

The Role of Higher Education in the Professionalisation of Adult Educators

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Edited by

Maria N. Gravani, George K. Zarifis
and Larissa Jõgi

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-4192-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4192-4

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CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR EXPLORING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF ADULT EDUCATORS

MARIA N. GRAVANI & GEORGE K. ZARIFIS

The first chapter of the book sets the background for the exploration of the role of higher education in the professionalisation of adult educators. In particular, it presents the rationale and justifies why it is important and with what ways higher education institutions contribute towards the process of professionalisation of the educators of adults in different stages of their career. It also provides a synopsis of the content of the book and briefly reports on the chapters that follow by locating them nicely in the ongoing discourse on the processes through which adult educators' professionalism and professionalism might be enhanced.

Adult educators have often acquired expertise within a subject area in the course of their initial studies, but often lack formal preparation for teaching adults prior to entering the profession and at its outset. Hence, it is worth questioning how prospective adult educators prepare themselves to perform according to high quality standards in a changing working environment. With the increased interest in lifelong learning and adult education, the qualifications of those teaching adults become increasingly relevant. While a number of studies have focused on the qualifications of adult educators and their need for certain competences, the question of the initial education of those willing to enter the field of adult education has hitherto been rather limited.

In recent years, the concern about the need to have qualified adult educators has been shared among practitioners, academics and researchers. This is exemplified on the one hand by the creation of ad-hoc training modules aimed at adult educators and, on the other hand, by the flourishing of national and cross-national studies, which shed light on the influences of societal, educational and occupational contexts within which professional development among adult educators occurs. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to the role of higher education institutions as regards the initial education and training of adult educators-to-be, when compared to other fields of education (e.g. primary and secondary education). Furthermore, while a number of policies emphasise the quality of adult education and current training provision, little attention has been paid within current policy discourses to the role of higher education in the initial education and pre-service training of prospective adult educators.

This edited volume focuses on the important yet less discussed roles of higher education institutions in both delivering academic programmes that provide relevant cognitive and professional skills and competences to future adult educators, and being more actively involved in the current dialogue with regard to the professionalisation paths of adult educators and trainers. The book explores recent thinking and research on the professionalisation of adult educators based, not exclusively though, on theoretical and research papers presented at the recent 4th Biennial meeting of the ESREA Research Network for Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professionalisation (ReNAdET) held in Cyprus¹.

The volume contains 15 chapters which involve both empirical and theoretical research conducted by academics, professionals and researchers in the field. It brings together research-based submissions which fill a gap in an area that has long been in need of theoretical and empirical attention. Overall, this edited volume, with its international scope, offers a groundbreaking resource, bringing together in a balanced relationship adult educators, their training, professional status and development, and the role of higher education in the professionalisation of adult educators.

The book is organised in four parts that follow a logical structure integrated around the following central themes:

¹ See <http://www.cypsusconferences.org/esrearenadet2015/>

Part I: The Initial Education and Training of Adult Educators in Higher Education

Part II: Types of Programmes Provided by Higher Education Institutions for the Professionalisation of Adult Educators

Part III: Existing Social and Cultural Factors within Higher Education Institutions that Influence the Formation of Adult Educators' Profiles

Part IV: The Development of Conduits among Policy-Makers and Academics with Regard to the Professionalisation of Adult Educators

In what follows, a brief synopsis on the content of the book is provided. Thus, in the second chapter of Part I, George K. Zarifis and Achilleas Papadimitriou from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki lay the ground for the initial education and training of adult educators in higher education, by reporting on the findings of a study, with students who participate in adult education courses, on the role of the university in developing the status, skills and competences of adult educators in Greece. In particular, based on data collected in 2015 from 64 undergraduate and postgraduate students of the department, they explore the possibilities of developing a targeted HE curriculum for adult educators and trainers, by taking into account the opinion of students who have already participated in adult education courses offered in the department, and the extent to which certain skills and competences can develop in relation to adult educators' professional tasks as they appear in the relevant literature.

The next two chapters are written by two Polish scholars. In Chapter Three, Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec from the University of Bydgoszcz, based on a critical review of the literature, analyses the characteristics of the adult educator professional and raises issues about the professionalisation of adult educators' training and education and the challenges that academic institutions still have to face with regards to this. In the fourth chapter, written by Beata Jakimiuk from Lublin University, the professionalism of adult educators is clarified as well as the professional tasks of adult educators. The chapter presents solutions for the professional preparation of Polish adult educators and proposes ideas for the professional training of adult educators in universities via postgraduate studies composed exclusively of pedagogical, psychological, sociological and apprenticeship modules; bachelor and master studies

comprised of the above-mentioned modules and additionally the technical module concerning the subject; and courses that develop teachers' knowledge and skills, organised in higher education institutions.

The next four chapters, comprising Part II, report on research findings with regards to the types of programmes provided by higher education institutions for the professionalisation of adult educators. Chapter Five written by the Italian scholars, Christina Palmieri, Andrea Galimberti and M. Benedetta Gambacorti-Passerini, from the University of Milano Bicocca, presents a university training programme organised for the professionalisation of Italian adult educators, and on the basis of this, proposes a new university training model for adult educators. At the beginning, the chapter offers a reflection on the training programme that is primarily based on research experience in educational services, where research is understood as a significant opportunity to train adult educators in reflection and critical thinking. Based on these experiences, a new model is proposed which combines two main educational directions: the first looks to construct adult educators' professional profiles and their practical skills, while the second is focused on conducting research, proposed as an opportunity to experience a fruitful exchange between theory and practice, generating reflection. This model moves from research to professional guidance, aiming to train reflective adult educators capable of critically questioning contexts and practice and signifying them in relation to strong theoretical knowledge.

In Chapter Six, Helena Koskinen from Finland presents a type of programme provided by the university where students become critical partners in developing the practices of adult educators' study programmes. In particular, the chapter reports on a study exploring students' engagement in the design of a study programme for adult educators/adult learning professionals focusing on pedagogical issues. In this teaching-based action research, based on findings of former research studies concerning students' learning experiences, a central question is posed: how can critical thinking and knowledge framework updating in seminar-style learning encounters be promoted by redesigning better instructional strategies? This chapter will be of interest to the developers of academic programmes for adult educators. The seventh chapter of this part, written by Simona Sava and Mariana Crasovan from the West University of Timisoara, Romania, and Ekkehard Nuissl from the University of Kaiserslautern in Germany, presents a case study of the Masters in Adult Education at the West University of Timisoara, Romania, with the aim of identifying the perceived added value of the programme on the

professionalisation and career development of its graduates. The study gives hints about how an academic offer of this kind contributes to the personal and professional development of the students as adult educators, and how it can be improved for increased added value.

The final chapter of part II, Chapter Eight, written by Maria N. Gravani and Yiasemina Karagiorgi from Cyprus, focuses on the role and contribution of distance learning universities in the professionalisation of adult educators. Based on the empirical findings of a qualitative research study that explores the case of the masters programme in “Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning” offered by the Open University of Cyprus, the two researchers address the following main research questions: To what extent does the distance learning programme influence participants’ skills and competences? In what ways have participants’ attitudes about the role of the adult educator changed as a result of participating in the programme? In what ways have their knowledge and understanding of the adult education field been amplified as a result of participating in the programme? The chapter raises issues about the role of open universities in the development of adult educators’ notions of professionalisation, in relation to other agencies that offer educational programmes for adult educators.

The next four chapters in Part III focus on the existing social and cultural factors within higher education that influence the formation of adult educators’ profiles. In Chapter Nine, Helen Murphy from the Waterford Institute of Technology in Ireland, presents the phenomenon of professionalisation in adult education in Ireland. She explores how social and cultural factors in an Irish Higher Education Institution (HEI) and a changing national regulatory environment influenced the development of new teacher education qualifications for adult educators. Helen draws on findings from a research study that she conducted in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Ireland on the impact of professionalisation in the field of adult education, adult education practitioners and adult learners during the period 2014 to 2016. In the tenth chapter, Larissa Jogi and Katrin Karu from Tallinn University, Estonia present a research study that focuses on former students of an Adult Education curriculum and on the formation of their professional identities during and after their studies at university. The aim of their chapter is to deepen and widen the understanding of significant meanings of the professional identity of adult educators during and after their academic studies at university. Empirical data was collected using written self-reflections from development portfolios and narratives and analysed qualitatively using dialogic and social-interactional analysis.

The study identifies the richness of various meanings of professional identities and shows that a relational interdependence exists between academic studies at university, the professional context and the construction of the identities of adult educators.

In Chapter Eleven, German scholars Aiga von Hippel and Claudia Kulmus, based on the assumption that different patterns in the motives for the choice of a course of study represent different starting points for academic professionalisation and for the development of professionalism, present the first results of a longitudinal survey carried out among university students and graduates of a bachelor study course in Educational Sciences in Munich, Germany. Their study pursues a threefold objective: first, to reveal typical motivational constellations in the choice of a study course; second, to gain information concerning the competence requirements in the respective profession and the competence development from the perspective of graduates; and third, to promote academic professionalisation by discussing the possibilities of didactic planning and counselling for students with diverse motives for their choice of study course.

The final chapter of this part, Chapter Twelve, written by Hazel Beadle from the UK, draws on an exploratory research study which examined the composition of 228 adult educator profiles published in hard copy advertising material, issued by six adult and community education providers in the United Kingdom. The educator profile was drawn from seven themes and this paper pays particular heed to the influence of where the adult educator had previously studied, invariably a higher education institution, in that profile. As well as detail as to where the adult educator had previously studied, the profile themes included occupational interests, recent career features, detail surrounding the educator's experience, the educator's membership of professional or trade associations, the awards they had won, and the location in which they had grown up. This chapter concludes by highlighting that whilst where the adult educator had previously studied was a significant element within the adult educator profile, this tended to be used in conjunction with occupational interests to emphasise competence.

The next three chapters, comprising Part IV, report on findings of the development of conduits among policy-makers and academics with regards to the professionalisation of adult educators, and some concluding reflections on the role of the university in the professionalisation of adult educators. Chapter Thirteen, by John Ward from France, offers a historical

and prospective analysis of the impact of recent reforms of the educational system of training for social workers recently introduced by a series of legislative measures in France. John discusses the political and educational implications of these reforms for the training and professionalisation of social work educators working in the field and in academic positions. He calls upon the first results of a joint Franco-Canadian study of the professionalisation of social workers, based upon 64 semi-structured interviews with a reasoned sample of social workers and managers. The fourteenth chapter of this part, by Ioannis Zenios and Paraskevi Chatzipanagiotou, describes a sit and get programme for the professionalisation of adult educators in Cyprus introduced by the Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus (HRDA), a semi-governmental organisation. The programme that consists of four alternative routes and is a policy-driven initiative is described. In the final chapter of the book entitled, "Reflections on the professionalisation of adult educators in the context of higher education", Larissa Jõgi from Tallinn University, Maria N. Gravani from the Open University of Cyprus and George K. Zarifis from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki sum up the conclusions of the book by critically reflecting on the professionalisation of adult educators in higher education in the light of the discourse developed throughout the chapters. They highlight the different providers, activities, frameworks and research results for supporting the professionalisation and development of academic programmes for adult educators in universities around Europe.

Overall, this edited volume, with its international scope, aspires to become a ground-breaking resource by bringing together in a balanced relationship academics working on adult education, universities and professionalisation, as well as adult educators. As such, the book, which brings together scholars who are at the cutting edge of the ever-expanding fields mentioned above, addresses the issues involved in the role of higher education in the professionalisation of adult educators, and broadens the approaches undertaken to date. Given its scope and nature, the volume constitutes an important reference source and reading material in the field of adult education, the professionalisation of adult educators and higher education, and a point of reference in pre- and in-service training of adult educators. The book targets educational scholars, researchers and policy-makers working in the area of lifelong learning in Europe and globally. Beyond that, educational and teaching staff in all educational organisations, and all higher education students, consist of the subsidiary audience.

PART I:

**THE INITIAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
OF ADULT EDUCATORS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION**

CHAPTER TWO

VOICING THE LEARNERS: A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' VIEWS ON DEVELOPING ADULT EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

GEORGE K. ZARIFIS
AND ACHILLEAS PAPADIMITRIOU

The current debate on the professional development of adult educators in Europe poses a number of challenges, many of which are very much related to the role of Higher Education (HE) and university training. The scope of this preliminary survey that took place in the Department of Education at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, is to discuss the views of undergraduate students who participate in training courses that prepare and qualify them as adult educators. The study highlights those areas in which universities can provide high quality professional training based on students' views, and suggests ways through which universities can provide a more pragmatic training framework for the professionalisation of adult educators.

1. Theoretical background and scope of the study

The professional development and the improvement of the quality of adult learning staff have been recognised as priorities at a European level. However, at European and national levels there is not always a clear view of the competences needed to fulfil the professional tasks in adult learning, partly due to the diversity of the field. In several European countries, competence profiles and standards for adult learning staff (referred to hereafter as adult learning professionals) have been developed and implemented, although their scope of application differs considerably

between institutional and regional levels. Recent European-wide studies show that the adult learning sector is very diverse. This diversity can be seen in the various target groups of adult learning, subjects covered by adult learning courses, the professional pathways to becoming an adult learning professional, the employment situation of adult learning professionals and furthermore, in the competences required for working in this sector. This diversity makes it difficult to develop the sector as a whole and in particular make it a dedicated profession for an Adult Learning Professional (ALP).

The current debate on professional development of adult educators in Europe poses a number of challenges, many of which are very much related to the role of Higher Education (HE) and university training. The policies and practices that have been developed in the Adult Education (AE) field so far only address a limited number of issues relevant to the role of HE in a rhetoric manner without going deep into the heart of the matter (European Commission 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006^{a,b} & 2007^{a,b}; European Council 2002, 2007 & 2009). The field of AE itself is so fragmented and incoherent that it is almost impossible to address a shared concern for those providing relevant services; it is even more so for those HE institutions that prepare adult learning professionals. The spectrum of adult education staff is extremely broad both in terms of provision and employment conditions. There is one issue that seems to be distinguished in this debate—an intense discussion on the competences and skills needed by those working in the field. Within the context of this chapter, this issue revolves around the actual role of the University as an agent of training and human resource development for adult educators to be.

The theory behind competence development for adult educators is scarce and fragmented, just like the variety of the roles adult educators undertake. However, not much is known about this particular group of practitioners. At a European level there is a lack of information about the various aspects of the profession, such as who they are, how they are recruited, what competences, skills and qualifications they are expected or required to possess, what their specific roles and tasks are, what their employment status is, how their professional development is organised, how they are assessed, and how attractive their profession is (Buiskool et al. 2009 & 2010). The complexity of the adult-education field and the wide variety of adult-education contexts make this field a particularly demanding one for adult-learning staff. The literature stresses that adult-learning staff—adult educators in particular—need specific competences (skills, knowledge and attitudes) in order to carry out their (professional) tasks such as teaching,

managing, programme design or planning, assessment and evaluation, etc. Relevant studies (Buiskool et al. 2010; Zarifis 2009 & 2012; Bernhardsson & Lattke 2011; Egetenmeyer & Nuissl 2010; Nuissl & Lattke 2008) show that there is no clear view on the standard competences or skills needed to fulfil professional tasks in adult learning, partly due to the diversity of the field. In some European countries, competence profiles and standards for adult learning staff have been developed and implemented. Their scope of application differs considerably between institutional and regional levels. The studies largely focus on themes which are highly relevant in the context of this chapter, albeit with not much reference to the role of higher education. These themes include changing working contexts¹, professional profiles of adult learning staff², pathways leading to the profession³, and quality assurance and quality management⁴.

¹ One of the key characteristics of the field of adult learning is its enormous variety. All kinds of educational activities are established to meet an even larger variety of educational needs of different groups. It is a challenge to outline the kinds of environments in which adult learning professionals are working. The changing working context concerns changes in the target groups that the educational programmes address, changes in the topics that the professionals cover and, most importantly, changes in learning methods (in general there is a more learner centred approach in adult education). The emphasis is not only on providing instruction, but also on focusing on the broader concept of learning, which involves paying attention to the well-being, motivation, and transformation of the individual (see Buiskool et al. 2010; Zarifis 2009).

² Adult learning professionals fulfil a broad range of tasks and activities, especially in the case of teachers and trainers. The most important observation is that teaching staff are involved in practically every aspect of an educational organisation. Managers also face a broad array of tasks, although these seem to be more consistent, in the sense that they relate to management and coordination, development and planning, supervision and, to a lesser extent, technical and organisational support tasks. Too many contrasting tasks may threaten to overwhelm an individual's core competence, while on the other hand, a too narrow definition may lead to a lack of multidisciplinary cooperation, with people being responsible only for their own area (see Bernhardsson & Lattke 2011; Egetenmeyer & Nuissl 2010).

³ Adult learning professionals come from a variety of backgrounds. Many of them enter the profession without specific training to become an adult educator, though they often have experience in other work settings. There is no standard pathway for becoming an adult learning professional. Moreover, there is no evidence as to which pathway might be considered the most effective and might ensure the best preparation for the profession (in terms of learning outcomes). Finally, as a consequence of the broad variety of pathways and institutions involved, there is also a wide variety of qualifications, ranging from certificates of participation in a

There are hardly any studies though that discuss the key challenge that many universities in Europe face more and more today in developing qualification programmes, or training interventions for adult educators. Relevant evidence shows that there is a considerable diversity regarding the existence of specific programmes and interventions, occasionally in the form of projects and practices that support adult education professionals who work with vulnerable adults (i.e. migrants, unemployed, seniors); but again there is a high level of diversity as in some countries, universities have gained more autonomy during the last few years, but university resources have decreased, directly affecting access to higher education and quality of teaching (Osborne, 2003). Some authors argue that relevant programmes should be practice-oriented and based in real-life tasks and situations and not only focused on academic success, but on the development of social skills (Duru-Bellat 2013). Other authors stress that higher education institutions need to fulfil the technical needs of the job market (Nuñez 2009; Osborne 2003; Parjanen & Tuomi 2003). The majority of higher education institutions in Europe, however, seem to lack alternative or complementary mechanisms for training adult educators and adult learning professionals (including academic teachers) *per se*. In this sense, we may have a long way to go before achieving a reliable, accountable, and competence-based framework for developing professional skills and competences for adult educators in our higher education systems. Research at the level of provision, even more so at the level of practice, particularly in responding to the immediate professional needs of

training course to diplomas and academic degrees. Moreover, adult learning professionals usually have 10 to 15 years of experience elsewhere before they decide to become an adult educator. This variety makes the market for professionals and their employers less transparent (see Zarifis 2012; Buiskool et al. 2010; Nuissl & Lattke 2008).

⁴ Quality assurance and management within adult learning institutes is indispensable for the professionalisation of the sector. Several national country studies illustrate a demand for more measurements in this field. The study shows that continuous professional development (CPD) and external evaluation only play a relatively small role in quality enhancement policies for adult learning providers. This indicates a need for change. It is necessary to increase external evaluation and pay more attention to the career prospects of practitioners. These strategies support processes of professional development in the sector. They stress the need for practitioners to have professional autonomy in determining their own career paths and, at the same time, to be accountable through external evaluation (see Buiskool et al. 2010; Zarifis 2009 & 2012; Egetenmeyer & Nuissl 2010; Milana & Skrypnik 2009).

those students who are prepared to enter the AE field as highly trained educators, is imperative.

The scope of this preliminary survey that took place in the Department of Education at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is to discuss the views of undergraduate students who participate in training courses that prepare and qualify them as adult educators. The study highlights those areas in which universities can provide high quality professional training based on students' views, and suggests ways through which universities in Europe can provide a more pragmatic training framework for the professionalisation of adult educators.

2. Survey background and questions

The survey was initially designed and developed in order to explore the following questions:

- 1) What competences are relevant for working in the field of adult learning?
- 2) How are these reflected in educational programmes?
- 3) How are these reflected in job descriptions?

This chapter only focuses on the first question, hence the competences required to work in the field, which forms the basis for responding to the two remaining questions. Relevant research in Europe shows that most countries have the possibility of studying a bachelor's or master's programme including a specialisation in adult pedagogy. The total study length of these kinds of training programmes is usually four or five years, including a three-year bachelor's cycle and a one- or two-year master's programme. Bachelor's and master's programmes in the pedagogy of educational sciences usually include modules or courses on adult learning to provide graduates with a general knowledge of the specific processes involved in adult learning, of adult learning institutions, as well as the political, social and economic background of adult learning. A few academic centres currently offer a specialisation in adult learning at BA level. Despite the fact that in most countries there is the possibility to study BA and MA programmes in addition to further post-graduate programmes leading to qualifications for adult learning professions, these do not often explicitly mention adult learning in the title of their degree programmes. With the introduction of the bachelor-master structure, more

and more specialised master's programmes on adult education have been developed, though a firm trend cannot yet be identified. In readdressing the agenda of professionalisation of adult educators in Europe, it may be fruitful therefore to focus on the needs of adult educators performing specific roles, e.g. teaching adults, rather than on the type of occupation they hold. This will justify to a large extent the necessity to examine ways on how to identify and frame the required skills and competences for adult educators. More recent studies show that the adult education sector is very diverse. This diversity can be seen in the various target groups of adult learning, subjects covered by adult learning courses, the professional pathways to becoming an adult educator, the employment situation of adult learning professionals, and furthermore, in the competences required for working in this sector. This diversity also makes it difficult to develop the sector as a whole and in particular as a dedicated profession. In 2010 the European Commission's study on *"Key competences for adult learning professionals: contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals"* was released. The study identified various ways in which the set of key competences can be used by different stakeholders. It is up to stakeholders how to use the set of key competences and for what purpose. During the final phase of the study, the research team noticed that there was a momentum to embed the set of key competences in policy making on different levels. Different stakeholders from various Member States expressed their interest in the set of key competences to open the debate on key competences in their country and sector.

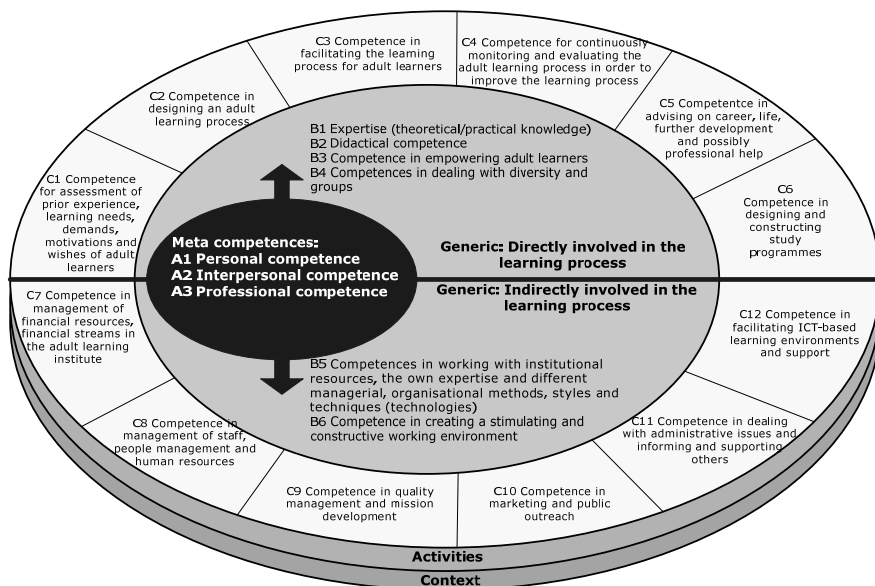
It is on this basis that the research team in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Department of Education) developed an ongoing research project, with students who participate in adult education courses, on the role of the University in developing the status, skills and competences of adult educators. Based on data collected from 50 undergraduate students of the department (36 women and 14 men) in the period between May-June 2015, the research team looks at the possibilities of developing a targeted HE curriculum for adult educators and trainers, by taking into account the opinion of students who have successfully participated in adult education courses⁵ offered in the department, and the extent to which

⁵ These courses are as follows:

1. Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning: theory & practice.
2. Vocational Education and Training: programme planning and assessment.
3. Critical Reflection in Adult Education & Learning: issues of meaning-making and transformation of human experience.

certain skills and competences can develop in relation to adult educators' professional tasks as they appear in the relevant literature.

A questionnaire was prepared that was based on the generic and specific competences as described in the reference framework developed in 2010 on behalf of the European Commission by Buiskool et al. and presented in the report *"Key competences for adult learning professionals: Contribution to the development of a reference framework of key competences for adult learning professionals"* (see Graph 1).



Graph 1. Graphic representation of the set of key competences of adult learning professionals.

Source: Buiskool et al. (2010, p.11).

4. Adult educational praxis with internship.
5. Adult & Continuing Education in the EU: policies and practices in the member states.
6. Adult Participation in Education and Learning Activities: issues of Motivation and Accessibility.

The students who participated in the research had successfully completed all of these courses.

The questionnaire was built having in mind generic competences that are relevant for carrying out all activities in the adult learning sector, hence teaching, management, counselling or administrative activities. Generic competences consist of a cluster of seven competences that include:

1. Personal competence in systematic reflection on one's own practice, learning and personal development: being a fully autonomous lifelong learner.
2. Interpersonal competence in communicating and collaborating with adult learners, colleagues and stakeholders: being a communicator, team player and networker.
3. Competence in being aware of and taking responsibility for the institutional setting in which adult learning takes place at all levels (institute, sector, the profession as such and society): being responsible for the further development of adult learning.
4. Competence in making use of one's own subject-related expertise and the available learning resources: being an expert.
5. Competence in making use of different learning methods, styles and techniques including new media and being aware of new possibilities and e-skills and assessing them critically: being able to deploy different learning methods, styles and techniques in working with adults.
6. Competence in empowering adult learners to learn and support themselves in their development into, or as, fully autonomous lifelong learners: being a motivator.
7. Competence in dealing with group dynamics and heterogeneity in the background, learning needs, motivation and prior experience of adult learners: being able to deal with heterogeneity and groups.

The first three competences deal with aspects in relation to professionalism, while the last four competences are more focused on pedagogical/didactical competences.

One of the limitations in exploring students' views on required competences in the field, however, is that the data collection instrument is based on a set of key activities that immediately refer to the generic required competences as these are described in the framework that was developed by Buiskool et al. in 2010. The questionnaire consisted of 64 interval (rating scale) closed-ended questions that were divided into 12 clusters. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of each key activity by giving a quantitative value between "1" (not important) and "4" (very important) on the Likert scale.

3. Analysis of the collected data

The analysis is based on responses which the students consider as more or less important. Specifically, the 50 respondents in the survey responded to the extent to which adult educators' activities are implicitly relevant to certain competences. SPSS Version 23 was used to quantitatively analyse (descriptive analysis) the collected data. Descriptive statistics are used in this case to describe the basic features of the data in our study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. In the following paragraphs, we present the raw quantitative results for each cluster of questions.

Cluster 1- Assessment and diagnosis of adult learners' needs

The first cluster measured the extent to which it is important to recognise the different needs (based on the framework of action, personal biography, inadequacies, and personal goals), and the potential and the skills of adult learners through a process that should be organised with respect to learners, and also with a view to wider social needs. According to the answers in Table 1, 48% (24 respondents) consider it very important, 38% (19 respondents) think that it is important, 12% (6 respondents) consider it to be of small importance, and finally 2% (1 respondent) think that it is not important.

Table 1

	(f)	(%)
Not important	1	2,0
Of small importance	6	12,0
Important	19	38,0
Very important	24	48,0
Total	50	100,0

As seen in Table 2, the extent to which it is important to identify and evaluate the cognitive level, previous learning and adult learners' experience, the majority of respondents consider it very important (38%).

Table 2

	(f)	(%)
Not important	2	4,0
Of small importance	11	22,0
Important	18	36,0
Very important	19	38,0
Total	50	100,0

Cluster 2 - Preparation of lessons

The next cluster is related to identifying learning sources and appropriate teaching methods (including those using ICT). This process is associated with material and non-material resources of knowledge within the educational structure (what trainees are as knowledge resources in the lesson, what comes from all those involved in the programme, what comes from other relevant organisations or companies, etc.). As shown in Table 3, 34% think it is important and 30% consider it very important. A total of 30% consider it to be of minor importance while 6% think it is not important.

Table 3

	(f)	(%)
Not important	3	6,0
Of small importance	15	30,0
Important	17	34,0
Very important	15	30,0
Total	50	100,0

In terms of planning and organising the learning process, having in mind their different backgrounds, learning needs and the cognitive level of adult learners, the largest proportion (60%) considers it very important and 34% considers it important. A total of 4% considers it of small importance while only 2% consider it as not important. With regard to compiling, developing, negotiating and communicating the objectives of the course and informing adult learners about the structure and course of the learning process, most (16) responded that these are important.

Cluster 3 - Facilitate the learning process

As shown in Table 4, the majority of respondents (24) answered that it is very important to link the adult learning instructor to the real world and the adult learners' context. This is achieved by exploiting the previous knowledge and experience of the adult learner, and incorporating examples from reality into the classroom.

Table 4

	(f)	(%)
Not important	2	4,0
Of small importance	7	14,0
Important	17	34,0
Very important	24	48,0
Total	50	100,0

Most respondents (72%) also consider as very important that the activity must strengthen, activate, motivate and encourage adult learners, while creating a positive environment for learning and development is considered by the majority (58%) of respondents to be very important. However, 21 respondents (42%) consider it only as important to be aware of and understand the diversity and problems that may arise and be able to predict the consequences of diversity for the adult trainees. As regards the question of whether it is important for the activity to be informed about current developments in the field of adult education, developments in teaching methodology and the relative progress made in relation to the subject matter in the courses, most respondents (52%) suggest that it is very important.

Cluster 4 - Monitoring and evaluation

According to respondents' replies, as shown in Table 5, 46% of respondents suggest it is very important that the activity provides support and feedback to adult learners. Equally high are those who consider it important (34%).

Table 5

	(f)	(%)
Not important	3	6,0
Of small importance	7	14,0
Important	17	34,0
Very important	23	46,0
Total	50	100,0

Regarding the question of whether it is important to evaluate the action framework, the learning process and the results of this process, 40% said it was important and 34% said it was of small importance.

Cluster 5 - Advisory and guidance activities

Table 6 shows that the majority of respondents (40%) consider it important to offer career advice and basic information about work environments.

Table 6

	(f)	(%)
Not important	2	4,0
Of small importance	16	32,0
Important	20	40,0
Very important	12	24,0
Total	50	100,0

As far as testing to gather information on the characteristics of adults in relation to their career paths, 36% suggest that it is important while only 2% see little importance in it. Providing guidance before and during the course is also considered as important by 38% of respondents, while 36% responded that implementing personal guidance and counselling skills (within second chance education and in relation to the return to learning) is of minor importance. Last but not least, 36% of respondents suggested that it is very important to provide guidance on metacognition (learn how to learn/study skills).

Cluster 6 - Curriculum design and development

A total of 44% of respondents considered adult education curriculums and modules in a programme as very important while 36% suggested that developing a full-time or part-time programme with flexible timetabling is of small importance (Table 7).

Table 7

	(f)	(%)
Not important	5	10,0
Of small importance	18	36,0
Important	14	28,0
Very important	13	26,0
Total	50	100,0

Cluster 7 - Financial management

Managing financial resources is considered to be of small importance by 38% of respondents as presented in Table 8. The same number of respondents also see this task as important. In the same vein, 40% consider organising and managing financial budgets to be of little importance, while 34% suggest that it is not important.

Table 8

	(f)	(%)
Not important	5	10,0
Of small importance	19	38,0
Important	19	38,0
Very important	7	14,0
Total	50	100,0

Preparing applications for funding is also considered to be of minor importance according to 44% of respondents, while 4% said that it was of no significance.

Cluster 8 - Human resources management

In the question about managing teaching and non-teaching staff on a daily basis, the answers were split (see Table 9).