

Information on Adult Education in Europe: InfoLetter¹

Marta Ferreira, InfoLetter, No 1, 2010

COMPETENCES FRAMEWORK FOR ADULT LEARNING STAFF DEVELOPED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ACTION PLAN

A fly which asks the mouse to move the elephant: With the 2008 Action Plan „It is always a good time to learn”, the EU Commission developed a guide, which encourages the countries’ governments to do more for adult education and to motivate more people to pursue further education. Increased participation, the promotion of reforms and more transparency: the list of priorities in this plan is long. Right at the top for 2010 is the publication of a framework of reference with key competences for the adult education staff.

This new framework aims to improve the quality of staff working in the sector by providing a set of competences needed to support the activities carried out in adult learning institutions. This means that not only the teaching activities, but also management, programme development activities, etc. are also included. It should serve as a reference for developing a professional profile for staff working in the sector which can be used in a number of ways: to assess those entering the sector and define their job profile, to develop curricula for initial and continuing education and training of adult education staff or in-service professional development, as well as to effectuate validation of competences obtained via non-formal and informal learning. The Commission has already commissioned two studies on this topic (see the article on ALPINE). The development of the framework is

¹ Information on Adult Education in Europe – InfoLetter je elektronski informativni servis evropske mreže „European InfoNet in Adult Education“, koja je nastala u okviru Grundvig programa za doživotno obrazovanje Evropske komisije. InfoLetter izlazi dva puta mesečno i pruža informacije o obrazovanju odraslih u zemljama Evropske unije. Tema broja 1 za 2010. godinu, iz koga čitaocima dostavljamo izvod, uz saglasnost Akademie Klausenhof (Hamminlken, Nemačka), jeste „Nastavnici za odrasle: profesija ili socio-kulturna misija“.

another element in the whole strategy to systematise the competences of teachers and trainers into a recognisable profession and to make them comparable. They form part of the Action Plan goal to improve teaching quality. The intention is to disseminate the framework among practitioners and encourage constructive feedback which should serve to update and improve them. The Plan also provides for the analysis of the countries' reform efforts, the provision of better access to education for disadvantaged groups, the improvement of the monitoring system and the strengthening of opportunities for everyone to achieve a higher educational qualification through adult education.

Five priorities

After adopting the Communication, the first action undertaken by the Commission was the establishment of the Working Group (with representatives from Member States, EFTA and EEA countries, European associations involved in adult learning and European social partner organisations). Since January 2008, the Working Group has been meeting on a regular basis to fulfil its role: on the one hand to support and guide the Commission's work; and on the other hand, to ensure implementation of the Action Plan in members' respective countries. Work on the five Action Plan priority areas was also given direction by five focus groups, each of which consists of five experts invited by the Commission to give advice and guidance at strategic points. In addition, four regional meetings have been organised in 2009, which assembled neighbouring participating countries to strengthen cooperation between their relevant stakeholders. The meetings were also used for a wider consultation on future actions needed to assure that adult education becomes an essential element of lifelong learning strategies.

Along with quality assurance, the creation of a glossary with definitions of key terms in adult learning and an inventory of good practice focussed on enabling low-skilled adults to take their qualifications further, "one step up", are also on the Action Plan agenda for 2010, all of which will be accessible from the web page: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc58_en.htm.

Much more than compensating for the gaps

For Marta Ferreira, head of the department responsible for adult education in the Commission, the financial crisis has shown only too clearly "that adult education is so much more than compensating for the gaps in school and family education. However, it still needs greater recognition in terms of visibility, policy prioritisation and resources."

For Magda Trantallidi, currently engaged in adult education in the Greek Ministry for Education, "the Action Plan plays a complementary role to the existing processes, such as Copenhagen (VET) and Bologna (HE) and supports the horizontal cooperation among the governments. As adult education is the responsibility of more than one government department, some structures have difficulties in adapting to this horizontal approach. Thus, evidence of progress and related data are collected with difficulty. Also the dissemination of the Action Plan outcomes is a key issue for the validation of the results. The main challenge, therefore, is to adopt a more comprehensive monitoring system in adult education policies in order to make lifelong learning a reality for all."

Katarina Popovic, InfoLetter, No 1, 2010

HOW TO BECOME AN ADULT EDUCATOR IN EUROPE?

Adult education as a specific field of education in Europe has developed in a very different contexts, with the whole variety of specific characteristics. Traditionally and today, they differ in their preparation, pre-service and in-service training, the requirements to enter the profession, fields that they are covering, social position and remuneration.

Several studies

The continuous tendency to professionalize adult educator sector in Europe, together with the increased mobility across the Europe, did increase, after all, interest in defining some core knowledge, competencies and skills for adult educators. In spite numerous differences, majority of European countries are dealing with the issue of defining the profile of adult educator – as a full-time profession, but also as a part-time job.

Several European studies offer the broad range of information around the topic "adult educators". To mention just some of them: TEACH, Adult education trends and issues in Europe, ALPINE – Adult Learning Professions in Europe, A Reference framework of key competences of adult learning professionals, several publications of the DIE (German Institute for Adult Education) etc. The questions that have been raised and researched recently are: entry requirements, working and employment conditions and remuneration, institutional context where this job is being exerted, legal regulation, awareness of belonging-to-the-field, public recognition and status etc.

The comparison is not easy due to the variety of occupational sub-fields, as well as to the different structure of adult education / continuing education system where adult educators are working in. Either they work at popular universities, folk high schools, cultural centres, or in business sector and in human resource departments, one of the main questions remained – who and where should they be educated and what competencies should they obtain. Having a look across the European countries, one can easily find that the main differences are in the preparation/training of the staff and their status. These differences are the results of the different social and economical setting, but also of the different conception and theoretical approaches, which may differ very much even within one country.

University degrees

Some of the European countries have the university studies and offer degrees (on different level) for adult education staff, for example: Scandinavian countries, Germany, Austria, Switzerland... In the countries of South and Eastern Europe the preparation of the staff is also situated at the institutions of higher education, with the BA-degree. Scandinavian countries usually offer MA degree in adult or continuing education. In France, the initial training of the staff is dispersed over a wide range of school levels, but without specialisation, and in UK new professional standards for the education of teachers, tutors and trainers in the lifelong learning sector are developed, more as an issue of social partnership than as a part of traditional university offer.

If the initial training of the adult education staff is situated at the university, it is mainly a part of general pedagogical or educational study, with the specialisation in adult education after the 4th or 6th semester. The other model is just two-year university study with the lower degree and in some countries there is even complete 4-year study for adult educators (such as University of Belgrade, Serbia, and Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania). Several European universities offer Doctoral degree in adult education. In terms of training opportunities for adult education staff, training of trainers is a growing market in almost all countries in Europe. This might compensate the fact that still less emphasis was put on the qualifications for the part-time and freelance staff who are by far the largest group working in adult education, than on the initial training of full-time staff, who are still an exception in the majority of European countries.

The tendencies and perspectives in adult education as a profession show increased interest in the quality of initial education of the staff, their further pro-

fessional development, training of trainers and part-time staff. As for the knowledge and competencies, country and regional differences will probably remain one of the main characteristics of this field. Further specialisation and shaping will probably be based on the profilisation of the working fields and specific roles of adult educators. They will probably group around following occupational fields and clusters of activities:

- teaching (adult educator as a teacher)
- training (instructor)
- counselling and guidance, coaching (guide, mentor, coach)
- moderation, facilitation (moderator, group guide)
- management (manager, human resource manager, leader)
- programme planning, monitoring, evaluating (andragogue)
- support – administrative, technical, logistic (organizer)

This list of activities and roles will be subject of changes due to the dynamic developments in the overall field of adult education and learning, but further focusing on required competencies and their obtaining (as one of the main aspects of the professionalisation) will have to deal with the clusters and not with the traditional idea of an profession. Adult educators will never be as doctors and layers, but it could be finally turned to an advantage.

Terhi Kouvo, InfoLetter, No 1, 2010

ADULT TEACHERS ARE COMMITTED TO THEIR WORK

FINLAND. Finnish liberal adult education teachers are committed to their work, master the subject they teach and implement group work. Expertise in adult pedagogy and multiculturalism need to be refreshed.

Adult teacher's diploma from the 2010 academic year

EXCELLENT: contents of subject, cooperation and interaction skills

GOOD: guiding learning, evaluation and knowledge of the goals and strategies of one's own education establishment, ability to adapt to new tasks and situations

SATISFACTORY: knowledge of students' different starting points, ability in and desire for innovation, ability to develop as an expert

SUFFICIENT: knowledge of adult pedagogy, network pedagogy skills, multicultural skills, multiprofessionalism, working life cooperation

This sums up the expertise of Finnish adult teachers. Today, it is known how trainers understand and experience their work.

The expert body working at the University of Jyväskylä, the Education Assessment Board, produced a report on the experiences of 1,744 liberal adult education professionals. It included full-time teachers, part-time teachers, principals and representatives of education establishments.

It is pleasing that a Finnish adult education teachers can master the subject they teach as well as the implementation of group work.

“Education staff are strongly committed to their work, which creates a good basis for the development of liberal adult education and educational establishments”, sums up professor Esa Poikela from the University of Lapland. He led the assessment work group.

It seems also that education staff masters their own work despite the increase in work load over the past few years. Over half of the principals and almost as many full-time teachers say that they feel rushed.

The most concerning aspect of the report is the situation of part-time teachers, of which there are as many as 30,000 in liberal adult education. In the adult education centres, for example, two thirds of the education depend on them.

The part-time teachers are usually experts in their own field, such as handi-craft experts or physical education instructors, and teaching is their part-time job.

A formal competency based on pedagogic studies is not required of them. The statistics show that 90% of the principals, 80% of the full-time teachers and 50% of the part-time teachers have done pedagogic studies.

Adult pedagogy and multiculturalism

The adult education centres, 90 educational establishments, are known for their immigrant education. No wonder their teachers stand out with their multicultural skills. Regardless of the education establishment, an intensive update of adult pedagogy and network pedagogy skills is required.

“Only a fifth feel they have a good knowledge of adult pedagogy and part-time teachers’ knowledge of it is particularly poor. Network pedagogy is well mastered by about a quarter of all staff groups”, says Esa Poikela.

There is also room for improvement in multiprofessional co-operation and working life co-operation, which the work is increasingly requiring.

“The education establishments and principals have a much better idea of the education possibilities of the education staff than the education staff themselves”, Poikela states.

Who supports part-time teachers

In February, Finland's Ministry of Education will start training to update teachers at a cost of 8 million euros. However, the skills programme does not guarantee that the part-time teachers will reach the update training, because under Finnish law, the employer is not obliged to take care of their training.

In addition to the official training, Esa Poikela emphasises learning at the work place, such as team work and development discussions. The new law obligates the liberal adult education establishments to further welfare and health. Poikela emphasises that the teachers must also value the welfare of their own work community by getting involved in team work.

The findings of the report from the Education Assessment Board were used in planning the adult teachers' diploma.

