

Life-long learning in Finland

Finnish people enter the system of life-long learning from very early on: in Finland all children have subjective right to day care as well as pre-school. School normally begins by the 7th year of one's life (the child can also have an extra year to practice for school competences, if that is considered necessary) and lasts for 9 years. After that one can choose whether to go to high school or to vocational school. Nowadays there are some high schools in Finland where you can combine vocational training and the more scientific studies and graduate from both sectors.

For those who want to take an extra year to improve their results on the final report there is a possibility to take an extra year, the so called 10th class. It is also possible to change one's career plans later on in life and go to an 'Evening high school' or to 'Adult high school' to fulfill the requirements needed to study in a university. It is also possible to take courses in open universities, summer universities and Folk High Schools. One can also choose to be educated through an apprenticeship program, which means that they can be working almost full time and attend to a schooling system part-time. Adult education centres also provide courses which are credited for in the formal education system.

In Finland there are two kinds of institutes for formal higher education: Universities and Universities for Applied Sciences. Universities are mainly targeted towards research whereas Universities of Applied Sciences are more oriented towards the so called 'working life', meaning, that their interest in research and development is targeted towards more practical issues than in the Universities. Both institutes have programs for adult learners (as opposed to the youth program) and programs for additional courses for improving work competences, etc.

There is also a wide range of possibilities for non-formal learning: There are a lot of institutes who are working according to the principles of providing learning possibilities for all. This is based on the idea of enlightenment and in Scandinavia in particular on the ideas promoted by Grundtvig. People's institutes and Worker's institutes are responsible for the major part of this non-formal education. There are over 200 such institutes in Finland and more than 600 000 people attend to various courses annually (in Finland there are a little more than 5 million citizens). Some political parties also provide possibilities for learning, either on their own initiative or by funding courses organized in cooperation with others. The content of the education does not have to be politically biased.

The status of non-formal life-long learning through certain institutes is protected by law. There is also a system of basic arts teaching, which is provided by numerous institutes throughout Finland. The status and standards of that is also protected by law. The law also makes it a stable system with financial support from the state and municipality. Naturally, Finland is also taking part in the European Life-long Learning initiatives and programs, such as Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus and Grundtvig.

Other institutions, such as museums, libraries, sport institutes and sport clubs are often forgotten from the list of life-long learning institutes, yet they provide a broad variety of activities with a lot of substance.

All in all the concept of Life-long learning in Finland is rather similar to the situation in Scandinavia in general. There are a lot of possibilities for the taking and financial support from the state, whether in the form of student money and loans for formal learning or financial support to the organizers of non-formal learning in order to make the courses financially accessible for all.