



Adult Learning policy and provision in the EU

The Network of Adult Learning Experts and
Synthesis Report on Adult Learning in the EU
Member States

**EUROPEAN VOCATIONAL
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Employment,
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Synthesis Report on Adult Learning in the EU
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JENNY MOLYNEUX, ECORYS
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HELSINKI

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Employment,
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Adult Learning Network

• Introducing the Adult Learning Expert Network

- Support to DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL)
- National level updates and insights
- 28 Country Experts
- Based in and native to the Member States
- Drawn from backgrounds in policy making, practice, and academic research
- Network managed and facilitated by Ecorys



Tasks of the Expert Network

- Briefing reports – updates on policy and practice in the Member State
- Providing insight and updates on particular topics of relevance
- Narrative reports and validation of information via communication/questionnaires
- Independent expert opinion





Introducing a Country Expert from the Expert Network

• **Thomas Collins, Expert for Ireland**

- What is your background?
- What are your key research or policy interests?
- Examples of deliverables produced for the network?
- Experience and process of preparing inputs for the Expert Network



Synthesis Report



- Published May 2019
- Based on 28 country expert reports and questionnaire
- Set of high level experts to design research tools, analyse findings.
- Contributes to the evidence base on the state of play in policy and practice across EU; What exists and how do policies and systems compare?



Research Questions

- Differences and similarities in policy frameworks across the EU28?
- What national targets exist?
- Do national interventions include the building blocks of the conceptual framework for effective adult learning (2015)?
- What are the core strengths and weaknesses of national 'systems'?
- What can we learn about the current state of adult learning policy and any reforms that might support development?



Some context...

- Educational attainment key driver of social and economic participation
- Learn more, earn more...also wider health, life quality, civic engagement benefits
- Member State efforts to increase adult participation in learning have increased
- EU initiatives; Agenda for Adult Learning, New Skills Agenda for Europe, Upskilling Pathways
- Rich variety of measures (basic skills to work-based skills)
- Participation in education and training for adults (25-64 years) and employment rates vary
- Mixed performance in relation to EU targets (15%, 75%)



Governance in Adult Learning

- Cross-cutting policy area
- Governance responsibility shared horizontally and vertically
- Diversity of arrangements and involved institutions and agencies
- Rich tapestry of approaches across EU
- De-centralisation one approach for tailoring provision
- Challenge of potential complexity and fragmentation
- No apparent correlation between most prominent level of Governance and effectiveness



Policy Frameworks

- Established and relatively strong legislative and policy basis
- All MS have some sort of legal basis for adult learning
- National policy frameworks comprise of different elements; Acts, Laws, Strategies, but vary in their focus and specificity
- Challenge of policy alignment
- Most MS have discrete AL laws
- Half of MS cover via general education laws
- Treatment within national strategies is more piecemeal (e.g. LLL, competitiveness or digital skills)



National Targets

- All MS have targets in place for adult learning
- Many MS have translated EU benchmarks into national targets
- General congruence across targets therefore
- Targets generally relate to participation in adult learning, but are less often concerning results (e.g. qualifications or impacts).
- Future scope to broaden targets and indicators to capture progress in results and impacts ('quality' as well as 'quantity')?
- Opportunity to develop strategic and systematic logic in target setting i.e. *Can they be reached? How can they be reached?*



Financing Frameworks

- Public sector expenditure varies but consistency in spend as proportion of GDP (around 0.1%), with higher spend in some (e.g. NL, HU, DK, SE)
- Increased public investment since 2010 in half of MS, decrease in a quarter
- General view amongst half of experts that public funding insufficient in light of expected goals
- Targeting of funding emerged as important
- Funding covers a minority of adult learners (over half), majority (one third)
- Transparency and availability of data limits findings



Are building blocks in place?

- Six Key Success Factors (for each a set of building blocks: policy actions that contribute to successful adult learning)
- Learners' interest, Employer investment, Equity of access, Relevance, Quality, Coherence in policy.
- Experts assessed the extent to which they were in place for their MS
- Front-runner = Employer investment (employer incentives, work-based learning); Lagging = Coherent policy (policy coordination, alignment at local level)
- Coverage of Success Factors varied but recent progress reported
- 21 Building blocks; 16 said to be in place for half of experts



System Strengths and Weaknesses

- Experts reported three strengths and three weaknesses
- Caveats apply (!) but some interesting themes and findings emerged...
- Strengths: Collaborative working, targeting, ensuring demand-led provision
- Weaknesses: Complex provider landscape, level of funding, poor use of data
- Consistency between +/- across different types of MS, with different types of adult learning systems



Future reforms in adult learning?

- Develop strategic and intervention logic thinking to underpin improvements in AL
- Communication and clarification on provider landscape
- Extending research into adult learning finance
- Evaluation of adult learning provision (understanding effectiveness)
- Sharing report findings with relevant fora

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Many thanks!

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