

A brief review of adult education in Finland

In Finland there are at least one thousand centres of education which cater for adult education. Most centres offer courses for both adults and young people.

Diversity is a characteristic of adult education in Finland, and it is possible to attend courses at:

- Universities
- Technical colleges (polytechnics)
- Vocational training colleges
- Adult education centres
- Special vocational training institutes
- Civic centres
- Workers' institutes
- Vocational institutes
- Popular adult education centres
- Summer schools at universities
- Upper secondary school for adults
- Study centres
- Sports academies
- Music academies
- At the place of work or otherwise run by employers
- One special form of adult education is that concerned with labour-market training.

Each year, about one million students participate in the adult education courses arranged by centres of education in Finland (excluding workplace training or employment support for the labour market).

Adult education which results in a university degree is free of charge, in the same way as the corresponding education for young people.

Most of the remaining adult education is subject to fees, but there are also courses which are free of charge, as well as courses and programs which are priced according to the market.

Most people following adult education courses do so outside their regular employment.

One basic study module comprises 15-20 study weeks, and a study module in a major subject about 35-40 study weeks, with some variation between subjects. One study week generally requires 40 hours of study and includes lectures, oral presentations, written work and textbook studies.

Methods for adult education, including open university courses

Nowadays, studies are less dependent on time and place, thanks to advanced teaching methods. The phrase "distance teaching" is not used in Finland; "**multi-form teaching**" is used instead.

Local area teaching is usually offered in the evenings and at weekends, or as intensive courses in parallel with the normal job.

Various forms of multi-form teaching have been developed to cater for the needs of adult education. Over the last few years there has been a marked increase in studies via the Internet.

The trend is towards more varying and flexible forms of work, and courses comprise various combinations of lectures, independent work, exercises, seminars, group activities of various kinds, video and audio conferences, IT-supported studies, studies via the Internet, work practice and study visits.

A number of courses follow the traditional form of lectures, textbook studies and examinations.

The open university in Finland

History

The UK has led the development of open university teaching.

The first lectures outside the university sphere were held at the end of the 19th century for women, who at that time were not allowed to enrol at university.

In 1907, The University of Helsinki began to arrange continuing education for schoolteachers.

In 1912, the first summer university was founded, in Jyväskylä.

By the 1970s a network of summer universities had been developed, and a system for open university teaching was in the planning stage.

At the same time, freestanding units for continuing education were being formed at the universities, which arranged evening classes. These were aimed at students over the age of 25. These courses dealt mostly with teaching methods or social sciences.

Since then the open university has moved from experiment to expansion.

Since 1986, when record keeping was introduced, there has been a distinct rise in the number of students on open university courses.

In 1993, the minimum age for enrolment in open university courses was lowered to 18.

Current situation

There are twenty universities in Finland. Nineteen of them offer open university courses.

The aim of the open university is to **promote educational and regional equality**.

The Swedish School of Economics and The University of Åbo Academy are the major providers of education in the Swedish language in bilingual Finland. The other universities offer only little Swedish-language teaching.

There is no centrally-organised open university in Finland. It is up to each individual university to arrange courses in collaboration with other, external centres of adult education.

The expansion and development of adult education has occurred most rapidly in the area of open university teaching.

There are various forms and lengths of study of continuing education, ranging from short courses to specialist programs lasting 20-40 study weeks.

In addition to the universities there are 29 technical colleges in the country, one university in the Åland Islands, and a police academy.

Fees are charged for the majority of courses. The University of Åbo Academy charges a fee of 40 Euros for one course and 70 Euros for an unlimited number of courses. There is no obligation to pay membership fees to the students' union.

Charges vary according to university, form of study and institute. It is possible for an institute to charge a small fee in addition to tuition fees paid to the university. The open university provides an opportunity for all members of the community, irrespective of age and educational skills, to study at university level.

There are no special requirements concerning the student's basic education, but, since the studies follow the university syllabus, the student must be fully prepared for such studies. **It is up to the student to decide when he or she is ready to enter a course.**

The **University for Seniors** is a phenomenon which is increasing within the open university area.

It is not possible to take a degree within the open university, but such studies can be credited towards a degree if the student at some later date is given entry into a degree course.

The basic principles of the open university can be described as follows:

- It is a form of study, not a university as such
- It is open for all: students can study at university level without being registered at a university
- The teaching corresponds to basic teaching at university level: the same level and the same quality
- The courses do not lead to a university degree, only a portion of a degree; they usually correspond to introductory or subject-oriented university courses and can be credited towards future university studies.
- The courses are provided at cost price.
- Courses are held in the evenings and at weekends: they are part-time courses.
- The courses are arranged by the universities themselves, within their subject areas and in collaboration with facilitators of adult education courses.

Courses run by the open universities are organised in collaboration with the faculties at the universities. In terms of both aim and criteria these courses correspond to those provided by the universities. Each university has its own requirements for the awarding of degrees and for course syllabuses.

Students who have completed one-third of a degree course within the open university can obtain the right to study for a degree in that subject. The universities themselves decide how many study weeks must be completed at the open university before a student becomes eligible to enrol at a university, and, in some places, the requirements have been lowered to about 40-60 study weeks.

The collaborative network of the open universities in Finland

	Parent university	Summer universities
Ministry of Education	The open university	Adult education centres
		Workers and civic institutes
		And other educational institutes and vocation institutes

The figure above shows the network of collaboration. In 2003 there were altogether 85,000 students in the Finnish open university, and 76 % of them were women.

Study support. As a rule, students do not have the right to government grants or other study-related discounts. These courses are seen as being of a general nature and are run part-time. Courses are therefore held in the evenings and at weekends so that as many as possible are able to attend.

Target groups. A typical open university student has traditionally been a 30-40 year old working woman. Her reasons for entering the course may be to do her job better, to move forward in her career, to change careers, to get a higher salary or to obtain formal qualifications in her profession.

Reasons for studying at the open university vary, but the most common include:

- Continued education for higher professional competence
- A desire to study at university level
- General education
- A step towards a university degree.

In the last few years there has been a change in the type of student entering the open university. The second, “**new**” **target group** of typical students includes:

- Workers in the public sector and in small companies
- Students
- Unemployed young people, predominantly women.

The open university has become a sort of stepping stone or “prep school” for the young or unemployed. Recent research has identified four new profiles of open university students:

1. students focusing on a career (continuing education, higher salary, etc)
2. students focusing on a degree (both young and mature students)
3. students who want to change their current situation
4. life-style students (studies are seen as the “spice of life”)

Courses at the open university are seen as a way to prepare for real university studies and degree courses. It may also be an interesting way to try out new forms of studying or to get used to a different study environment.

Students can choose freely how they study in the open university—whether to take a single course or several courses within a study module, or more.

The open university has developed into the **third way** to university studies, beside the traditional routes of upper secondary school or vocational training. As a result, the open university now has three major tasks:

1. To offer a route to university studies
2. To provide professional continuing education
3. To provide general studies.

Along with the change in student profile there has been such a rise in student numbers that the universities have been forced to introduce regulations for application to courses, professional criteria and even admissions tests. Such requirements are becoming necessary especially at the Finnish-speaking universities since they are receiving many more applications than the Swedish-speaking ones.

The University of Åbo Academy

The open university at The University of Åbo Academy was started in 1981 and operates throughout the Swedish-speaking part of Finland. It is not a separate institution but rather a collaboration between the continuing education centres at The University of Åbo Academy and various adult education centres.

Adult education in all its forms has continued to increase at The University Åbo Academy since the 1980s, and the university accounts for about five per cent of all university-based adult education in Finland.

Strategies for adult education are being developed at many universities.

The most popular adult education courses at The University of Åbo Academy in 2002 were:

<u>Åbo Academy in Turku</u>	<u>Åbo Academy in Vaasa</u>
Business Economics, Jurisprudence, Theological studies, Foreign languages, Psychology, The Science of Religion/Folklore, Swedish, Sociology	Teaching methods, Nursing, Developmental psychology, Special teaching methods, Mass communication, Political science

Tables 1 shows the extent of The University of Åbo Academy's open university activities, and Table 2 describes the courses offered locally.

Table 1. No. of courses and study weeks at Åbo Academy's open university, 2000-2002

	2000	2001	2002
Persons	4,497	4,506	4,545
Study weeks provided	1,307	1,303	1,242
Study weeks completed	18,323	17,846	18,46
No. of courses	434	436	399

Table 2. On-line courses provided in the open university, 2000-2002

	2000	2001	2002
No. of courses	9	33	37
Study weeks provided	37	129	152
No. of participants	259	572	726

Obstacles and opportunities

Some obstacles

Factors which limit the opportunity to study are often of a socio-political nature. One concrete obstacle to fulltime studies at the open university is funding.

These studies do not provide the right to state aid (student grants or loans) or other discounts and reduced charges which registered university students are entitled to. Student lodgings, for example, are only available to fulltime students.

Charges vary from university to university. Some Finnish universities may charge up to 400 Euros, as well as additional fees from those arranging the course. University fees and who shall pay them is currently a matter of some debate.

The unemployed must ensure that they do not study "too much". The right to unemployment benefits is different for part-time and fulltime students. As a rule, part-time studies will not affect unemployment benefits. Studies are considered as a sideline if they do not exceed three study weeks in a study month. This means that a student can complete the basic course (15 study weeks) in a subject at the open university without losing the right to unemployment benefit.

The parent universities are worried that the open universities are competing for the normal student intake. There is a risk that the faculties consider the open university as a competitor for the already meagre funds for education.

Some possibilities

The open university should, however, be seen as a possibility for providing new courses and minor subjects which are not offered by the university in question. One of the tasks is also to develop new forms of study which can be realized through the use of new technical solutions.

The open university has a role to play in raising the general level of education and functions as a port of entry to university studies. It has also been shown to be an effective solution to the continuing education needs of a number of different industries.

The open university can contribute to the recruitment of students to the parent university.

The development of interactions between higher education and society—the so-called third goal—has been given increased funding, and a major new target group is young people who study, take a year off, or are unemployed.

The challenges include

- In the near future to continue the virtualisation of courses and in other ways increase their availability to all who wish to study. The open university is showing the way.
- To ensure the quality of both traditional and virtual courses
- To work for a reduction in admissions requirements for the so-called open university route (the way in to university after a number of completed open university study weeks) to a more reasonable level
- To develop study guides and personal support, primarily for virtual courses and the longer study modules
- To achieve equality by attracting more men and disadvantaged groups to open university courses
- To obtain local government participation in funding, in addition to state funding, in order to assist local course organisers in financing open university courses.

Valuation

In the period 2001-2002, The Council for Evaluation of Higher Education carried out a national evaluation of open university teaching. In the report, the evaluation group presented its most important recommendations for the future. The group consider that the parties should together draw up a national strategy and that the activities should be coordinated via a network to become the Finnish Open University. In addition, the group recommends that the organisation be managed on the principle of equality and that the transition to university studies be facilitated. Quality assurance should be systematised and realized in the network, and quality and collective competence supported by funding.

Other news, from the EU

The so-called Bologna agreement will mean a change in the traditional university degree, with major and minor subjects etc. Under the new system, a Candidate degree (Bachelor's) will comprise 180 credits (ECTS) and a Magister degree (Master's) 300 credits. This change of the whole structure of the universities will, of course, also affect the open universities, since they are so intimately connected to their parent universities.

(ECTS credits will be introduced in the whole of Finland from 2005. ECTS credits are already awarded in the open university.)

Validation in an EU perspective

(Written by the Finnish Minister of Education to the universities in 2003)

Proposed change in EG legislation on the validation of professional competence

The Minister has presented to Parliament a note on the proposal by the European Commission for a directive on the validation of professional competence. Validation means that any person who has obtained professional competence in a member state of the European Union receives the right to perform out his or her profession in any other member state even if such performance in that state is restricted. According to the proposal, citizens of a member state shall receive the partial right to perform their profession in those cases where the professional duties in the recipient state are more extensive than in the home state. The applicant will receive the right to perform those professional duties for which he or she has competence in his or her home state. Degrees which have been awarded outside the EU and which have been recognized by a member state shall, according to the proposal, be considered equal to those which have been awarded in a member state if the person has performed his or her profession for a period of three years in the state which validated the degree. A member of a profession who is legally stationed in a member state shall, irrespective of profession, have the right to offer his or her services in another member state.