Flexible Pathways Towards Professionalisation

Senior Adult Educators in Europe
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German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) – Leibniz-Centre for Lifelong Learning (Coordination)

![Image](image1)
Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA), Spain

![Image](image2)
Educational Centres Association (ECA), United Kingdom

![Image](image3)
Estonian Non-Formal Adult Education Association (ENAEA)

![Image](image4)
Romanian Institute for Adult Education (IREA)

![Image](image5)
Swiss Federation for Adult Learning (SVEB)

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“Vom Lernen zum Lehren“ (From Learning to Teaching) was the title of a book published by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) some years ago, in which a study of the state of the art of research on the subject of teaching and learning in adult education from differing disciplinary perspectives (e.g. sociology, pedagogics and neuropsychology) was published. At that time, the title was indeed provocative: the paradigm shift in thinking about adult education, which took place around the middle of the 1990s, put the spotlight onto learning in all its variations: self-directed, self-organised, informal, non-formal etc. In the (correct) view, that the central action in adult education, namely learning, is only carried out by the learner him- or herself, it seemed that the baby was thrown out with the bath-water. The aspect of teaching, creating a framework, a form and design of the teaching and learning process was virtually blanked out.

Not necessarily because of the book brought out by the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE), but systematically connected to it, ten years after the “paradigm shift” the viewpoint was once again more focused on the teaching aspect. The indispensable competences of teachers, a necessary professionalisation and a regulated acquisition of qualifications were increasingly rediscovered as criteria with which to measure the quality of adult education. Since then, especially at a European level, many initiatives, research projects and concepts have been generated in terms of the professionalisation of those working in tertiary education, which will be named and described in the different chapters of this book. They all serve to outline the fields of work, necessary competences and qualification pathways in adult education. The Project “Flexible Pathways for Adult Educators between the 6th and 7th Level of the EQF” (Flexi-Path), took an especially innovative path in this respect: in collaboration with seven European partners; a competency profile and an instrument for the collation and validation of competences in adult education were developed with the aim of facilitating transparency and comparability of qualifications.

1 Nuissl, E. (Ed.) “Vom Lernen zum Lehren“, Bielefeld 2006
and increasing mobility on the European jobs market. The particularly innovative aspect is the concept of self-evaluation, which enables teachers in the field of adult education to define their own competences in a reflective and differentiated way, and to verify requirements. The basic principle of “self-direction” for learners which prevails in adult education, is also used here, but directed at the teachers. The kernel of the premise of the “Flexi-Path Project” can be found in this enlacement of competence analysis, self-evaluation and own initiative and at the same time also the unique quality of the product or, to be more precise, the products of the project work.

The DIE coordinated the project and based the work on impulses given, along with the Romanian partner, IREA and the other partners in Flexi-Path. With this project, several themes have been continued which have three objectives: the increasing professionalisation and qualification of adult educators on the basis of defined fields of competence, the increasing internationalisation of the professionalisation in adult education in the fields of research, development and implementation, as well as the translation of services and tools for an increasingly differentiated practice. The project partners, wherever possible still in international cooperation, will continue their work on the topic of professionalisation of and support for adult educators in the future in different, “flexible”, but also effective ways.

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Part I: Flexi-Path: The Content
The debate about professionalisation in the field of adult education is nothing new. Since the 1970s the issues of professionalisation and professionalism affect the debates in the field of adult education. It is a common understanding that well-qualified staff is needed to support adults in their learning. Across Europe there do exist a few training systems for adult education professionals, which right now do not allow cross-national comparability. But there still is need to contribute to the comparability and transparency of adult educators’ competences in order to increase quality as well as to facilitate access and career progress and also the mobility of adult educators on the European labour market. Professionalisation approaches on European level are needed in the sense of the development towards professionalism in adult education, which refers to quality standards for activities in adult education as well as to certain knowledge, skills and attitudes.

A lot of different European projects currently deal with the challenge to find ways for the sustainable professionalisation of adult education staff. At the beginning of the debate around quality and professionalism in adult education, the preoccupations and tasks in this sector are mainly linked to the teaching role. But yet in the following years, the scope of the occupational field is extended and various tasks and activities like e.g. counselling, organising or managing are comprised in the field of adult education. (cf. Gieseke 1997; Nuissl 1997). Though the exposure to terms such as “adult education manager“ is hesitant as it was still not definite in the 1990s which occupation or job profile represented a “manager“ in adult education. Moreover, it is still not explicit which professionalisation pathways qualify as adult educator whether in a teaching or a managing role. To determine criteria for quality, – which is one of the main terms used in the 1990s -, or professionalism in adult education, it is aimed to define standards which adult educators could be geared to and with the help of which the professionalism of staff in adult education
could be assessed (cf. ibid.). Various attempts to identify, register and specify adult educator competences are made. Thus, it is necessary to resort to the different occupational fields and training pathways of adult educators to analyse which competences are acquired, adopted and demonstrated in the field of adult education. With the definition of adult educators’ competences, the challenge to feature specificity and completeness for the sector emerges. By means of the competence approach, new prospects unfold and adult educators also obtain the chance to demonstrate their competences which have been acquired non-formally and informally.

There are several and no compulsory pathways to the field of adult education in most European countries. Both formal and informal pathways are viable options for the professionalisation of adult education staff. Apart from formal pathways, informal learning plays an important role, too, as a lot of relevant adult education competences have been acquired in the field of practice. Some professionalisation approaches foresee only a formal pathway; some also try to take informal learning processes into account.

Most formal pathways are academic professionalisation pathways for adult education staff. Since the 1960s, one way of academic professionalisation of people working in the field of adult education in European countries is through pedagogical study programmes. Since the Bologna process most of these study programmes lead to a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree. One example of an academic professionalisation pathway approach is the European Master in Adult Education (EMAE). Based on a three-year project funded by the European Commission this Master study has been developed in a seven-country consortium together with the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) from 2004 on. The consortium developed a core curriculum that has so far been implemented in three European universities (University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Timisoara, University of Florence). The EMAE study covers 120 ECTS and leads to a Master’s qualification in Adult Education (see Egetenmeyer/Lattke 2009). Regarding a differentiation between research-oriented and practical-oriented Master programmes the European Master in Adult Education position is more research-oriented. Nevertheless it covers practical-oriented elements, too.

There also exist alternative professionalisation pathways that follow a non-academic approach. Practitioner associations foster a more practical-oriented, non-academic pathway. In some European countries like Austria or Switzerland there already exist professionalisation models that allow adult education staff to have their non-formally and informally acquired competences validated and certified and to take additional further education modules in order to obtain a recognised qualification (see Schüßler/Mai 2008).
maintain a non-bureaucratic, flexible and ethical attitude towards the many challenges of work life and long term voluntary engagement in the field. Familiarity with the community of practice that forms the professional and voluntary cadres within European youth work and capacity / information required for networking within it. Willingness to participate in relevant associations and their debates about professionalisation and quality among peers. Up to date information and ideas emanating from European (and national) level debates on quality, professionalisation, qualification and validation for the field of European youth work. Professionalisation imparts a certain social responsibility and dignity to management. A professional cannot be controlled or directed by the client. He has professional knowledge and judgment which he uses to make his decision. Thus, professionalisation makes business more efficient, dynamic and socially responsible. The growth of management education in India has contributed to professionalisation in the business field. The company form of business organization which has split ownership from management and the gaining popularity of the company form of business organization have increased the