

SUMMARY

Background

The Nordic region has historically had and continues to have a prominent international position in the field of lifelong learning. We have a comprehensive, well-functioning adult education system producing high-quality education. A very considerable proportion of that quality is anchored in adult educators' competence.

In a globalised world, which constantly presents new demands to the education system, it is necessary to focus on how adult educators' competence can be secured and developed. This is the focus of the present study. The study incorporates knowledge from earlier studies, but the present results are new and based on an extensive collection of current data.

The survey can function as a basis for both Nordic, national and institutional reflections concerning the existing competence requirements and education opportunities and which of those need to be developed further.

The study was initiated and financed by the Advisory Group for Nordic Co-operation on Adult Education (SVL), which operates under the Nordic Council of Ministers. The study was conducted as a co-operation between the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL) and the National Center for Kompetenceudvikling (NCK), which also participated in its financing. Another essential prerequisite for the completion of this survey, however, was the large number of resource persons who collected data and put their expertise in this field at our disposal.

Summary of results and recommendations

The report describes the results of the survey in three main areas. The first part presents an overview of the formal competences required of adult educators within different adult education programmes and sectors in the Nordic countries. The second part describes which competences are emphasised by recruiters of adult educators in the different sectors in all the Nordic countries. The third part presents an overview of the education opportunities available in the field of adult pedagogy. The report concludes with summarising and cross-cutting analyses of the individual areas. The results of the analyses provide a background for proposals concerning courses, training and other activities that can contribute to strengthening Nordic adult educators' competences and improve the quality of Nordic adult education. The proposals have been incorporated into the text and relate to the different survey areas. The most important results of the survey are summarised here in a form that follows the same structure as the report.

Formal competences required of adult educators

The report surveys the formal competences required of adult educators working within the following forms of adult education: basic-level general and vocational education, higher education taking place at universities, university colleges and other institutions of higher education, special education, education for people with dyslexia, second-language instruction for adult immigrants, and education offered by folk high schools and adult education associations. The survey reveals that while there are differences between these different education forms, significant similarities also exist.

On the whole, a high standard of formal qualifications is required of adult educators in all sectors in the areas of general pedagogy and knowledge of the subject taught. The exception is liberal adult education (*folkeoplysning/folkbildning*), where the subject-related requirements are not formal.

Generally speaking, there are no formal requirements regarding adult pedagogical competence in any sector in any of the Nordic countries. Specific requirements regarding adult pedagogy exist only in

individual specialised areas and only in Denmark. In many areas Finland is the country with the highest subject-related competence requirements. Iceland is the country with the least formal requirements both regarding subject content, pedagogy and adult pedagogy.

It is remarkable that while the training of comprehensive school teachers is moving in the direction of research-based education with increased specialisation by age group and subject, there is no focus on the specific needs and learning prerequisites of the adult target group, such as adults' experiences and life situation. Furthermore, the content and organisation of adult education programmes require adult educators to have various adult didactic competences which differ from the requirements faced by teachers in primary and lower secondary schools. Examples include flexible education forms, workplace-based training and cross-sectoral co-operation.

Recruiters' assessment of adult educators' competences

Altogether 29 interviews were conducted, equally distributed between general, vocational and liberal adult education institutions in the five Nordic countries. Subject-related competence is clearly seen as the most important competence in all sectors and particularly within the vocational education sector. This evaluation is evident in the recruiters' replies as to which competences are the most important – those related to subject content, general pedagogy, adult pedagogy or attitudes – as well as in the themes chosen for the supplementary training and courses that the teachers are offered. General pedagogical competences are emphasised more than adult pedagogical competences. At the same time, the great majority of the respondents feel that there are differences between adult educators and teachers working in primary and lower secondary schools. All of the respondents describe particular competences required of adult educators. These include personal qualities as well as knowledge of adult psychology and development processes, adults' learning prerequisites and forms of resistance, expertise in adult didactics and ability to use methods such as experience-based and participatory learning.

The respondents made several concrete training-related suggestions which show that the different sectors have some common training needs as well as sector-specific needs. Common training themes include the theory and practice of adult pedagogy and didactics. Sector-specific needs are indicated by respondents in the vocational education sector, for instance, who suggest courses targeted to specialised, costly and small-scale professional fields and emphasise the need for up-to-date practical experience. Responses from adult education associations in all the Nordic countries and individual education providers in Iceland indicate that it is difficult to motivate part-time employees to participate in supplementary training. At the same time, the recruiters feel that the pedagogical competences of this group of teachers need improving. The survey indicates that particularly respondents within in the general education sector would like courses in how to use versatile methods and work forms.

Furthermore, the great majority of recruiters are interested in cross-sectoral training opportunities and Nordic co-operation.

Education and training

The survey shows that training and education in the field of adult pedagogy are available in the Nordic countries but great variations exist between the countries with regard to the scope and character of the training offered.

It is remarkable that only in Finland and partly in Sweden is it possible to complete a basic academic, theory-based degree in adult education. In 2011 a Bachelor-level programme will start in Norway, where up until now a Master's level degree has been offered. In the other Nordic countries adult educators can acquire qualifications through supplementary and continuing education at various levels. Some training options enable educators to specialise in the needs of a specific target group. There are differences

between the content and scope of the education programmes, which is why different Nordic countries have particular strengths in individual areas.

Denmark differs clearly from the other Nordic countries with regard to education and training provision in the field of adult pedagogy: no education is available within the ordinary education system, but the range of training offered within the continuing education system is greater than in any other country. All of the continuing training programmes in Denmark and some of those offered in Norway are chargeable. The survey shows that Finland has the strongest provision of education opportunities within the ordinary education system, followed by Sweden, where education programmes are shorter than in Finland. Finland and Denmark offer the widest range of training and education in adult pedagogy (albeit differently organised), followed by Sweden. Training opportunities in Norway and Iceland appear more limited.

Recommendations

As the survey mentions, adult education is seen as a priority for action in all the Nordic countries. There are differences between the individual countries with regard to national priorities, the structure of the education systems and the working conditions and training opportunities available to individual adult educators. Even so, the survey reveals a number of significant similarities between the Nordic countries, which make it meaningful to give recommendations on common Nordic efforts. Based on the results of the survey, the authors make various recommendations (see below) concerning measures that can strengthen adult educators' competences and improve the quality of Nordic adult education.

In several areas, Nordic co-operation is underway in the field of adult pedagogy with a view to establishing common Nordic education programmes. Examples include a Nordic Master's programme in adult pedagogy and a Nordic teacher training programme at Master's level. In addition, adult education associations, folk high schools and umbrella organisations in the liberal adult education sector have well-established forms of Nordic co-operation. The NVL network and the Nordplus Adult programme have each initiated, participated in and supported various activities relating to the competence development of adult educators. Therefore the authors of this report recommend the following as a starting point:

- Creating structures and information pathways which strengthen the links between the various Nordic initiatives aimed at developing the field of adult pedagogy and establishing both formal and non-formal Nordic teacher and adult educator training programmes.

The survey has revealed that the individual countries can have specific competences and strengths relating to education programmes, development projects or the way in which education is organised. It would make sense to utilise these differences by improving the opportunities for exchanging and sharing specialised expertise and experiences. Several recruiters mention that economic constraints pose an obstacle to offering adult educators supplementary training. It is a particular problem that labour costs must be paid as well as course fees. In light of this, the authors recommend the following:

- Continuously securing up-to-date information about each individual country's special competences in an understandable, comparable form, for instance by updating schematic overviews such those in this report and in the reports "Komparativt studie af de nordiske læreruddannelser" (Nordic Council of Ministers 2008) and "Muligheder for en fællesnordisk læreruddannelse på kandidatniveau" (Nordic Council of Ministers 2010)
- Strengthening the economic and practical possibilities for continuing education and training through actual co-operation between educators and mutual practical visits between teachers employed at Nordic educational institutions.

In the course of the survey, certain themes and issues relating to adult pedagogy and didactics have turned out to be relevant across sectors and countries. These common themes are connected to the professional role of the adult educator and to the process of organising learning experiences for adult target groups irrespective of the subject content. It would be beneficial to include such themes in pan-Nordic and cross-sectoral training programmes/courses, where perspectives from different educational fields and different countries can add nuances, increase understanding and give a wider range of options for covering the subject matter. Encounters with colleagues from different countries, sectors and learning contexts can change and expand cultural (both professional and national) conceptions and thus lead to increased linguistic and cultural competence. Therefore, the authors recommend establishing shorter and/or longer Nordic courses and continuing training focusing on adult pedagogy related themes which have emerged as important in the survey, such as:

- Theoretical knowledge about the conditions, psychology and development of adulthood and which specific adult didactic reflections these require
- Knowledge and training relating to the use of experience-based and participatory methods which take into account the competences and experience acquired by an adult target group
- Knowledge about and training in how to teach heterogeneous groups consisting of participants with high levels of knowledge and competence in a way that permits learning to happen not only between teacher and participant but also between participants
- Theoretical knowledge about and understanding of adults' forms of resistance and how resistance can be used to further learning among participants
- Training in how to assess educational needs, plan and organise tailored courses at businesses
- Knowledge about and opportunities for relating subject content to relevant circumstances in the job market or society
- Development of teaching material suitable to an adult target group and for concrete contexts
- Knowledge about and training in how to implement individual assessment of previously acquired competences
- Knowledge about and training in how to use and teach ICT in adult target groups
- Budget and economy planning for designing and organising courses

It emerges from the survey that adult educators must have knowledge and skills necessary for functioning with heterogeneous, adult target groups and in different learning arenas, often in co-operation with colleagues from other sectors. Furthermore, the teaching may take place at workplaces or businesses and calls for an ability to combine theory with praxis. For this reason, the authors of this study recommend the following:

- Strengthening the link between theory and practice by organising training and courses in authentic environments, with particularly inspiring educational activities, and to focus on both theory and reflection and practical training. Organising cross-sectoral training/courses involving knowledge about the goals, content, challenges and opportunities of different sectors, and practical training in cross-sectoral cooperation
- Organising workplace-based continuing training in order to secure up-to-date practical experience and cultural learning.

In the course of the study, suggestions emerged regarding training, courses and cooperation aimed more specifically at individual sectors or education fields. It is relevant to consider at Nordic level both the aforementioned general adult education themes and more specific adult education related themes, such as:

- Courses specifically designed for part-time teachers
- Field-specific courses for specialised, costly and small-scale professional and educational fields.

On the whole, the results of this survey show that there are learning prerequisites, content-related issues, educational and professional conditions and structures within the field of adult education which pose specific requirements to adult educators with regard to subject content, adult pedagogy and adult didactics. Nordic adult educators generally have high qualification levels in general pedagogy, special pedagogy and professional knowledge in the field they teach, and formal competence is required in these areas. However it is remarkable that practically no formal requirements in the area of adult pedagogy exist in any of the Nordic countries. Education and training in adult pedagogy is available but such qualifications are only rarely a formal requirement for working as an adult educator. Competence development of the adult population is a challenge and a priority for action in every Nordic country. Competence development of adult educators can offer a route to improving the quality of adult education programmes. To this end, the authors recommend the following:

- Raising formal qualification requirements in the area of adult pedagogy in all sectors of adult education apart from non-formal educational institutions offering liberal adult education
- Developing education opportunities at basic degree level in the field of adult pedagogy
- Improving supplementary and continuing training opportunities in the field of adult pedagogy at all levels and in all sectors.