



Center for
Higher Education
Policy Studies

Continuing Higher Education

Part One:

*General Impressions of an International Inventory
and Explorative Analysis of Policies concerning
Flexibility in Continuing Higher Education for Workers*

International Higher Education Monitor
Thematic report

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1 Continuing Higher Education

1.1 Introduction

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has commissioned the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies to explore the diverse field of continuing higher education. The results of the study have to feed policy discussions on creating a more diversified Dutch higher education system. A diversified higher education system refers here to an open and flexible higher education system that offers a broad range of study provisions and opportunities for multiple learning pathways for students and working people. Such a system should be driven by both supply (providers of higher education which aim to strategically profile themselves) and demand factors (needs from society (students, the business community, public organisations) . In this context, continuing education at the tertiary level is getting more and more important. Given the perceived importance of continuing higher education and, despite many initiatives on this topic, the lack of (clear) progress, or at least concerns about it, the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science wonders if the provisions for continuing higher education in the Netherlands are sufficient to meet future labour demands or that new provisions are desirable? In response to these questions, this study addresses the modes of delivery in continuing education in five countries: Australia, California, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. What are the lessons to be learned with respect to flexible and open teaching and learning forms in higher education elsewhere?

Worldwide the emerging global knowledge economy is changing the labour market demands. A highly qualified and well-educated workforce plays a decisive role in the success of national economies. To balance the outputs of higher education in terms of graduates and labour market needs, higher education systems have to adapt their educational programme offer. It is not only that knowledge and skills have to be updated continuously, or that new skills and competences have to be learned. That is to close the gap between the skills and competences of graduates and labour market requirements (the qualitative argument). There are also demographic developments at play that stress the importance to look critically at higher education outputs. A shrinking and aging work force calls for carefully looking at target groups that have been underrepresented in traditional higher education (the quantitative argument). One option to close the perceived gap is to complement “traditional” higher education programmes and modes of programme delivery for “traditional” students by other modes of delivery for “non-traditional” target groups. For this reason – traditional higher education programmes for the traditional student cohorts (18-24 years) will insufficiently meet the requirements of future labour demand – is the further development of open and flexible higher education provisions increasingly being stressed, in the Netherlands as well as elsewhere.

National and international political agendas highlight the role of continuing higher education as a significant catalyst for social and economic success. Open and flexible higher education systems that comprise a broad range of study provisions and

opportunities for multiple learning pathways for students and working people are important, as has repeatedly been stressed in the educational strategies of for example the OECD, UNESCO and the European Commission. Whether it is the Lisbon-strategy, the Bologna-movement or Europe's strategy 2020, they all stress the growing need for more and better-trained workers. However, generally speaking the several initiatives taken over the last years, at the European and national policy levels, do not leave the impression that much progress has been made when it comes to continuing higher education. As the Council of the European Council argues: "While new initiatives in the field of lifelong learning may be developed to reflect future challenges, further progress with on-going initiatives is still required, especially in implementing coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies." ¹

1.2 Key concepts

Continuing higher education is not a clear-cut concept. In this study continuing education will be seen as a component of lifelong learning. The European Commission defines lifelong learning as 'all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective' (European Commission 2003). Where lifelong learning does not distinguish between initial and post-initial education, continuing education refers only to the latter part of lifelong learning. Initial education comprises all education to the point where students enter the labour force, e.g. primary education, secondary education, senior vocational secondary education, higher vocational education and university education (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), 2012). Continuing higher education is defined in this report as organised learning activities that take place after initial education for a specific target group (non-traditional students², i.e. 'workers'). The working definition is:

Continuing higher education for the target group workers encompasses the organised learning activities at the tertiary level that take place after initial education, to obtain and improve knowledge, skills and competencies targeted at adults in employment or having work experience.

Before using this definition there are a few issues not need to be addressed. Firstly, some terms cover the same ground, such as 'continuing tertiary education', 'post-initial higher education', 'university continuing education' or 'continuing professional development'. In this report these terms will be used interchangeably (cf. Teichler & Hanft 2009:8). Secondly, the distinction between initial and post-initial higher education is not clear-cut at the undergraduate level. These programmes can be students' initial experiences in higher education, but can also be followed by students who re-enter higher education in lifelong learning. Whether the education followed can be characterized as post-initial depends on the situation of the student, not on the

¹ The Council of the European Union, Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") (2009/C 119/02)

² In this report we see traditional students as students in the cohort 18-24 years that follow a fulltime Bachelors or Masters programme.

definition of the programme.³ Thirdly, even the definition given does not change the fact that different countries have a different understanding of continuing higher education. As Müskens and Hanft (2009) argue ‘continuing higher education’ is a phenomenon that cannot be limited by a single unambiguous set of criteria. To narrow down the definition further would overshoot this study that aims among other things to add some creativity into the discussion in the Netherlands about modes of delivery in continuing higher education. Fourthly, there is the issue about formal, non-formal and informal learning.⁴ Whereas formal learning is a distinctive feature of higher education systems, non-formal and informal learning are far more difficult to detect and appreciate.

Flexibility of continuing higher education provision is understood as an enlargement of the opportunities for workers to participate a particular mode of higher education (that is, next to the traditional full-time studies at higher education institutions). A flexible continuing higher education system offers such learning opportunities at an on-going basis. A number of dimensions can be distinguished:

- Educational orientation: academic or vocational/professional;
- Qualification level: associate degree, bachelor, master or doctorate;
- Type of courses: degree or non-degree (including certificate education);
- Mode of delivery: campus-based, distance learning, mixed mode or blended learning (including workplace learning) distance learning, online delivery of standard courses in face-to-face programmes, small seminars and interactive discussions, part-time courses and module based curricula but also workplace learning
- Time: ‘office hours’ / weekends / evenings.

1.3 The analytical framework for this study

To provide input to the Dutch policy discussion with respect to the organisation and modes of delivery of continuing higher education we collected and analysed information from five different higher education systems: Australia, California, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In consultation with the Dutch ministry these higher education systems have been selected on a system characteristics such as high participation rates, high number of part-time students, significant number of lifelong learners, significant supply of blended learning. Information is collected by means of

³ <http://www.jointquality.nl/content/denemarken/WorkingEuropeanDimension.pdf>

⁴ We use Cedefop’s glossary of the European Inventory. **Formal learning:** Learning that occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically leads to certification. **Non-formal learning:** Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically does not lead to certification. **Informal learning:** Learning resulting from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner’s perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

desk research and expert-interviews. To the extent possible for each higher education system the following aspects have been addressed:

- A. Context, provisions and providers
- B. The legal and policy framework
- C. Organisation and governance
- D. Policy instruments
- E. Effects of policy instruments

Table 1 depicts the questions related to the five aspects that guided the five case studies. The description of the five case studies can be found in a separate document.

Table 1: Specification of the analytical framework used

A. Context, provisions and providers
Description of the context, provisions and providers of continuing higher education in the specific country
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the provisions for continuing higher education in the respective country?</i> • <i>Address each countries respective understanding of continuing higher education for the target group workers</i> • <i>Describe the way in which continuing higher education is integrated into a country's education system</i> • <i>What modes of delivery for continuing higher education are offered for workers?</i> • <i>What providers are active in the field of continuing higher education? What is the relation between the different providers i.e. what is the level playing field? Do public and private providers for example work together, are there public providers with private activities?</i>
B. The legal and policy framework
The legal and policy framework for continuing higher education in main lines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is (in mainlines) the policy and strategy for (creating) flexibility in continuing higher education for the target group workers?</i> • <i>Describe specific (set of) legal and regulatory frameworks (in main lines!) that may support and / or stimulate (be it limit) a flexible and demand-driven continuing higher education for workers. The formal aspects of continuing education (access, admission, allowances, crediting, etc.) are also frequently regulated by national or local laws and regulations.</i> • <i>Are special characteristics of continuing higher education taken into account by legislation?</i>
C. Organisation and Governance
The organisation and governance of continuing higher education, referring to the formal roles and responsibilities of government and employers; and the relationship between different providers

Government:

- *What is typically seen as a task of the government with respect to the organisation of continuing higher education? Elaborate on funding provisions / financial arrangements (including e.g. tax redemption) and study financing for continuing education by the government. This is addressed in detail in 'policy instruments'.*

Employers:

- *What role and responsibility do employers have with regard to (continuing) higher education for their workers? How and on what level is this laid down (national / sectoral / regional)? Elaborate on funding provisions for continuing education by employers.*
- *How to employers accommodate their workers to engage in continuing higher education? This asks after the infrastructure provided by employers to support and stimulate the participation of lifelong learning. (How) is this laid down for example in collective employment agreements, sectorial development programmes and the tutoring of workplace learning?*

Providers:

- *What providers are active in providing continuing higher education? Continuing higher education can be provided by a variety of different public and private institutions and non-profit or for-profit organisations. public, semi-public and private sector establishments. Indicate who can offer by law; what they can they offer.*
- *What is the level playing field? With respect to partnerships between different providers, do public and private providers for example work together, are there public providers with private activities?*

D. Policy instruments

Policy instruments to enhance flexibility in continuing higher education. Aimed specifically at:

- *Greater diversity in provisions and modes of delivery*
- *Qualification and quality assurance (e.g. credit transfer system, recognition competence)*
- *Financial support for workers: vouchers*
- *What policy instruments are in use by government to stimulate **diversity in provisions and modes of delivery** in (continuing) higher education (and steer providers)? Exemplary this could encompass new modes of delivery, an open system with opportunities for the public financing of private higher education, performance agreements or experiments with measures as these.*
- *Instruments with regard to **quality and qualifications**: What is the policy with regard to the connection between formal, non-formal and informal learning, and what facilities and infrastructure are in place for this to ensure quality of continuing higher education and (individual) learning paths? Discuss specifically if there is a national qualification framework for scaling the levels of non-formal courses and training, a credit transfer system etcetera. Also note if and how these instruments for quality assurance are different to the 'regular' higher education system.*
- *Measures regarding financing continuing higher education: focus specifically on the question whether (specific) student support and / or demand-side financing is in place in the specific country. In contrast to traditional supply-side funding mechanisms, demand-side financing is a method whereby funds are given to individuals or institutions on the basis of expressed demand. This encompasses that 'vouchers' are provided to students / workers they can spend relatively freely throughout their working lives in order to obtain new knowledge and to update their skills.*

E. Effects of policy instruments

Results and impacts of policy instruments to participation, diversity and quality in continuing higher education

- *What are the experiences in the respective country with the specific policy instruments and efforts made by employers? If impact studies and policy evaluations are available, report on the effects and results. Indicate to what extent the current practices and policies as well as the position of the employers contribute to broader goals such as participation, diversity and quality of continuing higher education.*

The results of the case studies show a rich and diverse picture of continuing education for workers at the tertiary level. In the remainder of this chapter the results will be summarised by addressing three themes, followed by a reflection upon the results.

In the first theme contextual changes that put up new challenges for higher education are outlined. In the second theme, the provision of continuing (higher) education and its modes of delivery in the different systems are presented. The final theme reports on the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, as well as the policy instruments that are discussed and implemented.

2 Dynamic and diverse contexts

The global education and economic landscapes have for some time now been in a state of rapid transformation. The descriptions of the different contexts of continuing higher education focus on those factors in each country or education system that have (had) a relevant impact on the development of this field. In overall terms, there are three main factors that explain the importance and expansion of continuing higher education in the different countries of this study: a demographic, economic and educational factor (see also OECD).

2.1 Demographics

Most Western societies are characterized by a rapidly ageing population that is also expected to work for a longer period of their lifetime. In this regard, national economies can not only rely on the supply of highly educated and trained young employees by the traditional universities and colleges, but also need the older generations with up-to-date skills and knowledge. With an aging population there is a growing yet “underexploited” pool of talent for which the existence of appropriate opportunities for continuing education to remain employable are important. Demographic changes like the ageing of the workforce and the population in general, as well as the decline of the (relative) size of younger generations are seen as challenges for the further development of the provisions of continuing education. Demographic changes are likely to have several implications for the redistribution of skills and experience. In California for instance among the baby boomers there are more people with some college, associates and graduate degrees, on a percentage basis, while the younger cohort holds more bachelor’s degrees and fewer graduate degrees. This implies that when the economy requires a highly skilled workforce action is needed, because the labor force not only loses the capacity of experienced workers because of the ageing of those workers; their “replacements” are less educated as well. Sweden and Finland face a huge demographic challenge in the years to come. According to demographic projections, the number of older people will grow at a faster rate than the young population. This increases the pressure among others on the government to ensure that a sufficient number of people enters the labour force when the older generation retires.

The total population of Finland will increase according to the population forecast. In absolute terms the number of children will go up during next five decades, but their share of total population will decrease slowly while the share of older people will be increasing. These demographic changes will challenge the Finnish educational system. As the result of the demographic changes, combined with other developments such as a perceived lack of skilled labour in many sectors of the economy, the retraining and continuing training of adults is becoming increasingly important.

Sweden also faces a severe demographic challenge. Demographic projections outline that the number of older people will grow at a faster rate than the young population. Replacement of the older generations after their retirement is therefore problematic. Yet, demographic projections also indicate that Sweden is among those European

countries that have a lower old-age dependency ratio as the result of a relatively high rate of gross and net immigration.

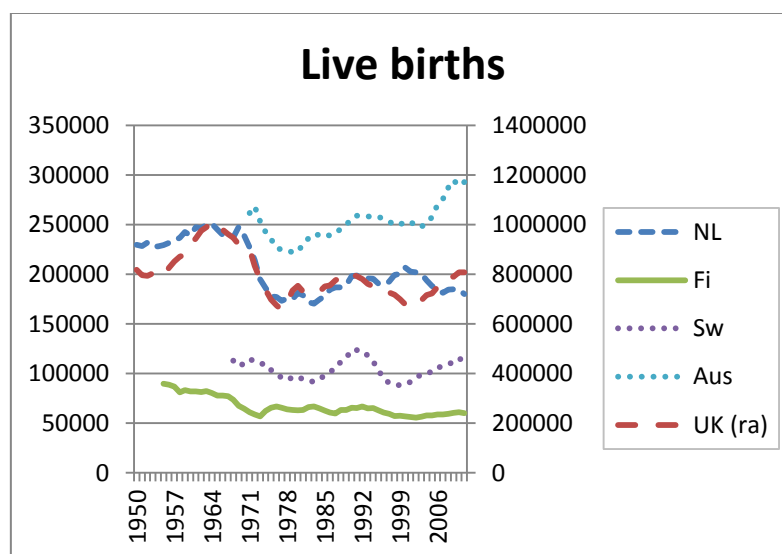
The UK population is projected to increase by 4.9 million from an estimated 62.3 million in 2010 to 67.2 million over the ten year period to 2020. Projected natural increase (more births than deaths) accounts for 56 per cent of the projected increase over the next decade. The UK population is projected to increase to 73.2 million over the 25 year period to mid-2035. The population is projected to continue ageing with the average (median) age rising from 39.7 years in 2010 to 39.9 years in 2020 and 42.2 by 2035.

The annual population growth rate in Australia increased steadily over the last years. It was 1.8% in 2010. In the past five years there has been an incline of the population aged under 15, and an increase of the population aged 65 or older. Particular to Australia is the high net migration rate of approximately 13 per cent.

The California population is aging and becoming more diverse. The highly educated “baby boom” cohort will begin exiting the workforce in 2011 as they reach retirement age. The growth in the population of those over 65 years old is projected to grow by 2.3 million — a greater number than any other group. By 2030, 20 % of Californians will be over 65 years of age.

An overview of the trends in live births shows that the situation differs considerably between the countries. In the UK and Sweden, the decline of the traditional entering cohorts is immanent as the drop that started in the 1990s has arrived at the gates of higher education 18 years later. The situation will improve (i.e. the entrance cohorts will grow) in the coming five years in Sweden, the UK and Australia. In the Netherlands however the cohorts keep shrinking, till the turning point at by the end of the decade. The Finnish data show far less fluctuation: there was a steady decline till the early 00s, after which the number of live births slowly goes up again.

Figure 1: Live births in five countries



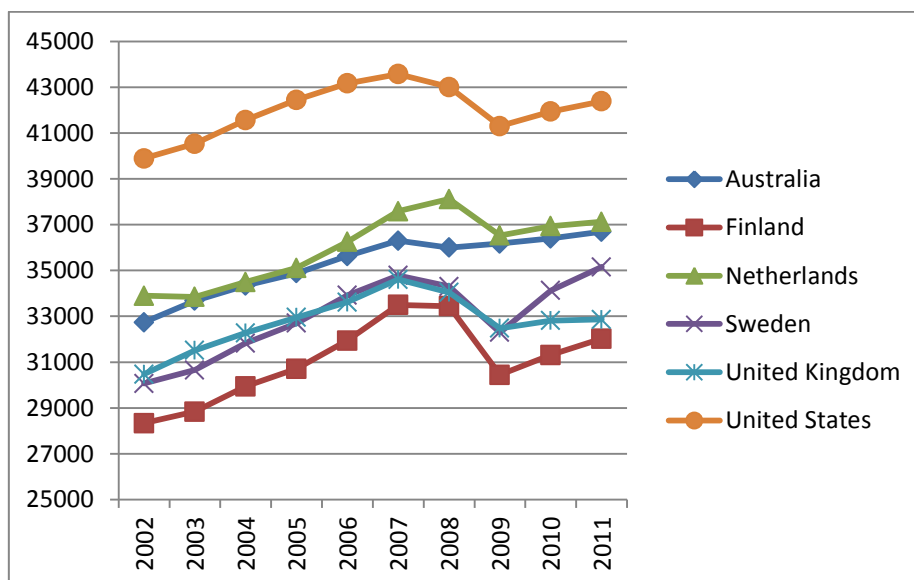
Source: national population statistics

2.2 Economics

The continuing rise of the knowledge economy calls for a highly educated workforce. As globalisation and technology continue to re-shape the needs of the global labour market, technical, professional and academic knowledge will continually have to be updated. As a precondition for the continuation of working careers, the retraining and continuing training of adults has become more important. This has created powerful incentives for individuals to build their knowledge and skills through education – and for countries to help them do so by attuning their national policies (see also OECD 2012). In Sweden the issue of the further development of labour market skills to remain competitive as an economy was already addressed in the early 1990s. At that time, high levels of unemployment stipulated the development of specific courses to facilitate re-integration into the workforce. The launch of the *Adult Education Initiative* must be seen in this light.

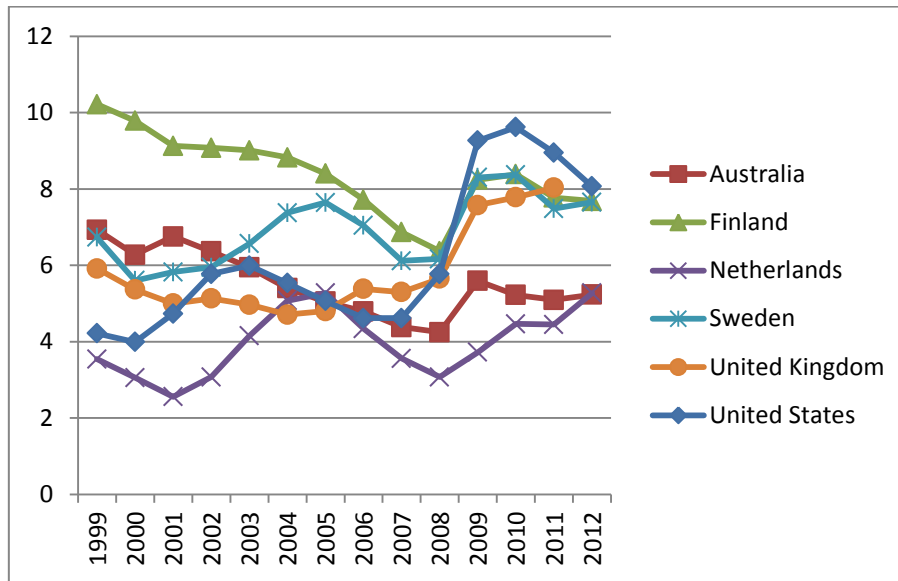
Over the past several years the global economic crises has provided an additional incentive to invest in education and reduce the risk of being unable to secure or retain employment in difficult economic circumstances (OECD). Outspoken in this respect are several initiatives in Finland that aim to lengthen working careers. In reference to the unemployment in this country, maintaining high participation and employment in the face of the recession and a rapidly ageing population are defined as major challenges for policy makers (OECD, 2010 – economic survey).

Figure 2: GDP per capita in US\$ constant prices



Source: OECD

Figure 3: Harmonised unemployment rate



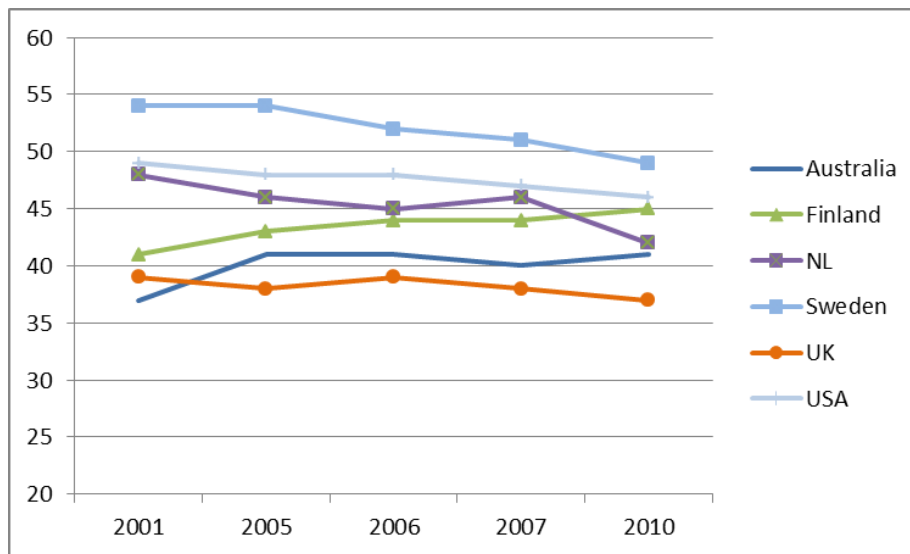
Source: OECD

Also important is the transformation of economies and the accompanying changing labour market demands. A good example provides the Californian economy. The Californian economy is continuing its long-term transition to one dominated by knowledge-based industries that require a workforce with specialized skills and advanced knowledge. Changing workplace needs are requiring increasing levels of education, technical skill, and other workplace skills.

2.3 Educational attainment

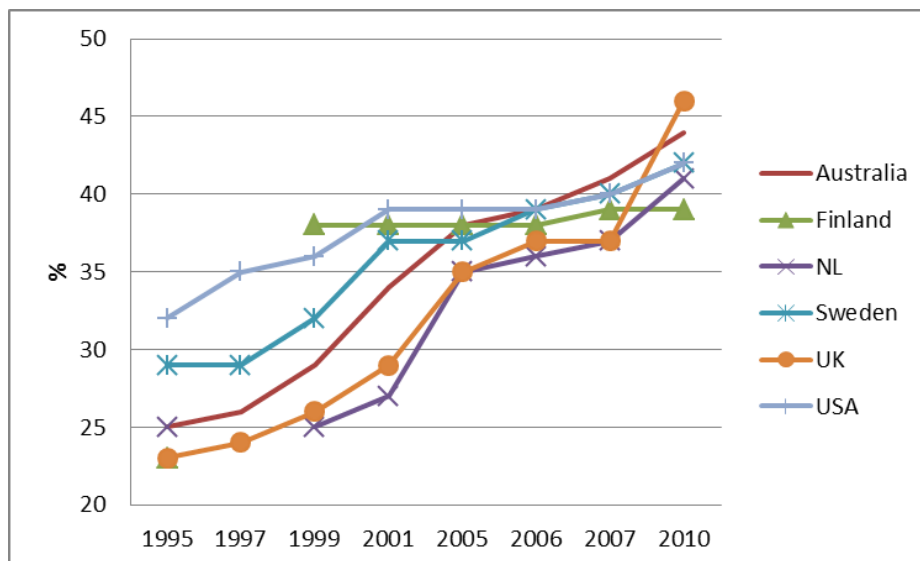
In addition to these developments there is a shift in focus from obtaining knowledge and skills to maintaining and updating skills and knowledge. Another argument used in the discussions regarding the need for continuing higher education is the rising level of educational attainment. There is no growth in the part of the population aged 25-64 with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education in most countries (except for Australia) and a significant growth of the part with tertiary education. If we focus on the youngest age-group (25-34 year olds) the picture is even more evident: there is a growing part of the population that has a tertiary education, which means that the potential demand for continuing higher education (updating knowledge and skills at the tertiary level) will continue to grow. The demand for upgrading skills (of those who have obtained upper secondary education has stabilised.

Figure 4: Educational attainment: upper secondary education; 25-34 year olds



Datasource: OECD, EaG

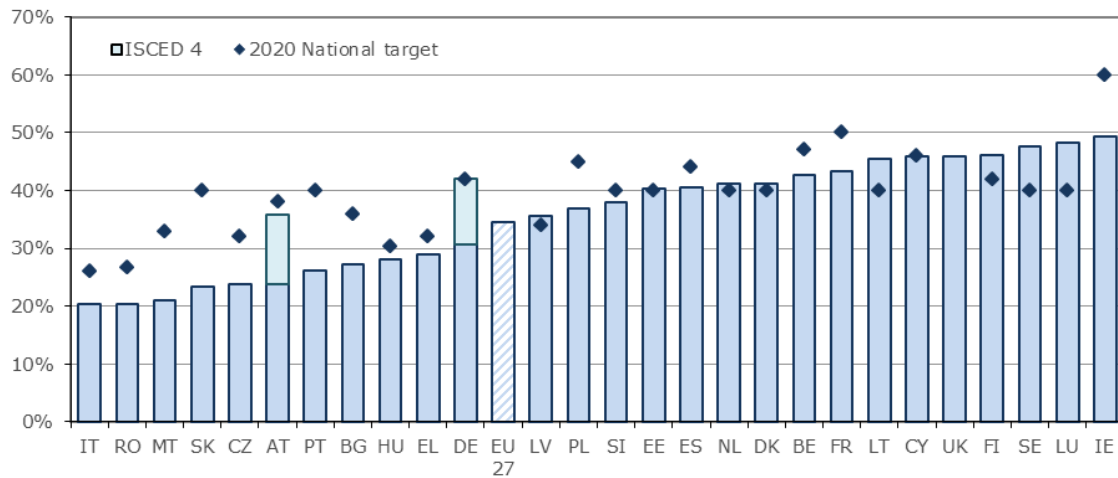
Figure 5: Educational attainment; tertiary education; 25-34 year olds



Datasource: OECD, EaG

The EC has formulated a 40% target for 2020. This refers to the educational attainment of the age group 30-34 year olds, tertiary education. This European target has triggered most member states (UK is the exception) to set national targets. The Dutch and Swedish targets are in line with the 40% European target.

Figure 6: EU targets regarding ISCED 4



Source: Eurostat (Labour Force Survey). Note: The lighter blue parts for Austria and Germany denotes inclusion of postsecondary attainment (ISCED 4 for DE and ISCED 4a for AT, both national data); this is the equivalent identified in the headline indicator definition. (ETMonitor 2012)

All these developments place new demands on higher education as they require flexible and effective education and training systems. The next theme outlines the provisions for continuing higher education in the different systems.

3 Open and flexible provisions of continuing higher education

There is overall a strong felt need to enhance the level of educational attainment of the labour force in which continuing education is supposed to play an important part. There is a variety of definitions, terms and data used to define and describe the field of continuing higher education and training and adult learning. This implies that it is almost impossible to use a strict definition that allows for a straightforward country comparison. The observations from the five higher education systems in this study illustrate for example that the educational provisions are not always limited to graduates as might be suggested by the term ‘continuing’ higher education. Some programmes are geared towards an enlargement of opportunities for workers to participate in higher education (preparation courses). Continuing education at the tertiary level is however not part of the mainstream activities of formal higher education systems, which has led to the evolution of various modes of delivery, even within national systems, to meet the emerging demand.

We distinguish three dimensions in the provision of continuing higher education: 1) the level and scope of the provision, 2) the mode of delivery, and 3) type of provider. Levels indicate the type of degree: sub-degree, bachelor, master, postgraduate or certificate). Scope refers to single courses or to a full degree programme. The second dimension, the mode of delivery, relates to the way the educational and training services are offered to the ‘student’. Here a number of distinctions can be found. To mention a few: full-time

versus part-time education, face-to-face versus distance education, or work-based versus school-based. Providers, the third dimension, can be public higher education institutions or private organisations. Based on these three dimensions we will describe the educational offerings in the five countries. Detailed descriptions of continuing higher education in the five countries can be found in the second volume of this study (“Continuing Higher Education, Part Two: Five Countries”).

3.1 Australia

In Australia continuing education is provided by a number of providers: universities, self-accrediting providers, non-self-accrediting providers, and the Open Australian University. Only Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), public and private ones, can issue Australian Qualification Framework qualifications in the framework of continuing education, vocational education training and higher education. All together these organisations offer a full range of continuing higher education provisions, that can lead to different qualifications: from diploma’s and certificates to masters and doctoral degrees. The qualifications are manifested in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) that sets out levels of educational achievements in the form of qualifications and attainments. In total the AQF identifies 14 qualifications, both for vocational education and training sector (VET – elsewhere also known as further education) and higher education sector. The AQF tries to combine the sectors, allowing for seamless transitions. In practice, this remains to be difficult to achieve. Since 2011 the AQF is compulsory.

In terms of continuing education, VET is important. The colleges of technical and further education (TAFE) are the leading providers of VET; they are funded by the state governments. Their courses are tailor-made to meet individual needs and can be taken full-time, part-time, through distance learning or online learning. In total, more than 1,200 nationally recognised qualifications are offered. A notable feature of VET are traineeships and apprenticeships, which are available to all age groups and can be taken part-time as well as full-time. The volume of VET is substantial: in 2011, nearly two million Australians were participating, which equals roughly 650,000 equivalent full-time students (NCVER, 2012) (compared to 860,000 equivalent full-time students in higher education).

Another notable VET-feature concerns the training packages that are developed together with industry and employer groups. Then Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) are engaged in this and endorsed by the National Quality Council. Training packages endorse a set of national standards and qualifications for a particular job that exist for nearly every sector in the economy. There are strongly ‘competence-based’ which is one of their major points of critique. TAFE institutions build their curriculum on these training packages. In total there are more than 70 training packages across Australia (examples “Business Services”, “Tourism”, “Metal and Engineering”, and Financial Services”). The AQF qualifications which can be obtained in the VET sector are: certificate I Advanced Diploma, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Statement of Attainment, and options for career development.

In Australia, there are about 5,000 RTOs. Some of them are public and include TAFE-institutions, secondary schools and colleges, universities and specialised institutions. The private RTOs offer a range of accredited and non-accredited courses for further education and training. They are a mixed bag.

The Open Universities Australia, offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses, mainly online, comprises seven leading Australian universities. In 2011, it had 167,000 enrolments. The OUA does not award degrees, but rather sells learning units online.

In Australia continuing higher education is also linked to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Continuing Professional Education (CPE) which refer to activities that systematically enhance the professional knowledge and personal skills for the advancements of a certain job. Many professions have CPD obligations. Acknowledging the variety across the professions, the bottom-line is that professionals need to obtain periodically points that can be acquired through different activities and that indicate the possession of (updated) skills.

3.2 California

The overall picture of continuing education in California is scattered. Many educational services for non-traditional students are offered by several providers. Public, not-for-profit and for-profit private institutions are offering a range of programmes and courses. These may contain degree, credit and non-credit programmes.

The main providers of continuing higher education are the institutions from the various subsystems of California higher education (University of California system, California State University system and the California Community College system as well as the Independent Colleges and Universities). Both the private and the public institutions offer a range of continuing education services. Generally speaking they offer online and off-campus credit degree programmes, professional development certificates, courses for personal enrichment and access to courses without university admission. At many institutions the Extended University is a separate unit offering these multiple continuing education services (including for instance an Open University). They serve a substantial number of students. In 2009/10, the State California University sector for instance had a gross enrolment of nearly 260,000 (in terms of FTE this means nearly 18,000 enrolments).

Apart from the institutions mentioned above there is the private postsecondary school sector. The enrol about 400,000 students, of which approximately 75% takes diploma or certificate based programmes. The nearly 1,500 approved private postsecondary schools typically cater to working adults who wish not to take the royal road (in terms of lengthy degree programmes of more traditional institutions).

Adult education, aged 16 years and older who are not enrolled in high school, attracts many students in the US (44% in the US in 2005). Most adults participate in work-related courses (27%). Higher education is not the main focus; it is primarily basic skills oriented.

Distance learning also attracts many students at undergraduate and graduate level education in the US. In 2007/08, about 20% of all US undergraduates took at least one

distance learning course and nearly 4% took an entire distance learning programme. Of the post-baccalaureate students 22% took at least one distance learning course and nearly 9% an entire programme.

Hybrid offerings – blending online learning with classroom instruction – is underdeveloped but is likely to grow in the coming years. California has a number of apprenticeships programmes that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training. The volume, type of participants and level of training are unknown.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is a very recent phenomenon that is booming in 2012. While scepticism remains by many, MOOCs are regarded as setting the stage for higher education in the future. Several organizations were established recently to offer learning through massive means.

There is a demand for and growth of lifelong learning programmes and institutions. California has 31 lifelong learning institutes. Important programmes are Elderhostel and the Osher programmes, some of them located at the well-known universities.

3.3 Finland

Adult education and training is an umbrella term covering different study opportunities at various levels, ranging from secondary schools to universities. More than 1.7 million Fins participate in different types of adult education each year. More than half of this number is made up of the working age population, and this figure is high in international terms. The aim is for the annual share of the working age population participating in education to reach 60 per cent by 2012. Providers of adult education can be divided into two main categories: the official education system and the liberal adult education system.

The official education system comprises 422 institutions, including 29 polytechnics and 20 universities. For adults the Finnish polytechnics offer polytechnic degrees, postgraduate master degrees, specialisation studies and open education. The degree programmes are offered along the same lines as for ‘young students’. The specialisation studies for adults are 30-60 ECTS credit courses. They are supplementing the traditional degrees and can be taken with some exceptions by persons with a university degree, a vocational post-secondary qualification or a vocational higher education degree. A specialisation study leads to a certificate from the polytechnic. ‘Open polytechnics’ offer the opportunity to follow individual study units (modules) which are part of the polytechnic curriculum. For these modules polytechnics charge tuition.

For adults, the universities have vocational continuing education and an open university. They have their own continuing education centres, including several affiliates outside the campus. Persons holding an academic degree are eligible for these vocational continuing education programmes. At the open university students can take various modules. After having collected 60 credits a student may decide to go for a degree programme. In offering open university courses the university closely cooperates with other educational institutions (educational centres, folk high schools

and summer universities). This network structure characterises the open universities in Finland.

The liberal adult education system offers courses in subjects related to citizenship skills and society and different crafts and subjects on a recreational basis. Liberal adult education does not lead to a qualification but the studies completed in liberal adult education may be taken into account in preparatory training for competence-based qualification and when making an individual plan for completing competence-based qualifications. Liberal adult education, comprising adult education centres, folk high schools and summer universities, offers non-formal studies, without qualification or occupation specific aims. Summer universities offer short-term courses, not degree programmes and are open to everyone regardless prior education. There are 20 summer universities, geographically spread over the country, and have every year nearly 62,000 students. Their offerings concern among other things open university modules, further vocational training, preparatory and extramural courses, stadium general lectures, and seminars. These summer universities work closely together with the universities, the polytechnics and other institutions of learning. Participants have to pay a fee (ranging from 70 to 600 euros); additional funding comes for the state and the municipalities.

3.4 Sweden

Sweden has a long tradition in adult education and lifelong learning, which is embedded in different levels of both formal and informal systems. *Folkbildning*, non-formal adult education, is mainly provided through folk high schools and study associations. While access is open for everybody, the main target group are adults with low levels of formal education.

At the basic and (upper) secondary school level one finds municipal adult education, education for adults with learning disabilities and Swedish tuition for immigrants. The universities and the institutes of higher education also offer adult education and professional development programmes. These institutions have special units for continuing education (such as an office of lifelong learning, commissioned education or professional services). For example, *Lund University Commissioned Education* offers special educational programmes, ranging from one-week short courses to year-long masters programmes in different fields. Moreover it organises one-day seminars as well as a wide range of web-based courses (more than 250 courses in English annually). A key element in Karlstad University's strategic plan, as another example, is to provide opportunities for lifelong learning to employees of companies and governmental organisations. For this purpose it established *Karlstad University Professional Services*, a kind of transfer office that should facilitate the interaction between the university and society.

Higher vocational education refers to post-secondary, non-tertiary school education, designed to provide training to meet labour market demand for specialist know-how. Tailor-made courses are developed in consultation with employers. In 2010, 43,000 persons took up a vocational higher education programme. These programmes are very

competitive: 3.8 applicants competed for one place. Next, there are advanced vocational education programmes, another type of post-upper secondary vocational training, which are supposed to be a joint cooperation by various educational providers and the workplace. One third of the learning that usually takes about two years is work-based. In 2011, students following these courses represented about 10% of the tertiary students. Finally, there are smaller training programmes for adults: supplementary education, through folk high schools, and through joint training boards (apprenticeship-like programmes).

Vocational training also is organised by private providers, whereas the volume of the services provided by the private sector is not known. There is also a state-owned company – Lernia – that on behalf of the municipalities across Sweden offers among other things adult education with a vocational focus.

Online education, distance learning and e-learning are popular. In 2011, nearly 90,000 students were enrolled in a distance learning course. A vast majority (78%) were taking distance courses only; the others combined it with on-campus courses. The distance learners represent almost one fifth of all higher education students; most of them are part-timers. A larger proportion of the distance learners belong to the older age groups. Not only the universities and colleges are engaged in distance and e-learning. The online network is supported by learning centres set up by local municipalities. In 2009, about 200 learning centres organised academic, vocational and pre-academic courses, in consultation and cooperation with universities, labour exchange offices, and companies.

3.5 United Kingdom

In England the continuing higher education focus is on formal education. As it has a long history, there is a wide range of modes of delivery. Part-time education and sandwich courses are a traditional mode as are modular structures. Slightly less than half of postgraduate students are enrolled in part-time education; for undergraduates this is more than a quarter. In the last decade there has been a slow but consistent decrease in the proportion of UK part-timers. Also the number of students taking sandwich courses, most of them provided by a small cluster of universities, are declining; 70% of the sandwich courses are provided by just twenty institutions.

Foundation degrees, the equivalent of the first two years of an honours degree, can be studied part-time as well full-time. It consists of an academic study integrated with relevant work-based learning. HNDs and HNCs are courses generally related to particular career areas. These courses, validated by the Edexcel Foundation and recognised as valuable qualifications by industry, usually mean a full-time study over two years, or longer if they are taken part-time in include work experience. Some universities and colleges offer two-year full-time DipHE courses. They are usually the equivalent to the first two years of a degree course. While successful, foundation degrees, HNDs, HNCs and DipHE are only a small part of higher education provision of universities (between 15% and 20%).

Another interesting mode of delivery concerns the open education resources (OER), in which the OpenLearn website plays an important role. Also for universities this is becoming a real issue. Recently some universities mentioned that they will join the Open University (FutureLearn) to launch free, non-credit bearing internet courses. These courses are modelled on the idea of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs – see also California).

Finally to be mentioned here are the CPDs and higher apprenticeships. Driven by the associations of professions (such as psychiatrists) courses and services are offered (by associations of professions, private companies as well as regular universities that focus on professionals who want to upgrade and update their skills and competences. Encouraged by the 2011 Higher Apprenticeship Fund partnerships (in which organisations like employers, training providers and awarding organisations who want to develop a new framework participate) have been given funding to develop and implement frameworks in a number of occupational areas.

Among the main providers are the universities, the colleges for further education, the lifelong learning networks, the Open University and a recently established strategic alliance of the Open University and the Workers' Education Association. The supply of educational offerings of private companies is unknown to us; they are likely to be most active in the area of Continuing Professional Development (CDP) courses.

The universities are the main providers of degree-oriented programmes. They offer part-time and sandwich courses as well as programmes leading to a foundation degree, higher national diplomas (HND) and higher national certificates (HNC), and diplomas of higher education (dipHE). Moreover, universities are developing a more open attitude towards regional demands, are engaging in community learning and are developing CDP courses.

The approximately 400 FE colleges, providing a rich mix of academic and vocational education, offer an array of courses and programmes for in total about 33% of all higher education students. Two-thirds of the 400 colleges offer foundation degrees. Half of all the foundation degree students are taught at these colleges. The colleges also deliver most of the HNCs (81%) and HNDs (59%)

The Open University UK, having 250,000 students (in 2010), is renowned for its flexible approach to the delivery of learning opportunities, especially for non-traditional students. The mode of delivery is (mainly) online distance learning. The recently established alliance with the WEA aims to further remove barriers for adult education by providing practical training and freely available learning resources.

The Lifelong learning networks are regional partnerships of universities and colleges. They intend to facilitate progression from vocational courses in higher education through curriculum development and guidance to students.

4 The main policy actors and the policy instruments at play

4.1 Australia

In Australia the policy area with respect to continuing education is fragmented. The main actors are the federal government departments, the state government departments, governmental agencies, public providers (universities, TAFE), community providers (adult education, community learning, a wide range of associations including the WEA and Adult Education Centers), private providers (the private institutions are united in the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET)), and labor market organizations (employers and industry articulate their needs in the form of ‘training packages’ (see previous theme)).

One of the consequences of being a federal state is that state policies vary. Where the federal government bears responsibility for higher education, state departments are responsible for VET. The latter means that each state provides, at least to some extent, different opportunities for the Australians to participate in continuing education. The availability and funding of training depends in which state one lives.

At a strategic level, the Australian Government has recognized that there is a need to improve working aged Australians’ skills and knowledge to sustain Australia’s economic growth and social wellbeing through higher qualification pathways. To address this, various higher qualification targets have been set for the VET and HE sectors.

With respect to government regulation and steering we mention three aspects: taking initiatives, quality assurance and funding. In recent years, the national government (department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education) has taken several initiatives to establish networks (steering through networks) and to enhance coherence and transparency. Examples are:

- Australia’s National Training system: This system *brings together different stakeholders* in VET and aims to develop skills among the population which are responsive to the local needs; in 2008, the ‘National agreement for skills and workforce development’⁵ was endorsed with the overall goal to improve quality and *transparency*. In the beginning of 2012 it was agreed to revise the national agreement and move towards a more *demand-driven and client-focused system*;
- Industry Training Strategies Programme (ITSP): it is funded under the Australian Apprenticeship Workforce Skills Development component of the national VET support programme and is intended to provide a strategic response to industry-based VET and funds projects related to industry-based Apprenticeship implementation models;
- National Advisory for Tertiary Education Skills and Employment (NATESE): it provides *independent policy advice* to key government committees like the

⁵ To read more about the National agreement, see here; the effects of the implementation of the agreement might vary across the states/territories because the training systems are run differently per state:

http://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/20081129_skills_workforce_development_fact_sheet.pdf

Council of Australian Governments (COAG), SCOTESE, National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC), the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC), the National VET Equity Advisory Council (NVEAC) and the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG).

- Productive Ageing through Community Education (PAAtCE): funding is made available for training of senior Australians
- Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills & Employment (SCOTESE), established in 2011, has the purpose to ensure that Australia's current and future workforce needs are met through increased participation, educational attainment, skills development and skills use to achieve greater productivity. SCOTESE released in Autumn 2012 the 'National Foundation Skills Strategy for adults'. The strategy should serve as a *policy direction* for the state/jurisdictions and outlines three principle areas: collaboration and coordination, equitable access to, and increased participation in, learning, and a stronger research base in order to have evidence for improving outcomes for learners.
- Unique Student Identifier (USI): in 2014 a new national policy instrument will be implemented with the intention to make the VET sector more *transparent*. The USI will be launched enabling students to access their VET achievements in a coherent way and also include their recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer. This will in turn also be beneficial for training organisations, the government and employers. The instrument is considered to serve as a building block for a range of reforms of the VET system.
- In an attempt to create more coherence and transparency, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) published its 'national career development strategy', in which the importance of lifelong learning was stressed for career development and mobility. It concerns among other things a framework to guide efforts and access to national career information.

An important government instrument to regulate continuing education is the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and quality assurance mechanisms. The AQF is referenced in new national legislation setting out the standards and regulatory arrangements for higher education and for vocational education and training. Qualification developers must adhere to these standards. The new national regulators, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) for the higher education sector, and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) for the vocational education and training sector, assess compliance against the qualification standards as part of the course accreditation process. 14 qualification types are identified, (ranging from secondary education to vocational education and to the tertiary education sector) connected to one of the 10 levels, with the exception of secondary certificate of education. The qualifications related to the VET are advanced diploma, diploma, certificate I, II, III and IV, graduate certificate and graduate diploma. The higher education qualifications include the following: diploma, advanced diploma, associate

degree, bachelor degree, bachelor honours degree, graduate certificate (typically 1-2 years)⁶, graduate diploma (typically 1-2 years), masters degree⁷ and doctoral degree (typically 3-4 years). Master degrees and professional doctoral degrees can be done by coursework as well. **Error! Reference source not found.** describes both, the qualification levels in the vocational and training sector and the higher education sector/post-graduate sector. The qualifications are defined in terms of particular knowledge, skills (i.e.: cognitive and creative, technical, communication, oral, interpersonal) and the application of knowledge and skills. The AQF qualifications are issued by RTOs and higher education institutions.

Additionally, there are Statements of Attainment that document learning achievements and identify competency units from training packages or accredited courses.

In addition to the funding attached to the initiatives mentioned above the Australian government has systems in place to financially support student in continuing education. there are loan programmes such as FEE-HELP (for higher education) and VET FEE-HELP. The latter, not available for certificate courses, support student in paying the tuition fees. In 2012, the VET scheme was implemented nationwide and reduced (to some extent) financial barriers implying that more student could enrol to take diplomas or advanced qualifications.

The Australian government also is engaged financially in apprenticeships (Knight, 2011). The costs of apprenticeships are shared among employers, apprentices and governments (federal and state). Governments meet the management costs of the system, cover most of the cost of the off-the-job training, pay a range of incentives to employers (and in some cases personal benefit payments to apprentices and trainees), provide tax exemptions to employers, and subsidies or exemptions to employees. According to Knight (2011, p. 52), Australia is the only country that pays government incentives and subsidies on a large scale to the employers of apprentices and trainees to offset wage costs. An important aspect of government financial support is the provisions available for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.2 California

With respect to higher education the state plays a modest role. It sets the broader framework (the California Master Plan) and licenses the institutions. It provides funding and aims to impact higher education through labor market policies. The institutions however are largely autonomous with respect to the intake of students and the services they offer. Self-governance is the most appropriate term to characterize the higher education policy area. It means that state authority is limited and oversight

⁶ Volume of learning is expressed in equivalent full time years

⁷ There are three main forms of Masters degree qualification type:

- Masters Degree (research) (typically 1-2 years)
- Masters Degree (coursework) (typically 1-2 years)
- Masters Degree (extended) (typically 3-4 years)

and policymaking is fragmented. Arguably, California has no state-level capacity to lead a coherent, long-term strategy in the area of continuing education to ensure the future competitiveness of the economy.

The formal public higher education sectors (UC, CSU and CCC) certainly are engaged in continuing education but it is not clear to what extent they really are connected to the needs of the economy and society. An expert (personal communication) speaks of 'random acts of excellence'; many university initiatives regarding continuing education are peripheral to what they feel is their main mission. Creating a diversified funding base, or generating alternative revenue sources, is perhaps more important than developing alternative modes of delivery to serve the economy and society. The aim of finding new sources of income through continuing education could well be to cross subsidize traditional tasks in order to maintain or move up ranking positions (which are not based on continuing education performance).

Apart from the state, its agencies and boards and the universities, there are many interest groups, accreditation organizations and professional associations in the policy arena. There is a wide array of largely ad hoc private, voluntary and regional initiatives aimed at meeting the needs of the adult population. Some of these interest groups include companies and workforce agencies which advocate a stronger link between education and the workforce (e.g. the California Edge Campaign). It is hard to find evidence on the importance and roles of employers regarding continuing education. Employers seem to find it important to train and update skills and knowledge of their workers, but their investments mainly concern internal training. Professional relationships with universities are modest. Continuing education students bear most of the costs for their training and education, though many employers reimburse costs (e.g. for tuition). Because there is clear evidence about the private rates of return ("education pays off"), it seems likely that students are willing to pay for continuing education activities.

While state-level capacity appears to be limited, there is a number of policy instruments worth mentioning. Firstly, there is state regulation, combined with requirements from professional associations, with respect to renewing of licenses for practicing a profession. California Departments through their Boards have set requirements for instance to protect consumers. Secondly, there are financial incentives such as grants and scholarships, but their impact (in terms of volume) on continuing education seems small. Another financial incentive is tax benefits. Under certain conditions one can apply for a lifelong learning credit (up to \$2,000 tax reduction). Thirdly, there are tools to provide information about online courses and programmes (California Virtual Campus). Fourthly, there is a complex, sophisticated system of accreditation, non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programmes, to safeguard and demonstrate the value of courses and programmes. Accreditation is voluntary and does not provide automatic acceptance by an institution of credit earned at another institution, nor does it give assurance of acceptance of graduates by employers.

4.3 Finland

In Finland, adult education can be divided into three components: self-motivated studies, labour market training and in-service training. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy bears the responsibility for labour market training. In-service training is the responsibility of companies that have to take into account several legally-imposed conditions. Apprenticeship training constitutes a main element in Finnish continuing education. Labour market training also is provided by means of apprenticeship training. The Ministry of Education and Culture plays a strong role in continuing higher education ('self-motivated studies') through legislation, funding and promotion to increase the competitiveness of the Finnish economy and society.

A large scale reform of adult education in 2007 stressed the need for stronger adult education better information, instruction and counseling services, better training opportunities for the less active groups and better subsidy systems for adult learning.

Lifelong learning, the principle that everyone gets opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in different learning environments throughout their lifespan, is well integrated in educational and labour market policies. This becomes evident in Finland's University Act (558/2009) where section 2 stipulates that universities (as well as polytechnics) must promote lifelong learning; it is legally required to offer lifelong learning:

“The mission of the universities is to promote free research and academic and artistic education, to provide higher education based on research, and to educate students to serve their country and humanity. *In carrying out their mission, the universities must promote lifelong learning, interact with the surrounding society and promote the impact of research findings and artistic activities on society.*” (University Act 558/2009; Section 2)

At the Ministry of Education and Culture, the division for Adult Education and Training of the Department for Education and Science Policy is responsible for legislation, policy development, planning, coordination and evaluation of adult education and lifelong learning, including issues of funding, certification and qualifications. The Ministry is assisted by at least two expert bodies: the Council of Lifelong Learning, consisting of representatives of different interest groups, and the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE). FNBE is among other things responsible for the national qualification requirements for vocational education and training and competence-based qualifications.

Next to the government and public and private providers⁸ also employers are active with respect to continuing education, more specifically in in-service training, apprenticeships programmes and through funding staff participating in formal lifelong learning. Part of these costs are tax-deductible. Companies with more than 20

⁸ In Finland there are about a thousand private commercial training organisations. They are not publicly funded and not degree-awarding.

employers must annually develop individual plans that include training targets. In-service is paid for by the individual participant and/or the employer.

The ministries of Education and Culture and of Labour negotiate with the social partners about training needs. For this purpose vocational training committees, comprised of representatives of the government, social partners and universities, have been set up at branch level to monitor training needs. The social partners also participate in other national committees (such as the Advisory Board of Educational Cooperation, Adult Education Council, Council for Labour and Training Affairs, National Education and Training Committees).

An important instrument for the government to steer continuing education (indirectly) is through qualification structures and quality assurance.

Based on the European Qualifications Framework, the Finnish National Board of Education as the National Coordination Point and appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, is preparing the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning in Finland. It is intended that the National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning will be adopted from the start of 2013. A framework covering the whole system of education will improve the clarity and effectiveness of the Finnish qualifications system, increase the national and international transparency and comparability of qualifications, and promote national and international mobility.

The framework describes the learning outcomes of qualifications, syllabi and other extensive competence entities as knowledge, skills and competences, and by defining their interrelations. The competence-based description of qualifications is designed to support lifelong learning, improve employment prospects, increase mobility, and bridge the gap between education and the world of work.

In the proposal, Finnish qualifications are placed at the following levels of competence of the National Qualifications Framework:

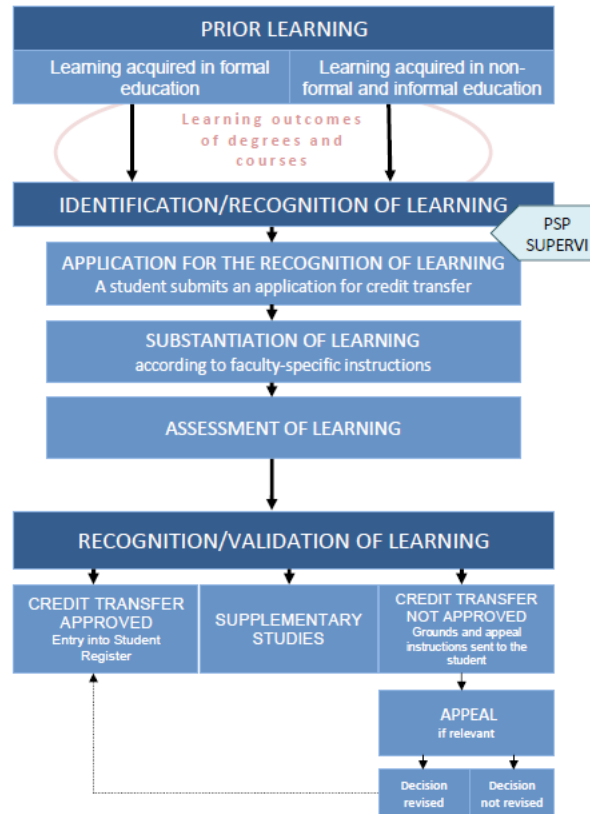
- learning outcomes produced by completion of the basic education syllabus at level 3
- The Matriculation Examination and completion of the upper secondary school syllabus at level 4
- Vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications at level 4
- Specialist vocational qualifications at level 5
- University and polytechnic Bachelor's degrees at level 6
- University and polytechnic Master's degrees at level 7
- Scientific, artistic and professional postgraduate degrees from universities, e.g. Licentiate and Doctoral degrees at level 8

An example of indirect governmental steering via qualification structures can be found in the vocational education and training for adults, which is based at large on the system of competence-based qualifications. This system is intended to enable working-age adults to gain qualifications without necessarily attending formal training. It is possible to take competence-based vocational qualifications, further vocational

qualifications and special vocational qualifications, or only parts of them, through the competence test system that demonstrate the required competences. These competence tests are generally intended for adults with working life experience. Vocational skills are demonstrated through competence tests, regardless of whether the skills have been acquired through work experience, studies or other activities. The professional skills for each qualifications are confirmed by the Finnish National Board of Education: The Finnish National Board of Education appoints a qualification committee for each competence-based qualification; these committees are made up of representatives of employees, employers and teachers of the field; and these committees are in charge of arranging and monitoring competence tests.

The significance of the recognition and validation of prior learning has been particularly highlighted as a component in the promotion of life-long learning. The Committee on lifelong learning in universities, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, highlighted the impact of structural change in society on the career paths and education needs of individuals. Competences acquired through work should be more widely recognized as components of studies and degrees. Institutions of higher education should provide opportunities for graduates to complete non-degree studies and to consider what kind of recognition, validation practices and opportunities to update acquired competences could be offered to highly educated, employed people. For the universities, among others, this means that they have to reconsider their policies and procedures on credit transfers. As an example, in the figure below the process of recognizing and validating prior learning at the University of Helsinki is presented.

Figure 7: The process of recognising and validating prior learning at the University of Helsinki



Funding obviously is another main tool for governmental steering. Apart from fiscal measures for employers, the government provides a general higher education budget for the higher education institutions who must, according to the national act, engage in lifelong learning. Degree education at universities and polytechnics is totally publicly funded. Training leading to further and specialist qualifications are publicly funded but moderate fees may be charged. Liberal adult education is financed by the government (about 50%), student fees and the maintaining organisations.

Next, the government indirectly steers by the purse. That is to say that the government funds, together with the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Education Fund. This Education Fund provides financial support for mature students. It is not administered by the government but by the social partners. The fund supports employees' vocational studies by granting them financial assistance (Adult Education Allowance) and to support the development of the vocational qualification system by granting scholarships for competence-based qualifications (Scholarship for Qualified Employee). The Fund also provides information and advice on benefits and makes proposals for the development of legislation within its field. In 2012, the Education Fund paid out a total of EUR 102.9 million in benefits, of which adult education allowances accounted for EUR 94.7 million and scholarships for qualified employees for

EUR 8.3 million. In 2012, allowance was granted to 13,456 students and the scholarship to 23,179 people.

Finally in 2007, a voucher system was introduced for disadvantaged liberal adult education participants to compensate for fees (disadvantaged refers to immigrants, persons with poor educational backgrounds, unemployed, etc.).

4.4 Sweden

Lifelong learning and adult education have a long tradition in Sweden. It is embedded in society and perhaps for that reason the Swedish government does not have very specific policies and strategies in this area (Research voor Beleid, 2010). They perceive their educational system as flexible enough to offer sufficient opportunities to adults to upgrade and upscale their skills. Adult education and continuing professional development are not just said to promote economic development; of equal importance is citizen participation in society.

Having said this, the establishment of forms for cooperation between different political spheres of activity is regarded as a necessary prerequisite for the development of a support infrastructure for adult learning and lifelong learning in general. Next to industry and the public and private providers of continuing education, the central and local government are important stakeholders in terms of shaping the learning opportunities of the individual. Education activities of the governments range from guidance, outreach activities, validation or prior knowledge and accessibility to financial study support.

At the national level there is a wide range of agencies in the field of continuing education such as:

- the Swedish National Agency for Education is the central administrative authority for the public school system, publicly organised preschooling, school-age childcare and for adult education;
- the Swedish National Council for Adult Education is responsible for distributing the state grants and monitoring the activities of popular and liberal adult education.
- the Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education is in charge of all matters concerning higher vocational education (HVE) throughout the country; and
- Swedish Higher Education Authority (the former National Agency for Higher Education) is responsible for evaluating subject areas (main fields of study) and study programmes as well as granting degree awarding powers.

Through its agencies the Swedish government provides several guidance and counselling labour market services. The Public Employment Service for instance offers services such as the job banks, information of occupations and training programmes. It also offers an online education and career guidance portal that provides information about 200 occupations (including employment prospects). The Education Act of 2010

also encourages municipalities to reach out to those who are entitled to receive basic adult education.

An applicant for higher education may be considered qualified even though he or she does not meet the formal entry requirements. This may be the case if the applicant's acquired knowledge and experience enables the university or university college to consider that he or she has the potential to cope with the course or programme. The *higher education institution* can then decide that the applicant meets the entry requirements through prior learning.

Sweden has generous funding schemes for those individuals that would like to take advantage of continued education offers. Students making use of higher (vocational) education opportunities are entitled to study support regardless of the study programme in which they are enrolled. Study support can be provided for full- or part-time studies; if students work alongside their studies, they may earn a limited amount without having their study support being reduced. Study support usually is a combination of a study loan and a grant being given for the period of study (usually 40 weeks per academic year). 54 years is the upper age limit for students to receive financial aid.

The sum paid as a study grant is equal for all and is adjusted annually according to the general development of prices in society. The study grant constitutes approximately one-third of the total amount of study support and is tax-free and pensionable. Students with children are entitled to an additional grant. More than two-thirds of all students choose to take out a study loan which makes out about two-thirds of the total amount of study support. Some students receive further supplementary loans and loans for additional costs in connection with their studies. Repayment of study loans starts at the beginning of the year following the completion of studies and normally continues for 25 years. Interest is immediately added to the debt. The interest rate is advantageous in comparison to other interest on loans and takes account of deduction rules in the tax system. The repayment system furthermore contains safety clauses so that an individual's ability to pay can be taken into consideration.⁹

Finally, since 1975 employers are entitled to take unpaid study leave. After this leave, employers must be hired again for the same job and same salary, unless there has been a reorganization of work in that period. The latter means in practice a serious risk for employers, particularly when they take a rather long study leave.

4.5 United Kingdom

The government has an active role in the developments of continuing (higher) education. In recent years, its role and its key actor have changed. Instead of the Department of Education, currently the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is the leading department and this department is developing a new strand of

⁹ See Also <http://www.government.se/sb/d/2098/a/69849>. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on November 30, 2012.

skills development policies. Nowadays the government has a strong drive towards empowering the providers and demand (students and workers), instead of coordinating continuing education services itself. It attempts to introduce more market characteristics into the delivery of HE.

In essence, the government believes that the present 'quasi market' in HE is not working for several reasons: (a) there is insufficient competition based on price and (b) there is inadequate information for applicants to make informed choices. Further, governments need to intervene in HE markets because (a) private credit markets are unwilling to lend owing to uncertainties about future behaviour (b) HE is a public good and provides wider benefits to society that a purely private market would not take into account and (c) as HE provides significant individual benefit it is important these benefits are shared across society – arguments related to equity.

There is a number of government-related agencies at work in the field of continuing education:

- the Skills Funding Agency, responsible for the implementation of Skills Investment Statement that is set by the Department of BIS in the area of further education and skills training.
- The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), funded among other things the Lifelong Learning Network programme between 2004 and 2012.
- The National Apprenticeship Service supports, funds and co-ordinates the delivery of apprenticeships throughout England. It is supposed to contribute to the growth of apprenticeships in England.
- Skills CFA promotes skills and qualifications in the workplace. They develop standards, apprenticeships and training programmes across the UK.
- The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulations (Ofqual) sets and monitor standards and rules that organizations need to meet when they design. Deliver and award regulated qualifications.
- The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is an independent agency that reports directly to Parliament.
- The Learning and Skills Improvement Service provides resources and support for the day-to-day work in the learning and skills sector
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, a non-governmental membership organization whose members range from universities, colleges and local authorities to the BBC, the National Federation of Women's Institutes, the Trades Union Congress and the Ministry of Defense.

In recent years the government perspective on continuing education has shifted. Generally speaking, continuing education is supposed to become more customer-driven. Therefore, transparency and information systems are becoming more important. Two major initiatives in this respect are the establishment of the:

- National Career Service: supported by qualified career advisers, this service provides information, advice and guidance to make decisions about learning, training and work opportunities;

- Lifelong Learning Accounts: provides tailor-made information and advice on skills, careers and financial support. Individuals can open an account to share knowledge and experiences, using social media devices.

In this respect, the government has taken various measures in which public funds are provided either directly to business to enhance skills development or through other intermediary organisations (such as the Higher Apprenticeship Fund).

The government (Department of BIS) has taken a number of measures to reconfigure the system, aiming to reduce the administrative burden as well as entry levels for new providers. This means that they abolished, merged, ceased funding or scaled back the number of governmental agencies in the field. Moreover, they tried to simplify systems and structures (deregulation).

Obviously the government also steers continuing education through legislation. Important new acts are the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009) and the Education Act (2011). They mark the intention of a government stepping back, to develop a level playing field and to enhance competition among providers. One of the barriers to be removed is the tight student number control by the government (through HEFCE).

Next, the field of continuing education is regulated through qualification and quality assurance measures. Ofsted, a national agency, has introduced a new inspection framework for colleges of further education, work-based learning providers and adult and community learning. Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) has been set up to develop new professional teaching standards for the whole further education sector.

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is a new tool of recognising achievement through credit awarding of units and qualifications. QCF qualifications are designed with the assistance of employers, so learners know that skills are taught employers want. QCF has a modular approach in awarding three types of qualifications: Award (1-12 credits), Certificate (13-36 credits) and Diploma (over 37 credits).

Apprenticeship frameworks in England are described in the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE). These frameworks define the requirements of an apprenticeship programme, including the key skill targets, qualifications needed, job roles, entry routes, study length and career paths.

The Personal Learner Record is a free service to verified participation and achievement records of individual learners from when they were at school, college or a recognised further education training provider from 14+ years. It allows individual learners access to their past and current achievement records. It can share records with the school, college, further education training provider, university or employer; where the individual is making an application to further their education, training and employment. It can also allow an individual learner to share their PLR with a Careers Advisor when taking advice on what to do in future. Schools, colleges, further education training providers and universities staff can use the PLR to directly access

records for individuals making applications or studying at their organisations. These organisations will inform individuals where they plan to access their records usually during an application process. Organisations typically use the PLR to verify learners' qualifications because it's quicker and easier than reviewing and checking certificates, so speeds up the application process. They can quickly build up a picture of an individual's achievement to give the best next-step education or careers advice and/or ensure the individual receives all the public funding to which they are entitled. The PLR enables to plan an individual's future vocational training within the complicated structures of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The government also steers via financial measures. There is the competition-based Higher Apprenticeship Fund that aims to enhance the number of apprenticeships on a structural base. Via two rounds of bidding, over 2,300 new apprenticeships are established in two years' time. For both employers and individual learners this measure looks promising. The National Apprenticeship Service searches for opportunities to better connect this measure to the SASE and the Higher Apprenticeships Frameworks.

There is also a new National Scholarship Programme, introduced in 2012/13 that is meant to financially support some of the least well-off young people and well as adults to enter higher education.

The Employer Ownership of Skills pilot is a competitive fund open to employers to invest in their current and future workforce in England. Employers are invited to develop proposals that raise skills, create jobs, and drive enterprise and economic growth. Government will invest in projects in which employers are also prepared to commit their own funds in order to make better use of our combined resources.

Another channel for providing public funds for skills development to business is through the Growth and Innovation Funds. The programme supports business that (may) contribute to the development of skills of their employees, like the Best Market Solutions initiative and the National Skills Academies. These NSAs are employer-led organisations with a leading role in developing the infrastructure needed to deliver specialist skills for key sectors and sub-sectors of the economy.

Further Education (at 4+ level) will not be funded anymore. Students will be given the opportunity to take up loans that will pay the fees and cost of living. Starting in the 2013/14 academic year, learners 24 years and older can get government loans for the tuition of FE courses at A level equivalent or higher, including apprenticeships.

Finally we mention the Professional and Career Development Loans: bank loans to pay for courses and training that help with a person's career or to find a job. An individual may be able to borrow between £300 and £10,000. Loans are usually offered at a reduced interest rate and the government pays interest while the individual is

studying. To apply an individual must: be 18 years or over; have been living in the UK for at least 3 years before the course starts; plan to work in the UK, European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) after the course.

5 Conclusions

This explorative study shows how diverse and complex the organisation of learning activities at the tertiary level for workers is. There are numerous opportunities to upgrade or maintain skills and knowledge, be it for personal or professional development. The number of contributing organisations, from the (higher) education and the 'labour market' field, is enormous. They range from federal to local authorities, from private for-profit to public providers, from public agencies to interest groups. All together they have established complex policy networks, that are engaged in different ways in offering continuing educational and training services.

The importance of continuing education is underlined continuously. Statements from government as well as from other stakeholders leave no doubt that their societies and economies cannot do without a fully-fledged supply of continuing education. Demographic developments and future needs of knowledge societies require to fully makes use the potential at hand. Upgrading and upscaling skills and knowledge is essential to build and maintain human capital for a viable society (where everyone can participate without being side-lined) and high-quality workforce to serve the economy. From political rhetoric to reality is however a long way. It is clear that many workers find their way to take continuing education courses and programmes in one way or another, but the overall impression is that more needs to be done.

To condense the information we presented in the 'five country report' (separate document) we have developed two tables; one dealing with the providers and modes of delivery and one with the main actors and instruments at play. These tables provide only a rough overview. With respect to continuing higher education the tables do not do justice to the full richness in the five countries. They are meant to highlight for instance the variety of providers and modes of delivery. For more detailed information the report should be read. Below we summarise general findings an observations that we consider to be important for further discussion. They may trigger future discussions on continuing education, or some particular aspects of it. These two tables are preceded by a tentative assessment of the impact national contacts may have on the urgency of the debates on continuing education.

5.1 Impact of context on need for continuing education

The demographic context may have an impact on the need for expanding continuing higher education. If the size of the traditional entry cohorts is still rising, the need for continuing education is less than in those countries where the traditional entry cohorts are shrinking. In those countries the updating of knowledge and skills of the workforce depends more on upgrading (through continuing education. Based on these

assumptions, the situation in the Netherlands and California call most for an expansion of continuing higher education. In Australia, the growth of the traditional cohort makes the society less dependent on continuing education for bringing in new knowledge and skills. The situation in UK and Sweden is mixed as in both countries life births have increased over the last decade, but only after a strong decline in the decade before. In Finland the demographic situation is relatively stable.

One of the major drivers of the debates on continuing education is the importance of a high level trained and educated workforce for economic growth. Almost all countries experience an economic crisis. GDP (per capita) has fallen in most countries in the period 2007-2009. Only Australia shows a continuous growth (although it also slackened in the mid 00s). What is interesting to see is that recovery in some countries (Finland and Sweden) has been much stronger than in other countries (UK, the Netherlands and Australia). The influence this may have on continuing education is ambiguous. On the one hand, in countries with a slow recovery more knowledge and skills are needed to push economic growth back up again. On the other hand, slow growth limits the opportunities private sector and industry have to invest in continuing education.

Another aspect of the economic context is the level of unemployment. The basic assumption here is that if unemployment rates are low, there is no strong need felt for participation in continuing higher education. If unemployment levels are high, it is crucial to upgrade the level of educational attainment of the workforce. In addition to that, graduates are most likely to continue their study to avoid unemployment. In all countries, unemployment rates grew since 2008. In a number of countries this growth has turned into a decline a few years later (USA, Finland, and Sweden) and in some countries (the Netherlands, Australia and the UK) the growth has not (yet) turned into a decline. The Netherlands and the UK are most vulnerable in this context and the situation there calls strongest for continuing education there.

The third aspect of the context is educational attainment of the (younger part of) population. The assumption is that people who have only upper secondary education will articulate a demand for continuing education to upgrade their skills and knowledge to the tertiary level. People who have a tertiary education degree will need more updating and maintenance activities. Based on data on the educational attainment of the 25-34-years olds, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland will need relatively much upgrading and the other countries more updating, although the balance is shifting towards updating.

Given the observation that the continuing higher education field is complex, which makes it tricky to link specific context characteristics to specific needs for continuing education, we draw some tentative conclusions. In the Netherlands the push towards stimulation of continuing education will be relatively strong. The policy urgency is probably the least in Australia. For the USA, Sweden and Finland, the context factors described here do call for stimulation of continuing education (but not as strong as in the Netherlands and the UK).

Table 1: Impact of context on need for continuing higher education

	Demographics	Economy		Educational attainment	
		growth	unemployment	updating	upgrading
Australia	+	+/-	-	-	+
UK	+/-	-	-	-	+
Sweden	+/-	+/-	+/-	+	-
Finland	0/-	+/-	+/-	+	-
California/USA	-	+/-	+/-		
NL	--	-	-	+	-

+ *no impact on need for continuing higher education*

+/- *weak impact on need for more continuing higher education*

0/- *some impact on need for more continuing higher education*

- *clear impact on need for more continuing higher education*

-- *strong impact on need for more continuing higher education*

5.2 Provision

In every country the ‘regular’ higher education providers such as universities and colleges, both the public and private ones, are engaged in various modes of delivering educational services to workers. Almost everywhere workers or adult learners have the opportunity to follow regular degree programmes at these institutions. Universities and colleges also provide special offerings (modular courses, summer schools) for more targeted audiences (who for instance can follow courses in the evenings or weekends). In several countries universities and colleges have established special units for continuing education. The Extended Universities in California are a good example for this. In a number of countries, alternative modes of delivery (part-time, distance learning, sandwich courses, open universities) are more or less naturally extension or complementary parts of the traditional teaching offerings. The modes of delivery training and educational services for workers also display an enormous variety. From traditional degrees to single units, offered face-to-face, online, or in blended versions. Blended learning not just refers to the combination of on-campus and distance learning, but also to combinations of work and learning. The latter is clearly visible in apprenticeships programmes. The most eye-catching development concerns the rapidly growing supply of Massive Open Online Courses. Started in the US these courses shoot up like mushrooms. It is too soon to tell to what extent these Moocs will sink in properly. Awarding credits, and for the individual to costs attached to that, may be a serious problem. Moreover, it is hard to tell whether organisations such as universities will be able to adequately handle huge numbers of students.

Although the number of participants in continuing education are substantial, it is hard to assess to what extent continuing education activities really are part of university and college life. In California where the universities have separate units for continuing education (the Extended University as a kind of faculty unit) doubts remain whether continuing education is actively part of the university mission. Arguably, in the

Californian context it could be seen as an alternative source of university income that is supposed to cross-subsidise the university's 'core functions' for traditional students. In Finland, by contrast, the national university Act stipulates that lifelong learning must be part of the university's mission (and universities are held accountable for that). At face value, there it seems to be part of university life.

In addition to universities and colleges we see that in every country a significant number of private companies are involved in training workers. Here a distinction must be made between private training organisations and 'other companies'. It is very common that private companies offer in-service training for their employees. They may also decide to buy 'in-company' training programmes from public or provide providers, sometimes in cooperation with local authorities or unions. Developing individual learning or career paths is for companies in some countries mandatory. Companies also can be engaged in apprenticeships programmes. Apprenticeships programmes are important in several countries. Both governments, their agencies and companies see this as an important tool to train workers for the workforce, or to create better job opportunities for unemployed persons. A good overview of the size of this sector is not available. Also noticeable is that particularly at the regional and local level, networks or intense collaborations exist between public authorities, public and private providers and business. In most countries social partners (employer organisations and unions) are part in establishing opportunities for workers to upgrade and upscale their skills. A lot of continuing education is vocational driven or work-based. Upgrading skills and competences is one of the main goals, although personal fulfilment (citizenship) can also be important (particularly in the Scandinavian countries). Professional development seems to be mostly important in the Anglo-Saxon countries where the professions require skills to be updated on a frequent base (as a condition for a licence to practice). Professional associations are therefore an important actor.

Policies: actors and instruments

Table 3 deals with the policy actors and the instruments at play. Again it is only a general outline. The role of the government differs in the five countries. In California we see limited state-steering capacity in arranging continuing education. Initiatives are mainly (labour) market driven and undertaken by providers (such as the public and private universities and colleges) and labour market organisations. The UK government is devolving some its authorities. The latest reforms encourage agencies, employers and employees to act. Continuing education is regarded as important but is not seem as the primary responsibility of the government. In Sweden and Finland national and local public authorities are active, include social partners and other stakeholders. In Finland it is interesting to see that lifelong learning is a legally-imposed part of a university mission.

In terms of steering instruments, national qualifications frameworks are important. It is one way of intending to sorting out the links between educational achievements and their recognition. It is also seen as an important step to create 'smooth' pathways between different parts of the educational systems and to link prior learning and work experience to formal education (qualifications). It is clear however that qualifications schemes are not yet the perfect solution. Their meaning in practice is far from clear.

Steering by means of financial incentives is another popular way to stimulate continuing education. In most cases the students have to bear (a share of) the costs, some of which are paid for by employers. All countries have student support schemes (grant and loan systems), varying in size, to stimulate demand. Next, there are tax measures to ease the costs. They may apply to the individual as well as to companies.

Empowering participants by providing information is an instrument that is used in all cases, but the extent to which governments facilitate transparency differs. In California, the market provides the information; in the other cases the government organises in online information tools and counselling services for workers and companies. In addition, in Australia and the UK, personal learning accounts, keeping track of (lifelong) learning activities are put in place.

Table 2: Providers and modes of delivery in five countries

	Type of provider		Level	Scope	Mode of delivery		
	Public/private	University/ other type	Sub-degree/ bachelor/master	Single course/ full degree	Full time/ part-time	Face to face/ distance	Work-based/ school-based
Australia	public	Open Universities Australia (OUA)	Undergraduate/ postgraduate courses	Single courses/units	Part-time	Distance/online	
	Public/private	Universities, self-accrediting/non-self-accrediting providers	Sub-degree / bachelor / Master; AQF qualifications: diploma, advanced degree, bachelor degree, graduate certificate, graduated diploma, master degree, doctoral degree/professional doctoral degree	Courses / degrees	Full- time; part-time	Face to face; coursework; distance	Partly work-based (Work-integrated learning)
	Public	Other type / work placement	Apprenticeship (AQF qualifications)				Work-based / school-based
	Public /private	Registered training organisations (RTO)	AQF qualifications: Advanced diploma, diploma, certificate 1-IV, vocational graduate certificate, vocational graduate diploma	Points; Single courses/ units; diplomas	Full- time; part-time	Face to face; coursework; distance /online	Partly Work-based
California	Public	UC CSU CCC	Undergraduate and postgraduate	Signal courses; CE Units/-credits; degrees	Full-time; part-time	Campus-based; Distance learning; Open university Mocc; Blended learning	
	Private	Independent universities; Private secondary schools	Undergraduate and postgraduate	Signal courses; CE Units/-credits; degrees	Full-time; part-time	Campus-based; Distance learning; Open university Mocc; Blended learning	
	Private	Companies					Work-based; in-service training
Finland	Official adult	Upper secondary level	Specialised studies; continuing vocational				Staff-development

	Type of provider		Level	Scope	Mode of delivery		
	Public/private	University/ other type	Sub-degree/ bachelor/master	Single course/ full degree	Full time/ part-time	Face to face/ distance	Work-based/ school-based
	education	institutions;	training; Certificates;				training; Labour market training
		Universities and polytechnics	Degree programmes; Specific provisions	Degree courses	Full-time; part-time	Open university	
	Liberal adult education	Centres and schools; summer universities	Non-formal/non-certificate; Preparatory training for competence-based qualifications	Single courses			
	Private	Companies	In-service training; Apprenticeships;				
	private	Commercial training organisations					Vocational training
Sweden	Public	Universities and colleges	Ba and Ma degrees; Professional development courses	Degree courses; Short, single courses	Full-time Part-time	Campus-based, e-learning and dual mode	
	Public	Municipalities, county councils and learning centres	Addressing local needs and competence development			e-learning; blended learning	
	Private	Private organisations and companies	No degrees				Work-based
UK	Public	Universities	Degree oriented programmes; HND/HNC/dipHE Foundation degrees	Programmes; Modules Courses	Full-time; Part-time		Sandwich courses; CPD courses
	Public	Open University	Huge variety	Programmes; Modules Courses		distance	
	Public	FE colleges	Undergraduate level; HND/HNC/dipHE Foundation degrees	Programmes; Modules Courses	Full-time; Part-time		
	Private	Training providers and organisations		A.o. CPD courses (points; certificates)	Part-time		CPD courses

Table 3: Policy actors and instruments in five countries

	Government role	Legislation	Financial incentives	Communication and information
Australia	Lifelong learning important ever since; initiatives to establish networks; enhance coherence and transparency; attempts to align VET and higher education better;	Australian Qualification framework combines VET and higher education; TEQSA checks implementation; national training framework; training packages;	Grants and support for students; Students pay 10-20% of total costs of publicly funded VET; tuition fees varies per institution/jurisdiction; employer assistance; apprenticeships funding divided by employers, state and apprentices;	Unique Student Identifier (USI) to be implemented, registering VET achievements and prior learning; webpages provide information about courses and programmes
California	Limited state-level capacity; CE market-driven and self-governing; public and private providers in the driver seat; ad hoc private, voluntary and regional (labour market) initiatives	Hardly state regulation; impact on CE through labour market policies; Regulation licences for professional practitioners; costumer protection; Non-governmental accreditation systems; Many accreditation agencies;	Grants and scholarships, but limited; Tax benefits Students bear most of the costs, sometimes with employers reimbursements	Online instruments providing information about courses and programmes
Finland	Lifelong learning is integrated into education policy and related public sectors; Government important for self-motivated studies and labour market training; in-service training responsibility of employers; Government negotiates with social partners on training needs; stakeholders in national committees;	Lifelong learning formally part of university mission; Reforms to stress importance of LLL; National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning; companies must establish plans with individual training targets; competence-based qualifications; liberal adult education act: providers of liberal adult education are evaluated by Education Evaluation Council; Vocational Adult Education Act; Public Employment Services Act;	In-service training paid by employer and/or employee. Costs partly tax-deductible; Funding CE at public institutions through regular basic grant; liberal adult education 50% government funded; Education Fund: adult education allowance, student loans, scholarships for qualified employees	
Sweden	Adult education embedded in society; active role of national government, national agencies and municipalities, without downplaying responsibility of the individual; inclusion of social partners in developing CE opportunities; at local level shared responsibility of municipalities and providers stressed.	CE in Sweden is extensive and characterised by a long tradition; regular and non-regular students treated equally; Flexible working schemes: unpaid study leave	Public support for full-time and part-time studies (54 years as upper limit); combination of loan and grant	Various organisations (municipalities, providers, employers, unions) provide have guidance and counselling services (online); the Public Employment Service also provides information
UK	Active government that is aiming to “stepping back”; deregulation, interesting shift: Department of Business, Innovation and Skills main actor instead of Department of Education More emphasis on role employers (e.g. strong focus on apprenticeships)	Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act and Education Act. White papers: Skills for Sustainable growth / New Challenges, New chances; HE Students at the heart of the system. Key points: funding, level playing field, transparency, credit accumulation,	Several funding schemes such as the Skills Funding Agency (funding and supporting adult further education) or National Apprenticeships Service; Higher Apprenticeships Fund; National Scholarship Programme; Employer Ownership of Skills Fund;	Various agencies supporting and promoting skills and professional development; Information systems such as National Career Service and Lifelong Learning Accounts; Personal Learner Register;

Government role	Legislation	Financial incentives	Communication and information
Steering partly takes place through agencies (e.g. Ofqual)	employers in the front; Qualifications and Credit Framework; Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England	Growth and Innovation Fund; Student loans for FE and PCDs	