

## PLA on Flexible Provision 21-22 September 2021

### Summary – Day 1

The PLA participants were welcomed by the host, *Hanne Christensen*, and the country cluster team, followed by an opening speech by *Anders Fremming Anderssen* from the [Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills](#) .

*Klara Engels-Perenyi, European Commission:*

#### EU Policy Updates

EU Policy updates were presented on the following:

- General goal by 2030: 60% participation in adult learning
- Central developments:
  - individual learning accounts
  - micro-credentials
- Renewed European Agenda for adult learning in November 21
- New work group in the field of adult learning

*Tove Dina Røynestad, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills:*

#### Initiatives to increase flexibility 1; Modularisation pilot projects in Norway

This modularised adult education offer provides a flexible learning pathway possibility to different target groups. In two pilots (and a third consisting in a mix of the two) immigrants and adults who completed lower secondary school get “parallel” training instead of sequential training.

Validation of prior learning achievements is part of the creation of the individual training curriculum leading to formal certification at secondary or upper secondary level.

*Laura Iveta Strode, Ministry of Education and Science (Latvia):*

#### Introducing flexibility in AL: How far have we come?

Implementation of Upskilling Pathways is supported by amendments in VET legislation, linked to the “Education Development Framework” (2021-2027).

The National Coordinator work groups support the implementation in their activities, notably work on quality criteria for adult non-formal education and an Adult Coordinators’ Training Programme. The Programme provides a flexible formula for different target groups:

- a 72h Training program for teachers without pedagogical basis,
- a 36h Training program for teachers with pedagogical basis,

with a large range of contents, defining *life skills* as a wide field covering different aspects of everyday life.

*Karine Nicolay, Epos, National Erasmus+ Agency Flanders (Belgium):*

A story of transformation in education

Video 1: A story of transformation in education for 2020-2030, *Jo Caudron*

Video 2: Is school still cool in a digital era? *Bart Boelen*

The two videos gave a great input for the field of adult education: "thinking outside of the box" in the matters of new learning and working environments. The new possibilities that resulted from a major impact, as the COVID-19 crisis, offer a lot for the future. Also, new technologies and the possibilities for a more modern way of learning should push the education sector to find new opportunities for learners. The discussion about micro credentials and flexible learning pathways in adult learning can be seen in this context.

*Jon Albert Risahagen, Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills:*

Initiatives to increase flexibility 2; Trade and industry programmes

The sectoral programs with public funding aim at helping different sectors, also those who are most affected by the COVID crisis. The programs support all levels of adult learning including non-formal education, VET, and higher education.

Flexibility is a core element in those programs: the contents and the skills to develop are decided by the industry itself, and short/ digital courses would make it accessible for the learners. The so gained possibility to combine the courses with working life and the funding would motivate the industry representatives to show a great commitment for adult education and the contribution in upskilling pathways.

*Erno Hyvönen, Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland):*

"TUVA"-studies as a new learning offer in Finland

Upskilling pathways in 3 steps (skills assessment, learning offer, validation/recognition) need a great flexibility permitting an individual learning project responding to the needs of every student. In Finland, a great amount of learning offers for adults in the field of the lower and upper secondary school or liberal education already existed.

Different actors (municipalities, VET providers, liberal adult education institutions) are united under one "roof" called "TUVA". "TUVA" offers one Curriculum, one legislation, one status of studies and one source of funding, at the same time it contributes to a greater offer because of a wider variety of organisers/providers.

*Maria Kapniari, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Greece):*

Learners' voices. Learner testimonials from the EASI BASIC project, Greece

The learners in the video participated in the training offer for unemployed people who graduated from compulsory education. The BASIC (Building Alternative Skills Innovative Schemes) is presented in a more detailed way in day 2 of this PLA: the flexible adult education offer is provided in blended learning with literacy, numeracy, physics, and ICT contents. The videos transmitted positive feedback from the participants, a successful outcome of the project and a great impact on the learners' upskilling pathway.

*Eline Wigdel, Norwegian Directorate of Higher Education and Skills:*

Reflections on flexible learning

We were given a short theoretical presentation of the many aspects of flexible learning, what it is, what it could be and what it is not. Flexible learning is more than (just) digital, online or flipped – the main aspect is learning- or learner-centred approach (vs. more traditional models which may have been more teacher or outcome centred...).

Technology is a big part of all learning designs today. Learning platforms, digital learning materials, lecturing tools, social media and digital collaboration are important parts of education, BUT technology itself does not ensure flexibility; technology is only a set of tools that supports flexibility.

Besides technology, other important aspects of flexible learning solutions are the question of high self-regulation (in many occasions seems as a prerequisite to benefit from flexible learning) and the important role of support and counselling (as a way around the aforementioned obstacle).

Flexible learning places the learner at the center by providing a learning ecosystem that includes relevant options on multiple dimensions. The dimensions for flexibility include time, location, scope, progress, assessment, formalization, collaboration and content.

There was also a message: To achieve lifelong learning through flexible education we need to go beyond the dedicated teachers and the single, innovative institution, and see a shift to a more learner centered perspective at a structural and systemic level.

*Maria Kapniari, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Greece):*

EASI BASIC project: A basic skills learning program for adults

Continuing from the learner testimonials from the day before, we were now presented different practical hands-on examples of the work done, evaluated, and honed during the BASIC project. The various groups consisting of different kind of students collected to try various experimental teaching methods have been rather small during the project but the need for working solutions to teach basic skills at the national level exists – studies show that quarter of adults in Greece struggle with literacy skills and one third of adults struggle with mathematical skills.

*Aline Schott, Ministry of Education, Children and Youth (Luxembourg):*

Flexible learning pathways in Luxembourg: challenges & new perspectives

Luxembourg has launched its own modular adult education offer which has similarities to Finnish and Norwegian initiatives. It is located in primary school (or basic skills education) and lower secondary education, and gives access to upper secondary education and/or VET when completed.

There is also new infrastructure in the country. The first Folk high school (based on German and Nordic models) has been founded, as well as nation's first one stop guidance centre. Compared to The "Cité des métiers" found in francophone countries, or local and regional "Ohjaamos" found in Finland, the local solution in Luxembourg was to found just one Centre to serve the whole country.

One interesting example was the integration of E-learning into adult basic skills education. By combining QR-coded teaching material with more traditional material it becomes possible to track and evaluate the use of teaching material and its usefulness.

*Klara Engels-Perenyi, European Commission:*

### Conclusions for future work

At the end of the second day Klara Engels-Perenyi returned to the themes of the first day and explained from the European Commission's point of view, why micro-credentials, individual learning accounts, validation of prior learning and the role of non-formal providers of adult education is on the rise and why more flexibility is needed to cope with problems caused by the fast-changing postmodern society. There was also time for discussion, questions and comments.

## **SUMMING UP THE PLA**

During this PLA we learned, discussed and shared our views around the following topics: What is "flexible learning" and why it is seen important in European and national education policy contexts?

We got several examples from the organising countries on how to produce learning for adults who struggle with basic skills in a flexible ways, using innovative, learner-centred approaches and new technology, QR codes etc. It is definitely possible, and not too expensive.

However, we also heard about the struggles in different countries to combine these learning results accumulated by flexible means to the existing formal, non-flexible education systems. Ministries of Education are trying to find means to validate, evaluate and 'count' flexible learning outcomes to be able to compare the acquired skills to existing formal qualifications. If you fail to find a way, you are not able to fund the flexible approach in the future, and tie it - or tame it, if you want! - more closely to the already established system.

BUT, we also got some glimpses on how, when and from which sources some individuals acquire knowledge and skills as 'rogue learners'; studying, learning and honing their skills outside of the formal system, below the radar of educators and public administration officials – it could be said that Youtube is the most influential teacher of the postmodern society!

Finally, we might be able to find a perfect solution for measuring and evaluating the exact level of mathematical or literacy skills that individuals have acquired during some learning course. And accounting departments might even be able to set a right price for that unit. But what really matters are the side effects of learning new (basic) skills – the feeling of achieving something, of belonging to society as a capable individual, as a citizen. And you really cannot measure that.

18 October 2021

*Aline Schott*

*Erno Hyvönen*

*Hanne Christensen*