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## **Perspectives on Policy and Practice in Access in Sweden**

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(Presentation at the Alpine Project Dissemination Conference at the 11<sup>th</sup> Scottish Forum on Lifelong Learning, Stirling Management Centre 3-6 December 2003)

**Adult education (vuxenutbildning) in Sweden is extensive and based on a long and strong tradition (more than 100 years). The Swedish strategy has for long time been education for everyone and it has been a conscious concentration that education is a way to strengthen and increase democracy and equality. Responsibility and decision making is carried out by institutions, municipalities and local organisations. Several initiatives has been taken during the years. In 2001 we got a new Government Bill, The Open University (Den Öppna Högskolan 2001/02:15) where the Swedish Netuniversity, the Delegation for widening recruitment and the Delegation for Validation play an important role to increase adults into higher education.**

### **Background**

Adult education (vuxenutbildning) in Sweden is extensive and based on a long tradition (more than 100 years) and a conscious concentration that education is a way to strengthen and increase democracy, equality, "folkbildning" and further that health, freedom in working life, life expectancy and influence in society are a consequence of educational level. Already also for more than hundred years ago corresponding courses ("Hermods") started for adults and those were very popular and reached a high number of individuals. Adult education range from higher education (HE) to non-formal popular education. It also ranges from government or municipal adult education to vocational training and staff education or competence development in working life. Although rich in variation and consisting of a large number of organisations it has some common principles. Swedish adult education is highly decentralised and autonomous. As a general principle, adult education is free of charge for the learner and financed by the public budget (study organisations may charge participant fee). Students and learners are offered financial assistance in form of grants and loans, in order to facilitate their studies (Sweden 2003a). Just over 1 million people are enrolled in adult education programs, including the Adult Education Initiative (Kunskapslyftet) and popular adult education (ibid.)

### **Policy and perspectives**

All the initiatives from OECD, the United Nation and the European Commission and even beyond, are on the agenda for initiatives and strategies for the ministries involved in lifelong learning and the eInitiatives in Sweden. In 2001 we got a new Government Bill, The Open University (Den Öppna Högskolan 2001/02:15). This is directives and guidelines for all HEI in the country. The Swedish perspectives can be summarized as follows (Sweden 2001 a b, 2001/02 2003 a,b,c,d,e, SAMS,2001,

Myndigheten för Sveriges Nätuniversitet 2001, 2002, Myndigheten för Kvalificerad yrkesutbildning 2002, NFA 2003, RVUX 2003, SCB 2003, CFL 2003, Folkbildningsrådet 2003, Höskoleverket 2001, 2003, Myndigheten för Skolutveckling 2003, Svenska Institutet 2003).

The Government is raising high demands on Universities to provide good conditions for the lifelong learning process (SUHF 2001, Höskoleverkets årsrapport 2001, Budgetpropositionen 2002, Den Öppna Höskolan 2002). The society today is rapidly changing and working life is more and more complex and raises high demands on competence and knowledge and different ways of competence maintenance to the working life. The inquiry from the world around on different forms of University Continuing Education, (UCE), is extensive and even increasing. The Swedish system gives already today possibility for continuing education, in-service training and competence maintenance. The system is open for everyone, who has the qualifications, irrespective of age, or other background and most of them are entitled for study financing.

#### **The Swedish strategy-Education for all:**

- *Improve knowledge and competence* (to increase personal growth, democracy, equality, economic growth and employment and equitable/fair allocation)
- *Pedagogic and working methods* have to be developed to meet demands for LLL and a knowledgebased society
- *Individual support and counseling*, based on validation of prior experiences
- *Suitable learning environments* for education, coaching, supervision and netbased learning
- *Economic support* to adults to stimulate participation in education and competence development
- *Jointly responsibility* for individuals and groups demand on common and specific education (for individuals, society and employers)
- *Formal and informal learning* (based on democratic attitudes and equal value)
- *A fundamental teamwork* by politicians and co-operation to realize individuals learning and competence development (authorities, labour -market and popular movements) (Vuxenutbildning för alla, 2003)

#### **Different forms of education for adults and facts and figures**

A. *Higher education:* In Sweden there are 13 universities, 37 university colleges of which 23 are state run, 300 000 students per semester, 18,000 are enrolled in research training and 20,000 works as teachers and researchers. Budget; SEK44 billion (€4.8 billion). There are different support structures to increase adults into HEI, such as The Swedish Netuniversity, Support for disadvantage groups, Delegation for widening recruitment and of course the National Agency.

B. *Liberal Adult Education- the popular non-formal and voluntary educational system for all ages:* In Sweden there are eleven different study associations (studieförbund) which conduct around 350.000 study circles every year, with about three million participants altogether. Every study association is made up of a number of local units, all in all around 900. They also arrange more than 200.000 cultural events as concerts, theatre performances, lectures, exhibitions etc. with about 15 million participants or visitors.

There are also 147 folk high schools (founded in 1868) scattered around the country. Each semester they have around 20.000 participants to their longer courses and about 80.000 participants to their shorter courses. The folk high school is for adults and the schools normally favour the admission of people with short earlier schooling. The freedom allotted to the folk high schools to create their courses according to the special profile and direction of the school, allows the course participants ample opportunities

to influence the aims and contents of their course, according to their current knowledge, interests, and needs.

For more than a hundred years people in Sweden have come together to study on their own conditions, to listen to lectures, to take part in cultural projects, etc. People meet to learn more together, to strengthen their opportunities for influencing their own situation in life and oftentimes to influence and change social conditions. Activities are wide and comprehensive. Around 75 percent of the Swedes from 18 to 75 years of age have at some time taken part in a study circle; around 40 percent have taken part in at least one study circle over the last three years. Thirteen percent have taken a folk high school course and eight percent have taken a long folk high school course. Liberal adult education is largely financed by grants from government, regional governments and local councils. The parliament has laid down the aims and conditions for granting government support to liberal adult education: People are to be given the opportunity to influence their situation in life and take part in social development. Democracy is to be strengthened and developed. Interest in culture is to be broadened and participation and the individual's own creativity is to be furthered. Liberal adult education is supposed to give priority to such activities that aim at bridging educational gaps and that are geared towards the people who are educationally, socially and culturally disadvantaged. Particularly important target groups are people of foreign descent, physically or mentally challenged participants and those unemployed.

A fundamental reason for government grants to liberal adult education is that it contributes to democratic development in society. A Government Bill in 1998 wrote, among other things: "The role of liberal adult education today is also a matter of defending, vitalizing, and developing democracy. The instability of democracy is obvious, when seen in an international perspective. There is the risk of weak popular support and alienation between the elected and the electors; there is a feeling of impotence in the face of social development that we don't seem able to influence. Through our membership in the EU, the Swedish decision making process has extended beyond the national borders. A series of new rights and obligations has also taken effect for the individual. This situation demands new knowledge. The survival and vitality of democracy must build on a culture of democracy with dialogue, discussions, and participation as important elements. It must also comprise knowledge about values, conditions, and institutions necessary to democracy. Giving liberal adult education the opportunity to grow is - in its essence - just this: strengthening democratic culture, and filling gaps of knowledge and information in society. Liberal adult education has a key role in this process. It can help create meeting-places for change and bridge the gaps between groups of people and between humans and technology."

The grant-given *liberal adult education* activities take place in study associations, mostly in study circles and at cultural events; and also at folk high schools with both long and short courses and cultural activities. Many study associations and folk high schools also conduct a number of other learning activities for councils, and organisations. A small group of people meet regularly for a period of time. The study circles are characterized by democratic values and are based upon the participants' taking responsibility for the work. Together they plan their studies, based on their own needs and interests. An important part of study circle methodology is the exchange of experiences and ideas between the participants and their own analysis of the subject studied. A major part of liberal adult education work, both in study associations and folk high schools, is done in close cooperation between popular

movements and other organisations which either are members of the study associations and /or are organisations responsible for folk high schools.

The budget is SEK 2.5 billion (€272 million). The Swedish National Council of Adult Education (Folkbildningsrådet) is entrusted by the government and parliament to distribute grants to the study associations and folk high schools, submit budget and fiscal reports, follow up and evaluate the popular education activities, and administer the Popular Education Net, a digital platform for learning and conferences.

*C. Advanced Vocational Education:* In Sweden there are 180 educational providers offering 330 courses (year 2001), 11 000 participants, SEK 55 million (€6 million). (Sweden 2003 a).

*D. Municipal Adult Education (Skolverket) (Kommunal vuxenutbildning)*  
<http://www.skolutveckling.se/vux/index.html> Municipal Adult Education consist of 419 schools in 280 municipalities, 300 000 students per year. To *Komvux*, (Kommunala vuxenutbildningen), refer basic and gymnasium adult education and some special supplementary courses. Komvux was established in 1968 to give possibilities to adults who suffered from equivalent 9-year compulsory school (grundskola) or gymnasium (gymnasium). To the official school system for adults are Komvux, adult education for mental retarded (särsvux) and Swedish for immigrants (Svensk undervisning för invandrare, sfi). Since 1996 "Knowledge increases" (kunskapslyftet) has been running. "Knowledge increases" (kunskapslyftet) is the largest concentration on adult education as ever in Sweden. The concentration has had three aims: to increase the competence, to reform adult education and to decrease unemployment. Kunskapslyftet finished in the year 2002/03 as a special project. From the 1st of January 2003 special support from the government will be available for the municipals, corresponding around 47 000 full time study places (årsstudieplatser).

*The Swedish Association of Local Authorities* (Svenska kommunförbundet)  
 The Swedish Association of Local Authorities was founded in 1908 and represents all municipal authorities in Sweden (289 primary local authorities). Its main aims are to: support and develop the system of local self-government, defend local authorities' interests, promote co-operation between local authorities and assist local authorities through service and expert advice. (Swedish Association of Local Authorities, 2003).

*E. The Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning* (Nationellt centrum för flexibelt lärande, CFL) <http://www.cfl.se/english/index.htm>  
 Flexible learning involves a form of teaching where the student's own wishes and needs are paramount. Flexible learning gives students the opportunity to choose the time, place, pace and structure of their studies. Teaching is centred on the individual and the organisations change their teaching, course structure and techniques to meet the needs of their students. Given these major changes in the world of education, the Swedish government has decided to set up the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (Myndigheten för Flexibelt Lärande, CFL) in 2002 to meet the needs of those who organise training for skills development and advice. CFL promotes the development and utilisation of flexible learning in municipal adult education, liberal adult education and working life.

### HEI- The Open University, Government Bill

In the policy from the government, stated in the Government Bill (Den Öppna Högskolan 2001) interventions for promoting broader recruitments to Universities are described as follows:

- The government suggests that there will be special regulations in the Higher Education Act, concerning Universities duty to promote and *widen the recruitment to Universities*. The government suggests further that there will be a special delegation, aiming to stimulate and promote wider recruitment activities at each University.
- Each University will also establish special *action programs* according to the plans for *wider recruitment*.
- Another activity supported from the government is the so-called *college education, together with the Local Authority Administered Adult Education*.
- The government also promote the new role of Universities, the role to stimulate lifelong learning, for example to stimulate judgment of *real competence for qualification for higher education* (validering) and even to state in the Higher Education Ordinance that real competence is adequate as well for qualification for higher education. Universities have to develop methods for judgment of competence, besides the formal educational system.
- *Commissioned Education* is one instrument to confirm the Universities role in the process of life long learning.
- There will be new possibilities for *doctoral students, to study on part –time* and also for students at licentiate degree, to be enrolled in research study programs.
- The government also states different commitments for *renewal of the pedagogic in higher education, as well as organization and structure*. Also all lecturers enrolled in higher education will have a formal pedagogic education as well as in ICT and ICT /netpedagogy.
- *The Swedish Net University* was established in March 2002. All net courses from all of the Swedish Universities will be co-coordinated from the Swedish Net University.
- From 2002 there is also a *new organization (CFL) for flexible learning*, aiming to co-ordinate, stimulate and promote all flexible learning (The Old organization was the National School for Adults).
- *New forms for distributed learning and also new alternatives for education will stimulate and promote possibilities for lifelong learning*.
- The government also estimates that there will be a stronger concentration on *additional courses for immigrants with foreign higher education qualifications*.
- The wider perspective of internationalization mobility activities will also promote recruitment to higher education. Sweden will also through different activities *promote and stimulate recruitment of foreign students*.
- Universities will also, without the government's admission, get possibilities to *prosecute education on mission, even from customers outside the EES-region*.

### Other official reports of signification

To mention some other reports of signification for widening recruitment and increasing the number of adults to HE: On Knowledge increase to strategy for LLL (Från kunskapslyftet till strategi för LLL, SOU:1999), Support for short-time studies and some other study allowance issues (Bidrag vid kortidsstudier och vissa andra studiestödsfrågor, Government Bill 2000/01:72), Qualified vocational training (Kvalificerad yrkesutbildning, Government Bill 2000/01:63), Adults learning and development of adult learning (Vuxnas lärande och utveckling av vuxenutbildning, Government Bill 2000/01:72), Equal treatment of students in HEI (Likabehandling av studenter i högskolan, Government Bill 2001/02:27), Widening recruitment for adult education (Rekryteringsbidrag vid vuxenstudier, 2001/02:161), Labour-market and HE (Arbetsmarknad och högskoleutbildning, 2003:27).

### **Authorities**

All together there are approximately 17 authorities in co-operation for adult education at all levels. It range from The National Agency, The National Swedish Social Insurance Board, The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, The Swedish Association of Local Authorities, The Swedish Netuniversity, The Center for Flexible Learning, The National Board for Study Aids and different boards for disable groups (The authorities in Swedish; Arbetsmarknadsverket, Centrala studiestödsnämnden, Folkbildningsrådet, Handikappombudsmannen, Hjälpmedelsinstitutet, Högskoleverket, Landstingsförbundet och landsting, Myndigheten för skolutveckling, Nationellt centrum för flexibelt lärande, Myndigheten för Sveriges Nätuniversitet, Riksförsäkringsverket, SISUS (Statens institut för särskilt utbildningsstöd), Socialstyrelsen, Specialpedagogiska institutet, Statens skolverk, Svenska kommunförbundet och kommuner, Talboks och punktskriftsbiblioteket).

### **The Swedish Netuniversity**

The Swedish Net University mainly aims at widening distance education in Sweden. The Swedish government recently decided to set up the Swedish Net University as a dual or multi-modal university based upon the courses and education already given by the Swedish universities and university colleges. As an initial incentive 2002, these institutes of higher education was given disbursement from the government, for courses given within the Swedish Net University. For 2002 it was 211 million SEK (21.1mill.€). This made an extra resource for departments of 9 000€ for each FTE. For 2003 the extra disbursement was totally 160 million SEK (16mill. €),this make 2000€ extra for each FTE. For 2004 the disbursement will be 100 million SEK (10mill€), this make also 2000€ extra for each FTE. Participation within the Net University is voluntary for the universities and university colleges. However, most universities will participate, for the moment 34 HEI (49 totally) and all offer a wider range of courses than those supported by the extra stimulation resources. The Swedish Net University is planned to be a strong *brand name* for Swedish distance education provided by Swedish universities. In order to run the project the Swedish Net University Agency (located in Härnösand in the geographical middle of Sweden) has been started. The *primary task for the agency is to co-ordinate the different courses and education given by the various Swedish universities*. The agency has an annual budget of about 35 million SEK (3.5mill. €) and 11 staff. Most of this funding will be used for different purposes such as *stimulating improvements* in skills and competence among distance education teachers and other personnel. It will also be used to identify topics and areas that would benefit from more distance education. Furthermore the agency runs and develops the web-based platform where the Swedish Net University and its courses are presented.

The strategic plan for The Swedish Net University Agency is mainly: Information and marketing of courses via a web gateway, development of ICT supported distance education within important areas and Development of knowledge and exchange of experiences including administrative and co-ordinate activities within the Swedish Net University

The webgateway for the Swedish Netuniversity [www.netuniversity.se](http://www.netuniversity.se) is both for students, lecturers, HEI and common information for interested. On the Gateway you can search among courses, through for example specific university or subject, level or course extent, course information, there is a map of Sweden, including all HEI and all local study centres, you find virtual study rooms,



student pool. Further the portal is not just an info portal, but it is a communication portal and you can find Net Jour Librarian, Technical support, Expert panel "Competence bank", Barometer, International Section for EC issues. In Fig. 1 some figures can be explicit, number of courses, interest application and admission since the start in 2002.

FTE		Courses	Interest application	Individuals	Admission
700 (4000)	HT 02	93 (873SE)	14 000	7 000 (22 000SE)	4 000
(4000)	VT 03	70	9 500	5 000	3 000
(4000)	HT 03	90 (2500SE)	14 000	8 000	4 000
	VT 04	73	11 000	7 699	4000

Fig. 1 Statistics for Sweden and Lund University

Numbers in brackets is for Sweden, the other ones are for Lund University

(For Lund University the youngest was born 1984 and the several 1938 or earlier and the rest somewhere between)

### Problems

Three kind of obstacles can be crystallized as individual obstacles (time, money, activity, desire or interest, socio-economic), to meet the inquiries and deliverable limits and system problems.

### Success factors

Among success factors for bringing adult learners to HE can following be mentioned: Liberal education and its long tradition and Kunskapslyftet. Further the long history of "education for all" and to include adults into universities at every level can be seen as successfactors. The Open University (the Government Bill) including The Swedish Netuniversity, Validation (2001-2007 60milj/4år), Delegation for wider recruitment and accessibility and support for disadvantage groups

Other initiatives are support for the IT portal (1 mill€ /3year, for 2003 the Municipalities get 46 500 FTE+38 self financing). The same figures are to be foreseen for 2004, the support to Municipalities 35mill€ for 2002 to develop the infrastructure for adult education. For CFL 2mill€ is allocated for development of learning centres until 040630, All education is free of charge for the individuals, so no fees for the individual. As described in the paper there are strong support from the government and different kind of initiatives has been taken during the years and also the financial support allocated for education at all kind of levels, this of course is of signification for success. The co-operation among the actors at different levels is also a success factor

## Future

Democratic values for sustainable development is a general objective of Swedish Government policy. The Swedish Prime Minister took initiative in the summit meeting in Johannesburg for a conference in Gothenburg SE 4-6 May 2004 on sustainable development. Several initiatives are to be foreseen in the coming years, such as: Support for the IT portal (Stöd till vuxnas lärande och IT portal för vägledning, 030922), Further development on adults learning and validation, (Fortsatt utveckling av vuxnas lärande- ny skrivelse om validering, 030508), An overhaul of the rules for admission to HE (Översyn av reglerna för tillträde till grundläggande högskoleutbildning, 20030327), Validation delegation for national equivalence (Valideringsdelegationen för nationell likvärdighet, 030922), Extra resources for The Swedish Netuniversity (Extra resurser till Sveriges nätuniversitet, 030922), Ranking of countries industry/economic climate, where Sweden is ranked as no3 (Rankning av länders näringslivsklimat (031030).

Other issues for the future is strengthen of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation of eLearning, Trends 2003: Progress towards the European Higher Education Area. Further extension of the third mission and development of Learning regions, SMS, Commissioned education and learning communities.

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