

SITRA

SUMMARY

# TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING

The shared aim, funding principles  
and challenges



This shared view about the future of lifelong learning in Finland was created by the following organisations:

Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland Akava  
Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences Arene  
Finnish Association for the Development of Vocational Education and Training, AMKE  
Confederation of Finnish Industries, EK  
The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, FINEEC  
Ilmarinen Mutual Pension Insurance Company  
Varma Mutual Pension Insurance Company  
The Finland Chamber of Commerce  
Keva  
KT Local Government Employers  
The Trade Union of Education, OAJ  
The Finnish National Agency for Education  
The Ministry of Education and Culture  
Finnish Education Employers  
The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health  
The National Union of Vocational Students in Finland, SAKKI  
The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, SAK  
The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities  
Suomen Opiskelija-Allianssi – OSKU  
Suomen opiskelijakuntien liitto – SAMOK  
Universities Finland, UNIFI  
The National Union of University Students in Finland, SYL  
Suomen Yrittäjät  
The Finnish Confederation of Salaried Employees, STTK  
The Finnish Pension Alliance, TELA  
The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment  
The Prime Minister's Office  
The Office for the Government as an Employer  
The Ministry of Finance  
The Finnish Adult Education Association

Experts and influencers from the field of learning have also contributed to the work in the Towards Lifelong Learning workshops organised by Sitra.

# What has been done, why and what will be done next?

Sitra's project, Competitiveness and Well-being from Lifelong Learning, was launched in autumn 2018 and will last until autumn 2021. The purpose of the project is to support societal actors in developing and promoting lifelong learning and competence in Finland. The project is based on the view that lifelong learning is both a productive long-term investment and a building block for well-being that benefits individuals, different communities and society as a whole.

Work has been carried out in collaboration with 30 key stakeholder organisations. Sitra's role has been to provide an arena for the collaboration between the key stakeholders and to act as a bridge-builder facilitating their work. To support this work, Sitra has produced information on matters such as the current overall situation regarding the funding of lifelong learning (With what Money? report, October 2018).

Based on the jointly formed overall picture, Sitra has published a shared aim for how lifelong learning should be developed in order to meet the challenges of the future. Furthermore, it has identified a number of vital challenges that need to be addressed on the road to implementing the shared aim, as well as the funding principles that outline common guidelines for a systemic change in lifelong learning.

This publication summarises the work carried out in the first stage of the project: determining the purpose of lifelong learning, the change drivers, the aim, the challenges and the funding principles. The work to develop lifelong learning will continue through the creation of a roadmap. In the roadmap stage, we will discuss the creation of concrete steps for reaching the shared aim to ensure that the transition to the era of lifelong learning can be made in a controlled manner.

You are welcome to join us in the work!

# The various levels and phases of the work



## The purpose of lifelong learning

What kind of a meaning does lifelong learning have in the life of an individual, the operations of communities and the whole of society?



## Change drivers

With the change drivers we strive to describe the direction of change: for what kind of world has the current system been built? How have the circumstances changed? In what direction will change lead us in the future?



## Aim

The aim refers to the ideal way in which things should be in the future. For example: "Learning needs are responded to in a diverse, flexible and agile manner."



## Challenges

What obstacles might need to be overcome along the way in order to implement the aim?

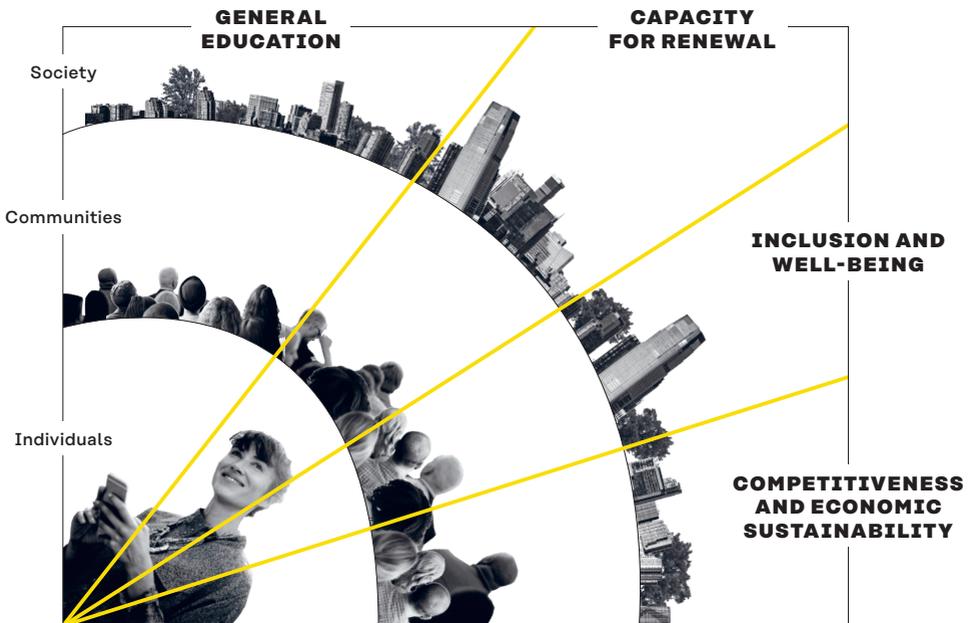


## Funding principles

The funding principles propose policies that can be used for supporting the implementation of the aim.

# The purpose of lifelong learning

Depending on the perspective taken, lifelong learning has different purposes. The societal perspective focuses on general education and inclusion, and on the economic sustainability and competitiveness that can be achieved by improved competence. At the community level, lifelong learning is about competitiveness, competent labour, learning organisations and an active civil society. For an individual, lifelong learning offers the keys to economic success, the ability to engage in democratic participation and an opportunity for continuous personal growth.



# Change Drivers

Societal and global changes are forcing a change in the basic assumptions upon which the present Finnish education system and the practices for competence development have been built. In this work, these changes have been described as change drivers.

## The speed of change challenges existing systems

### BEFORE

The economy grew and the demand for competence was slow. For most people, the qualifications provided by the education system were sufficient for ensuring employment and a livelihood for the rest of their lives. Competence was updated at and by work, if any update was necessary at all.

### TODAY

Accelerating technological development and the globalisation of work are changing the competence requirements. The education system awards qualifications and encourages the learning of new skills. There is an emphasis on the need for continuous learning as work tasks change. Complementary ways of learning are being developed.

### IN THE FUTURE

Competence will be increasingly improved and recognised outside the education system. People will continuously complement their basic skills regardless of their employment situation. Certified competence is produced through a new kind of co-operation between the education system, working life and unofficial networks.



## Emphasis on change as a foundation for sustainable economic growth and well-being

### BEFORE

Stable labour-intensive economic growth and positive productivity development ensured the funding of well-being services. The growing population guaranteed the provision of a sufficient workforce. The majority of Finns were in productive employment.

### TODAY

Productivity development is slowing down, and economic growth is increasingly dependent on international competitiveness. Competitiveness requires competence and a society capable of reforming itself. The lack of skilled labour is becoming an obstacle to growth.

### IN THE FUTURE

The need for the decoupling of economic growth and well-being from overuse of natural resources has been acknowledged and there is an emphasis on the importance of improving competence as a source of well-being. New challenges include attaining a sufficient level of competence and the integration of competences and skills acquired in different ways.

## Diversity will increase in society

### BEFORE

A homogeneous society (business structure, culture) offered its members opportunities for social mobility and personal development. Employment relationships were stable, and productivity growth manifested itself as positive income development. The need for support is exceptional and occurs only occasionally.

### TODAY

Heterogeneity is increasing: the economic structure is changing, cultural diversity is increasing, regions are becoming more diverse and the population is ageing. The need for support and guidance is increasing and diversifying.

### IN THE FUTURE

Diversity will be the new normal, and different communities and networks emerge. Creative destruction is changing regions, the economic structure and jobs. The need for support and guidance is individualised.



# Four theses on lifelong learning

The aim of lifelong learning is based on the change drivers and is divided into four areas.

1

## Everyone learns throughout their life

A society that believes in the future and trusts people enables creativity, personal development and learning for everyone throughout their life. Active participation and a willingness to improve oneself create the preconditions for the individual's and society's well-being.

### The goals and desires we are striving for:

- A.** The continuous building of competence is genuinely possible for everyone.
- B.** Responses to learning needs must be diverse, flexible and agile.
- C.** Everyone should be supported to take responsibility for learning and developing a passion for personal competence building.
- D.** Guidance is needed in all life situations, especially during transitional phases. Services must be integrated and comprehensive.
- E.** Individuals and communities can make their competence visible and utilise it.

## 2

**General knowledge, basic skills and competence are the foundations of well-being**

Experiences of participation and succeeding maintain stability in society. General knowledge and continuously maintained basic skills ensure opportunities for people to find their place in society and live a meaningful life amid a raft of changes.

**The goals and desires we are striving for:**

- A.** Children's and young people's resources and confidence, and their motivation to learn and enjoy learning, are supported comprehensively by the education system and other growth environments.
- B.** Everyone will acquire the basic skills and competence corresponding to basic education and upper-secondary qualifications.
- C.** Everyone can maintain and improve their basic skills throughout their life. The availability of education must be ensured, and individuals must be provided with suitable support and learning environments.
- D.** Qualifications will continue to be important. Qualification structures, content and pedagogy are developed by anticipating educational needs and by responding to changes in society and working life.
- E.** There needs to be a recognition of the central role that art, culture, physical activity and sport play in building general knowledge and encouraging participation.

## 3

## **Competence improves working life and working life improves competence**

Finland has the best preconditions in the world for network-based learning together, improvement of competence and creation of innovations. New competence is increasingly created in a changing working life and in other informal places of learning. The education system supports the reform of working life.

### **The goals and desires we are striving for:**

- A.** Finland will learn to predict structural changes, which will ensure a continuous improvement in the competence of the workforce and will extend working careers.
- B.** Finland creates the best preconditions in the world for broadbased ecosystems in which learning takes place together.
- C.** Learning is easily available in working life and competence can be exploited to the full.
- D.** Educational institutions are given a stronger role in supporting learning that takes place in working life and elsewhere.
- E.** Shared rules are created for the identification and recognition of competence acquired in various ways.

## 4

**Finland's success is based on competence**

A high level of competence enables increased work productivity and a high employment rate. This way, the funding of the welfare society and Finland's competitiveness can be ensured. The high level of competence makes Finland internationally attractive and secures a sufficient number of competent people in Finland.

**The goals and desires we are striving for:**

- A.** Finland increases the competence level of the whole population – individuals and organisations.
- B.** Finland implements a broad, long-term, lifelong learning policy that combines different policy sectors.
- C.** Finland must ensure there is sufficient competence and a sufficient number of competent people.
- D.** People's well-being and opportunities to participate in working life are taken care of. This is how the foundation for a sustainable economy is safeguarded.
- E.** The shared national intellectual capital is visible.

# Challenges

There are a number of difficult challenges that lie between where we are now and attaining the goal of lifelong learning. These challenges, eight in total, can be solved only through constructive co-operation.

## **1. Who bears the responsibility for ensuring that people's competence does not become outdated during their careers?**

*The increased estimates of the need for systematic retraining have led to a situation in which the costs of competence building must be discussed.*

Some people are of the view that everyone must take care of building one's own competence because the individual personally benefits from improved competence both financially and psychologically. Others, on the other hand, think that it is the employer who must take care of competence building during employment because competence development linked to performance of work benefits the employer, and the competence gained will be available to the employer.

## **2. Should everyone have the opportunity and obligation to develop their competence regardless of the type of benefit?**

*Future working careers are likely to be more diverse than currently and include a wider variety of different ways of working. People are also likely to increasingly operate with different statuses. Income may accrue from various sources in the various stages of the working career.*

Some people are of the view that active job-seeking should be prioritised during unemployment and the unemployment benefit is a "salary" paid for seeking employment. Others, on the other hand, think it must be possible to use the period of unemployment for goal-oriented

competence development to increase one's personal labour market value. In this view, competence development should always be possible.

### **3. Is the shared money allocated in the right way regarding the competence building of adults?**

*Working life is changing fast and there is a desire to extend working careers. It is necessary to improve and update competence during careers that last between 40 and 50 years. However, the people who most actively develop their competence are those who are already highly educated and have a reasonably good income. They often update their competence with support provided by society.*

Some people are of the view that investing in adult education is sensible because society always benefits from competence in many ways. Furthermore, Finland must maintain a high level of competence to do well in international competition. Others think that the shared financial resources should be invested in competence development that will also raise the competence level of those with a lower education. This reduces inequality and benefits society more.

### **4. Can we afford to exclude some people from working life or competence building?**

*The sustainability challenges stemming from the state of public finances and the ageing population create pressure to enhance the employment rate and work productivity. However, the rapid technological developments and the globalisation of work are eliminating the kind of work tasks that have typically provided employment for people with a lower level of education. Employment therefore requires an increasingly high level of competence.*

Some people are of the view that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in productive work. When people lack competence, it must be developed to ensure sustainable employment and participation. Others, on the other hand, find that we must accept that not everyone has the opportunity to engage in society and participate in productive work. It is not possible to achieve a situation in which everyone's competence develops as the level of resources required to achieve the right level of effectiveness would be too high.

## **5. If more money is needed for lifelong learning, where do we source it from?**

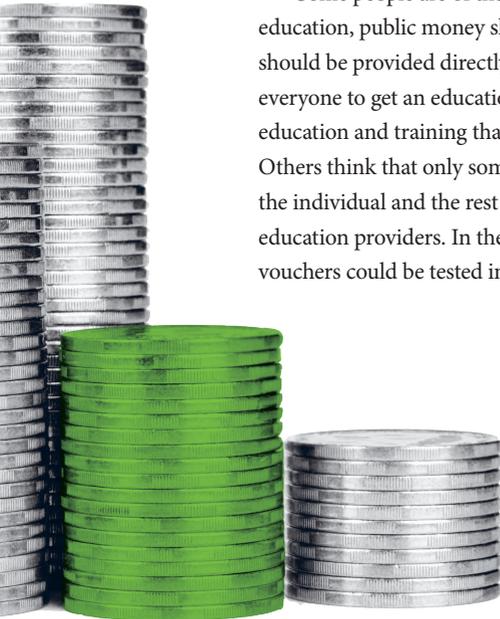
*The debt level of the public sector threatens to grow too heavy as the dependency ratio declines as a result of an ageing population.*

Some people are of the view that not even the current amount of public money should be used for competence development because of the sustainability gap. Therefore, the additional funds need to come primarily from the private sector or public funds must be reallocated within the budget by political decisions. Others think that public funding for lifelong learning should be increased even if it means increasing the national debt because it is an investment yielding a positive return in the future.

## **6. What share of the public funds allocated to the competence building of the working-age population should be provided directly to individuals?**

*The decision about which operator public money is provided to affects the available education and the education market through its impact on demand.*

Some people are of the view that in continuing education and adult education, public money should follow the learner and all of the money should be provided directly to the individual. This is because it encourages everyone to get an education and directs educational institutions to provide education and training that meet the needs of working life and individuals. Others think that only some of the money should be provided directly to the individual and the rest should be allocated directly or indirectly to education providers. In their opinion, models based on accounts or vouchers could be tested in continuing education.



## **7. Should we discuss charging fees for education?**

*For the most part, in Finland education leading to a qualification or degree is free of charge for the student. At the same time, a large proportion of those applying to study for their first qualification or degree do not get selected, and the start of their studies is delayed. Education leading to a qualification or degree is also used by adults as continuing education. If the need for retraining continues to grow, we must decide whether society can afford to offer several qualifications to an increasingly large number of citizens free of charge.*

Some people are of the view that publicly funded education leading to a qualification or degree should always be free of charge to the student. Others, on the other hand, think that there is not enough public money to do this and it should be possible to collect fees for education leading to a qualification or degree provided by publicly funded educational institutions.

## **8. How can we manage lifelong learning as a cross-cutting phenomenon?**

*Phenomenon-based thinking refers to the kind of mindset where phenomena are used as a way of interpreting and framing issues that can be influenced by measures taken by the public sector. In adulthood, different combinations of studying, earned or entrepreneurial income and social security connected with varying family situations create a large number of different situation-bound incentives or obstacles to competence development. If we want to manage phenomena, we need to be able to define and produce such incentives.*

Some people are of the view that we should gradually transfer from a sector-based model to phenomenon-based administration. In that case, the impacts of decisions on jointly defined phenomena, such as lifelong learning, are taken into account in legislative work. Others, on the other hand, are of the view that measures in different administrative sectors should be implemented in a manner that promotes lifelong learning as a whole.

# Funding principles

The funding principles indicate the direction for the comprehensive management of lifelong learning and define a shared view of how the implementation of the aim for lifelong learning can best be supported. The funding-related issues for which there is a shared view are introduced below.

## 1

### **Decisions concerning competence building and the development of working life must be based on a policy of lifelong learning that spans all administrative sectors**

- A. The entity of lifelong learning is managed based on a shared snapshot of the situation. The effectiveness of operations is assessed according to predetermined criteria. This way funding can be targeted in a long-term manner and with increased efficiency. It is also possible to react to unpredictable changes in working life, taking account of the consequences to emerge at different time spans. Different funding channels and ways of combining them are identified.
- B. When preparing reforms and legislation, attention is paid to the broad assessment of the impacts and effectiveness of lifelong learning. When preparing reforms in any administrative sector, their impacts on a broader scale must be taken into account, also from the perspective of competence building.
- C. Learning of basic skills and their maintenance shall be ensured throughout life.
- D. Services promoting employment encourage people to build their competence to increase their employment capacity and employability.

## 2

**Funding enables raising the competence level to boost the potential of the whole working-age population**

- A. The financing model enables the provision of good basic skills for everyone and services tailored to the different needs of individuals that provide comprehensive solutions ensuring better employability to individuals.
- B. Education financed from public funding provided throughout a working career must be directed more to those whose capacities to find employment are weak or whose careers are at a risk of being disrupted. If funding is targeted at work communities, the emphasis should be on communities with the weakest resources for competence building.
- C. When reforming income-related benefits, attention must be paid to ensuring that the benefits encourage people to build their competence.

## 3

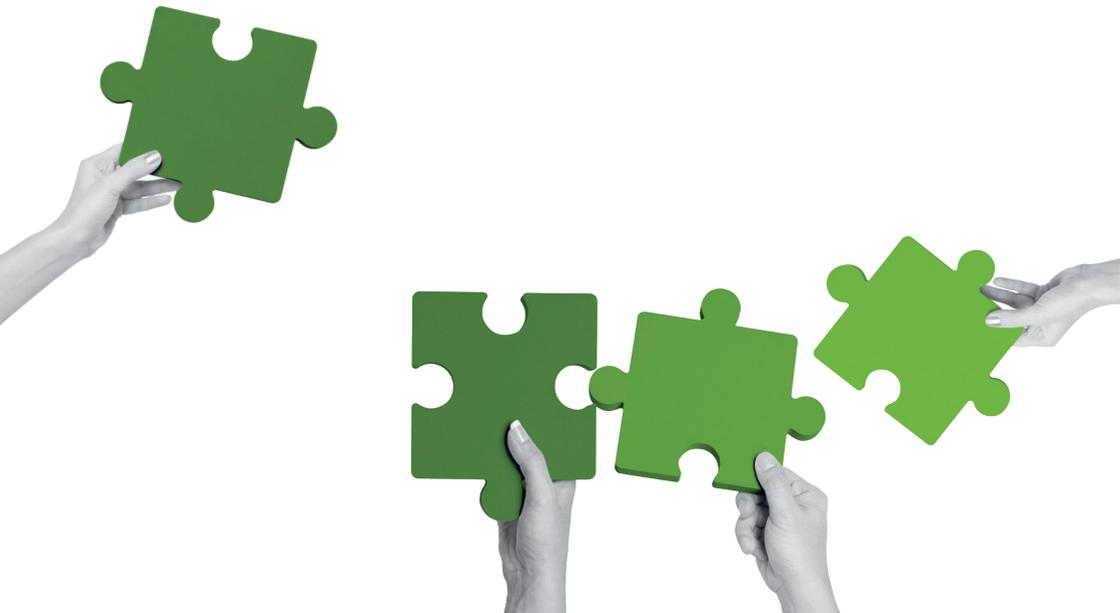
**Funding and steering enable the promotion of sustainable working careers by strengthening the competence of individuals**

- A. Integrated, multi-channel support and guidance services will be developed in collaboration by various bodies to enable smooth transitions. The emphasis should be on the importance of individual competence building as part of the enhancement of work ability and employability.
- B. Legislation supports the equal opportunities of individuals to build their competence regardless of their educational background, taking advantage of the different forms of training and education in a manner that suits their purposes.
- C. Educational institutions are encouraged to increase the provision of a new kind of education that better meets the needs of the working-age population and working life. This is taken into account in the educational institutions' funding.

## 4

**Supporting the development of organisations to become learning communities**

- A. Investment in intellectual capital is made visible in the form of financial investments. Existing learning communities are identified, and their number is increased by encouraging organisations to actively build their intellectual capital.
- B. Incentives are created for workplaces to build the competence of their personnel, particularly of those employees who are at risk of discontinuing their working careers. Entrepreneurs are encouraged to build their own competence, and genuine opportunities are created for that.
- C. Prerequisites and incentives are created for mutual co-operation between working life organisations, and collaboration between educational institutions and providers of other learning services and developers of learning technologies. Methods are created for small companies and individuals to enhance their prerequisites for competence building when an individual acquires his or her income from one or more sources in various manners.



## 5

**Strengthening of education, research and innovation boosts the national economy's sustainable growth**

- A. Conditions are identified in which ecosystems generating knowledge and competence can emerge in different operating environments and their emergence is encouraged. The development of the existing ecosystems into ecosystems that create economic growth will be strengthened.
- B. The objective is to enhance the use of resources intended for innovation activities and enhance their productivity. Support is provided for the openness and international networking of regional or sector-specific profiled ecosystems. The operating principle is to encourage collaboration between various fields across sectoral boundaries.
- C. Measures and competence that accelerate the deployment and wide dissemination of new technologies in society, and in working and business life in particular, are strengthened. Openness of data and flow of information are secured by creating conditions and platforms that enable the efficient use of data.
- D. It must be ensured that Finland remains a stable and predictable operating environment for companies. We have competence, competent employees and flexible co-operation opportunities, and we develop co-operation with a corporate perspective in mind.

This is a summary of the publication  
“Towards lifelong learning – The  
shared aim, funding principles and  
challenges”. The publication can be  
downloaded on Sitra’s website at  
[sitra.fi/en/publications/  
towards-lifelong-learning/](https://sitra.fi/en/publications/towards-lifelong-learning/)

Sitra, The Finnish Innovation Fund, is a  
future fund that collaborates with partners  
from different sectors to research, trial and  
implement bold new ideas that shape the  
future. Our aim is a Finland that succeeds as  
a pioneer in sustainable well-being.

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