



LIFELONG AND LEFESIDE LEARNING IN FINNISH ADULT EDUCATION CENTRES

The Adult Education Centre in Finland

There are around 230 adult education centres in Finland. The centres are called either kansalaisopisto (citizens' institute) or työväenopisto (workers' institute). They offer education and training mainly to the adult population in their area. Anyone can attend the courses, irrespective of their age, profession or educational background. The adult education centres promote cultural and educational equality by offering anyone opportunities for learning citizenship skills and developing their personality. The adult education centres cover the major part of the Finnish non-formal education.

Lifelong and lifewide learning is the leading concept for adult education centres. The centre is often the nucleus of adult education and training service in each municipality. The centre's task is to offer citizens opportunities to develop their general education and vocational skills. Bringing learning closer to home is a key value.

1899

From enlightenment to educational service

The first adult education centres was founded in Tampere in 1899. In the early years of the 20th century the underlying principle of the centres' activity was the enlightenment of the people reforming later towards non-formal education. Since 1970 the adult education centres have moved from curriculum based education and goal-oriented training towards a more client-centered approach.

At present, the adult education centre is an active partner in the community participating in local cultural activities and cooperating with other educational institutions. The municipal library, different branches of municipal administration (youth work, social work, etc.), as well as various local associations and volunteer organizations are partners in the network. In rural communities, the adult education centre is often the only local learning centre.



ADULT EDUCATION CENTRES PROVIDE

- general education and training for all
- training for marginalized groups e.g. unemployed, senior citizens, immigrants and asylum seekers
- EU-projects
- open university studies
- art and music classes for both adults and children
- in-service training

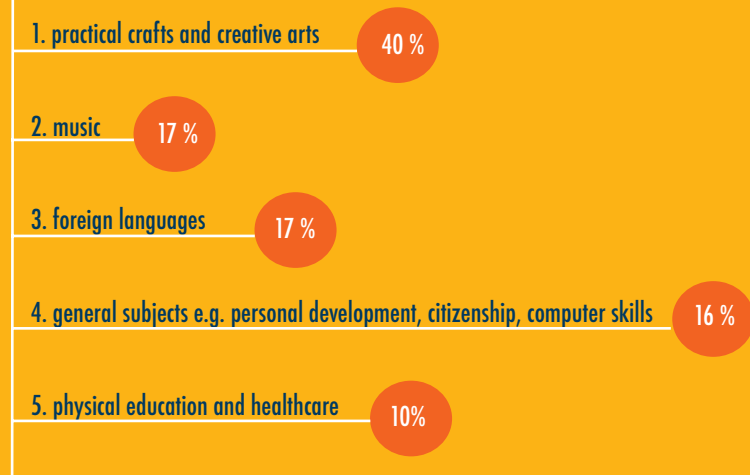
Values and leading principles

General adult education, humanism, personal fulfillment and social integration and cohesion are the main values and operating principles in the adult education centres. They offer learning opportunities guided by professional staff. The participants represent the whole society as men and women, working people and the unemployed, old and young, academically trained and workers without a degree all study in the same group. 76 % of all students are women.

In 2006 the centres had over 620 000 students signing in for a course in the evenings and during the weekends. Many adults set a great value in studying and learning – they have a passion for learning. The right to lifelong learning and equal learning opportunities are fulfilled through a network of adult education centres which covers the entire country. The students consider the teaching in the centres to be of a high quality and the cost to be very reasonable. Student associations look after the interests of the students, come up with suggestions for the curriculum of their centre, and organize excursions and leisure-time activities for their members.



THEMES OF COURSES

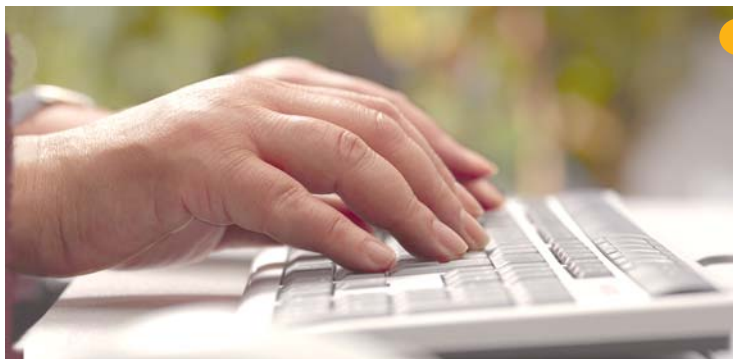


The learning process stresses the adult learner's own responsibility, goals and role as a self-directed learner. All the more, the teachers of the adult education centres act as counselors or tutors for the learners, utilizing their own life experience, professional skills and group and teamwork methods. There is a growing interest in integrating the information and communication technologies into the learning programs.



The present and the future


The adult education centres make initiatives for new forms of activity to be taken along with the traditional forms of operation. Unemployment, marginalization, sustainable development, internationalization and the ageing of the population are examples of new challenges for the work of adult education centres. Piloting new teaching and learning methods and participating in development projects are features of everyday work in each centre.





Administration and financial resources

The adult education centre is usually owned by the municipality. The work is funded by the state (52 %), the municipality (26 %) and student fees (16 %). Despite its municipal ownership and funding, the centre operates free of political and ideological affiliations. A small number of the centres are privately owned. Along with adult education service many of them are involved in youth work, social work and community work.



The goals of an adult education centre have been outlined in the act on "liberal adult education". Changes in national politics or the outcomes of parliamentary elections have no influence on the status, staff or curriculum of an adult education centre. The Ministry of Education annually confirms the maximum amount of teaching hours granted the state subsidy (2 038 000 hrs in 2006). Income on training service and project funding has expanded the financial basis of many of the adult education centres.


The students are required to pay a course fee. Fees can vary from 10 Euros to 300 Euros depending on the number of teaching hours, the size of the class room and the facilities needed for the course. A reasonable price is considered a basic value in order to guarantee access for education and training for all.

Staff

Each adult education centre is a unique kind of adult education institution with its own competence profile and meeting the local interests and requirements for adult education. The number of staff depends on the size of the centre, but the law mandates that the staff includes a principal, an adequate number of full time teachers and some administrative assistance.

The curriculum of an adult education centre is planned by the full-time workers together with the principal. However, part-time teachers are responsible for 80% of the teaching. The teaching is characterized by professional standards, pedagogical know-how and high quality. The centres don't hire volunteer teachers and all teachers are paid by the hour according to the teacher's professional qualifications.



A photograph of a wooden desk with various items. On the left, a hand is on a mouse. In the center, two red apples sit next to a framed photo of a dog. To the right, a silver laptop is open. In the background, a large brass instrument, possibly a tuba, is visible. A newspaper is rolled up in the foreground.

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The Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres (KTOL)

KTOL (Kansalais- ja työväenopistojen liitto KTOL – Medborgar- och arbetarinstitutens förbund MAIF r.y.) acts as an umbrella organization for the adult education centres in Finland. KTOL is a non-governmental organization (NGO) and it was founded in 1919.

1919

The association makes proposals on adult education policy and negotiates with decision-makers in order to improve adult education and learning in Finland. The major interest is focused on non-formal education.

KTOL carries out further training programs and developing projects for the staff of adult education centres.

KTOL produces teaching material, sends out a newsletter to its members and publishes an adult educational magazine Aikuiskoulutuksen maailma (The World of Adult Education) and the internet news service <http://www.sivistys.net> together with KVS Foundation.

KTOL is represented in many committees, working groups and networks in adult education. An important objective of the association is to promote international relations and to be a partner in international cooperation.





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