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## Work and Learning in the Adult Education Sector: A Cross Country Comparative View

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### Introduction

This chapter presents research on workplace learning among early career employees in adult learning across four countries (Austria, Italy, Slovakia, and the UK) and covers different sub-fields of the adult education sector. When following employees working for adult learning providers, the

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focus of our interest is early career teaching staff. The two preceding chapters have followed early career workers' workplace learning in the metals/machinery and retail service sectors. The adult learning sector complements these, differing by its employment of predominantly high-skilled workers. Organisations engaged in the provision of adult learning form a particularly diverse sector in terms of the content, range and type of services, subject areas, and learning programmes or courses provided, as well as in their primary sources of funding (public/private), their organisational forms, and their human resource strategies. Teachers in the adult learning sector ('adult learning teachers') have diverse professional backgrounds and, in most cases, hold high-level educational qualifications, though these are not always a condition of recruitment. Formal qualifications are not systematically linked with high professional skills.

Despite employees' high levels of skill, conditions for young or early career teaching staff may vary significantly across and within sub-fields of adult learning. Some research has focussed on adult learning teachers' competence profiles, and their role in influencing adult learning participation outcomes (e.g. Buiskool et al., 2010; Egetenmeyer & Nuissl, 2010; Mikulec, 2019); Milana (2010) provides insights into training opportunity structures for adult educators in selected European countries. However, evidence on how adult learning teachers access workplace learning remains limited. Our investigation mainly concerns workplace learning, understood as learning available in the day-to-day work experience and learning from one's relationship with others, individually, and in groups. We investigate workplace learning's interaction with organisational practices using the concept of organisational agency: this allows for a focus on the differences set in motion by particular decisions which an organisation makes, although similar organisations under equivalent conditions might make different decisions (see Chap. 10).

Providers constitute the key element of adult learning frameworks within adult learning systems, but the overlap of this provision with other services, such as business consultancy, human resource services, social work, and others, prevents researchers from clearly delineating organisations involved in adult learning provision. Adult education is an immensely complex sector in Europe, with an interplay of different providers—private/corporate, not-for-profit/charitable (voluntary) sector,

and state-funded—operating with diverse sources of funding and governance structures and providing learning in a variety of subjects. Adult education provision is also influenced by societal and welfare state structures (Saar & Räs, 2016). Some countries collect data on provision, but overall data on the adult learning staff is scarce. The focus of national statistical efforts in this area is often on accreditation or certification of teaching professionals or programmes. The focus here on adult learning professionals, and their opportunities to develop teaching skills, against the backdrop of organisational practices, contributes to the growing body of literature on adult learning and on human capital development.

## The Case Studies: Organisations as Embedded in Adult Learning Systems

The organisations selected for case studies stem from different sub-fields of adult learning and are embedded in quite different adult learning systems (Desjardins, 2017), characterised by a wide array of dimensions. These dimensions include forms of governance, the role of public funding, links between initial education and formal adult education, links between adult learning and systems of qualifications, and frameworks for guidance, and recognition of prior learning.

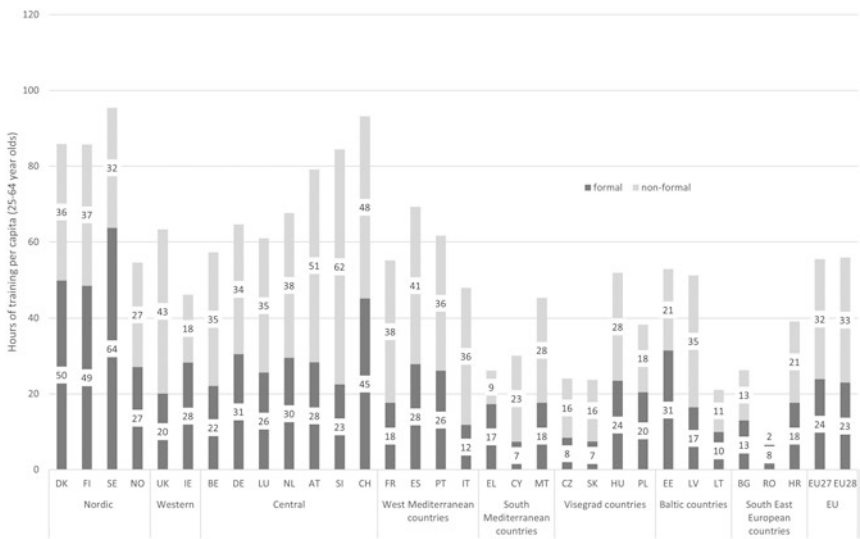
With regard to the sub-field of adult learning provision, unfortunately, no widely used typology of sub-fields of adult learning is available (for a review see Merriam & Brockett, 2007, Chapter 5). Typologies often use the category of learning provision (formal versus non-formal), the sources of funding (private versus public) or the type of provider organisation (see example below) as their basis. More comprehensive typologies have been constructed for the purpose of a particular survey or study only, such as the typologies for covering formal adult learning (Hefler & Markowitsch, 2013) or for adult education provision targeting disadvantaged groups (Boeren & Whittaker, 2018).

Unfortunately, there is no comparable cross-country statistical source on organisations active in adult learning. However, as a proxy for the size of the adult education sector, and, respectively, some of its sub-fields, information stemming from the Adult Education Survey (2016) can be used.

When comparing countries based on the data available (which, taken overall, is scarce), adult learning systems differ, first of all, by their relative size, as captured by the indicator of the number of hours of provision per adult—the more hours per capita, the larger the provision (see Fig. 13.1). Relative to the size of the population, among the four countries compared, Austria provides the highest number of hours (79) of organised learning. Only in the Nordic countries and in Switzerland are the figures significantly higher. In the UK, more hours of organised instruction (63) are provided than the average of the EU27. In Italy, the number of hours provided (48) is slightly below the EU27 average. Slovakia has one of the EU’s lowest numbers of hours provided per adult (23).

Focussing on non-formal adult learning and again using the number of hours per capita as a proxy, further relevant differences between the four countries’ adult learning systems emerge. The role of employers in sponsoring non-formal education and training differs substantially.

Examining the distribution of absolute hours per capita in non-formal adult education across sub-types of provision, in Austria, approximately



**Fig. 13.1** Number of hours in formal and non-formal learning activities per adult (25–64) in 2016 (Adult Education Survey). (Source: Eurostat—Adult Education Survey, own calculations)

24 hours per capita (46.8% of all hours in non-formal adult education) are job-related and employer-sponsored, 13 (25%) are job related but not sponsored by the employer, while 14 (28.2%) are not job related. In the UK, the importance of employer-sponsored job-related training is even more marked (21 hours, 59.7% of all hours); this compares with approximately 4 hours in job-related training without the support of the employer (10.4%) and 10 hours in training not related to a job (30%). In Italy, approximately 18 hours (51%) are employer-sponsored job-related training, about 9 hours are job-related training not supported by the employer (24.4%), and 9 hours are training not related to the job (24.6%). In Slovakia, much lower numbers of training hours are provided. However, the structure of non-formal provision is similar to that in the UK: 9 hours (59.9%) of employer-sponsored job-related training, 2 hours of job-related training not supported by the employer (14.3%), and 4 hours of training not related to a job (25.8%).

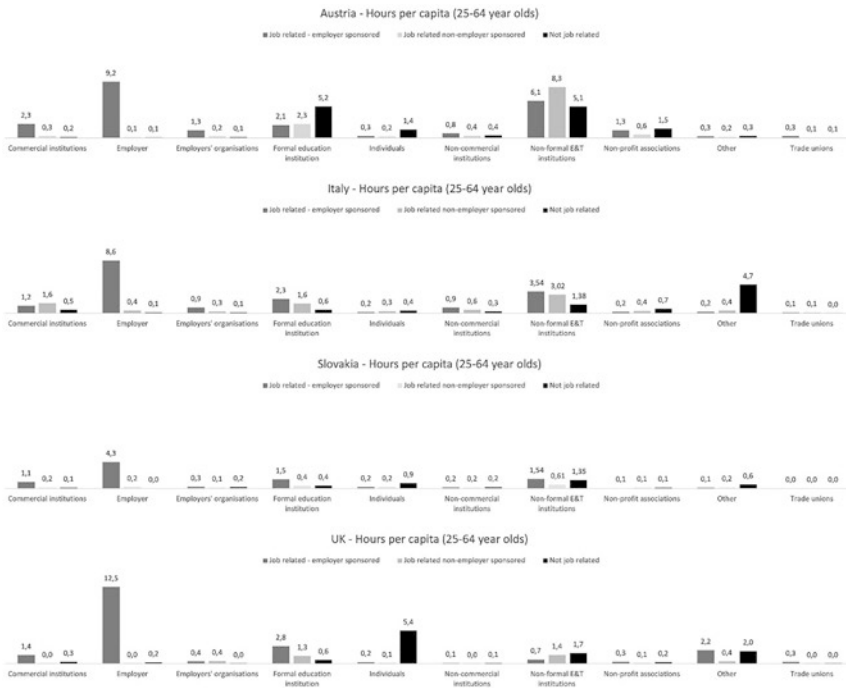
The Adult Education Survey (AES) uses a long-standing typology of types of providers of non-formal education and training.<sup>1</sup> In all countries, the participant's employer is not only the main funding source for non-formal training but also a key provider of these activities (AT: 18.9% UK: 35.8% IT: 24.0% SK: 27.9%). However, employers make substantial use of external training providers for delivering training activities, (Cedefop, 2019), so for their in-house training as well as for external training activities employers are the source of funding for a whole sub-segment of the 'training market' within the adult learning system. The two case studies in Slovakia both concern organisations which mainly provide direct support for enterprises in the provision of internal training activities, so their activities appear primarily under the 'employer' category.

Countries also differ starkly in the size of their non-formal education and training sectors. The latter comprise both public and private, or not-for-profit and for-profit organisations. Organisations belonging to this

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<sup>1</sup> Formal education institution (as schools or universities), non-formal education and training institutions (no matter whether public or private, for-profit or non-profit); commercial institutions where education and training is not the main activity (e.g. equipment suppliers), employers (of the participant), employers' organisations or chambers of commerce, trade unions, non-profit associations, for example cultural societies or political parties which run adult learning programmes, individuals (e.g. students giving private lessons), and non-commercial institutions where education and training is not the main activity (e.g. libraries, museums, ministries). See Eurostat (2017).

sector play a key role in providing courses to all, irrespective of their employment; they do this through public funding, through taking fees, or by a combination of both. Organisations regarded as ‘adult education providers’ employing adult educators fall mainly under the statistical category ‘non-formal education and training institutions’; they would typically be regarded as the core of each national adult learning system, although their contribution to the total hours of non-formal education is only small in some countries. For the four countries, the relevant shares are 11% (UK), 22% (IT), 23% (SK), and 38% (AT). The hours provided by most of the case study organisations (AT1, AT2, IT1, IT2, and UK2) would fall within this statistical category (Fig. 13.2).



**Fig. 13.2** Number of hours of education and training per adult, with breakdowns of sub-type of non-formal education and sub-type of provider—Austria, UK, Italy, and Slovakia. (Source: Authors’ calculation/representation based on Eurostat—Special data extraction on behalf of the DG Employment used for the report (Molyneux et al., 2020))

The four countries' adult learning systems reflect wider differences in their institutional arrangements. Roosmaa and Saar (2017) constructed a typology reflecting the interplay between adult learning provision and broader 'institutional packages' (Mills et al., 2008). Austria is typified as having a conservative welfare state regime with generally good income protection, a highly developed active labour market policy, where education and training are configured to provide appropriate skills, and above-average participation in adult education. Slovakia has a post-socialist, embedded and predominantly neoliberal welfare state, which features minimal income protection and a less developed active labour market policy. Participation in adult education is generally low, with high inequality in participation; however, in relation to workplace learning, participation rates are above average in terms of coverage but very low in terms of the number of training hours per adult. Italy is typified by a Southern European familiaristic welfare state system, with a coordinated market economy, a medium level of income protection and a less developed active labour market policy. There is a medium level of participation in adult education generally, but inequalities in participation are high. The UK is a liberal, market-based economy and a related liberal welfare state regime marked by formal contracts, minimal income protection, and limited business coordination. Participation in adult learning is at a medium level and increasingly unequal.

Our choice of organisations for fieldwork and analysis represents different types of providers and sectoral sub-fields of adult learning and, within individual countries, vital sub-fields within the adult learning system. The case study overview presents a concise summary of the information gathered for each organisation. Each organisation was asked to fill out a questionnaire on company human resource and training practices and sectoral conditions, and desk research focussed on sectoral information and mapping of the sector according to organisational fields. Fieldwork relied on two rounds of semi-structured interviews with employees and management of each organisation. Table 13.1 offers an overview of the eight organisations involved.

**Table 13.1** Characteristics of the organisations studied

	Austria		Italy		Slovakia		United Kingdom	
Anonymised name	AT1	AT2	IT1	IT2	SK1	SK2	UK1	UK2
<i>Field</i>	General adult education	Alternative education/social work	General education	Vocational/publicly funded training (ALMP)	Corporate training	Corporate training	Further education college	Adult education college
<i>Number of employed</i>	50–249 (unit)	50–249	250–449	10–49	10–49	50–99	>500	50–249
<i>Year of foundation</i>	1887/ 2015 (unit under study)	1986	2013	1978	1995	1993	1928	1909
<i>Type of area/location</i>	Capital	Regional capital	Medium town	Medium town	Capital	Small town	Larger town	Capital
<i>Type of organisation</i>	NGO	NGO	NGO	Private association	Private for-profit	Private for-profit	College	NGO
<i>Target audience/participants</i>	Individuals	Individuals	Individuals	Individuals	Employers	Employers	Individuals	Individuals, employers
<i>Course financed (main source)</i>	Public funding	Public funding	Public funding	Public funding	Private/ employer	Private/ employer	Public funding	Public funding
<i>Type of provided learning</i>	Formal/ non-formal	Formal/ non-formal	Formal/ non-formal	Formal/ non-formal	Non-formal	Non-formal	Formal	Formal
<i>Primary educational goal</i>	Skills/ qualifications	Skills/ qualifications	Skills	Skills/ qualifications	Skills	Skills	Qualifications/ skills	Qualifications/ skills

Source: ENLIVEN



## Austria and the Sub-field of Adult Basic Skills

The two Austrian organisations studied both have a focus on the provision of adult basic education. While adult education as an organised field of activity has a century-long history, adult basic education as an independent field of activity emerged only in the early 1990s, and forms of governance, eligibility criteria and funding rules remain under constant development. A further strand of work relates to the provision of courses of German as a Second Language to learners with limited previous schooling in their mother tongue: this has gained in importance with every new wave of immigration—these are often caused by forced displacement. However, the field is also under constant pressure as laws and practices governing immigration and support for refugees have become more and more illiberal over the past three decades.

The first pilot projects in literacy education started in 1990 at the Vienna Adult Education Centre (Volkshochschule Wien, *VHS*); another strand of courses was developed for practically illiterate participants studying German as a second language (Doberer-Bey, 2016; Hefler & Steinheimer, 2020; Wieser & Dér, 2011). In response to the Lisbon Strategy and the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, Austria increased its policy attention on adult education. By 2000, the Ministry of Education had gained access to ESF funding, previously limited to the Ministry of Social Affairs. New initiatives could be supported in line with EU policy prescriptions. In 2000, the first PISA results became available, showing that up to a quarter of 15-year-olds lacked basic skills, and leading to a recognition that adult illiteracy is widespread in Austria (later confirmed by PIAAC).

## Italy: Basic Skills and Training Within Active Labour Market Policies

The case studies developed for Italy cover the sub-field of adult learning provision of general education with a focus on basic skills and employability. General adult education (also known in Italy as popular adult education) was developed to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged

sections of the population, in particular the working class, to fill a gap in training and social skills. Courses for adults were first offered in 1947 in so-called ‘social schools’ promoting literary and numeracy skills. From the 1970s to the 1990s, associations and trade unions played a key role. Since the 1970s, responsibility for adult education has mostly been transferred to the regions.

Data show the importance of adult education providers aiming to develop skills, including basic skills, as a means of empowering learners, especially those who dropped out of the mainstream school system. A first element concerns functional illiteracy among adults: in PIAAC (2012) Italian adults (aged 16–65) were lowest with regard to literacy skills and the second lowest for those of numeracy in Europe. A second area of concern was inactive young people: those included neither in the labour market nor in education and who have stopped looking for opportunities. Italy’s percentage of such people aged 20–34 is the highest in the EU 28, according to Eurostat.<sup>2</sup> Migrants are an important target of adult education provision offered by the third sector. Currently, popular education—which aims to empower disadvantaged people, offer a second chance for training, and develop critical thinking and participation—comprising non-formal education in a multiplicity of subjects, is organised mainly by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with mainly volunteer teachers.

## **Slovakia: Training Provided by Employers**

The adult education sector in Slovakia can be considered newly developed after system changes following the ‘velvet revolution’ of 1989. Prior to that, the training provision had been centrally planned and ideologised, and establishing links between current and socialist structures remains problematic. Some legacies of the previous system can be identified with regard to the type of training adult educators typically have: for example ‘organisational psychologists’—who provided consultation to employees in socialist enterprises and worked for other institutions in

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<sup>2</sup> See Eurostat Dissemination Database EDAT\_LFSE\_18.

areas overlapping with current training provision—still have a significant role. Psychologists represent one of the stronger professional groups among adult learning teachers, in particular in ‘corporate training’. This sub-field is formed by organisations providing training to private companies; two such organisations took part in our research. The corporate training sub-field is also sometimes referred to as management training, and while managers at different levels of private commercial organisations represent the main kind of participant, employer demand for training of wider groups of employees is increasing.

Organisations active in corporate training vary in size and corporate type but are mainly small. The analysis of registration and survey data shows this sub-field comprises about 50 smaller companies, each with around 10–15 employees. The sub-field is marked by intensive competitive and innovative pressures, and international and foreign players are entering the market with products or complex services, often forming partnerships with local organisations. Some training is provided by self-employed consultants hired directly by employers. In terms of content, the organisations specialise in soft skills training or vocational (hard skills) training, or a combination of both.

## **The United Kingdom: Community-Based Colleges for Continuing and Further Education**

The UK has a long and rich history of adult education provision. This has taken a range of forms, which reflect the changing status of post-school education over the last century. The two case studies were chosen to reflect adult education’s complex and diverse offers, as well as particular issues of funding and sustainability currently affecting the sector.

The adult residential colleges in the UK, of which UK2 is an example, emanated from a tradition of community-based education and included short- and long-term residential colleges for adults. Many developed in the wake of the Second World War. Much of their work now focusses on basic skills and responds to burgeoning mental health issues connected with increased precarity and social inequality. Further Education colleges, such as UK1, largely continue the work of former technical schools, providing

technical and professional education and training for young people and adults. The Further Education sector in the UK also came into its own following the Second World War. Further Education colleges became associated largely with industry and its technical needs, developing strong links with businesses and employers in the areas where they were located. Since the 2008 financial crash, participation rates in adult learning and education have fallen significantly (Tuckett, 2018, p.14), showing a decline in education and training participation (in the four weeks prior to the survey) for 25 to 64-year-olds from around 21% in 2008 (double the then EU average) to around 14% in 2017 (EU average: 11%). Although all groups participate less, the well-educated and wealthier members of society remain the main beneficiaries of educational opportunities for adults.

## **Organisational Agency in Shaping Workplace Learning Potential: Key Results**

In this section, we explain how the adult education organisations support learning among the teachers they employ. We use the Enliven analytical framework presented in Chap. 10—which studies the interplay of individual agency and organisational agency in workplace learning—and build on the analysis presented in Chaps. 11 and 12.

We mainly address workplace learning, understood as learning available in day-to-day work experience. We investigate three areas where organisational agency affects early career adult educators' learning, assessing how organisational agency affects early career teachers in adult education organisations in terms of (i) their workplace learning opportunities, (ii) their career pathways, and (iii) their involvement in innovation processes.

### **Organisational Agency in Shaping Workplace Learning Opportunities**

In Austria, both organisations rely on the self-sustained work of teachers, who—as members of a (para-) profession—are able to deliver a demanding service on their own, taking responsibility for meeting participants'

needs and meeting professional standards. While teacher jobs in both organisations comprise a broad set of tasks and include a large range of non-routine work, AT1 somewhat limits the task requirements and, in particular, excludes practically all management-related activities, while AT2 requires the full set of tasks to be covered, including taking part in the management of projects. Its vision is to turn everyone in the project-based organisation, in the long run, into an 'independent contributor'.

In Italy, both organisations' core staff are composed of managers, administrators, and trainers. The core trainers are recognised as experts in education and training and design the general structure of the training programmes, but they seldom teach. The lion's share of teaching is provided by adult educators who only teach: often employed on non-standard contracts, they have no other role in the organisation. In both organisations, informal learning in the workplace is the dominant form of learning. Early career teaching staff perceived their workplace learning simply as 'learning by doing'.

Early career corporate trainers in both Slovak organisations reported that (i) learning by doing, enforced by 'being thrown into the deep end', was the key mechanism for learning and induction in the workplace, and (ii) learning from unexpected events was a regular feature of daily work. The two organisations differed with regard to how managerial and teaching tasks were divided: a strict division in SK2 but a more fluid division in SK1, where trainers were seen as para-professionals and at least partly encouraged to take a more active role in developing business opportunities. While new corporate training teachers in SK2 had some access to senior trainers' knowledge, this was not explicit and was seen by the new teachers as limited. In contrast to that, SK1 places emphasis on access to learning and support for new corporate training teachers and reflects on organisational forms that could lead to more intensive support of workplace learning for them.

Managerial and administrative tasks were clearly structured in the British organisations UK1 and UK2. Both employed experienced tutorial/teaching staff: given the skills-based focus of their teaching, there was an emphasis on industrial sector experts in UK1. In UK1, job descriptions for administrative staff were tightly defined, but there was an increasing expectation that they would take on additional work when

departing staff were not replaced. Continuing professional development was required to retain appropriate skills and knowledge; some staff paid for this themselves. In UK2, by contrast, there was a higher degree of flexibility in administrative staff job descriptions, though this was beginning to change as the job system itself was becoming more closely delineated.

## **Organisational Agency in Shaping Early Career Pathways**

Neither Austrian organisation foresaw any formal route of advancement for employees with teaching obligations. The organisations complied with sectoral collective agreements (AT1 for adult education, AT2 for the social work sector), under which improved professional competences were captured by a pay scale rewarding additional years of professional experience in a current organisation and (though to a lesser extent) in the field of practice. In AT1, adult basic education teachers were expected to focus on teaching and not take on other roles. Given the variety of basic education on offer, trainers could move internally between sub-types of programmes and sites of delivery. Moving to a non-teaching, administrative or managerial position was not formally envisaged, although new roles were frequently filled by former teachers, who gave up a temporary teaching position to assume a permanent administrative role. In contrast, in AT2, adult basic education teachers were expected to move on to related—yet different—situations, following the project-based logic of the organisation and changing fashion in demand. While the qualification for basic education teachers was decisive for work in AT2's current situation, it was expected that employees would adapt to changing certification requirements if they stayed with the organisation over several funding periods and regimes. Becoming a multi-skilled member of the organisation and engaging in its overall mission could be seen as the goal in career development, with less emphasis on the particular roles associated with any particular type of professional activity. Equal emphasis was therefore given to the generic aspects of how to support client groups with various needs, and to the capacity to make learning happen. Neither

AT1 nor AT2 could make lasting promises going beyond the funding period of the particular training programme. As the organisations lacked the resources to bridge interruptions in public funding, educators in the field needed to accommodate themselves to the constant risk of becoming unemployed, at least for a period (such as between the end of one funding cycle and the start of another).

For teaching positions in adult basic education, neither AT1 nor AT2 differentiated personnel into groups for different career pathways according to any formal criteria (for instance, according to the level of formal qualification or previous experience). Any decision on further advancement, such as an invitation to qualify for other roles or apply for an administrative position, was based solely on evaluation of individuals' demonstrated practice, rather than formal selection or stratification criteria.

Turning to Italy, the University of the Third Age programme tended to change little, and IT1 usually hired the same teachers every year. About 300 teachers worked for IT1, but a teacher might be hired for a limited activity, such as for a single course of a few hours. Teachers hired in one year had no assurance of being hired the next, though in IT1 they did in most cases. One progression route seems to have been to achieve higher volumes of teaching hours. As a public body, IT1 must adhere to regulations when hiring staff. Teachers usually work on the basis of freelance contracts, even when employed exclusively by this organisation. Avoiding permanent contracts for freelance consultants seems to be common practice in the field: after three renewals of a fixed-term position, an employer must offer the employee a permanent contract. Recently, IT1 developed activities to cover certification of skills as a new area of professionalisation for teachers. IT2 is privately owned and therefore more flexible in its hiring and human resource processes. Teachers usually start with freelance contracts but progression is open to fixed and (later) permanent contracts based on performance and interest. However, no career pathways were outlined: progression is limited to increased teaching and contract security. The trainers were experts in their respective fields and could therefore work for other organisations as well.

The two Slovak organisations employed different organisational strategies, which had an impact on career pathways for early career teachers

(usually called trainers or lecturers). SK1 emphasised selecting ‘the right type of talent for adult teaching’: prior experience and formal qualifications played little role in selection. New corporate training teachers were supported to find their own thematic focus or to assume other professional roles, such as management or marketing and sales. Corporate training teachers were expected to function as para-professionals responsible for a wide range of tasks related to company needs, but there were no strict requirements as to the actual mix. New teachers were strongly encouraged to develop organisational citizenship and—despite clear ownership by three managers—a horizontal structure was communicated; sharing responsibilities for company prospects was a strong factor in organisational culture. Core teachers worked full-time but flexible arrangements were possible (if mutually beneficial) so they could develop other activities outside the company. In SK2, teachers had consultant contracts. Their previous occupational experience in specific areas was often the key attribute for being offered engagement, new thematic areas being targeted to increase the scope of the training offer, and organisational prestige. Neither seniority nor previous senior executive positions were required, though SK2 recognised them as a marketing advantage. Progression routes were in general not clearly visible; some trainers were selected for closer cooperation with top management, and though formal qualification could be an asset, no general pattern was visible. Family ties may be a latent, unobservable, factor in SK2’s decision-making: it is family-owned. Decisions on further advancement in both organisations were made with reference to demonstrated individual practice, rather than to any formal selection and stratification criteria.

In UK1 and UK2, progression routes for staff in different employment areas were generally open only to administrative and managerial staff: teaching staff tend to be treated differently. Even at UK2, where they had job security and a defined position within the organisation, teachers seem not to have had the same flexibility to move upwards. Management staff in both institutions tended to come from managerial or administrative roles, either within the organisation or outside, and not from teaching, although the Principal of UK2 had started her early career as a teacher/tutor. At UK2, two management staff had worked in the organisation for many years, though the rest of the staff team was largely new. In UK1, as



is typical of the further education sector, financial issues and a shift in focus towards apprenticeships had impacted on staffing levels, and teaching staff numbers in particular had declined. Although guidelines on pay and conditions of service are recommended by the University Colleges Union, colleges can set their own salary scales: at UK1, teaching staff frequently work across a range of educational institutions—schools, further education colleges and community learning centres—on various part-time contracts. Adding to this sense of precarity, entitlement to sick pay, holiday pay, and pension schemes all depend on whether staff are employed directly or through an agency, and in UK1 the number of sessional agency teaching staff was large. For some roles, such as teaching core subject areas (e.g. English and Maths), the college was part of a national job evaluation programme: job descriptions were based on a model, roles were organised around teacher training system norms, and staff productivity linked to their qualifications. For other teaching staff, professional expertise gained in the workplace was preferred over teaching qualifications. With increased costs for higher education, UK1's teaching staff was expected to be appropriately teacher-trained before employment: the institution no longer supported studies on the Certificate in Education. UK1 also had a number of newer management staff, in their 30s, brought in as new areas developed, and there was an increasing use of business models. This was true, in particular, of business development and policy, where high-level skills from the corporate and governmental world were thought necessary and, in effect, 'bought in' (Table 13.2).

### **Organisational Agency in Involving Early Career Workers in Innovation Processes**

When discussing innovation in adult education organisations, as in the two Austrian organisations with which we are starting, we must distinguish between innovation at the organisational level (such as bidding within new funding schemes) and at the level of provision of courses (such as intensifying the use of smart phones in teaching).

**Table 13.2** Organisational agency and workplace learning paths for adult education teachers in early career stages

<i>Key routes of progression based on qualification levels/holding of specific qualifications</i>	<i>Staged models of progression</i>			
	<i>Visible or available for all</i>	<i>Visible or available for selected early career adult education teachers</i>	<i>SK2</i>	<i>Not outlined or not visible</i>
Closed (e.g. based on qualifications)				
Not closed	AT2			AT1, IT1, IT2, SK1, UK1, UK2

Source: own processing of information from the case studies

On an organisational level, both providers were pioneers in establishing adult basic education courses. The acquisition of funding was key from the very beginning. Adapting to ever-changing funding conditions remains a challenge. AT1 took the opportunity to engage broadly in the rollout of the ‘Initiative of Adult Education’, vastly expanding its educational offer and—as it grew to a substantial field of business—organising adult basic education in a unit of its own. Such processes are deeply bound up with the opportunity structures in place.

For AT2, the development of innovative educational programmes was a core aim. Besides adult basic education, it had previously taken other initiatives that eventually led to successful pilot projects. Whereas the introduction of new ideas to adult education was a key asset for AT2, the organisation subsequently had to step back from a broader roll-out of new programmes because—largely due to its commitment to long-term tenure and higher pay—it is less competitive with regard to costs than other organisations which only hire teachers on a project basis.

Responsibility for innovation at the organisational level is clearly linked to management positions in AT1. In AT2, most positions combine managerial and teaching tasks, and larger groups of staff are involved in organisational innovation. For educational providers, innovation at the teaching level also matters. Further development of teaching methods

and improving the quality of provision is an integral part of professional work for adult basic education teachers. Yet, there was at best a loose coupling between innovation in teaching and the overall performance of both organisations. Course quality does not seem to have been linked to ability to attract additional funding.

Without unconditional funding, the Italian organisations were also required to innovate and respond to ever-changing funding sources. Both IT1 and IT2 were able to respond efficiently to different challenges over the years. IT1 was founded in 2013 by rearranging components of an organisation first established in 1947, which had undergone several transformations over the decades; one of its main activities, the University of the Third Age, was founded in 1979. These different challenges meant it had rethought its objectives and mission. IT1 needed to ensure support from local government, its principal funding source. For five years, it had been struggling to occupy a niche not taken by other organisations. IT2, on the other hand, faced challenges relating to its need to find funding: in recent years, its focus had shifted to developing products tailored to particular customer needs. This has been led by an early career employee, whose strong entrepreneurial attitude the organisation recognised. IT1 trained its internal staff in new areas related to teaching, including certification of skills (a new service it offered). IT2's approach was different, hiring employees with relevant skills for specific projects.

The Slovak organisations' corporate training provision was financed by employers. The organisations were exposed to an ever-changing economic environment, which created both new training opportunities and threats from other competitors. Identifying new areas and niches in the demand for training was the key survival factor in this sub-field, and innovation was central to organisational development. The structures of both SK1 and SK2 evolved in line with their decisions to organise work to ensure constant delivery of high-quality training and to develop new services for financial stability. In both companies, some trainers, though remaining self-employed, could become intensively involved in company development (like internal employees); in SK1, however, internal employees form the core of the company, while SK2's workforce comprised trainers working as independent consultants and hired as experts in their field.

Both SK1 and SK2 were built on their founders' innovative ability, and this shaped their training provision. In SK2, the founder provided the innovative drive, with early career trainers not actively involved in innovation. SK1's management promotes a culture of cooperation on innovative ideas, focussing particularly on young trainers. It seeks to increase the company's innovative potential by developing its trainers' intrinsic motivation to strive for new solutions, encouraging all trainers—and specifically early career trainers—to develop their own solutions, and communicating internally that all trainers are potentially important contributors to its innovative capacity.

Both UK1 and UK2 considered themselves innovative in both organisation and the teaching and services they offer. UK1, required to become business-orientated by the removal of Local Authority control of further education in 1992, had worked hard since to become one of the largest colleges in the country. One of the main areas of its expansion until very recently was provision of apprenticeship support, with many teaching and support staff taken on to service the work and engage with employers. This offer was severely affected by the government's introduction of an apprenticeship levy; with a huge funding shortfall, the college subsequently lost over 200 staff.

UK2, one of the earliest adult residential colleges established, with a long record of supporting workers' education outside the state system, considered itself pioneering. Workers' education remained a key focus right until the 1970s, but UK2 has since gradually morphed into supporting 'second chance learning' with an increasingly therapeutic emphasis. It now plays a critical role in mental health, working with some of the most vulnerable adults in society. It argues through policy and research interventions to show the importance of adult education for health and well-being—well-being is a current 'buzzword' in government documents and connected funding. UK2 is increasingly one of the few adult learning organisations in the country that can manage support for people in education with such complex needs. It has engaged a number of staff in a recently created Business development team: this is deliberately situated within Education in the organisation and acts as a horizon-scanning mechanism for new trends in educational need, models of delivery, provision in community-based locations, and in evolving partnerships. This

**Table 13.3** Organisational agency and involvement of early career adult education teachers in innovation

<i>Active role of early career adult education teachers in innovation</i>	<i>Importance of raising the absorptive capacity by selecting or developing early career workers</i>		
	<i>Limited</i>	<i>Minor</i> AT1, UK1, UK2, IT1	<i>Major</i> SK2 AT2, IT2, SK1
	<i>Large</i>		

Source: own processing of information from the case studies

development has also been behind its creation of new learning support assistant posts and ensuring that teaching posts are integral within the organisational infrastructure, rather than being short-term or freelance.

We found that in adult education organisations, adult educators perform their professional roles, but often contribute little to organisational innovation or capacity to innovate (see Table 13.3). Teachers are seldom involved in organisational innovation processes beyond improving their teaching, and this is typically seen as part of their individual professional role. The situation is markedly different in the case of service providers, which mainly target enterprises: here organisations hire and develop trainers with the goal of expanding the range of customer services on offer (SK2). However, even in the case of two organisations which appear superficially similar, differences in approach to employee involvement play a role in shaping innovation. About half of the organisations studied (AT2, IT2, SK1, SK2, UK2) had a clearer understanding that by hiring and developing their own adult educators, they strengthen their potential to provide superior quality new services.

## Conclusions

Organisations in the adult learning sector rely on a (para-)professional model of work organisation for their teaching personnel. Adult educators are considered professionals, able to prepare and deliver teaching assignments on their own, and enjoy considerable leeway in how they do their job. They are typically responsible for both routine and non-routine aspects of their daily work, although they may be entitled to call in managers or other professional groups when responding to exceptional events.

Professionals' individual learning is—broadly speaking—considered the responsibility of adult educators themselves, although organisations may provide some support for formal and non-formal learning.

The organisation of work according to the professional model (Fligstein & Byrkjeflot, 1996; Freidson, 2001) can be observed across all European countries, not only for the iconic professions such as medicine or law but also in education, including adult education. However, differences in how countries prefer to organise work in general still need to be taken into consideration. As soon as professional work is provided within an organisation—rather than exclusively within the professional-client dyad—principles of professional work organisation are always blended with forms of hierarchical organisation and therefore managerialism.

The balance of power between managerial and professional members of an organisation differs not only between various types of organisations but also between societies (Fligstein & Byrkjeflot, 1996; Hefler & Markowitsch, 2012). However, the relationship between preferred types of work organisation and professional work is certainly not straightforward. Principles for work organisation present in manufacturing spill over into expectations about managerial behaviour in general. In societies where a strong occupational space limits the power of organisations and therefore managements' unilateral ability to decide how work is organised, the autonomy of members of professional groups should be greater.

The ambivalences reflected in how the ways non-professional work is organised shape professional work are visible in our Adult Education sector case studies, with its particularities—in particular its generally strong reliance on public funding—overshadowing more general patterns. The cases in the UK reflect a model where strong management dominates adult educators, though the latter belong to a group delineated and somewhat 'sheltered' by their credentials. The Italian cases also show a strong role for the management vis-à-vis educators, the latter being hired solely to teach and less shielded by their credentials. In Austria, adult basic education is a novel field and has only begun to define its professionalism: the two cases point to completely different arrangements, reflecting the organisations' size and particular histories. One is a major organisation dominated by full-time managerial staff; the other a medium-sized project-based organisation initiated on a self-help basis by unemployed

teachers. The Slovak cases represent another distinct part of adult education, made up of small, owner-dominated, for-profit organisations catering mainly for the enterprise sector: professionals with disciplinary backgrounds and different levels of expertise, seniority, and centrality within the organisations team up to meet the ever-changing tasks inherent within client projects.

Across countries and different types of organisations, the jobs of adult learning teachers are generally characterised by a strong emphasis on self-directed learning and professionalism. Management typically believes teachers benefit from their workplaces' high levels of learning conduciveness. However, we found evidence for significant variations in learning conduciveness of work available; this originated in organisational agency and cannot be attributed to the type of services provided alone. The organisation of work and HR practices can thus have a significant impact on the learning experience of teachers in adult education during their early career phases and beyond.

In terms of novice teachers' career pathways, the adult education sector is characterised by poorly structured career opportunities. Early career workers can seldom foresee what they can expect for the future. In practically all organisations, early career employees lack formally advertised career opportunities. Those organisations which pay attention to developing a sense of organisational citizenship usually provide richer progression opportunities than others, with teachers being invited to contribute directly to business. Teachers can engage in more managerial tasks and gain seniority in the profession: these usually involve winning new clients or client groups or taking on teaching roles in training programmes for new generations of teachers. Typically, in teaching roles, no career advancement whatsoever is foreseen: career progression means leaving teaching behind. In larger organisations, moving from a teaching position into management may be an option; however, this is generally not formally signposted and understood as exceptional, available only to a 'lucky few'. AT2, SK1, and UK2 represent interesting borderline cases: although they outline no formal pathways of progression, early career workers have been progressively involved in organisational cultures based on a strong sense of organisational citizenship.

Organisations with ‘business models’ focussed on providing large numbers of course hours often foresee no active role for teachers in innovation at the organisational level and take innovation in teaching to be part of teachers’ professionalism. The potential role of early career employees in organisational innovation often remains unacknowledged or underestimated. However, without involvement in organisational level innovation, adult educators are denied an important field of professional development, weakening their prospects of a decent future career in adult learning. Adult learning organisations which include teachers in their organisational innovation benefit from increased ‘absorptive capacity’ and staff motivation.

Despite high levels of skills and qualifications among adult learning sector staff, precarious employment conditions are almost omnipresent across the sub-fields and countries studied. While early career teachers enjoy their rich learning opportunities in day-to-day work, they suffer from precarious employment contracts and the absence of ‘career ladders’ which would allow them to pursue adult learning as a desirable long-term career option.

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