



## **Title of Case Study**

Noste -programme from the point of view of dialogue between researchers and practitioners

## **Summary research–practice dialogue**

In this case study all the elements of good dialogue between different partners and researchers is easy to see. From the beginning the research and practice were represented in the formal bodies of the project. Researchers worked as a part of project and they presented the results for practitioners in many occasions. This project had also had web-pages and researchers presented their results there, and results were open to comments. Researchers were also consulted and used as lecturers and experts. Research and practice was combined in many ways. The qualitative evaluation was planned to develop practices of programme. The researchers were very near the practitioners: the research dealt with the doings of practitioners, but the researchers also presented their results in the project meetings and also produced information and theoretical views to the practitioners. So there was a lot of interaction between researchers and policy makers and practitioners. One special trait was that policy makers were taking part in this project and Ministry of Education and Culture followed this project very closely.

## **Name of writer(s)**

Esko Paakkola

## **Institution(s)**

University of Eastern Finland

## **Keywords**

Noste programme, Dialogue between researchers and practitioners, access, outreach activities, vocational LLL

## **Abstract ( 100-150 words)**

In 2003 the Finnish government started a new national program called Noste (Finnish Adult Education and Training Initiative) aimed at raising the educational level of adults of thirty to fifty-nine years of age who have not completed their secondary education. The program was implemented until 2009. Its stated objective was “to improve the employment and career development of those who have at most primary-level education, to alleviate the shortage of workforce caused by the retirement of ‘baby boomers,’ and to have an effect on the level of employment.” Researchers took part in this programme from the first beginning. In this case study we are dealing with this programme mainly from the point of view of dialogue between researchers and practitioners.



## General background

Noste programme aimed at raising the level of education among adults. Like Antikainen (2005) has said "The Noste program is a state-promoted intervention in adult participation." There were generally noticed problems with people in working life with low educational qualifications (low-qualified and low-skilled people). "The situation of the least educated group was deteriorating on the labour market, as highly educated young people continue to enter the market." (Noste Programme Final Report 2010, 10).

The programme was formed on tripartite basis: education providers, working life and employees. The Ministry of Education was the main actor and financed the project. The other actors were vocational adult education centres, vocational institutes, adult education centres, folk high schools, general upper secondary schools, the labour market partners, The Federation of Finnish Enterprises and the Ministry of Labour.

The programme had a national steering group. The aim of the steering group was to steer the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and research activities. From the first beginning one member of the national steering group represented research activities and scientific expertise (professor Ari Antikainen University of Joensuu). In addition there was a steering group for research and evaluation, which was chaired by the project manager of the whole Noste project (Marja Pakaste).

The programme was divided into a total of 68 different projects all over the country. They all had their steering groups and in some of them also researchers were members.

The programme was implemented in 2003-2009 as a national programme throughout the country.

The special appropriation in the State Budget in 2003-2007 was a total of 124,5 million € for the Noste Programme. (Noste Programme Final Report 2010, 14)

## Objectives and Purpose

The group (low educated 30-59 years old) which was targeted was not easy to reach; therefore there were special objectives and measures to be implemented from the beginning:

- promoting access to education through the dissemination of information and other outreach activities (targeting also special funding for promoting access to education)
- improving their access to regularly financed vocational education and training
- increasing, through special funding, the number of available study places in vocational education and training and IT
- increasing the support measures available in general education and training through special funding. (Noste Programme 2003-2009 Final Report 2010)

The total potential target group was approximately 350 000 adults between 30 and 59 of age, who had no qualifications after basic education. The target group included also persons 25 years old and over who had not completed comprehensive school education (basic education). Out of the total group approximately 10 % (35 000) were to be reached by Noste Programme (Noste Programme 2003-2009 Final Report 2010).

The education in Noste Programme was specially funded and free of charge. The only



exemption was the statutory examination fee for participating in competence-based qualification.

Outreach activities were quite wide in scope and they were especially researched.

The means for achieving the objectives were

- to encourage and support the target group in applying for education and training using information and other outreach advisory services (guidance and direct interaction between students and teachers)
- to improve their prospects of gaining entry to the mainstream, publicly financed vocational training
- to increase intakes in vocational programmes and 'computer driving licence' courses financed from special funding sources
- to increase support measures in general and vocational adult education for untrained adults through Noste funding

The studies covered vocational qualifications fully or partially. It was possible to obtain a competence-based qualification, which is a flexible scheme designed for adults. Adults who plan to pursue further studies often have gained a large amount of experience-based knowledge during their previous employment careers. Hence, they do not need to start their training from the basics; instead their formal training can be built on their prior knowledge and skills.

The Noste Programme's competence-based qualifications consist of three levels; vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. All these could be accomplished in all fields of study. In addition, the 'computer driving license' could also be attained.

### **Links between Research and Practice**

The link between research and practice has been fulfilled in several ways. The basic thing has been the steering group of the project and the fact that professor of the sociology of education (Ari Antikainen) from the University of Joensuu was a member of that group. That group also heard the opinions of researchers. The other thing was the research steering group. Counsellor of Education Jorma Ahola, who was the chairman of the national steering group, was also a member of this research steering group. So these groups were intensively interlinked. The research steering group consisted of representatives of the Universities of Tampere and Joensuu. Essential thing was that the researchers were autonomous and independent.

Another major thing was the two-way follow-up of this programme: The number of students was followed by two separate systems: OPTI Database (NBE) and educational statistics of Statistics Finland (analytical). In addition to that there was qualitative evaluation and monitoring, which was conducted by the studies at the University of Joensuu and Tampere. This mainly qualitative research was carried out from the beginning of the programme



(normative by nature). These scientific approaches complemented each other. Research was focused on outreach activities, educational and study guidance, support measures, learning at work, regional networks of education providers, and the impact of education. (Noste Programme 2003-2009 Final Report, 18)

Research and practice was combined in many ways. The qualitative evaluation was planned to develop practices of programme. The researchers were very near the practitioners: the research dealt with the practitioners but the researchers also presented their results in the project meetings and also produced information and theoretical views to the practitioners. All the results were also on the web-pages of the project. So there was quite a lot of interaction between researchers and policy makers and practitioners.

**Research Process** (describe the method used to gather information /generate the new learning.)

The main aim of the research and evaluation process was to support the Noste programme and its implementation. Research and evaluation have been done on the national, provincial level and project level. Evaluation has targeted a) projects and the networks behind them b) the steering of the national programme and c) different activities in the programme like outreach activities, guidance and counselling and cooperation with working life and work-based learning.

Especially at the beginning of the programme the researchers used mainly participative and self-evaluative methods. Part of the collecting of information was regular e-formula inquiries. In the different phases of the project there were qualitative individual and group interviews and visits in the programme meetings. Research data was analyzed with qualitative analysis by NVivo-program. The programme enabled many-sided analysis and organising of the large data. (Kosonen and Pitkänen 2009, 42-44) Self-evaluation and self-evaluation seminars were designed to be utmost participative and executed in the spirit of developmental evaluation. Interviews were done by means of different established interactive individual and group interview techniques. One of these methods was a focus group interview or approach. This method is appropriate especially for the evaluative research and action research processes. (Kosonen and Pitkänen 2009, 45-46)

The implementation of the Noste programme was closely followed by research almost through the whole programme. Antikainen (2009, 18) has stated that the most important reasons for research was follow-up of the results and to bring evaluative knowledge to the practitioners so that they can evaluate their activities. Third reason for research has been to develop good and justified practices and to maintain and disseminate them. Research has provided good stimuli and ideas for further development of the programme implementation. Evaluation was mainly qualitative and monitoring of the programme was conducted with the help of commissioned studies at the University of Tampere and the University of Joensuu. Research activities were focused on many different aspects of the activities in the programme: regional networks of education providers and the impact of education, educational and study guidance, outreach activities, support measures, learning at work. All the

research reports are mentioned in the final report of Noste Programme 2003-2009 (Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2010:8).

**Measurement** (How was success measured? How did you find out the impact of your project?)

Approximately 7.3% ( 25 700) of the original size of the Noste target group was reached during the Programme, when the aim was to reach 10 %. Participation among the Noste group actually grew during the Programme. This was indicated by the simultaneous growth in education funded by a statutory government contribution and labour market training, which the outreach activities of the Noste Programme undoubtedly affected. The Programme succeeded in reaching 30-59 year old males, which can perhaps be described as the most challenging adult group. The distribution by gender was generally rather even (women 53%, men 47%). (Noste-ohjelma 2003-2009, 39-40; Noste Programme 2003-2009 Final Report, 26-28)

Some of the provinces succeeded in attaining and even exceeding the quantitative targets, while a few never managed to get the activities off the ground. The proportional shares in reaching the target group vary between 3.9 per cent and 12.4 per cent. The Noste group in some provinces was more active than average in accessing education funded by a statutory government contribution and labour market training aiming at a qualification, which partly explains its weaker participation in Noste-funded education. (Noste-ohjelma, 40)

Many interviewed Noste-students felt that their job security had risen through the acquisition of the certificates and qualifications. Most of them continued working in the same job, but some of them got new and more demanding assignments. Some of them received a salary increase immediately after the certification.

The Noste-programme's aim to enhance educational equality seems to have been achieved. Positive impact on the lives of those who have passed the competence tests and achieved vocational qualifications was evident. Equity was experienced best in projects where the employers had a strong involvement in encouragement and support to the training.

Acquisition of a qualification or part qualification has been acknowledged by employers. The competence needs of the employees and the workplaces were given full consideration when structuring the study programme. The Noste Programme assessment survey revealed an acknowledgement of employers on the increased professional skills and greater work commitment of their employees as a result of their attainment of qualifications. Older workers, too, found new inspiration for their work and wanted to share their skills with their younger work mates. (ibid. 43-44)

Studies undertaken after decades out of school taught the participants also abilities in "learning to learn" that are necessary for all adults regardless of their profession and status. These skills contribute to their functional capacities in their working and private lives. Employers appreciated also these abilities since they can be used as a basis for planning



additional training in the future. The value of the capacity to learn is invaluable for the employee particularly when he/she needs to acquire a new skill or new profession in order to improve his/her employability. The numerous computer driving licenses acquired during the Programme supported this development of learning abilities as well.

### **Linking Researchers and Practitioners (or Policy Makers)**

The interaction and dialogue between researchers and practitioners was realised through a many-sided process:

1. Yearly surveys to the practitioners of the Noste programme and extra survey on the resources for outreach activities
  - surveys were developed each year according to the feedback and findings
  - results were reported on the web-pages and in work seminars to the practitioners and actively discussed
2. Interaction between practitioners, teachers and employers. E.g. Case study of the North Carelian Noste -project contained interviews of the practitioners, teachers and employers and analysis of results. The same is true also on the research done by Tampere University. All the results were presented to practitioners and in some cases to policy makers.
3. The steering group of research; was from the beginning very well connected to the whole project steering group and realisation of the project
  - researchers addressed the central steering group and took actively part in the discussion
  - researchers could present their view to the central steering group and recommend research in different topics
  - there was common reflection upon the needs of research, foci, cooperation and division of work
  - research was guided by this interaction between the steering group and researchers, observations of the researchers and opinions of the project managers and the problems that were arisen in the different steering groups
4. Seminars for Noste projects all over the country
  - there were seminars for local Noste projects where Noste-coordinators and teachers and personnel from educational institutions taking part in the project were present
  - in seminars good practices were analysed in a cooperative way and the objective was to embed these practices into the practice
  - also other seminars were organised, such as the benchmark –seminars between the projects in which researchers have gathered data and also presented their results

### **Transferability of the Case and recommendations from the Case Study**

The following traits of this programme are perhaps transferable elements:

1. Clear numeric objectives and a long process
2. Organisation of the project with the interaction of research steering group and national central steering group and tripartite cooperation as a whole

3. Prerequisite: Investment of resources (and no tuition)
4. Interaction between researchers and practitioners
5. Numerical follow-up was done by Opti database (NBE) and educational statistics of Statistics Finland
6. Experiences in outreach activities (including peer support persons and their education; the most efficient outreach method has been a combination of various operational methods that included going into the workplaces and conducting face-to-face discussion with the target groups)
7. The aim to address and change the model of taking part in adult education by changing the attitude of people (school phobia) and make participation more equal
8. Guidance, personalisation and support measures (one stop shop; close to customer; Noste students needed more support and guidance than average students because of the inadequacy in study skills, fears and learning difficulties; The threshold for starting the studies is often high for those whose last experience in education has been years or decades ago. Students were also given the opportunity to improve their learning skills by studying auxiliary subjects, such as languages, information technology or mathematics. Help was also available for those suffering from reading and writing difficulties.)

### Further Reading and literature

Antikainen, Ari (2005) Between Empowerment and Control. A State Intervention into Participation in Adult Education in Finland. *European Education*, vol. 37, no. 2, Summer 2005, pp. 21–31.

Antikainen, Ari 2009, Aikuiskoulutukseen osallistuminen ja Noste. In: *Noste-ohjelma – aikuiskoulutuksen harppaus*. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2009:35.

Antikainen, Ari 2011 *Adult Learning for the Low-skilled: Experience from the Noste programme*. In Larissa Jõgi and Kristiina Krabi (eds.) *Raamat oppimisest. (The Book of Learning.)* Tallinn Ülikooli (University of Tallinn). Department of Adult Education. pp. 129-140.

*Noste Programme 2003-2009. Final report. Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland 2010:8*

*Noste-ohjelma 2003-2009. Loppuraportti. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2010:7.*

*Noste-ohjelma – aikuiskoulutuksen harppaus. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2009:35.*

*Hyvästi Pulpettikammo ! Goodbye school phobia ! Promising practices for adult education (in Finnish). Noste Programme 2008.*

Manninen, Jyri: *Nosteen prosessiarviointi (coming)*

Kosonen, Toni 2008 *Nosteen hakeva toiminta vuodesta 2003-2007 ja eteenpäin.*

Kosonen and Pitkänen 2009, *Hakevan toiminnan merkitys ja vaikutukset Noste-ohjelmassa. p. 42-44 In: Noste-ohjelma – aikuiskoulutuksen harppaus. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2009:35.*