Report from the online peer exchange with experts from other countries and the study visit to Finland

Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning (REFORM/SC2021/066)

A report prepared by ICF, Praxis, Tallinn University and Civitta Estonia[1]

September 2022

Suggested citation: ICF, Praxis, Tallinn University and Civitta Estonia. (2022) *Report from the online peer exchange with experts from other countries and the study visit to Finland.* Supporting young people to succeed – building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning (REFORM/SC2021/066).

Contents

1 Online peer exchange with experts from other countries

On 3 and 4 May 2022, an online peer exchange was hosted under the project "Supporting young people to succeed - building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning", a project supported by the EU through the Structural Reform Support Programme (REFORM/SC2021/066). The overall objective of the project is to support the Estonian national authorities in improving their capacity to design, develop and implement reforms to facilitate a better integration of formal and non-formal education. The online peer exchange contributes to the achievement of this objective and also supports one of the expected outcomes of this project, which is to ensure that Estonian authorities and stakeholders are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and modes of governance.

The specific objectives of the online peer exchange were to: 1) critically reflect and exchange ideas on integrating non-formal and formal learning; and 2) gain insights by comparing international practices and explore their potential for transferability to the Estonian context.

The event brought together 23 participants including representatives of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and participants from Finland, Malta and New Hampshire (USA) who presented international examples of practices that foster learning outside the classroom and support the validation of such learning. It also involved representatives from the European Commission and the project team.

This report draws on the presentations at the event as well as the group discussions that followed. The focus is placed on highlighting key messages and practical examples. The report starts with a brief background to the project and its objectives as presented by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and the European Commission. It is followed by an overview of the integration of formal and non-formal education in the Estonian context, based on the Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia (D1) prepared by the project team.

This is followed by a summary of the three practice examples that were presented and discussed at the event:

■ Practice example 1 - Learn Everywhere, New-Hampshire (USA)

■ Practice example 2 - LUMA Centre Finland

■ Practice example 3 - Secondary School Leaving Certificate & Profile (SSC&P), Malta

These practices have been described in the **Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries (D2)** prepared by the project team, so this report looks more specifically at similarities and differences in approaches and focuses on the aspects discussed among the participants.

Finally, the report reflects on the main challenges and learning outcomes from the group discussions and presentations. It also outlines the potential and challenges for transferability into the Estonian context.

1.1 Background and objectives of the online peer exchange

The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research opened the online peer exchange by outlining the objectives of the project under which the event was organised. The project supports the strategic planning period 2021-2035 and the Estonia 2035 action

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

plan in which the integration of non-formal and formal learning has been identified as an area of focus.

According to the Estonian Ministry, non-formal and formal learning environments and (human) resources are not well integrated, although good examples and practices exist at the local level. The potential **of non-formal and formal education is** therefore not maximised for the individual learner. By exploring practices from other countries, the Estonian Ministry is looking to identify multi-stakeholder approaches, guidelines, procedures and mechanisms that could be transferred to the Estonian context **and** make the education system **more** student-centred and flexible. A coordinated approach to the integration and validation of young peoples' non-formal and formal **education** is expected to reduce duplication in learning, increase learners' motivation, contribute to reducing early school leaving and improve young people's mental health/wellbeing.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support highlighted the importance of these types of peer learning opportunities as part of the support services of the Technical Support Instrument (previously called the Structural Reform Support Programme). Education policy is a national competence and the EU supports Member States in designing and implementing national structural reforms by mobilising European expertise and guiding Members States through structural changes and new policy initiatives.

1.1.1 Presentation on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia

In Estonia, there are a diverse range of initiatives and measures taken to foster the integration of formal and non-formal education. These include decentralised and school-based approaches as well as some systematic attempts at nation-wide initiatives, namely in the areas of physical education/sports, culture and entrepreneurial education, but research also shows that there is currently a lack of system-level initiatives and measures. Current experiences can be divided into four distinct ways of integrating non-formal and formal learning:

■ completing electives outside of school;

■ completing independent creative study projects (compulsory in upper basic education/lower secondary education) outside of school;

■ accrediting outcomes from non-formal learning as part of compulsory school curriculum; and

■ acquiring some learning outcomes set in the formal education curriculum in non-formal learning environments.

While these options are in principle available across the education system, some schools, particularly those located in more peripheral locations, have difficulties in making full use of this range of measures. This can partly be linked to the lack of availability of non-formal education opportunities in these localities, and lack of resources needed to access any existing opportunities. Moreover, application of such integration measures relies on individual schools or even specific teachers, and participation decisions are dependent on family resources available to the student. This is particularly an issue for hobby school-based activities as well as those school-based activities that are organised by non-formal learning providers from outside of the school, even though some school-based hobby activities, especially those facilitated by the teachers working at that particular school (e.g. choir practice or extracurricular study circle on physics), are often provided free of charge. Largely because of the reasons related to the costs to the students and their families and the lack of variety in provision of learning options in either hobby schools or school-based

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural Reform Support Programme and implemented in cooperation with the European Commission

hobby activities, it appears that only around half of basic education pupils participate in school-based hobby activities in Estonia. Similarly, around half of basic education pupils and just over a third of upper secondary education pupils participate in hobby school-based activities, which are specialised in providing non-formal education.

This highlights that there is a significant proportion of young people, particularly at the upper secondary education level, that is not participating in non-formal education through school-based hobby activities or hobby schools. This may point to inequality in access and could lead to important differences in the acquisition of associated learning outcomes from non-formal education by young people in different social groups and geographic areas. This also highlights the relevance of removing barriers that students must overcome in order to participate (e.g. against the background of their study loads and ensuring standardised levels of high-quality provision across the country and socio-economic groups). On the other hand, for those who do participate in non-formal education activities, key issues raised in the stakeholder interviews the project team carried out were low visibility of their learning outcomes and lack of standardised practices of accrediting non-formal learning. Further integration of non-formal and formal learning may secure benefits in relation to the future work and education opportunities, for example when accredited learning outcomes can be relied on during admission and in the process of gaining learning and work experience. Better integration of different forms of learning could also provide students with a more varied understanding of learning and secure a better sense of lifelong learning orientation among learners (and learning providers).

Specific problems in relation to the integration of non-formal and formal education arise as a result of the lack of a holistic approach and the low use of possibilities to acknowledge and accredit previous and parallel learning experiences occurring within or outside of formal education. Results from our research also show a mutual lack of trust between formal education providers and non-formal learning facilitators. This tends to relate, on the one hand, to the quality of the education provided outside formal education, and on the other hand, the quality of support for learners provided in formal education. There is some tendency to question the professionalism of learning facilitators in the non-formal education sector, as well as doubts that teachers and support personnel in formal education care about, or know how, to create supportive learning environments. Amidst issues with (perceived) lack of funding to the field, this kind of distrust limits cooperation between formal and non-formal education providers and may indicate a lack of attention to these topics in formal education and continuing professional development for teachers and for non-formal education facilitators. It may also result in limited opportunities for the two systems to interact on a more professional level to build understanding and trust.

1.2   International practices

The international practice examples involved in this peer exchange were selected on the basis of a review of existing literature and documentation on this topic (as presented in the **Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practices from other countries (D2))** and interviews with international experts and stakeholders. The following examples, presented in this report, focus on learning outside the classroom, the validation of such learning and/or methodological/pedagogical support:

■ Practice example 1 - Learn Everywhere, New-Hampshire (USA)

■ Practice example 2 - LUMA Centre Finland

■ Practice example 3 - Secondary School Leaving Certificate & Profile (SSC&P), Malta

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

Below we provide a summary of the discussions relating to each of these examples.

1.2.1   Practice example 1 - Learn Everywhere, New-Hampshire (USA)

Representatives from the New Hampshire Department of Education, presented the **Learn Everywhere** initiative launched in New Hampshire in 2020, following a 2018 invitation received by the State Board of Education to adopt rules for its implementation, issued by the New Hampshire Legislature. Through this initiative, any public or private organisation can apply to offer programmes that allow high school students to obtain credits for learning that takes place outside of formal education.

There are **no restrictions on the type** of organisations or individuals that can apply to the Learn Everywhere programme. It was explained that individual teachers are also encouraged to apply. For example, a physics teacher who wants to run a robotics and engineering programme on the weekends or before/after school hours could build a Learn Everywhere programme. Programmes can make use of school premises outside of the normal school hours, thereby maximising the use of the facilities and resources available.

The Learn Everywhere initiative builds on the New Hampshire experiences with **"Extended Learning Opportunities" (ELOs)**, which allow for the acquisition of knowledge and skills through instruction outside classroom settings (e.g. private instruction, performing groups, internships, community service and online courses). ELOs validate learning gained in non-formal settings and make it count in formal education, but this validation is reliant on the knowledge, skills and resources of individual schools (particularly school ELO coordinators), non-formal learning providers and students and may therefore vary across different schools and for different learners. Moreover, relationships between school ELO coordinators, non-formal learning providers and students can be time-intensive to create, monitor and assess. Students can use ELOs as one option towards graduation, but it is not a requirement and the participation in ELOs remains optional and voluntary. An important feature of the New Hampshire education system is that it is competence-based, which means that all education has to be defined in terms of learning outcomes, or competences (what a student knows or is able to do as a result of the learning opportunities).

What the Learn Everywhere initiative does is to extend the State Board of Education credentialising functions beyond teachers and schools, its traditional remits, to also credentialise courses or programmes, making them part of the educational offer to gain credits for graduation, in any subject. There is no differentiation in the certificate reflecting whether the credit has been obtained through formal education or non-formal education-based learning. To be included as a Learn Everywhere programme, applicants have to provide documentation on aspects such as the course credit that will be offered, instructors' qualifications (these can be based on experience, and there is no requirement for instructors to be a qualified teacher - in order to avoid too strong barriers for entry into the Learn Everywhere programme), how it will work, how students will be supported (including additional support for students with individualised education plans), assessed and graded. Learn Everywhere programmes receive a one-year provisional approval during which they are subject to the following requirements:

■ Monitoring by the New Hampshire Department of Education (as needed);

■ Require students to submit course evaluations prior to receiving their certification of completion;

■ Respond to student and/or parent complaints as required by rule;

■ Submit an annual programme report; and

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

- Submit a request for 5-year programme renewal, if desired, 90 days before the end of the one year provisional period.

Not all programmes are **equally credentialised.** The number of credits received depends on the competences developed as part of the programme. For example, an engineering programme may be associated with a higher number of credits than a theatre programme if the number of competences developed is higher in the engineering programme. At the state level, there is a minimum requirement to earn at least 20 credits to graduate from upper secondary education in New Hampshire, but the minimum number of credits needed for graduation can be higher at the local level (e.g. 24-27 credits). In cases where more than 20 credits are needed for graduation, the Learn Everywhere programme can be considered particularly useful as it gives students greater freedom to choose the subjects and courses that they would like to complete.

The Learn Everywhere initiative does not affect **school funding**, which continues to operate under the same funding formula. It does not require schools to create any new programmes or administrative support. Students who complete a Learn Everywhere programme will receive a certificate with a grade from the participating programme. This certificate will be provided to the student's school by the student so that credit can be awarded. As such, Learn Everywhere may simply capture the learning that is already taking place through student participation in programmes outside of school. This enables the creation of new and more individualised pathways for students to apply their learning towards meeting the minimum standards for graduation established by the State Board of Education.

One aspect of Learn Everywhere that was discussed during the peer exchange was the **qualification of non-formal facilitators/teachers and/or providers**. Those delivering the programmes do not need to be qualified teachers, although teachers can also set up new learning programmes outside of their working hours. The New Hampshire Department of Education recognises the **need to further ensure quality** within the programmes offered by approved non-formal providers. However, they also recognise the value offered by the diverse range of subjects and competences covered and the variety in the provision (including the use of educators/tutors that bring experience and expertise from their professional working life but that may not be qualified teachers). It should also be noted that resistance to Learn Everywhere does not tend to come from individual teachers but rather from the professional associations and from the regulatory body of higher education.

Another aspect that was discussed was the **inclusiveness** of Learn Everywhere programmes. As of May 2022, 15 programmes (or providers), covering a range of subjects and over 110 different credit granting courses, have been approved by the State Board of Education. As most of the programmes are **geographically based**, students are naturally more attracted to programmes that are close to their area of residence. Another challenge is to guarantee equal access in terms of **financial resources** because some of the non-formal learning opportunities have a fee structure involved. For example, students attending the Karate Academy must pay a membership fee. The New Hampshire Department of Education seeks to overcome these potential barriers and works with some of the organisations that have application fees or membership fees to put into place incentives such as sliding scale fees for families that have fewer financial resources or to put in place **scholarship opportunities.** These incentives can be offered to students coming from low-income families and who would normally not have the necessary financial means to participate.

Over the next couple of years, the New Hampshire Department of Education aims to examine the barriers faced for low-income students to participate in these programmes and address these challenges. Trying to defray that cost without the

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

State stepping in is one the challenges faced by the Department of Education as they do not have funding to cover this.

During the peer discussion, participants also enquired about the **application process**. It was explained that when the application is submitted, the New Hampshire Department of Education's officers look through the application and give technical feedback. To assess the application, the Department launches a call for volunteers (from the field concerned) for the review group – staff from the Department of Education, curriculum experts and certified teachers in the relevant areas. The members of the review group volunteer their time in exchange for professional development credit. A certificate indicating the tasks completed and the number of hours volunteered is provided. The application/approval process currently takes around 2-3 months.

The Learn Everywhere programmes **assess the competences gained** using the system approved at the application stage. If the programme providers want to make changes to the assessment process or any other part of the programme (e.g. curriculum), they need to inform the Department for Education about the proposed changes. The change request is assessed and approved by the Department for Education.

Certificates are created by the individual programmes and the information provided on the certificate is determined by the Department of Education. Once the certificate is generated, at the conclusion of the programme, the students bring it back to their school. There is not yet a digital system set up, but the **digitalisation** of this process is currently being discussed. For example, the Department of Education have started conversations with providers that may be able to provide a digital system for tracking student learning progress - a badging-type system where any student that participated in any of the Learn Everywhere programmes would have a digital badge as opposed to a certificate. It would live within the state-wide system and schools and programmes could just go on to that digital system and view any of those badges that the students have earned.

The **monitoring of the programmes** is done by the Department of Education and may involve looking at the individual students' learning records held by the providers. For example, the programme provider must be able to show the assessment data around the competences or how the competences have been assessed. The Department may also organise on-the-spot checks as part of the programme monitoring.

Participants also highlighted the risk of programmes or courses becoming unavailable after a student has started a course or programme. This points to the need to ensure appropriate safeguards to ensure that students' education is not interrupted.

The New Hampshire Department of Education noted that they have just started the **monitoring and evaluation process** of the programmes, as many of the programmes were approved only a year ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also emphasised that non-formal programmes may require a **non-traditional evaluation system** because current assessment data within the accountability systems for schools does not apply to non-formal programmes.

Participants also discussed the **outreach of the programme** and the political support of the State in developing and implementing this initiative. Substantial outreach activity with potentially interested groups was done before the law was passed. Programmes identified through this outreach activity and programmes already known to the Department of Education were targeted first for Learn Everywhere. Since then, the Department has looked wider to get more programmes to join Learn Everywhere. It was felt that the approach of starting small with the most enthusiastic programmes was a success factor in setting up the initiative. New Hampshire supports the

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

continued growth of the Learn Everywhere programme, with the goal of creating a system that captures non-formal learning across the state. In doing so, they continue to raise awareness among public school ELO coordinators.

Finally, the **political support** to the programme is important and this initiative was passed because one political party controlling three parts of the State government pushed forward the legislation proposal. The sustainability of the project is not fully guaranteed because during the next elections cycle, changes could be made by the next governor. Therefore, it is essential to create a lot of integrity and transparency around the initiative's processes, including monitoring. The more programmes that are accredited, and the more students that are taking part in the programmes, the more difficult it will be to end the Learn Everywhere initiative.

1.2.2   Practice example 2 - LUMA Centre Finland[2]

The presentation on the LUMA Centre Finland network demonstrated how the connection between formal and non-formal education in the field of science, mathematics and technology is supported in Finland. Developed over the course of around 20 years, and with public funding support since 2013, LUMA Centre Finland **promotes the engagement of children and young people from 3 to 19 years in maths, science, and technology** by using non-formal education methods and new solutions -such as integrative teaching, project-based learning, hands-on activities, research-based learning, digital means, and outside learning environments.

LUMA Centre Finland also offers a wide range of educational activities for both pre-service and in-service teachers (e.g., workshops, online courses, development days, online material banks). **Teacher education and training provision** at the universities is closely integrated into the activities of the LUMA centres and through the collaborations with schools it also supports the integration of these activities into the daily lives of teachers. Non-formal learning activities organised by the LUMA centres, and targeted at school children, are often co-designed with school teachers who report that this is hugely beneficial for their professional development, allowing them to teach or observe subject related content being taught in a different way.

Whilst LUMA Centre Finland largely focuses on STEM education, its model has **potential to be extended** to cover cross-cutting subjects, such as sustainability education, sport, environment, social studies and humanities.

Participants were very interested in knowing more about the **cooperation with different stakeholders**. LUMA Centre Finland is part-funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and an important pre-requisite of the Ministry funding is that the network operates nationwide (through its 13 LUMA centres) and offers activities to all regions and municipalities. Each LUMA centre has specific cooperation agreements with local municipalities to ensure better access to activities. The Network listens to the needs of **municipalities** and schools and involves **teachers and parents as co-designers** of the activities. It also collaborates with industry for the creation of new materials and ways of working. It has also set up the LUMAT Science Research Forum with the goal of increasing the quality of research of Finnish LUMA science education. Supporting research regarding teacher education and supporting lifelong learning are emphasised. The Forum includes research seminars, conferences, summer/winter schools and international journals.

The Network has developed a strong **governance structure and a collaborative culture** based on a co-design approach (learning communities, municipalities actors,

---

[2] LUMA Centre Finland was extensively covered as part of the Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries (D2), and is also part of the study visit in Finland. As such, it is not covered as much in this report as the other two practice examples.

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

companies, organisations, etc.). By involving almost all universities in Finland, activities are provided more or less nationwide and each LUMA centre establishes an annual programme. Even though LUMA centres operate slightly differently depending on their priority areas (and have individual agreements with the municipalities within their region), the organisation through a network ensures a high degree of cooperation and collaboration (including through a peer review process).

In addition to the core activities, the centres **develop online study materials** as well as **prepare tools** that support the organisation of non-formal learning events around science and math. For example, they provide materials and support for birthday parties in science. In this way, parents and children can experience science games fostering inter-generational learning. They also pay special attention to create study materials for those with special needs. Such materials are often made publicly available (e.g. online), which means that they can also be used by non-formal education providers outside the LUMA centres.

1.2.3 Practice example 3 - Secondary School Leaving Certificate & Profile (SSC&P), Malta

On completion of the secondary education cycle, students in Malta are awarded a "**Secondary School Leaving Certificate & Profile (SSC&P)**". The SSC&P was introduced in 2012 and became operational in the school year 2012-2013.

Representatives from the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE), presented how the SSC&P recognises all forms of learning accomplishments and experiences (formal and non-formal) during the five years of secondary education. Non-formal learning activities are included in students' transcript.

The SSC&P can be issued at different levels of the Maltese Qualifications Framework (MQF): Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Formal learning is the only requirement to be awarded an accredited level and carries a weight of 65%. Participation in accredited non-formal learning activities can also be added to a student's transcript and these will carry a weight of up to 35%.

Since 2020, the DQSE has been responsible for the SSC&P. The DQSE is the body responsible for establishing the regulatory framework and implementing the associated processes relating to non-formal programmes in compulsory schooling. The DQSE currently has regulatory frameworks related to non-formal activities and accredited non-formal programmes (since 2018). DQSE also issues registration to institutions wishing to offer non-formal education activities that can be included in SSC&P.

DQSE is responsible for issuing registration to institutions (including from the business sector) wishing to offer non-formal education activities that can be included in the SSC&P. The DQSE verifies compliance issues (health and safety), the accountability (target audience, record of work), and the teaching and learning planning and delivery. An evaluation visit and report are part of this accreditation process to ensure the quality of students' learning outcomes. Currently, there are around **400 registered institutions**. Learners have the option to select from these 400 institutions, including voluntary organisations and sports organisation. Some non-formal learning activities are free of charge and some related to private entities may involve a cost to participate.

The **inclusiveness** of the practice was also discussed during this peer exchange especially for young people from rural areas. It was explained that the advantage of an island like Malta is that the population is very concentrated. Furthermore, transport in Malta is subsidised and free of charge. If the non-formal activities are taking place

during the school time, transportation is ensured by the State. Schools are split in colleges ensuring that students only have a short distance to travel to school. Otherwise, in most cases clubs and equivalent entities cover the travel costs.

In 2021, a working group was established to **review the SSC&P and propose updates**. One of the changes proposed by the working group is that the SSC&P will become a qualification and not an award[3] – Secondary School Leaving Qualification & Profile (SSQ&P). Moreover, the definition of non-formal learning will be updated to reflect international discourse and the reference to informal learning will be removed. The updated SSQ&P may also introduce a requirement of accredited non formal activities (weighted at 15%) and the possibility of validation of prior learning with regards to non-formal activities - although the process and procedures governing the validation of prior non-formal learning have yet to be established.

Digitalisation was also discussed among the participants. The SSC&P is already available in a digital format using blockchain technology. The blockchain technology is provided by a private Maltese company commissioned through a procurement procedure.

1.3   Reflections and final discussion

In the final session of the peer exchange, the participants reflected on the challenges and learning outcomes arising from the group discussions and presentations. Participants also shared their reflections on the potential and challenges for transferability into the Estonian context. These reflections included:

■ Coming together and exchanging experiences in this way is one of the highlights of this project;

■ There are multiple rationales and initiatives for integration of non-formal and formal learning, including addressing skills shortages, providing real-world experiences in education, avoiding duplication of learning/excessive workloads for students, stimulating learning/motivating learners, stimulating inclusion, providing more diverse opportunities and pedagogies for learning and addressing health-related concerns, such as depression and mental health issues.

■ The existence of these multiple rationales for the integration of non-formal and formal learning are a strength but can also make communication of what such integration intends to do more challenging.

■ The provision of non-formal education is very diverse and while this can contribute to inclusion, there are non-formal learning opportunities that may be restricted due to economic or geographical barriers or special needs. An important challenge that should be kept in mind when considering the integration of formal and non-formal education is thus to ensure equal access to these activities for students with different profiles - for example in terms of socio-economic profile or learning needs - and living in varied geographical areas.

■ Different ways to support the integration of non-formal and formal learning were discussed and reviewed during the event, including:

---

[3] The Referencing Report (2016) state that a qualification is a substantial programme which fulfils a set of requirements: level of learning outcomes; number of credits and, in the case of vocational qualifications, also in terms of the distribution of credits to key competences, underpinning knowledge and sectoral skills. The term award can be used for any accredited course which does not fulfil the entire requirements of a qualification in terms of number of credits offered. For MQF/EQF Level 3 and Level 2, 60 credits are required for a qualification whereas for Level 1 40 credits constitute a full qualification. Consequently, any accredited awards with less than the number of credits stated above is deemed an award. https://mfhea.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Referencing-Report-2016.pdf

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

- **Focusing on subject-specific projects**, like the creative project in Estonia (compulsory in upper basic education/lower secondary education)

- **Requiring non-formal learning as a share of the curriculum**, like in the Maltese example

- Enabling learners to do get **accreditation for one or more electives or core subjects outside of formal education**, based on non-formal learning such as in the Learn Everywhere initiative

- Making use of non-formal learning environments to **acquire knowledge and support professional development/collaboration** that is relevant in the formal education curriculum, as in LUMA centres

Integrating non-formal education in formal education is not a straightforward task and raises many questions, such as:

- Who controls the system (e.g. centralised vs providing full local or school autonomy)? How prescriptive should the central level be? What forms of governance can be more effective?

- How to engage different stakeholders? How to promote these initiatives?

- Where are these learning activities provided? How are tasks divided between the formal and non-formal education sector (e.g. In what school years? Who assesses the learning? Who pays?)?

- What is accredited (e.g. providers or programmes)? What is the definition of a programme? Should integration focus on specific subjects or aim to follow a universal approach? How are programmes monitored and evaluated?

- How can trust in the quality and intentions of other providers be supported?

- How is the professional identity of teachers and that of facilitators of non-formal learning maintained?

- How can shared goals, robust data systems and a common vocabulary between the two sectors be developed?

- How are inequalities addressed? How can equal opportunities to young people with fewer opportunities or specific needs be ensured?

- How are those learners who make use of non-formal education integrated in school timetables and activities?

1.4 Conclusions and lessons for the transferability into the Estonian context

The online peer exchange provided an opportunity to learn about international practices to support the learning outside of the classrooms and the validation of this learning. The presentations and discussions on the three practice examples revealed that there are many shared challenges and also highlighted that there are some core elements that could be transferred into the Estonian context. Based on the experiences from the other participating countries, key success factors for supporting the integration of non-formal and formal leaning can be summarised as follows:

- Long-term **political commitment** (at national fund and local levels) is a necessary requirement for the design and implementation of measures, policies and structures fostering the integration of formal and non-formal education. From the practice examples presented, we can see that political support is central and can be expressed in various ways like in New Hampshire where the State adopted a legislation or in Finland where the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture plays

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

a key role in the provision of funding for LUMA Centre Finland and its affiliated higher education institutions. Political commitment is also linked to the level of financial resources and incentives available to support these measures and the cooperation between educational providers - including extra resources from municipalities, private foundations, provision of additional capacity within the educational system, incentives for non-formal learning providers and schools, and beyond, to remove access barriers dependent on material resources.

■ Creating a **policy framework** is a valuable resource but not a sufficient condition for integration. To ensure successful implementation it is critical that stakeholders (including local government, employers, teachers, coordinators, non-formal education providers, students and (grand)parents) are informed and included in reform processes. Stakeholders need clarity on what is allowed and what is required and also need sufficient knowledge to implement integration initiatives.

■ Offering relevant **professional development** activities to teachers and incorporating non-formal learning methodologies in their continuing professional training as well as initial **teacher education** can help support the integration of formal and non-formal education. Support is also required by non-formal education providers as they may need to undertake changes in the location for the delivery of their activities, the selection of learners, the selection of their staff, their assessment and monitoring practices.

■ **Empowering young people and students** to create their individual learning path and deciding on the competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values) they want to gain.

■ The importance of guaranteeing **equal access** to non-formal learning opportunities and their recognition and validation was highlighted repeatedly during the discussions. This may necessitate targeted support, in particular to vulnerable groups.

■ A **comprehensive and transparent model** is required in terms of accrediting and evaluating non-formal learning programmes - as strong accreditation systems can provide assurance to formal education providers that accredited non-formal education is of high quality. As the New Hampshire Department of Education highlighted in their presentation, the process and all its phases need to be clear and transparent to ensure the trust and sustainability of the initiative. A clear allocation of roles and responsibilities among stakeholders can serve to establish a coordinated service delivery and increase commitment. In Finland, the LUMA Centre network has a strong governance structure and collaborative culture that ensures better cooperation and collaboration. Such partnerships should be tailored to the local context and capitalise on existing channels of cooperation. This was well reflected in the Finnish model where each LUMA centre has developed its own operating model based on its priority areas. It also has individual agreements with the municipalities in the region covered.

■ Ensuring **ongoing monitoring and evaluation** of practices serves to establish a feedback loop to continuously improve implementation. Collecting data and evidence allows better prioritisation of resources, continuous improvement of practices and collaborative working methods.

■ Finally, the practice examples presented demonstrated that **starting small** (e.g. through piloting and small-scale initiatives) can be a useful way to progress the integration of non-formal and formal learning. However, after these initial stages, practices need to be scaled up in order to engage more learners/providers and achieve more systematic impact and coverage. Growth is also important to build resilience in the system and become politically independent and sustainable.

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

2 Study visit to Finland

A study visit to Finland was organised under the project "Supporting young people to succeed - building capacities to better integrate non-formal and formal learning", supported by the EU through the Structural Reform Support Programme (REFORM/SC2021/066). The overall objective of the project is to support the Estonian national authorities in improving their capacity to design, develop and implement reforms to facilitate a better integration of formal and non-formal education. The study visit contributed to the achievement of this objective and also supported one of the expected outcomes of this project, which is to ensure that Estonian authorities and stakeholders are aware of policy options to achieve better integration of non-formal and formal learning, including legislation, funding schemes and modes of governance.

The specific objectives of the study visit were: (i) to provide an opportunity to increase the knowledge base of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research; (ii) to exchange good practices on how to better support the integration of non-formal and formal learning; and (iii) to foster the interest and participation of wider Estonian stakeholders.

Finland was selected as the destination for the study visit on the basis of the analysis undertaken as part of the **Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries (D2)**, as well as further consultations with experts in the field, including Dr. Tomi Kiilakoski, a leading Senior Researcher at the Finnish Youth Research Society.

In a recent article by Dr. Tomi Kiilakoski ('Without wings of learning, one remains a prisoner of the ground'), he identifies three different forms in which non-formal learning may be acknowledged.

> *"Firstly, it can mean that the methodologies of formal learning change. Instead of being top-down and hierarchical, they transform to being learner-centred and dialogical. Examples of these are work-based learning, adventure education or gamification.*
>
> *Recognising and validating the outcomes of non-formal learning is another form of acknowledgment, and has been a matter of debate and development. In this process, the official status of learning that has taken place outside formal institutions rises, and its value to society increases.*
>
> *Thirdly, non-formal learning may grow in importance through increased professional co-operation. In my home country, Finland, this is exemplified by the rapidly increasing school-based youth work. The learning process in youth work tends to be open-ended: the emphasis is on the process itself compared to learning outcomes or pre-set goals, and the impact of peer relations is important. This combination of formal and non-formal learning is a way to make schools richer learning environments than before."*

The study visit sought to provide examples from Finland that cover each of these three forms of acknowledging non-formal learning. For example, the first form of acknowledging non-formal learning was covered through a visit to the LUMA Centre at the University of Helsinki (ChemistryLab Gadolin). LUMA Centre Finland was described and assessed as part of the **Analytical report on relevant examples of policy and practice from other countries (D2)** and further discussed as part of the **online peer exchange** that took place 3-4 May 2022. So, rather than repeating the discussion and assessment that had been undertaken previously, the focus of the study visit was therefore to see how some of the LUMA Centre activities are delivered in practice and also to talk to and hear from some of the researchers and pre-service teachers involved in the design and implementation of the activities.

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

The second form of acknowledging non-formal learning (and to some extent the first form acknowledging non-formal learning) was exemplified through the reform of VET and flexible learning in Finland and linkages between non-formal adult education and upper secondary education.

The third form of acknowledging non-formal learning was exemplified through the Nuoska centre of expertise for youth work in schools and educational institutions and the new Finnish model on leisure activities.

This report draws on the presentations delivered during the study visit as well as the group discussions that followed. It starts with a brief background to the policy context in Finland and is followed by a summary of the Finnish practice examples that were presented and discussed during the study visit, namely:

■ Practice example 1 - Nuoska - centre of expertise on youth work at schools and educational institutions

■ Practice example 2 - The Finnish model for leisure activities (Harrastamisen Suomen malli)

■ Practice example 3 – Reform of VET and flexible learning in Finland

■ Practice example 4 – Linkages between non-formal adult education and upper secondary education

Finally, the report presents a few concluding remarks.

2.1 The Finnish policy context

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the development of education, science, cultural, sport and youth policies. However, whilst education, youth and sport policy are all part of the Ministry of Education and Culture, they are organised in different departments and under different Ministers. For example, comprehensive school education, general upper secondary education and vocational education and training and liberal adult education falls under the responsibility of the Minister of Education, whilst higher education, science, arts, culture, youth and sport is the responsibility of the Minister for Science and Culture.

Figure 2.1   Education and youth policy are organised under different Ministers in the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture
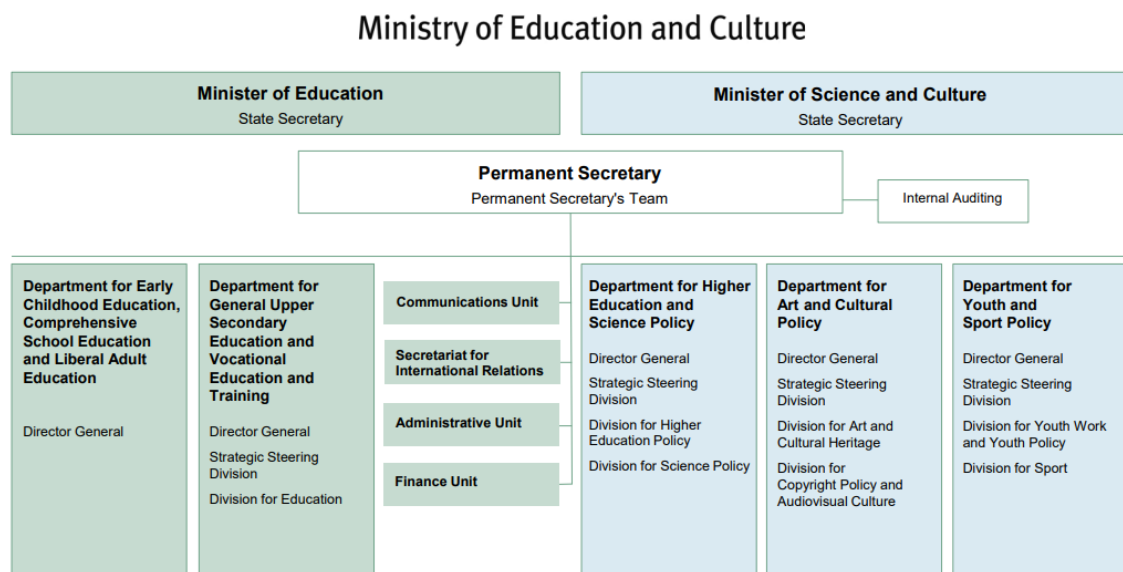
Source:
https://okm.fi/documents/1410845/3636812/Organigram+of+the+Ministry+of+Education+and+Culture.p

The administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture comprises 13 government agencies and public bodies, including Finnish National Agency for Education, Academy of Finland and Arts Promotion Centre Finland. Unlike Estonia, and its Education and Youth Board (Harno), Finland does not have a National Agency for Youth Work and this is also one of the reasons for setting up centres of expertise on youth work (see Practice 1 – Nuoska).

2.1.2 The Finnish Youth Act

Finland has had separate legislation on youth work since the beginning of the 1970s. The Youth Act covers youth work and activities, youth policy and the related responsibilities of the central and local government, cross-sectoral cooperation as well as state funding. The Youth Act is complemented by the Government Decree on Youth Work and Policy[4]. In addition, several other laws refer to youth issues and address the rights and obligations of young people.

The objectives of the Youth Act (last updated in 2017) are to:

■ promote the social inclusion of young people and provide them with opportunities for exerting an influence and improve their skills and capabilities to function in society;

■ support the growth, independence and sense of community of young people and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and adoption of skills necessary for this purpose;

■ support young people's free-time pursuits and engagement in civic society;

■ promote non-discrimination and equality among young people and the realisation of their rights; and

■ improve young people's growth and living conditions.

The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the overall administration, coordination and development of the national youth policy. Responsibility for local administrative duties in respect of youth work and policy rests with the regional state administrative agencies (AVI). Local governments (municipalities) are obligated to create the necessary preconditions for local youth work and activities by providing services and premises for young people and supporting their civic engagement. Similar to the organisation of the Ministry, local governments (municipalities) are also organised in a way that separates the departments for education and youth work. This can sometimes hinder collaboration and cooperation across the two policy fields.

The 2017 Youth Act no longer includes a list of the forms of youth work which should be available at the local level, but refers to the responsibility of local authorities to consider the content based on the local need. However, the government proposal (PG 11/2016/Proposal of the Finnish Government to Parliament as regards the content of the Youth Act, in Finnish/Swedish[5]) describes what the content of youth work can be and what it has traditionally covered in Finland: educational guidance for young people; facilities and hobby opportunities; youth information and counselling; support for youth associations and other youth groups; sport-related, cultural, international and multicultural youth activities; young people's environmental education, youth workshop services and outreach youth work.

---

[4] European Commission (2019) Youth policies in Finland 2019; Youth Wiki national descriptions https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-06/Finland_2019.pdf

[5] https://www.eduskunta.fi/SV/vaski/HallituksenEsitys/Sidor/RP_111+2016.aspx

	Funded by the European Union via the Structural Reform Support Programme and implemented in cooperation with the European Commission

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

In the Youth Act, young people are defined as those under the age of 29. In 2018, Finland had nearly 1.8 million young people, representing 32% of the population. It is expected that the number of young people will decrease to 1.6 million by 2029.

The share of young people in the total population varies a lot across Finland with young people tending to congregate in the main urban centres. This also makes it challenging to steer youth work nationally.

Figure 2.2   Th share of young people in the total population (municipalities)

Source: Statistics Finland
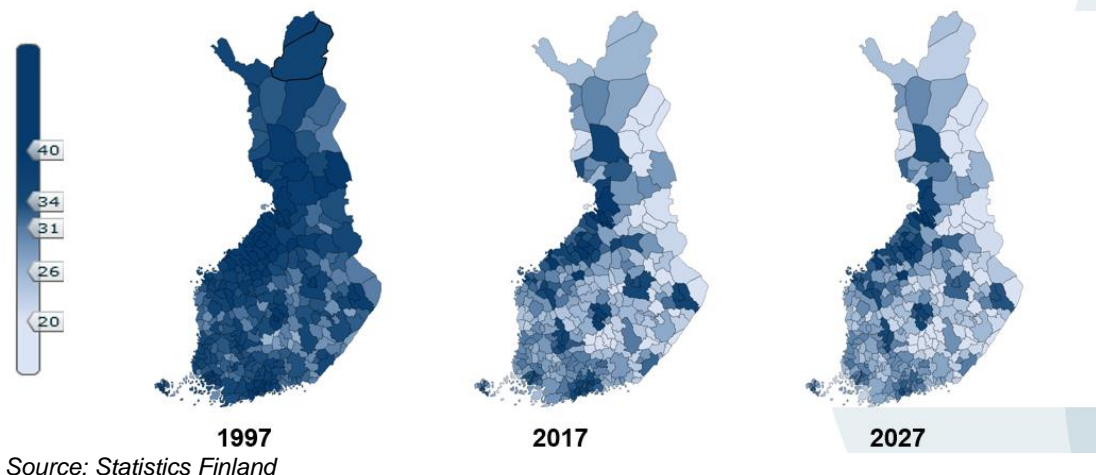
2.1.3   The National Youth Work and Policy Programme

The Finnish Youth Act requires the state government to design a youth policy development programme every four years - the National Youth Work and Policy Programme (VANUPO)[6] – with the aim of improving the conditions in which young people live and grow. In this programme, the Government defines its youth policy objectives and the measures for attaining them. It has its basis in the Youth Act, but is also informed by the Government Programme.

The 2019-2023 Government Programme *'Inclusive and competent Finland – a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society'* includes a pledge to promote competence, education, culture and innovation, including by raising the level of education and competence at all levels of education and reducing differences in learning outcomes, as well as making children and young people feel better.

In achieving these objectives, the Finnish Government is committed to:

- provide equal opportunities for pursuing individual learning pathways (e.g. by funding positive discrimination; encouraging more flexible teaching and providing adequate support; and reinforcing the position of schools as community hubs and advocates of wellbeing);
- draw up national principles for recognising and acknowledging learning to make visible the competence which individuals have gained by various means in the education system (and in working life);
- guarantee every child and young person a genuine opportunity to pursue a leisure activity of their choice as part of the school day (by developing a Finnish version of the Icelandic model);
- reinforce and improve the quality of the schools' morning and afternoon activities, clubs and cooperation with the municipalities and third-sector providers; and
- promote free-of-charge leisure activities during the school day.

---

[6] https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162381/OKM_2020_4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

In the current National Youth Work and Policy Programme 2020–2023, the Government's youth policy objectives are as follows:

■ Young people will have the preconditions for smoothly running daily lives – social exclusion will be reduced;

■ Young people will have the means and skills for participation and exerting influence; and

■ Young people will trust in society – Non-discrimination and security will be strengthened.

Under the first youth policy objective, measures to strengthen multi-professional cooperation and especially youth work in general education and vocational education and training will be supported (see Practice 1 – Nuoska centre of expertise). This is expected to foster educational institutions' cooperation with local authorities and third sector actors. In addition, it is expected that the communal school culture at educational institutions will be reinforced, and the pupils' and students' roles and opportunities to exert influence in the school community will be strengthened.

Young people will also be supported to participate in a hobby they enjoy. One of the measures to support this objective is the Finnish model of leisure activities which will support young people's participation in hobbies and guarantee opportunities for recreational activities for children and young people (see Practice 2 – The Finnish model of leisure activities).

In relation to the third youth policy objective, the action plan against bullying and loneliness that is to be drawn up in accordance with the Government Programme 2019-2023 will consider the bullying experienced by young people in different environments. A communal operating culture at educational institutions will be reinforced, and competence related to a sense of community and interpersonal and interaction skills will be strengthened among school and educational institution staff, pupils and students. Non-formal learning and cooperation between different actors can be expected to support this objective.

2.1.4 Youth work centres of expertise

The Ministry of Education and Culture develops youth sector services and expertise by supporting the activities of youth work centres of expertise and national youth centres.

Youth work centres of expertise form a network supporting the implementation of the objectives set out in National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2020-2023. A centre of expertise may consist of a contract-based consortium of two or more entities.

The roles and responsibilities of youth work centres of expertise are to develop and promote basic and special expertise in youth-related issues as well as expert and other services in youth-related fields by generating, compiling, making use of or sharing knowledge and information on young people, youth work or youth policy.

The priority areas for the youth work centres of expertise are determined by the Ministry of Education and Culture and this is a way for the Government to centrally plan and develop important topics in relation to youth. Funding is provided for 4 years and amount to approximately EUR 1 million per year. Future topics and priority areas for the centres of expertise will depend on future government priorities. As noted above, the youth work centres of expertise largely compensate for the fact that Finland (unlike Estonia) does not have a National Agency for Youth Work.

The priority areas of the youth work centres of expertise 2020-2023 are as follows:

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

- Youth work in municipalities

- Situational picture and impact of organisations operating in the youth field

- Social inclusion and exertion of influence

- Targeted youth work

- Digital youth work

- Youth work in schools and educational institutions (see Practice 1 – Nuoska)

Gender equality, non-discrimination and bilingualism are treated as horizontal themes across all youth work centres of expertise.

2.2 Finnish practices

2.2.1 Practice example 1 – Nuoska - centre of expertise on youth work at schools and educational institutions

One of the six youth work centres of expertise in Finland is Nuoska - a consortium coordinated and administered by the South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences. The Nuoska centre of expertise focuses on youth work in schools and educational institutions. More specifically, it develops youth work models at schools and educational institutions regionally and nationwide. The aim is to support the growth, independence, community, knowledge and skills of young people.

According to the National Youth Work and Youth Policy Programme 2020-2023[7], youth work reaches the greatest part of its target group when carried out in cooperation with schools and educational institutions: *"Youth work provides appropriate support that meets young people's needs, improves pupils' and students' school satisfaction, and can be used to intervene in bullying in schools and educational institutions. This cooperation should be modelled, reinforced and developed in different areas (such as in improving young people's holistic wellbeing and supporting their mental health and in secondary level dorm services). Schools and educational institutions also have an important role in promoting equal opportunities for taking part in hobbies by providing a setting for recreational activities during the school day and at other times. Youth work carried out in schools and educational institutions facilitates young people's smooth transition from one level of education to another as well as closer cooperation between schools and educational institutions on the one hand, and between leisure time activities organised by municipal youth work and NGOs providing content for recreational activities on the other."*

The objectives of the Nuoska centre of expertise are to:

- expand youth work in schools and educational institutions nationwide; and

- ensure that youth work in schools and educational institutions is high quality and based on evaluation.

The tasks of Nuoska centre of expertise are to:

- compile, launch and distribute best practices of cooperation between the youth sector and the education sector;

- describe and develop models and methods of youth work in schools and educational institutions; and

---

7   https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162381/OKM_2020_4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (p. 44)

The consortium implementing the centre of expertise and their individual roles are as follows:

■ Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention (Ehkäisevä päihdetyö Ehyt) - developing models for multidisciplinary cooperation, as well as methodological training;

■ Health-promoting voluntary organisation and an expert institution (Folkhälsan förbund) - maintaining network and communication of activities in Swedish-speaking learning institutions;

■ Finland-Swedish Information and Cultural Centre (Förening Luckan) - strengthening cooperation in Swedish environments and develop action models for bullying prevention;

■ Association of Mental Health Finland (Mieli Suomen Mielenterveys) - providing concrete tools and training to strengthen mental health skills;

■ Finnish Youth Research Society (Nuorisotutkimusseura) - evaluating the effectiveness and creating of indicators and quality criteria;

■ Development Centre Opinkirjo (Kehittämiskeskus Opinkirjo) - developing methods and operating models that improve wellbeing;

■ Municipal youth work centre of expertise (Kunnallisen nuorisotyön osaamiskeskus Kanuuna) - mapping and developing youth work based on the curriculum and developing cooperation between networks and the local community;

■ City of Vantaa (Vantaan kaupunki) - carrying out training, events and peer meetings and developing the functionality of professional dialogue; and

■ Åbo Akademi University (Åbo Akademi) – researching phenomena at the perspective of Swedish actors.

The centre of expertise builds on the experience developed by the consortium partners over the past decade or so, which have included a collaborative network of youth work educators that developed books and manuals and EU-funded projects such as "Together Forward" (European Social Fund, ESF). From September 2022, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences is also leading an Erasmus+ funded project, "Youth Work in Schools", which will help spread learning and good practices in this area for international use. The project partners are Freguesia de Vila Boa do Bispo (Portugal), Panepistimio Thessalias (Greece) and Saaremaa Noorsootöö Keskus (Estonia), as well as the municipality of Mikkeli in Finland. The project will be implemented until August 2025.

The need for this type of cooperation between youth work and schools and educational institutions has been established in recent studies and surveys and is a response to the increasing challenges in relation to the mental health and wellbeing of young people. According to the Finnish Basic Education Act, schools need to ensure pupil welfare and wellbeing. Teachers and other school staff may not always have the time, resources or skills to support their students' needs in this area. As such, there is a need for more adults in and around education and for multi-professional cooperation to be supported.

Moreover, since 1 August 2021, compulsory schooling in Finland has been extended to the age of 18 or the completion of an upper secondary education – either the general upper secondary cycle or the vocational training qualification. Prior this reform, the compulsory schooling was nine years (6 years of primary education and 3 years of lower upper secondary education). This reform has put additional pressure

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

on the transition phase between lower upper secondary school and upper secondary school and it is expected that school-based youth work can support this transition.

Other potential benefits of school-based youth work are that it increases the understanding of youth work and its methods among school staff, as well as giving further opportunities for youth workers to engage and interact with a larger number of young people.

Conceptually, school-based youth work is presented in the international literature as either utopia or dystopia.

Utopia	Dystopia
■ Change of school cultures and communities – Youth-oriented education – Change of intergenerational relations ■ Merging of formal and non-formal learning ■ Youth worker as an independent profession in multi-professional networks	■ Youth work colonised by schools – Discipline and supervision during breaks – Interventions when disruptions occur ■ Acting as assistant teachers ("helping hands") ■ Subordinate position without power to act as an equal partner

Source: Presentation by Finnish Youth Research Society

Municipal youth work has expanded in recent years and school-based youth work is the latest addition of that expansion. In Finland, there are around 3,000 youth workers and around 400 (full-time and part-time youth workers) are involved in school-based youth work. Almost all municipalities in Finland provide school-based youth work in one way or another.

Notwithstanding this growth in school-based youth work, the current situation in Finland is neither that of utopia nor dystopia. School-based youth work continues to have quite traditional orientations of Finnish youth work and the utopic goals are rarely present. The aims and methods used are generally determined at the individual or group level rather than at the municipal or national level. As such, there is a need for national guidelines and norms that can support the implementation of school-based youth work. The Nuoska centre of expertise will play an important role in this regard.

Connections with teachers also tend to be relatively weak and underdeveloped in many municipalities. This may reflect the fact that school-based youth work is often organised, coordinated, planned and evaluated by municipal youth work departments who are less connected to school structures. The cooperation with municipal education departments could also be improved in many municipalities to foster more integrated youth work in schools.

A couple of good practice models and tools developed through the centre of expertise and implemented in the City of Vantaa were shared during the study visit. These are as follows:

Grouping	Grouping is a method and principle in youth work used to strengthen the sense of social inclusion and communication skills in groups. Especially when a new group is formed – in school environments this happens primarily in the beginning of school terms. School youth workers use grouping as an ongoing process to improve group dynamics and as a method that provides opportunities for all the group members to be heard. The methods used in grouping vary and are designed to best suit the group's needs. For grouping to be as beneficial as possible, it should be considered and worked with as a process and not as a one-off event. Grouping is usually used within a class and the class teacher or coordinating teacher should take part in the grouping process as they are part of the group.

Funded by the European Union via the Structural Reform Support Programme and implemented in cooperation with the European Commission

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

	Grouping is also used within smaller groups that have formed for different reasons or phenomena (e.g. a group of young people that have fears and worries about proceeding to a new educational environment).
	The aim is to carry out grouping multi-professionally. Usually, a member of the school's welfare services, or another youth worker serves as a work partner.
	Kasku is an example of grouping and cooperation between youth workers and class teachers. Kasku is primarily targeted at pupils that start lower secondary school (grade 7) and is implemented over three sessions (1 hour each). Another 3-4 hours is required for planning and reflection for youth workers and teachers. The benefits of the Kasku model are that it provides: ■ a structure for cooperation between class teachers and youth workers; ■ an opportunity for the class teacher to observe their class; ■ an opportunity to make visible the supervisor's professional role and knowledge to the school's students and staff; ■ a way to develop the collaboration and atmosphere in the class; ■ increased ability to take responsibility for their role in the group; ■ strengthened actors; ■ a way to promote and strengthen participation; and ■ an opportunity to feel heard and noticed.
Bridging	In school-based youth work, school youth workers also work with (their own school's) youth outside of school – this is referred to as 'bridging'. The aim of bridging is for youth work to fully support young people's wellbeing.
	In practice, bridging involves small goal-orientated groups that stay together after school, detached youth work (Friday nights, holidays, end of school celebrations, and beginning of school celebrations) and cooperation with municipal youth work.
	Youth workers bring their observations of youth wellbeing outside of school to their own school's discussions – this includes different type of phenomena, safety, information about leisure activities and environments.

In addition to the centre of expertise, the Ministry of Education and Culture have also supported individual projects that aims to strengthen and develop youth work in schools and educational institutions. An additional budget of EUR 6.5 million was introduced in the second half of 2020 for two-year municipal projects. 114 projects were awarded funding, including to hire youth workers and to develop new models for cooperation and implementation. The aim of the imitative was to:

■ alleviate the negative impact of online distance/online education and to ease the transition of children and young people to return to face-to-face education, and to (depending on the Covid situation) eventually return to distance/online education; and

■ support the overall wellbeing of children and young people and their commitment to the school/educational institution community by strengthening their life management skills and preventing exclusion.

Reporting on the main outputs and outcomes of the projects is due later in 2022 and additional funding for similar projects is currently being discussed in the Finnish Parliament.

2.2.2 Practice example 2 – The Finnish model for leisure activities (Harrastamisen Suomen malli)[8]

The Finnish model for leisure activities was inspired by the Icelandic model that was introduced in the 1990s. Originally it was meant to be included in Nuoska (see above)

---

but ultimately it was introduced as a separate initiative. The model was piloted in 2021, with EUR 9.5 million of grant funding available for municipalities that participate in the pilot.

The main objective of the Finnish model is to increase the wellbeing of children and young people. The aim is to enable every child and young person to have a leisure activity in connection with the school day that they enjoy and that is free of charge.

The Finnish model combines consultation of children and young people on leisure activities (through a survey), coordination of existing good procedures and practices, and cooperation between schools and actors in leisure activities.

The essence of the Finnish model for leisure activities is that children and young people enjoy the activities and that they are based on local consultations of children and young people (this is a pre-requisite).

The target group are pupils and students in years 1 to 9 of compulsory education (i.e. children aged 7-16 years), as well as students in additional education[9].

The leisure activities funded are to be provided free of charge - before, during and/or after school – and can be organised by schools or other providers. The leisure activities should be provided on, or near, school premises.

The longer-term aim is to anchor the Finnish model as a permanent approach in municipalities. This may entail the creation of a legal basis and an examination of the system of central government transfers. For now, the initiative is organised through annual calls for government grants. In the school year 2021-2022, the Government granted EUR 14,5 million for municipalities to implement leisure activities locally. The funding was distributed by regional bodies. Almost 80% of municipalities (and over 400 000 pupils and students) took part in the model.

It is expected that the allocation of funding will increase to EUR 19.5 million during the school year 2022-2023.

The grants provided through the Finnish model are on top of other sources of funding for leisure activities, including school clubs run by teachers and other municipal provision.

A recent evaluation (in Finnish)[10] estimates that the state provides between EUR 250-300 million in government funding for leisure activities aimed at children and young people. The amount can be considered very significant; it is more than, for example, the entire administrative budget of the Ministry of Environment. Roughly two thirds of the funding consist of contributions to municipalities. The remaining third are various state grants to organisations and other actors in the field. Municipalities receive around EUR 200 million every year to promote leisure activities of children and young people. The annual funding for other organisations and actors is about EUR 60 million.

The evaluation also highlights that the funding system for leisure activities in Finland is fragmented with many different financial instruments through which the leisure activities of children and young people are promoted. This means that there are thousands of funding decisions and related search and reporting processes each year. Consequently, a lot of resources flow into administrative work rather than being used to guide, refine and disseminate good practices.

---

[9] Voluntary, general education lasting one school year intended for those having attained a primary or lower secondary school education certificate in the same or previous year. It is intended to help and encourage young people to continue their studies at upper secondary school level. Additional education also includes pupils receiving special support in extended compulsory education.

[10] https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/LNH_raportti_2501.pdf

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

Whilst the Finnish model does not seek to validate and recognise the learning in leisure activities or linking it to the school curriculum, it does seek to find ways to ensure better access to leisure activities and greater cooperation between school and leisure activity providers. As such, it deals with some the issues related to the unequal provision in different municipalities. The provision of leisure activities on, or near, school premises also removes some of the barriers to participation.

The Finnish model is still in its early stages of development and implementation. It is therefore difficult to assess the results and impacts of the initiative at this stage. Nevertheless, on the basis that leisure activities have many positive effects on the wellbeing of children and young people, it can be expected that meaningful leisure activities will allow young people to experience joy and success and help them find friends, and thus improve mental and physical health and wellbeing. Such positive effects may be carried through into adulthood.

2.2.3 Practice example 3 – Reform of VET and flexible learning in Finland

The Finnish vocational education and training (VET) system was recently reformed. The new VET legislation entered into force on 1 January 2018. The VET reform took several years to develop and represented a significant overhaul of the Finnish VET system. The most significant change is the way of thinking, shifting from a system-centred approach to a competence-based approach.
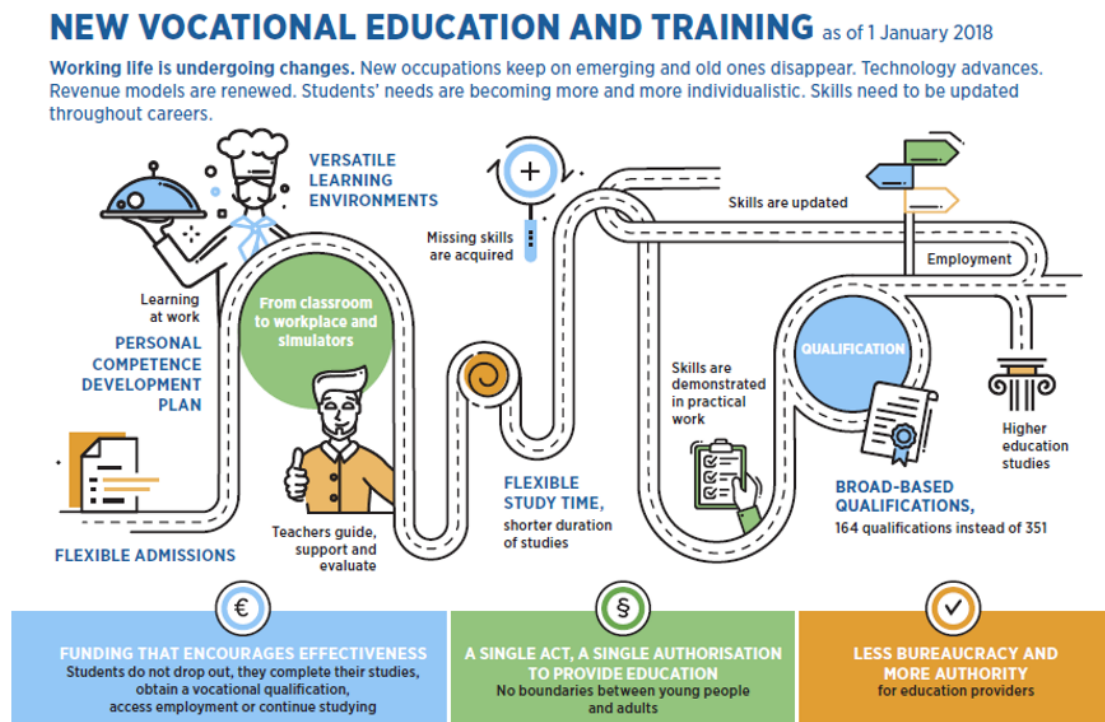
The objectives of the VET reform[11] are:

- Stronger capability to respond to the changing skills needs of both individuals and the labour market – flexibility and agility

- Quicker access to employment or further studies

- Focus on learners and learning outcomes – from supply-oriented approach to demand-driven VET

- Enhancing possibilities for lifelong (and life-wide) learning

- Effective, high-quality and efficient VET

- Stronger cooperation between VET and the labour market

- Clear and more easily approached VET-system (module-based studies, broad qualifications)

- Easier access to the VET-system (continuous admission throughout the year, "skills audit" prior to beginning the studies gives access to all)

---

[11]Finnish VET reform is also described here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzRklnHP5iU&t=7s

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

The new Finnish VET system is summarised in the figure below:

NEW VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING as of 1 January 2018

Source: Presentation by Ministry of Education and Culture

VET comprises initial and further training (IVET and CVET) and is catering for various target groups: young people, adults and people in working life who need upskilling or reskilling, unemployed.

VET is an attractive choice in Finland, with about 280,000 students attending vocational education and training annually, mostly in IVET (around 200,000). Around 44% of school leavers continue in IVET. In 2018, total operating costs of vocational institutions amounted to EUR 1.7 billion (average funding/student/year is approximately EUR 9,500)[12]. An important change in the funding of VET following the 2018 reform is that a greater proportion of funding is based on performance (35%) and effectiveness (15%)[13]. As such, the new funding system is moving away from the previous funding model that only had a small element of performance funding (5%). A limitation with the previous funding model was that it did not provide any incentives to take on adult learners that want to finish their studies quickly. A greater focus on performance and effectiveness should change that. The new funding system has been introduced gradually and will be fully operation in 2022.

The VET system aims to provide an individual study path for all learners by describing the objectives for competence development in a personal competence development plan (PCDP) that is drawn up by a teacher together with a student. Hence, teachers assume a guiding and coaching approach in their work and facilitate active cooperation with employers and labour market partners. If needed, a representative of a workplace or another cooperation partner may also participate in the development of the PCDP. The plan includes information on, for example, the identification and recognition of prior learning, acquisition of missing skills, competence tests and other skills demonstrations, and the necessary guidance and support. Validation of prior learning is not based on documentation or certificates but actual skills (see

---

[12] For more details on funding of VET, see the presentation by Erno Hyvönen "Reform of VET and flexible learning in Finland".

[13] A maximum of 4% of the total funding can be allocated as strategic funding, Therefore, a minimum of 96% of the total funding will be distributed as described above.

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

competence demonstrations described below). The duration of studies is shortened by focusing on the acquisition of missing skills in a manner most suitable for the student (this can be achieved by acquiring a module, several modules or a whole qualification). Education providers have an obligation to recognise prior learning.

Increasingly, skills are acquired in other learning environments than educational institutions, especially at workplaces integrating formal and non-formal learning.

Vocational qualifications are completed through competence demonstrations in practical work situations at workplaces. Competences are assessed for each module of a qualification or preparatory education. Previous learning and work experience can also be validated through competence demonstrations. To assure the quality of skills, the student's competence is assessed by a teacher and an employer or labour market representative.

Quicker access to employment is assured by a flexible year-round admission system, as students may begin their studies at any time of the year. The duration of studies is shortened and more rapid access to employment or further studies is enabled as the purpose of studies is to acquire only the missing skills and competences. Additionally, guided learning at workplaces lowers the threshold for finding employment.

Overall, the reformed VET system has, according to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, been successful in providing broad-based qualifications, granting more autonomy to VET providers and offering flexible admission to studies. Additionally, there is considerable modular flexibility for students as a PCDP is developed for each of the modules separately and competence demonstrations are also conducted at the end of each module.

Three years after the implementation of the reform there are also various aspects that are still in progress or that could be improved. These include: (i) new learning environments and ways to learn; (ii) role of the teacher to include more guidance; (iii) only missing skills are acquired; (iv) competence demonstrations in real workplace environments; (v) funding system to support the reform.

Providing a PCDP for everyone has also proved to be challenging. According to a survey of teachers in 2021, they found that PCDPs are individualised mainly for adult learners, whereas this is often not the case for young people[14]. Hence, more effort is needed to individualise PCDPs for younger students.

Another issue relates to the acquisition of basic skills. Namely students can take optional modules from different fields, or even from tertiary level, but not from primary level. Therefore, if a student needs to top up their competences, the system can offer support, but if a student lacks basic skills, the system is not designed to compensate for that.

Some of the challenges recognised in the case of the Finnish VET system are also regarded as challenges in the Estonian context, for example new/innovative learning environments and ways to learn, the role of the teachers in guiding and realising a lifelong learning ideology in VET. There are also aspects not receiving attention yet, but could be considered, for example competence demonstrations in real workplace environments (in Estonia competences are assessed via exams).

---

[14] Teachers who participated in the survey (n=373) find on a 10-point scale that PCDP is 10 or "completely individual" for 70% of adults and 32% of youngsters, while the competence plan is 1 or "one size fits all" for 17% of adults and 56% of youngsters.

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

2.2.4 Practice example 4 – Linkages between non-formal adult education and upper secondary education

In Finland, there are five different forms of educational establishments in non-formal adult education: (i) adult education centres (176 centres in Finland; courses available in every municipality); (ii) folk high schools (75); (iii) summer universities (19); (iv) study centres (12); and (v) sports institutes (11+3). Each establishment has its own statutory mission and their own operating principles. State funding for non-formal adult education amounts to around 57% of the costs, the rest is covered through course fees and/or municipal funding.

The minimum age for participation is 16 years (with some exceptions, for example, if parents have explained the need/expressed the interest, 13-year-olds have participated in language courses). Admission to the learning activities is on a 'first come, first served' basis, which can have some drawbacks as courses are filled relatively quickly.

The study supply is wide and diversified. Non-formal education offers adults a wide range of opportunities for the development of competences that may not be available in formal education[15]. Learning offers are based on actual and projected demand. Mostly, there is no national curricula (with minor exceptions regarding compulsory education).

The educational policy aim of adult non-formal education is a wide identification, recognition and acknowledgement of studies in non-formal education as well as the knowledge and skills acquired informally (e.g. through hobbies). Overall, non-formal education contributes to more personalised degrees and learning paths.

Since 1 August 2021, it is possible to register studies completed in non-formal education in the national Koski data repository (implementation in progress). The aim is to facilitate the recognition and acknowledgement of knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal education.

Registering learning completed in the non-formal setting in the national data repository is something for Estonia to consider. Indeed, the **Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia (D1)**, prepared by the project team, emphasised the need for the development of a single register or information system for both formal and non-formal learning activities taken up by young people. However, the report also pointed out potential challenges due to too much transparency. For example, some educational choices may be relevant for different life situations and may provide different signals for employers. As such, in addition to learner's consent to store the data, their right to decide on sharing and controlling the information related to their studies should also be carefully considered. For example, learning paths consisting of numerous learning episodes could be regarded (e.g. by employers) as a signal of instability or inconsistency in some contexts (see also the theoretical framework of the **Analytical report on the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Estonia (D1)**).

2.3 Concluding remarks and lessons for Estonia

The study visit provided an interesting and useful opportunity to learn more about Finnish practices to support the integration of non-formal and formal learning. The presentations and discussions on the different practice examples revealed that there

---

[15] According to the example of language studies, some adult education centres offer courses in more than 20 languages, while the language supply in upper secondary schools is much more limited. There are local agreements between adult NFE and upper secondary education. It offers flexible learning opportunities (e-learning and hybrid learning opportunities), thus during Covid-19 adult education became more popular.

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

is no single policy or system that deals with the integration of non-formal and formal learning in Finland. Acknowledgment of non-formal learning or integration between non-formal and formal education happens in different ways and for different purposes.

Based on the experiences from the Finnish practices, the main conclusions from the study visit can be summarised as follows:

■ There is a need to clearly define the purpose of the integration of non-formal and formal education as this will determine the most appropriate way forward. As seen in Finland, and through the review of other international practices, there are many different ways to integrate non-formal and formal learning but some approaches may be more appropriate than others when considering the purpose and objectives of the integration.

■ Wellbeing appears to be prominent objective in Finnish youth policy and many of the practices presented and discussed reflect this (e.g. the multi-professional cooperation in school-based youth work and the provision of free leisure activities in or near schools). Such provision and cooperation may not directly influence formal education but the improved wellbeing of young people may indirectly improve school satisfaction and study results. It may also provide a better understanding of the work of different professions (e.g. youth workers and teachers).

■ National policies and systems tend to reflect the context in which non-formal and formal learning is being provided. In Finland, as in Estonia, there is a high level of autonomy for schools and teachers to decide how the teaching and learning is carried out. In this context, it may not be desirable or possible to implement centrally determined and mandatory policies and measures around the integration of non-formal and formal learning. Instead, as in Finland, it may be supported through government grants or centres of expertise that can improve take up and support the development and spread of good practice examples.

■ School-based youth work in Finland faces an uncertain future in terms of whether/how it will be integrated within the relevant legislation (Youth Act and Basic Education Act) and the national core curriculum. The evaluative results of the Nuoska centre of expertise are expected to contribute to any future decision on this.

■ An important difference between Finland and Estonia is that youth work is generally not done by teachers in Finland. Most youth workers in Finland are employed by the municipal youth work department and not by the schools or the municipal education department. As such, Estonia may be further ahead in terms of cooperation between hobby education/activities and schools/teachers.

■ As non-formal learning and formal education are generally organised by different departments at the policy level, there is not only a need for cooperation and collaboration at the delivery level but also at the local municipality and national government level. In the City of Vantaa the education and youth work departments have been brought together in a Steering Group. Joint goals and aims are shared and recognised at the management level.

■ The Finnish VET system was reformed in 2018 and whilst it is showing significant potential (e.g. the validation of prior learning works really well in the Finnish system due to its modular based system and the focus on competences), there are still some challenges around its practical implementation (e.g. tailoring studies to only focus on the acquisition of missing skills).

■ The focus on missing skills in the Finnish VET system is important, yet it raises questions, how missing skills are identified (for example, are competence demonstrations able to assess vocational/professional ethics or work-psychology

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

related competences). As recognised in the Estonian national implementation programme of the European Union's Council Recommendation on vocational education, validation of prior learning and work experience has not been implemented in the desired form[16]. Knowledge and skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning and work experience are not sufficiently taken into account in formal education or when applying for a vocation/profession (partly this is related to the financing of the study costs for the provider – per capita costs). Overall, skills assessment or "skills audit" to identify existing skills and need for upskilling is insufficient in the Estonian VET system (currently, such assessment is provided for the unemployed by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund). Thus, there may be aspects to learn from the Finnish VET system.

■ The Estonian Educational Development Plan 2021–2035 acknowledges the importance of individualised learning paths, therefore implementation of the personal competence development plan (PCDP) is another aspect to learn from the Finnish VET reform. To provide better access to VET in Finland, there is continuous admission to studies. This would be worth further investigation, as in Estonia the admission is year or course based (whilst modular learning is applied also in Estonia, courses mostly continue throughout the semester). Overall, the question is how a more individualised and tailored education system can be achieved.

■ Compared to Finland, the meaning and role of non-formal adult education in Estonia is less clear. According to the Estonian Adult Education Act (2015), adult education is divided into formal education and continuing education. The latter is non-formal education, but based on the curricula, whilst in Finland adult non-formal education mostly do not follow a national curriculum (apart from in compulsory education). Additionally, continuing adult education in Estonia, regulated by the Act, is largely work-related, while non-work related or liberal adult education is provided in a less systematic way (e.g. sports activities, music and arts and handicraft)[17].

■ From the Finnish non-formal adult education and training and linkages with formal education, the main lesson for Estonia is the systematic, clear and wide provision of learning opportunities that complement formal education. In Estonia, adult non-formal education opportunities could be made more visible (non-work related learning in particular). The Educational Development Plan 2021–2035 states that participation in lifelong learning in Estonia is high, but some groups that could benefit from it rarely participate in lifelong learning activities (e.g. those with low educational attainment and non-Estonian speakers). The reason for not participating in adult education and training is partly due to negative previous learning experiences or negative attitudes and dispositions to learning in

---

[16] Euroopa Liidu nõukogu kutsehariduse soovituse Eesti riiklik rakenduskava [The Estonian national implementation programme of the European Union's Council Recommendation on vocational education]. Ministry of Education and Research. https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/kh_rakenduskava_ek_002.pdf. For an overview, see also: https://www.hm.ee/et/eesmargid-tegevused/kutseharidus

[17] Until 2015, the Adult Education Act included a separate concept of liberal education. Accordingly, adult education and training was divided into formal learning, continuing education/professional training and liberal education, which was formulated as follows: liberal adult educational enables the development of the personality, its creativity, talents, initiative and sense of social responsibility, as well as the addition of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary in life. Learning takes place in the form of courses, study groups or other forms suitable for learners. The Association of Estonian Folk High Schools (Eesti Rahvaülikoolide Liit) and Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association (Eesti Vabaharidusliit) have submitted a joint appeal for the (re-)introduction of the concept of liberal education (by these organisations, also referred to as non-formal adult education) in the Adult Education Act. These organisations define liberal or non-formal adult education as the freedom to learn regardless of age, previous level of education, social affiliation, and other factors.

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH

Funded by the European Union via the Structural
Reform Support Programme and implemented in
cooperation with the European Commission

general[18]. Less formalised learning settings are more "natural" for learning and thus adult non-formal education, particularly non-work related courses, could potentially give positive learning experiences and consequently lead to other learning episodes, including formal education and work-related training. Additionally, wider recognition of different types of learning (formal, non-formal, informal) could relieve some of the labour market disadvantages or inequalities related to differences in educational background[19].

■ In Finland, as well as in Estonia, there is scope to create better linkages between learning opportunities offered by adult non-formal education and upper secondary school, particularly for elective subjects. This has the potential to widen the learning opportunities available to young people (aged 16+) and would create greater scope for developing more individualised learning paths. Such linkages could be supported through better cooperation, and potentially local agreements, between non-formal and formal education providers.

---

[18] Illeris, K. (2006). Lifelong Learning and the Low-Skilled. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 25, 15–28. Roosmaa, E.-L. and Saar, E. (2017). Adults who do not want to participate in learning: a cross-national European analysis of their perceived barriers. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 36, 254–277.

[19] Cameron, R. and J. L., Harrison, (2012). The interrelatedness of formal, non-formal and informal learning: Evidence from labour market program participants. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 52, 277–309. See also Werquin, P. (2010). *Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Country Practices*. Directorate for Education, Education Policy Committee. Paris: OECD Publishing.