



OPEN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AT FINNISH UNIVERSITIES Summary of the National Strategy 2010–2013

The Open University Education at Finnish Universities strategy for 2010–2013 has been compiled and updated collaboratively by Finnish open universities. The strategy includes the principles and objectives of open university education and provides guidelines for collaboration within the Open University Forum.

In compliance with Section 2 of the Universities Act (558/2009), “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”. According to Section 7 of the same Act, universities may also provide open university education.

The Role and Development of the Open University

On the basis of Section 2 of the Universities Act, open university activities contribute to the mission of universities regarding lifelong learning and social interaction and impact. Open university education has been provided in Finland for over 40 years, and it was established in order to promote educational and regional equality. It has also been developed as a flexible study option to facilitate social change processes, e.g. in order to prevent youth unemployment and raise the educational and competence levels of adults. All Finnish universities, except for the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, provide open university education. The regional- and national-level partners of open universities – above all, summer universities, folk high schools and adult education centres (i.e. the so-called liberal adult education sector) – also organize courses in cooperation with open universities. The educational offerings of Finnish open universities are published online at www.avoinyliopisto.fi.

The Mission and Objectives of Open University Education

Open university education allows anyone to complete studies in accordance with the curricula of higher education institutions, irrespective of one’s educational background. Open universities are parts of Finnish university education, offering equal opportunities for independent self-development and flexible degree-oriented studies. The principal target group is the adult population of working age. The credits completed at open universities will contribute towards a degree if the student is admitted to a university in order to complete degree studies. Each university is responsible for the educational quality of its open university. Open university operations are regulated in the Government Decree 1082/2009 concerning the fees charged for university services and in the Ministry of Education memo of 10.12.2009 regarding the Decree proposal.

Vision

In 2013, 95 000 students will be studying in different scientific and artistic fields at Finnish open universities. They will enhance their education, competences and qualifications through flexible studies that apply adult pedagogical knowledge and utilize web-based methods. Through open universities, the students will be able to complete the studies required for university degrees, based on which faculties or other corresponding administrative units will grant the degrees.

Values

The values of the open university are based on equal opportunities to lifelong learning and education. The aim is to enhance individual learners’ knowledge, skills, competences and expertise; to enable them to raise their educational level; and to promote their personal development, active citizenship, social skills and employment.

The core values of open university activities:

- Academic education and close ties to universities
- Adults as learners
- Lifelong learning
- Equal opportunities to education
- Flexibility and accessibility
- High quality
- Collaboration and impact

Funding

As part of university core funding, the Ministry of Education and Culture provides funding for open university education based on completed credits. Students are charged a maximum of 10 euro per ECTS credit.

Cooperation and Networking

The Open University Forum is a cooperation network with participants from all of the universities that provide open university education. The Forum has a working committee and thematic working groups. It provides the opportunity to develop open university education through cooperation between universities, Universities Finland UNIFI, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Council for Lifelong Learning, universities of applied sciences (polytechnics), the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, and other interest groups.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2010–2013

1. Open university education will be developed as part of university adult education, lifelong learning and social interaction.
2. The financial preconditions for organizing and developing open university education will be strengthened within universities.
3. The educational offerings of open universities will be developed in order to flexibly meet the needs for competence and education in society, both those of working life and individual citizens.
4. Open universities will assure and develop the quality of their activities in compliance with their universities' quality assurance systems.
5. Open university education will serve as a degree track for adult students, as part of the two-cycle degree system.
6. The electronic services and information systems of open universities will be developed as parts of their universities' systems.
7. The internationalization of open universities will be furthered.
8. Open universities will advance adults' prerequisites for learning by developing study guidance, counselling services, learning environments, and pedagogical methods.
9. Open universities will reinforce their mutual cooperation and their cooperation with liberal adult education institutions and open studies organizers at universities of applied sciences, as well as strengthen their regional networks.

Keywords:

adult education, e-learning, lifelong learning, non-degree student, non-traditional student, Open University, widening participation,