

Hungarian Higher Education and Adult Learners

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Abstract

This paper is to analyse the state of art in how higher education in Hungary is prepared to open up to adult learners wanting to extend their knowledge and develop skills at an advanced level of education. Also, a detailed description of the roles and functions of higher education in adult learning will demonstrate some particular aspects of quality development of higher education and learning focusing on better performance and raising participation.

Key words

Lifelong learning, adult learning, higher education, validation of prior learning,

Key concept and short introduction

Definition of the term “adults” in higher education

The term „Adult” is not directly defined in the Act of Hungarian higher education⁴ as the minimum age for entering into higher education studies is 18, therefore, all students and learners must be at the age of 18 or over, regarded as adults, when entering into universities and colleges (generally in levels of ISCED 5a and 5b) regardless of the level and forms of their education within higher education. Another marker to underline one identical precondition of entering into higher education, and that is *maturation*, which is formally accessible through a set of exams in secondary schools and secondary vocational schools at the age of 18 and afterwards. However, the Act on Adult Education⁵ clearly defines *who is an “adult”* and this adult person, apart from being able to enter a variety of adult education and training programmes, can officially learn at HEIs in Hungary for either a BA and MA level diploma or a vocation-oriented certificate available through special accredited post-secondary Higher Vocational Training (Higher Education provided VET in ISCED 5b) as *an adult learner by holding a certificate of maturation*. One must also bear in mind that students having finished their studies in HVET are entitled to take relevant credit points into their BA level studies (up to 60 credits as maximum!).⁶

A general process of her/his entry to higher education to Bachelor, Master and Post-Graduate studies is achieved through a formal entry exam and this status enables the adult to become a student of the university or college and hold special rights attached to that status. One can directly enrol to full-time or part-time/distance studies, either at

⁴Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.

⁵ Act on Adult Education - LXXVII./2013./Point 2. – Definitive orders). – According to the Act, „*an adult is a person who has already completed her/his compulsory education*” (defined in the Act of National Public Education - CXC./2011.)

⁶ <http://www.ofi.hu/kiadvanyaink-110630/aims-and-types-of-study>

ISCED 5a or 5b. *Students learning in non-full-time formats are recognised as students and adult learners most of whom are considered by higher education institutions, according to the former HEAD-survey's typology, in majority as recurrent learners, some deferrers or returners.*

The above listed types of adult learners are the ones which Hungarian higher education institutions consider as relevant in functioning and operation of colleges and universities. Again, they are dominantly recurrent learners, some deferrers and returners. There are still no available statistics related to special grouping or types of adult learners other than those with reference only to sex and form/mode of education within the HEI (e.g. full-time, part-time, evening or distance education).

One must note that higher education in Hungary developed and has maintained some special roles in the education of adults in special part-time, evening or corresponding forms/structures of education during the last six decades. This kind of rather varying and changing partial role in adult education and learning has not yet turned most universities and colleges to recognise such actions belonging to their mainstream functions until the very end of the twentieth century. The mere emphasis to open up higher education to adults has been there for that period, however, some follow-up policy changes have not constrained academic cycles to step forward a more flexible and adult learner centred structure of higher education which stayed rather closed, in educational functions and orientations, for adults.

Criteria (e.g. age, life course) to define “adults” in HE in Hungary according to major groups of relevant adult learners

The OECD categories to define adults in higher education cannot be automatically used in the Hungarian context for the following reasons:

- all students above the age of 18 in higher education studying for a Bachelor, Master or a Doctoral degree are formally considered as adults in legal terms;
- people learning in higher education for a vocation are officially considered as adults learners in higher education in Hungary;
- the European statistical data collection system (Eurostat) applies the age cohort of 25-64 as an indicator to measure participation of adults in lifelong learning and it generates several questions and issues whether students and adult learners who start learning in higher education under the age of 25 may not be counted into/reflected by any lifelong learning indicator;

The OECD categories have not been directly used in Hungarian higher education, however, those categories are reflected in the changing concept of an “adult learner” in higher education from 2005. (OECD, 1987)⁷ That was the time when the newly accepted strategy on lifelong learning of the Hungarian Government heavily influenced law-makers to recognise each and all students in higher education who study in part-time, distance or in evening

⁷ OECD (1987) *Adults in Higher Education*. Paris: OECD.

educational formats both as students and adult learners.⁸ The peculiar aim was to make higher education institutions turn towards growing the number of their non-traditional students with more care, better provision and services as part of university lifelong learning.⁹

Recently, the situation in academic cycles has moved attention to raise the research quality of higher education institutions through some top “research universities” (from 2010 and onwards) and to shift the problem of raising the number of non-traditional students to more “teaching-oriented universities”. The biggest twelve universities in Hungary applied for the status of “research university”, but only the best five was ranked to receive the label in 2010 from the Ministry of Education and Culture. Another five of them were ranked to receive the label of “excellent university”. The process itself was a kind of paying more attention to research excellence instead of moving forward with the Bologna- process, as it is considered as a task formally having been completed by most higher education institutions. Universities and colleges, however, have started to show more attention and interest towards university lifelong learning and adult learners through their short-cycle programmes, vocational training programmes and peculiar distance/e-learning courses. Yet, the number of such programmes have been growing rather slowly and reflects the lack of overall institutional interest, the lack of adult training skills of most lecturers and the lack of appropriate and flexible curricula, proper teaching methodology and technical facilities.

Prevailing concepts of adults in HE in Hungary

Adults learners in higher education programmes are defined as those who have completed their compulsory education period (according to the new Act on Public Education, it is the age of 16 until which compulsory public education lasts!) and have enrolled to any vocational training, Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programme of the university/college; The age cohort of of 25-64 matters in the context of the EC, Eurydice, Eurostat surveys of lifelong learning.

The issue of participation of non-traditional students to represent underrepresented groups as minorities, disabled matters from the point of view of equal opportunities guaranteed by the Act on Higher Education.¹⁰ Most students, studying for a vocational certificate, a bachelor or a master degree, or even for a Doctorate degree in part-time, distance or evening course formats, can be described as persons who continue their studies which often paired with a family biography.

In the area of access and admission, one must recognize that access is formally open to any adult who holds a certificate of maturation and collects enough entry points through an entrance exam to Bachelor or Master programmes. Vocational programmes are open to all adults holding a Certificate of Maturation. Doctorate programmes require, as part of their admission criteria, a Diploma of Master studies and a successful entry exam. No

⁸ Strategy of Lifelong Learning of the Government of Hungary – Govt. Decree 2212/2005.

⁹ The approach of university lifelong learning has been effectively represented and demonstrated by the Hungarian Universities Lifelong Learning Network Association/MELLearn since 2003. Please find more at: <http://www.mellearn.hu>

¹⁰ Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.

alternative entrance and admission is available to accredited programmes of higher education institutions in Hungary. The only exception is the field of short non-degree courses, programmes for adults who want to upgrade their knowledge, skills in special continuing education for lifelong learners, for example in the programmes and courses as part of the university of the third age.¹¹ This point clearly underlines the orientation of universities and colleges to widen their Bachelor and Master programmes in part-time and distance formats of education for non-traditional courses, and, moreover, some exceptions show that particular universities and colleges open access and admission to non-traditional adult learners into their adult continuing education programmes or non-degree/non-credit courses also in part-time, evening and distance education, week-end, etc. forms. Since recognition and validation of prior learning has just taken some early experimental forms in higher education, it is just about to accelerate special admission or entry in its testing phase.

On the other hand, the typology of Slowley and Schuetze for lifelong learners can be partially and very cautiously applied in the context of Hungarian higher education. (Slowley and Schuetze, 2012.)¹² In Hungary, a second chance learner is a person who wishes to take or to complete her/his public education in special schools offering second chance programmes. Therefore, the notion is not used in that direct meaning, or to reflect an alternative way of access/admission through special examination or assessment. This would, on the other hand, require a rather sophisticated RPL or VPL system in higher education which is still in experimental and early phase.¹³ In Hungarian higher education recurrent learners and returners are the majority of lifelong learners, but refreshers and learners in later life are people who expand the number of new learners entering into higher education for gathering either scientific knowledge or practical skills.

Background information

Information on important regulatory issues and policies

So far as the regulation of higher education is concerned, it is the Act on Higher education that clearly regulates that only accredited degree programmes can be advertised and be accessible for candidate students within Bachelor, Master and Doctorate levels. The Act also describes the number, forms (universities and colleges) of higher education institutions (state-funded, and private) and defines what makes a higher education institution. The Act demonstrates the process of accreditation of degree/credit programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctorate (PhD) levels and describes how the state finances state universities, colleges and regulates the forms of financing of

¹¹ The Programme of King Sigismund College is identical in this context. List of courses for elder learners is accessible at: <http://www.zskf.hu/nyugdijasok>

¹² Slowley, M. & Schuetze, H.G. (eds.) (2012) *Global perspectives on higher education and lifelong learners*. London: Routledge

¹³ A latest project to focus on the development of validation system in higher education is described as follows (only in Hungarian!): <http://tamop413.ofi.hu/validaciorol>

studies at higher education institutions. This law regulates participation and defines entry forms and processes to degree and non-degree courses at Hungarian universities and colleges.¹⁴

Most relevant regulatory issues at national, regional and/or institutional level to stimulate the participation of adults in HE in Hungary (e.g. access and admission to HE, funding of HEIs, student grants/ loans)

Hungarian higher education is regulated by the Ministry of Human Resources and its State Secretariat for Education.¹⁵ The main goal of the Ministry is to regulate higher education, as part of the educational policy of the Government of Hungary, so as to properly generate and disseminate quality knowledge. This approach is also connected to the Science-policy of the Government so as to help higher education become competitive by paying a significant attention to quality education and research through partnerships with key stakeholders in research-development, and in innovation. The Higher Education policy of the Ministry is to help higher education maintain and develop its education and research activities and services. This policy supports the orientation of candidate students towards all sciences, especially to natural and technical sciences and engineering. This approach is also reflected in the rate of state-funded places for students in higher education. The Government of Hungary supports the freedom of students to decide in which subject area to study, however, the state-funded places are limited to state-interests referring to the scientific area/major. Students can self-finance their studies in case of insistence on a major the state does not fully support according to its policies. The funding system is orientated mainly to support full-time students as part-timers are financing their studies from individual sources in most cases. However, part-timers can also have financial difficulties to cover the costs of their education and training. In that case, a special social support starts to make the student pay his/her fee in monthly instalments and not in one sum. A special state-owned student-loan system is also in operation and that is the only system to officially help students cover the expenses of the studies and pay back the loan in monthly payment.¹⁶

Another important aspect of higher education in Hungary is the Hungarian Rectors' Conference which is a highest platform for university and college leaders to demonstrate a common view and position in each and all issues to influence the status and future development of higher education in the aspect of regulations/law, financing and national development plans and EU-funded/co-funded programmes and initiatives.¹⁷

Participation in Higher Education is formally regulated by the Act on Higher Education, namely, any person who enrolls to a certain university must pass an entrance exam, by holding a certificate of maturation, on the other hand, anyone can decide which major to enrol and choose what available format of education to take (e.g. full-time, part-time, distance or evening teaching). Another route is to take non-degree higher level vocational training, post-graduate specialisation, partial trainings, summer university courses which can also be accessed depending on the

¹⁴ Act on Hungarian Higher Education - CCIV./2011.

¹⁵ Description of the Ministry of Human Resources: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-human-resources/news>

¹⁶ <http://www.diakhitel.hu/index.php/en/10-key-features-of-the-student-loan>

¹⁷ Major Source on Hungarian Rectors' Conference: <http://www.mrk.hu/en/> A short description of Hungarian Higher Education and its institutions is accessible at: http://www.mrk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/mfi_angol_2012.pdf

current level of education of the person. Such courses and trainings open *flexible learning for adults and imply innovative methodologies and the use a certain VPL and recognition of prior experience in workplace environment.*

The basic principle for degree courses is that they are to be accredited, namely, only accredited programmes/courses can only be advertised to adult learners. They may be accredited by the Hungarian Board of Accreditation (MAB), based on the Act on Higher Education, referring to degree-courses (BA, MA and PhD levels) or through the Adult-Training Accreditation Board (FAT), based on the Act Adult Education. This approach, on the other hand, allows higher education organisations *to provide their accredited courses with flexible provision and methodologies* referring to time (e.g. part-time, evening or distance forms of education) and new ways of knowledge transfer (e.g. e-learning, blended-learning, m-learning, etc.). Moreover, universities and colleges are autonomous to provide non-accredited non-degree courses in any format they recognise as beneficial to adult learners and, from another angle, they are responding either to current adult learning needs or local/regional stakeholders' claims. There are no other specific laws to regulate this area with any particular orientation and claims.

The existing regulations give way to autonomous universities and colleges to provide flexible learning opportunities through either accredited degree-courses or non-degree courses, or even attend the varieties of informal learning programmes provided by higher education institutions focusing on the dissemination of scientific knowledge or to develop social skills in dominantly community learning formats either within the institution or in extramural environment. A more *specific strategy on adult and lifelong learning would be of social benefit*, on the one hand, to help raising participation, and on the other, to get universities involved into local and regional learning partnerships for better learning performance.

National policies and trends in HE as well as in adult education, vocational education and training to overcome barriers between the sectors (e.g. cooperation between HE and adult education sector and NGOs, strategies for RPL)

A significant policy element and trend, as part of the one-step up orientation, is to urge students to learn for vocations, BA and MA/MSc and Doctorate degrees and gain knowledge, develop competences, and skills which are needed in the labour market. Higher education policy in Hungary has turned towards trying to raise the number of students in higher education, in accordance with the goals of the Education and Training 2020 programme of the European Union, referring to attainment in higher education by 2020.¹⁸

However, demographic trends and the direct involvement of the Government to raise the number of state-funded places of full-time programmes in higher education in natural and technical sciences, engineering, and to radically reduce state-funded places in social sciences, humanities, economics and law will eventually make it difficult to raise

¹⁸ Source: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/ef0016_en.htm

the overall number of students in higher education. Additionally, the number of graduating students in higher education fell after 2010 from 38.000 to 35.000 in 2011 (a 6.5% fall).¹⁹

It seems fairly difficult to overcome barriers amongst sectors of education and training, as most adult education and training programmes are organised in the non-formal sector and consider higher education as a separate actor in the education of adults. Co-operation amongst higher education, vocational education and training and adult education is very rare and mainly demonstrated, within higher education, by departments and/or institutes of adult education/andragogy through their education and training programmes for the development of adult learning and education through the followings:

- accredited education and training of adult educators within BA and MA programmes;
- research and development initiatives, projects in adult learning and education through partnership with major stakeholders, like labour market key actors, employers, chambers of commerce and industry, local councils, labour offices, training centres, adult training enterprises, civic organisations, churches, etc.;
- accredited adult training programmes for adult learners.

Universities having a rather strong adult education/adult training orientation have their own partnerships/consortia with VET and adult education organisations to appear in joint development or research projects for quality adult learning and education targeted in the national development plan or maintaining partnerships for raising practice-oriented education and training dimensions of their own portfolio. Since the application of RPL, VPL mechanism is at a very early stage, most Hungarian higher education institutions have no or limited practice in the validation of prior learning, however, the new model for universities will be launched from 2012 and onwards at state-owned universities at least, and this can be regarded as a strategic development. One can find an existing practice of RPL in non-formal initial (iVET) and continuing vocational (CVET) training programmes.²⁰

Specific conditions/events/policy decisions shaping policy in the field of opening HE to adults (e.g. national policies which specifically mention the openness of HE to adults)

The new Act on Higher Education of 2011 urged for a better higher education developing its educational and training provision to support adult learning, as universities and colleges ought to open for new adult learners' needs in their localities and should develop partnerships with several institutions and organisations of education, culture, enterprises so as to raise joint actions of knowledge transfer by applying new ICT –tools, methods, curricula and identifying new needs of learners, organisations where higher education may play a significant, leading role implementing, developing and expanding quality learning. Such efforts can go along with place management, social capital development, local and regional development programmes, interregional projects, like that of the cross-border

¹⁹ Source: http://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng/xstadat/xstadat_long/h_wdsi001b.html

²⁰ Please find examples of the validation of prior learning in Hungarian vocation training centre and second chance school at the Observal project website of EUCEN (European Universities Lifelong Learning Network): http://www.observal.org/country_profiles/hungary and <http://www.observal-net.eu/node/50>

partnerships within higher education, local and regional councils, joint ventures, chambers of commerce, etc.²¹ Basically, one has to acknowledge that the conditions are provided for opening higher education for more adult learners, as, formally, each and all university and college lectures are open for adults to visit. Several universities and colleges organise their own actions by involving people from several age-groups to disseminate their services, their education and training portfolio through various programmes, festivals, projects, web-based contacts, public events, adult learners' weeks, third age university initiatives, city-region festivals, summer universities, etc. Most universities' and colleges' websites offer several programmes, lectures, training-packages for adult learners at a bargain price or even for free. Universities and colleges are promoters of the dissemination of sciences through open lectures, public speeches in lecture halls combined with broadcasted events, labelled as open university programme.²²

Disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in HE

There are some disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of adult learners in higher education in Hungary, like the members of the Roma minority, however, universities and colleges make every efforts to turn their institutions easily accessible for those groups and raise the number of Roma adults to learn and study in various programmes in higher education. Students from social disadvantages families can apply for additional social support from the university and it is a tool to compensate a significant part of social disadvantage. Such students can apply for being accommodated in halls of residence for the time of higher education studies. Also, students with disadvantaged family background can apply for a reduction of any occurring tuition fees or to state-funds in order to cover a proportion of or the total of their tuition fee. This approach applies to part-time students as well!

Successful policies in regard to opening higher education to adults

An analytical approach must underline that successful policies for opening higher education to adults are to cover up and measure the learning needs of adults and their own communities in the localities of the higher education institutions. Therefore, policies, missions of universities and colleges must focus on needs-oriented programmes as part of their education and training provisions. Also, universities and colleges are to demonstrate and maintain open access to several forms of scientific lectures, programmes and organize new forms of knowledge and data-bases where adult learners can decide which programme or service to take through a more formalised way. Higher education institutions may not consider themselves as places for adult learning, as they are, and not necessarily understand or rather slowly move in the direction of what makes an university a place for lifelong learning. The

²¹ Please find the example of Cross-border development programme for Hungary and Croatia with university participation and partnership-based educational, development and research orientation in the intercommunity human resource development dimension: <http://www.hu-hr-ipa.com/en/funded-projects>

²² The example of the Open University Programme of the University of Pécs is available at: <http://www.nyitottegyetem.pte.hu/> Another good example for open university programme in the media is the „University of all Knowledge/Mindentudás egyeteme”: <http://mindentudas.hu/>

Hungarian Universities' Lifelong Learning Network (MELLearn) and its actions, annual conferences help universities and colleges to explore their potentials how to expand their education and training provision towards adult learners.²³ A significant dimension of a successful policy is how an institution can become learner-centred, can turn to become a lifelong learning university. That means a new conception of organising the university/college into a flexible learning space where the organisation itself learns how to fulfil its missions in open and flexible ways through quality mechanisms and actions with monitoring of all actions and functions connected with education and training.

Important measures that have been initiated to increase openness of HE

Some initiated measures for widening the openness of higher education in Hungary are widening access to courses in part-time, open-distance and evening course formats for adult learners, establishing and developing new distance/e-learning programmes of non-degree programmes for adult learners, introducing and developing new higher vocational training programmes for adult learners and increasing new and effective methodologies of teaching and assessment. Universities and colleges have widened their collaboration with local and regional stakeholders, NGOs, etc. to collect some peculiar feedback upon which dimension and direction to expand provision and services in order to attain more learners from the local public. Therefore, institutions and organisations of adult education and training were also asked to give advice on how to increase openness of HEIs. One specific aspect has been the website-based virtual openness of the institution, and another has been the capability of recognising the corporate role of the university to respond effectively to local needs of adults, with new learning spaces, methods, contents amongst those needs.²⁴

Finally, universities and colleges have had to turn their physical infrastructures as open learning spaces to adult learners and demonstrate an open and partner mood of mutual actions and communication so as to get rid of the unsuccessful mood of the academia by closing science into an ivory tower of academic cycles and, instead, disseminate quality knowledge, based on research, to the public through several open ways by, for example, the "night of researchers" which brings research and science closer to adult learners.

Main particularities of Hungary in comparison with other countries (e.g. special characteristics of modes of study; exceptional features of adult HE)

One must recognise that there is not too much difference in the modes of studies in comparison with other Central-East European countries, however, one exceptional feature is the relatively low number of private universities and colleges (in comparison with Poland), and the limited educational policy orientation towards university lifelong

²³ MELLearn website demonstrates, through conferences and publications, the policy orientation of higher education towards adult learning and opening up to adult learners with quality services, accessible tools and effective methods. Source: www.mellearn.hu

²⁴ Please find more on corporate roles of universities at Jarvis: Jarvis, Peter (2001) *Universities and Corporate Universities*. London: Kogan Page

learning, other than some individual university initiatives, and the positive impact of European projects funded by the European Commission.²⁵

Main data on adults participating HE

Year	Number of adult learners		
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1990/91	11536	68162	31775
1995/96	5205	75891	62589
2000/01	2940	91700	143413
2005/06	3613	89950	192679
2010/11	10100	75434	120620
2011/12	12660	74204	118210
2012/13	14903	72808	114789
2013/14	14727	70793	96520

Source: http://www.ksh.hu/stadat_eves_2_6

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Slowey, M. & Schuetze, H.G. (eds.) (2012) *Global perspectives on higher education and lifelong learners*. London: Routledge

<http://www.mellearn.hu>

<http://www.zskf.hu/nyugdijasok>

²⁵ Source: Tempus Public Foundation – http://english.tpf.hu/pages/content/index.php?page_id=22; http://english.tpf.hu/pages/content/index.php?page_id=14

<http://tamop413.ofi.hu/validacirol>

<http://www.mrk.hu/en/>

<http://www.ksh.hu/docs/eng>

http://www.observal.org/country_profiles/hungary

<http://english.tpf.hu>