

## National report for Finland on Trade Unions and University Lifelong Learning



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## 1 Overview

Education is highly valued in Finland, and the high standard of education forms one of the cornerstones of the Finnish national strategy. In Finland there is a strong political commitment to creating conditions for equal opportunities and outcomes in adult education. Finland is among those countries with high participation rates in lifelong learning. According to the Finnish Ministry of Education the key words in the Finnish education policy are **quality, efficiency, equity and**

**internationalisation.** Education is a factor for competitiveness. About 6 % of Finland's GNP is invested in Education and Training annually. ([www.minedu.fi/english](http://www.minedu.fi/english))

The Finnish education system consists of preschool education, comprehensive school, post-comprehensive general and vocational education, higher education and adult education. The comprehensive school provides a nine-year educational programme (with a voluntary 10th year) for all children of school age, beginning at the age of seven. Post-comprehensive education is provided by general upper secondary schools (approximately three years, ending in the national matriculation examination) and vocational institutions (three years, leading to upper secondary vocational qualifications).

The learning outcomes of Finnish comprehensive schools have been found to be excellent in international comparisons in the PISA (Programme for International Students Assessment) studies carried out by OECD member states. PISA gathers information on the state and results of education, and on learning that takes place outside of the school. The PISA programme tests the skills of 15-year-old students in mathematics, science, reading and problem solving. (<http://www.pisa2006.helsinki.fi/>)

The objective of the higher education system is to offer a student place to two thirds of each age group. Higher education is provided by 20 universities and 29 polytechnics. Continuing education centres at the universities provide professional education for university graduates and also organise open university instruction and workplace training. (<http://www.avoinyliopisto.fi/en-GB/>)

## **2 Adult Education**

According to the Finnish Adult Education Committee the adult education and training strategy should be based in future on four principles:

1. Self-improvement will form part of the lives of a growing number of citizens, as work communities evolve towards learning organisations.
2. Adult education and training will provide a trained workforce for all job categories and all vocations and professions.
3. Adult education and training will develop teaching and learning methods and content, providing quality opportunities for people to develop themselves both in vocational and liberal education.
4. Adult education and training will maintain and strengthen participatory democracy, prevent exclusion and support active citizenship.

Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship in the national core curriculum should be evidenced through extensive, integrated education encompassing all instruction, in cross-curricular themes, in joint events and in the whole learning culture. The idea is to develop adult students' own abilities so that they become active, initiative-taking, responsible and independent citizens. As Kester and Pinaud (1997) note in their analysis of Trade Union challenges: Democracy is a learning process and a dynamic phenomenon, which requires a permanent support structure to monitor and evaluate. This comment is one of the reasons behind the Finnish Case Study in the TULIP-project: to strengthen business economy skills among shop stewards. The economy of the workplace is a

shared concern of both employers and employees and not just a formal declaration made by an employer's representative.

The annual number of participants in adult education and training is 1.7 million, which equates to half of the working age population. This is a very high figure in international terms. In workplaces this participation in education generates more education, i.e. according to this generally observed accumulation phenomenon in adult education, those employees with longer initial and basic education receive more education paid for by the employer (Erkkilä 2001). Vocational training seems to accumulate along with the commitment to the employer; the more committed the employees are to their employer, the more vocational training they have received (Antila, 2002).

Still there are wide differences amongst the population in terms of participation in adult education. By occupation, managers, professionals and technicians receive much more training than the rest. The levels of training are particularly low in skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled industrial and service occupations. With reference to employment and part-time status there are significant differences as well: part-time and temporary workers are less likely to have received training than their full-time, permanent colleagues. (EIRO 2007).

Adult education and training is provided by some 800 institutions in Finland; some of them are specialised adult education providers. Adult education is available within the official education system in adult upper secondary schools and vocational institutions and vocational adult training centres, national and private vocational institutions, polytechnics and universities all of which have a Continuing Education centre. Adult education is also provided by special adult education institutions.

In the field of liberal adult education, adult education centres, folk high schools, summer universities, study centres, and sports institutes organize a wide range of education and training opportunities. Finnish folk movements, ie labour movement, have been key players in this field. This education is both formal and nonformal and it can build a path for the learner to vocational or university exams and qualifications. Adult education also includes staff-development and other training provided or purchased by employers. Labour market training is financed by the labour administration and mainly intended for unemployed persons and those aged 20 or over who are threatened by unemployment.

Interaction and partnerships are built at all levels of education. There is co-operation between various levels of administration, between schools and between other social actors and schools for the development of education. Cooperation between universities and the Trade Union movement is one part of this national development.

### **3 Some future trends**

According to the Ministry of Education the challenges facing Adult Education in the future will be to respond to the increasingly ageing population and to growing multiculturalism, to motivate adults to study, to improve the learning-to-learn skills among the poorly educated and trained, and especially to ensure equity and equality.

In the near future the aim is to build better and more flexible opportunities for adults to study parts of higher degrees, e.g. modules, without studying for a whole degree. It should be possible for students to study for individual modules of university or polytechnic degrees as non-degree students at the Open University and within the polytechnic system. In addition, continuing further

education could offer courses as personnel training equivalent in content to degree modules. Following implementation this could assist educational co-operation between trade union education and higher education. It also helps people in working life to undertake continuing studies at her/his own suitable rhythm.

As part of the overall reform of adult education and training, the working group (2008) appointed by the Ministry of Education proposes the creation of an *apprenticeship-type* further education scheme at university level for those who already have a higher education degree. On-the-job training and learning would be at the centre of this education. The financing of apprenticeship-type continuing education should be arranged in the same way as that of apprenticeship training in continuing secondary-level training.

The graduate workforce participates extensively in short-term continuing education, but does not have adequate opportunities for gaining new competences during their careers or for demonstrating their knowledge and skills at degree level or through continuing further education.

#### **4. Education and Training in Working life**

Since 1992 the annually published *Working Life Barometer* is a follow-up study about the quality of Finnish working life. According to the Working Life Barometer 2008 over half of the wage earners have been participating in job related training paid for by their employers. Women are more active in receiving job related training than men but men can get little more time for training paid by employers. The average length of training is typically short in duration, c.a. 5.4 days per wage earner. ([http://www.tem.fi/files/21367/Tyoolobarometri2008\\_ennakkotiedot.pdf](http://www.tem.fi/files/21367/Tyoolobarometri2008_ennakkotiedot.pdf)) .

Funding for research and development (R&D) on working life in Finland is faring well. Percentage-wise, it has increased more rapidly than the overall public funding for R&D in recent years. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the increased priority of R&D on working life in Finnish public policy. In fact, Finland has obtained international recognition for its increased efforts in workplace and work organization development in recent years (Alasoini et.al. 2008).

Social innovation in the field of working life development is found in *The Finnish Workplace Development Programme* (Tykes 2004–2009). It supports the development of working practices in workplaces in Finland. In projects financed under the Programme management and staff develop the work jointly. The Trade Union Movement is involved in the programme both at national and workplace levels. The programme has a scientific forum of experts, that is made up of experts from 31 R&D units. The forum monitors the implementation of the programme, acts as an advisory body for decision-making in the programme, makes development proposals for the programme, and acts as a national network for experts in research-assisted workplace development. ([http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/01\\_ministry/05\\_tykes/index.jsp](http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/01_ministry/05_tykes/index.jsp))

At regional level it is worth mentioning a network based development programme *Promotion of Worklife Ability in Pirkanmaa*. (<http://www.worklifeability.fi/hankeen.shtml>). It is a diversified, interdisciplinary network based in the region of Pirkanmaa. It is exceptionally large in the Finnish context and focuses on pro-active improvement of worklife ability in work organisations. The Network organisation is in its present form divided into a Learning Network and a Business network. There are over 80 members in this network representing business firms, industry plants, universities, polytechnics, development consultants, working life authorities and social partners. The Programme is funded by participating organisations and the National Work Place Development Programme.

In the context of this programme worklife ability refers to the ability and willingness of people to learn, apply and combine new knowledge and skills related to the product, work, fitness for work, work organisation, work environment, and the business operations of the company (and their interconnections) in creative ways that are useful for the individual, enterprise and society” (prof.Olavi Manninen 2004).

The general objective of the network organisation is to find and test developmental models which link the functionality of working communities and organisations closely to the development of the work itself, which encourages the personnel to take the initiative and assume responsibility for development. This enables full utilisation of the abilities of the organisation, learning and the creation of a new positive, encouraging and confident working culture in work organisations.

## **5. Trade Union education and training**

The trade union movement has responded to employers’ human resources management (HRM) policies by new openings, which emphasize co-operation and participation in the development of a company (Kalliola 2005; Legge 1995). This development requires profound know-how in business economics and production development. Trade Union training has a strong role to strengthen economic know- how among union members.

The structure, contents and practices of the trade union education and training (TUET) are tied to the union strategies concerning members, employers and the government. In different social circumstances the trade union movement follows different strategies when defending the interests of its members, and the ways of action are influenced for instance by the historical development and the position of the individual trade union.

The impact of the TUET is directed outwards towards employers and the government, and inwards through its internal strengthening and development (Taylor 2001; Tuomisto1996). The education has thus a dual nature both in regard to the organisation and the individual as well as to the movement and the powers outside it.

Trade union education is also affected by the fact that the culture of manual workers traditionally has looked askance at intellectual work, and that culturally there have been borders in that direction (Alasuutari, 1997; Willis, 1977). Trade union education must overcome even this hindrance, which is partly diminishing but still has an effect. The low participation rate in education of rank and file members has also been regarded as a fact that culturally differentiates the active and rank and file members (Tuomisto, 1996).

Education and training has a very important role to play as a maintainer of social cohesion of movement and also as a combiner of different social realities. This is the reason, why the Trade Union Movement emphasises the fact, that different learning environments should support solidarity, co-operation, direct interaction and development of social skills. Education and Training in the Trade Union Movement has a role as maintainer and facilitator of both vertical and horizontal connections for union members.

Trade union education seems to produce so called metacompetences. These competences don't have a limited area of usage, but they support the development of the employer's and the employees' cooperation in various arenas. The entity becomes a process with tensions, in which emphasises on different strategies are melded together into educational content and the workers' professional and cultural competence. (Ojakangas 2003)

About 15% of the members of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions – SAK - ([www.sak.fi](http://www.sak.fi)) have participated in trade union education. That means that about 150,000 members have at some point taken part in education organised by the SAK-related trade union movement. Participation follows the educational opportunities offered, which mainly concentrates on active members who are taking care of different kinds of tasks. The education directed towards passive or so-called rank and file members is a small part of the educational offering. Education is organised nationally with TU-schools, locally and regionally. Murikka-institute ([www.murikka-opisto.fi](http://www.murikka-opisto.fi)) has annually about 3000 students mainly on short courses.

## **6. Co-operation between Universities and Trade Unions in Lifelong Learning at the workplace**

The Finnish Committee for Lifelong Learning (1997) stressed that Lifelong Learning is a multilevel principle, which takes into consideration not only individuals but also the communities guiding the learning career pathways of individuals, active citizenship, activities of communities and the promotion of broad and continuous learning in society. The goals of Lifelong Learning can be divided into three categories:

- *For the individual:* a sustainable competitiveness in changing labour markets, rich life opportunities both inside and outside one's work and increasing the capability to learn.
- *For enterprises:* a new kind of competitive strategy, new work and learning structures, development co-operation, better use of employees' skills.
- *For organisations and states* (e.g. EU, national states and their regions, trade unions): new knowledge based competition strategies, LLL-integrated education systems, social cohesion and welfare strategy. (compare Tikkanen et al. 2008).

Education and research are an important means of influencing development in society and in the workplace. The ever accelerating changes in the operational environment entail further enhancement of the interaction between education, research and the world of work (Kester & Pinault 1997). Educational institutions clearly need to intensify their contacts with employers and the world of work including the Trade Union movement. Cooperation is needed both in the anticipation of educational needs and in the planning, implementation and evaluation of education. Trade Unions can be core players in this field in order to promote their members' learning skills and to support their facilities for adult learners. Unions can build a bridge between their members and universities. It is noteworthy here that the role of educational institutions as working life developers has grown in Finland during the last fifteen years.

The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) over the last three decades has strongly driven the development of Workers' rights in the area of education and training, through the development and financing of adult learning, and increasing the demand for the expansion of the supply of adult education. SAK's Educational guidelines emphasize also education and training as a tool for strengthening democracy and participation in society. There are new aspects also to this traditional goal setting: the importance of vocational growth and competitiveness. SAK's Guidelines of Educational Policy has nicely changed from structure-centred demands to emphasize the learning of individuals and their possibilities to learn.

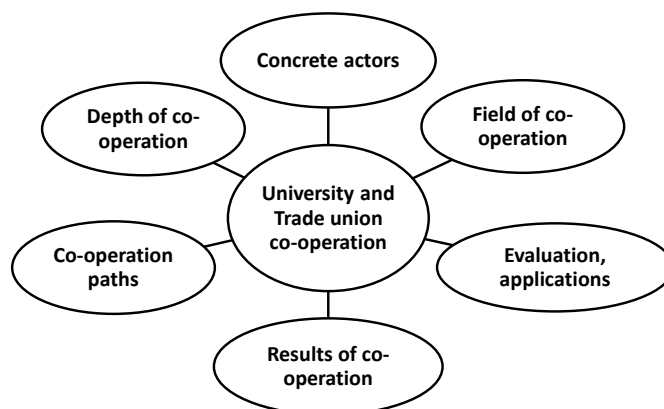
When regarding the role of research and training at Trade Union level, it is obvious that research and training are the most important resources in developing the working life and the supervision of the union members' interests. In a survey of decision makers in the Metal Workers union (Kalliola 2000; 2005) the Research Department of the Metalworkers' Union was singled out as the most

important source of information on industrial change in the metal industry. The Union Research Department is acknowledged as a unit which gathers and analyzes information on the metal industry and on the changes in the surrounding world. The Murikka-Institute was considered the second most important channel of information providing development-related co-operational training for enterprises undergoing changes. It also issues topical messages to the teaching staff, concerning the situation of different companies, who then communicate this information further in their teaching and through the organization at large.

At the University level we can see that Vaasa University's Levón Institute (<http://www.uwasa.fi/levon/english> ) is a very well organized research and development organisation which provides extensive practical competence, applied research services and an ability to recognize the needs in education, research and development. In its services academic/scientific knowledge is combined with a practical approach. Its strongest fields of know-how are management and development of organizations, entrepreneurship, public management, multilingualism and communication, evaluation research, regional development and energy and environment. The Levón Institute co-operates closely with the private sector and the municipality and regional officials in the Vaasa area. The Institute is an active national and international actor with a continually developing network of contacts.

## 7. Conclusions

Cooperation between universities and trade unions is now considered more urgent than ever because of the rapid change and instability in society, industry and the workplace. In the Finnish metal industry sector university-trade union co-operation has mostly been based on thematic concrete subjects such as workplace development projects dealing with training co-operation and action research.(see Reijonen 1997; Koivisto1997). It can also be based on an exchange of information, bringing up new research topics. In the following diagram university and trade union co-operation is theoretically modelled to illustrate different aspects of this co-operation:

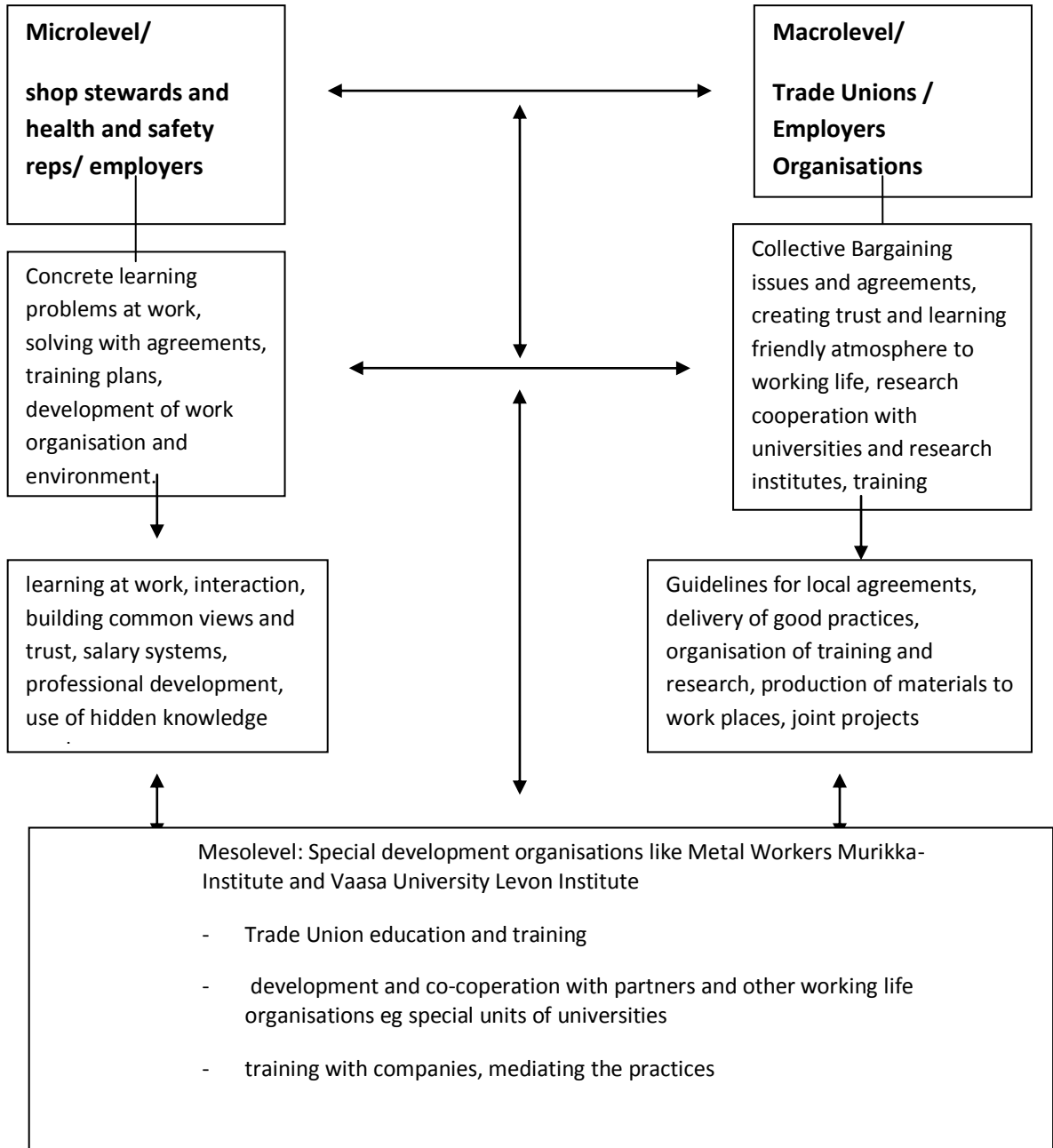


Our development and co-operation experience tells us that there are some basic human conditions which promote this co-operation.

1. Firstly academically educated specialists inside the Trade Union Movement can act as a resource in building a bridge to the university and research world. Personal contacts play an important role here as well as their experience of academic study and research.
2. On the other hand we emphasise the role of those university specialists who have some working life experience outside of universities. Our experience is that co-operation with them is easier than with those academics whose working life orientation is only gained from the university world.
3. A third precondition is to find those arenas which can connect Trade Unions and Universities. European projects are one path to find European and also National arenas of co-operation. Concrete connections are also created during working life research projects and conferences.

From the perspective of Trade Unions this training and research cooperation must be connected to normal union work. This work can be divided into three levels: workplace level (microlevel), union level (macrolevel) and mesolevel organisations, such as trade union schools, research organisations, consultancies. Co-operation between Trade Unions and Universities can build a bridge from national level to workplace level and vice versa. Mutual know-how and trust can lead to work place development projects, which promote organisational as well as individual learning. Mesolevel organisations also are in mediating positions and can deliver good practice from case to case. Case reports to national level can help Unions to reformulate their working life attitudes and working agendas. At the same time mesolevel organisations can support employers' organisations to encourage co-operation with unions and work place reps.

**Partnership, co-operation levels, issues and actors for lifelong learning in the metal sector in Finland**



(Ojakangas 2008)

In conclusion, the relationships, roles and co-operation of Trade Unions and Universities together in promoting Lifelong Learning in the workplace are crucial. Through this co-operation they can build bridges between different working life levels and bind actors to the same development processes without at the same time losing their own unique positions and goals.

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