

## A Dynamic Curriculum as a Platform for Continuous Competence Development

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**Abstract :** Focus on adult learning is vital to overcome economic challenges as well as to respond to the demand for new competencies and sustained productivity in the digitalized world economy. Employees of all ages must be able to carry on continuous professional development to remain competitive in the labor market. According to EU policies, countries should offer more flexible opportunities for adult learners who study online and in so-called 'second chance' qualification programmes. Traditionally, adult education in Finland has comprised of not only liberal adult education but also the government funding to study for Bachelor, Master's, and Ph.D. degrees in Finnish Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). From the beginning of 2021, public funding is allocated not only to degrees but also to courses to achieve new competencies for adult learners in Finland. Consequently, there will be degree students (often younger of age) and adult learners studying in the same evening, online and blended courses. The question is thus: How are combined studies meeting the different needs of degree students and adult learners? Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (UAS), located in the metropolitan area of Finland, is taking up the challenge of continuous learning for adult learners. Haaga-Helia has been reforming the bachelor level education and respective shorter courses from 2019 in the biggest project in its history. By the end of 2023, Haaga-Helia will have a flexible, modular curriculum for the bachelor's degrees of hospitality management, business administration, business information technology, journalism and sports management. Building on the shared key competencies, degree students will have the possibility to build individual study paths more flexibly, thanks to the new modular structure of the curriculum. They will be able to choose courses across all degrees, and thus, build their own unique competence combinations. All modules can also be offered as separate courses or learning paths to non-degree students, both publicly funded and as commercial services for employers. Consequently, there will be shared course implementations for degree studies and adult learners with various competence requirements. The newly designed courses are piloted in parallel of the designing of the curriculum in Haaga-Helia during 2020 and 2021. Semi-structured online surveys are composed among the participants for the key competence courses. The focus of the research is to understand how students in the bachelor programme and adult learners from Open UAE perceive the learning experience in such a diverse learning group. A comparison is also executed between learning methods of in-site teaching, online implementation, blended learning and virtual self-learning courses to understand how the pedagogy is meeting the learning objectives of these two different groups. The new flexible curricula and the study modules are to be designed to fill the most important competence gaps that exist in the Finnish labor markets. The new curriculum will be dynamic and constantly evolving over time according to the future competence needs in the labor market. This type of approach requires constant dialogue between Haaga-Helia and workplaces during and after designing of the shared curriculum.

**Keywords :** competence development, continuous learning, curriculum, higher education

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