as well as the different ministries' action plans.

Liberal Education Research

FAEA promotes and coordinates a [cooperation program](#) among agents involved in liberal adult education research in Finland. An agreement has been made among three universities (University of Eastern Finland, University of Tampere and Åbo Akademi University). The practical research work is done in the universities. The researchers are three professors and their students preparing a PhD in liberal adult education, involving university students as well as teachers and rectors of liberal adult education institutions. So far, four doctoral dissertations and 10 master's theses have been completed under the framework. FAEA is also a cooperating organiser of the 6th Nordic Conference for Adult Education and Learning to be held on 25-28 March 2015 in Tampere. The theme of the conference is Adult Education and the Planetary Condition.

Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development

In Finland a social commitment has been made, "[The Finland we want 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. The development work with OKKA Foundation for [sustainable development certification](#) of educational institutions is remarkable.



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