

ADULT EDUCATION IN SWEDEN

Source: Ministry of Education

Municipal adult education

Part of the public education system for adults, the municipally-run adult education system was established in 1968 with the aim of providing adults with skills at levels equivalent to 9-year compulsory school education (basic adult education) and upper secondary school education (upper secondary adult education).

Municipal adult education comes under the Education Act and the Municipal Adult Education Ordinance. The ordinance, which came into force on 1 January 2003, is based on the strategy and objectives set out in a government proposal approved by the Riksdag (the Parliament) in the spring of 2001. The Government's Adult Education Initiative, launched on 1 July 1996 and concluded in 2002, marked the start of a programme of extensive reform and renewal in a number of areas including municipal adult education.

Municipal adult education and upper secondary schools share the same curriculum. Although they may differ in terms of content, the goals of the national syllabuses for upper secondary adult education and upper secondary schools are also the same.

In addition, municipal adult education provides for the establishment of locally initiated courses to meet local or regional needs. Individual courses may also be organised within upper secondary adult education.

Under the ordinance, the content of municipal adult education is to be based on the needs and abilities of the individual. Support for adult learning may take the form of teaching, supervision, study guidance, or assessments of goal attainment or knowledge. Each learner is also given an individual study plan based on her or his abilities and life situation.

Educational activities must be distinguished by accessibility and flexibility in terms of time and location. They must be designed to take account of the knowledge and skills acquired by an adult in other contexts, such as her or his working and social life, so that validation of such knowledge and skills is an important starting point.

Municipal adult education may be designed in close cooperation with representatives of the infrastructure developed by local authorities along with other actors and stakeholders, such as employers and representatives of other policy areas. Introductory courses may be organised locally at basic or upper secondary level to provide opportunities for analysis, guidance and validation.

The purpose of basic adult education is to help adults acquire the knowledge and skills they need to take part in society and working life. It also aims to prepare adults for further study. Municipalities are required to offer basic adult education to all adults who lack skills normally acquired in the compulsory school system.

The aim of upper-secondary adult education in turn is to help adults gain knowledge and skills that correspond to levels set for young people at upper secondary school. When selecting from

a pool of qualified applicants, precedence should be given to those with relatively little previous education.

Education for adults with intellectual impairment (särsvux)

Education for adults with intellectual impairment is another part of the public adult education system. The scheme, which is divided into basic adult education and upper secondary level education, is intended for adults with intellectual impairment, acquired brain injuries, autism or autism-related conditions.

The system follows the same curriculum as municipal adult education but uses specially adapted syllabuses. The purpose of adult education for the intellectually impairment is to extend the individual learner's knowledge and skills on the basis of her or his previous schooling, experience and abilities. Learners can thus acquire skills in individual subjects in addition to skills equivalent to those taught in compulsory and upper secondary schools for children with intellectual disabilities and vocational training.

1 January 2007 marked the introduction of the right to basic adult education for persons with intellectual impairment who do not have the skills that compulsory special schools are designed to provide but who are capable of benefiting from such an education.

Swedish tuition for immigrants (sfi)



Swedish tuition for immigrants forms part of the public adult education system in Sweden. The purpose of the scheme is to provide learners with basic Swedish language skills. It also aims to give adult immigrants who cannot read or write the chance to acquire these skills. Immigrants must be given the opportunity to develop their ability to communicate in Swedish - orally and in writing - in everyday situations, social settings and working life. Swedish for immigrants must also prepare learners for further studies.

Municipalities are required to offer Swedish language instruction to all adult immigrants who lack basic Swedish language skills. This should normally begin within three months of

registration of residence in the municipality. Depending on the learner's educational background and previous knowledge, she or he is placed in one of three differently paced study tracks, with the right to progress to course D in study track 3, regardless of which track she or he started on.

Advanced vocational education and training (KY)



The course may be organised in the form of contract education.

Advanced vocational education and training is a collective term for vocational training in a range of subject areas. Such training is distinguished by close cooperation with representatives of working life who take part in designing the training programmes and fund the workplace training scheme Learning in Working Life, which covers about one third of the total training period. Training programmes are developed on the basis of local and regional initiatives and are thus also important for regional development. Courses of between one and three years' duration leading to an advanced vocational qualification in the trainee's chosen occupational area are aimed at students who have completed upper secondary school and people with a professional background.

Advanced vocational education and training participants are entitled to study support throughout the training period on the same basis as higher education students. Training may be organised by universities or other higher education institutions, municipalities, county councils or private education providers. Funding, in the form of state grants or special funds, may be awarded on application following suitable assessment. The entire course or a part of it may be organised on a contract basis.

The authority responsible for qualified vocational training is the Swedish Agency for Advanced Vocational Education.

Supplementary education



Supplementary education is not part of the public adult education system. Unlike other forms of adult education, it is privately owned and run, either by physical persons or organisations. Courses may supplement upper secondary education and are often dedicated to a specific subject or vocational area. Subject areas include art, dance, theatre, music, handicrafts, media and aviation. The supervisory authority is the National Agency for Education.

Liberal adult education (Folkbildning) in Sweden

Source: Folkbildningsrådet (www.folkbildning.se)



Courses include a wide variety of subjects.

Liberal adult education (folkbildning), which has a long history in Swedish social life, is provided by folk high schools (folkhögskolor) and study associations (studieförbund).

The hallmark of Liberal adult education is that it is 'free and voluntary', i.e. free from central government control and voluntary for its participants.

Swedish folkbildning is the collective name for the activities conducted by the country's folk high schools and study associations in the form of courses, study circles and cultural activities. Folkbildning is a part of the liberal non-formal educational system. Every year, several million Swedes participate in folkbildning activities.

Folkbildning – for lifelong learning

People want to learn and develop in many different contexts in all phases of life. Swedish folkbildning meets this need – and thereby contributes to societal development and growth. But folkbildning also has an intrinsic value because well-informed and active citizens constitute the core of democracy.

Folkbildning is open to everyone in society. In folkbildning, everyone participates on equal terms, but based on different conditions.

People seek knowledge and development through folkbildning for various reasons. All of these reasons are meaningful – regardless of whether it is a question of personal development, increasing the chances of finding a new job, or simply a desire to learn.

In study associations and folk high schools, opportunities of lifelong learning are provided through a rich offering of courses and educational programmes – everything from study circles where a small group meets a few times in their leisure time, up to multi-year, full-time courses of study at folk high schools.

Concept of folkbildning

Folkbildning grew forth at the beginning of the last century in a Sweden where the level of education was low and large groups of the population were excluded from higher education. Folkbildning became the answer to people's longing for knowledge and desire to influence societal development.

Folkbildning is still borne by the idea of a society with small educational rifts. There are always people, who for various reasons need alternatives to the formal educational system. Here, folk high schools and study associations have their most important mission, based on the fundamental right of all citizens to knowledge and development.

Folkbildning is a part of the liberal non-formal education sector and is free from detailed national control. This freedom, like the strong ties to the non-profit sector, makes folkbildning a force of societal change.

The ideas of folkbildning are noticeable not least in its practical activities, through dynamic interaction with the participants. Folkbildning has the following characteristics:

- It is always voluntary for the individual to participate in folkbildning.
- The participants have considerable opportunities to influence the content of the activities.
- Folkbildning is characterised by an environment in which learning and social interaction go hand in hand. The circumstances and experiences of every participant are taken into account.
- Folkbildning contributes to strengthening civil society through close co-operation with volunteer organisations, associations and various types of networks.

9 study associations

In Sweden there are currently 9 study associations to which the Swedish National Council of Adult Education distributes grants. The study associations have different profiles and emphases in their activities. There are close connections between the study associations and the Swedish popular movements, such as disabled, immigrant or environmental organisations. The study associations are located throughout Sweden.

The study circle is the most important form of study in the study associations. In the study circle, a small group meets to learn together based on a plan of study and with a study circle leader. There are study circles in hundreds of different subjects. Some have a more theoretical emphasis, such as language, history and studies in current social issues. Others are more practically oriented, such as dance, woodworking, instrumental music and so forth.

The study associations are also Sweden's largest arranger of cultural events. By arranging cultural events and lectures, the study associations contribute to a rich cultural life throughout the country.

148 folk high schools

Sweden's current 148 folk high schools are spread throughout the country. Folk high schools offer courses for adults from the age of 18. Many folk high schools are run by popular movements, such as organisations within the workers', temperance or Free Church movements. Others are operated by county councils or regions. The schools have different profiles and emphases in their activities. The folk high schools are not guided by national curricula, but instead are free to shape their activities on their own.

The length of the courses varies from a few days up to several years. The long-term courses are generally 1-3 years, some of which can provide knowledge equivalent to upper secondary school and thereby also qualify participants for university studies. Many long-term courses have a special emphasis – music, media, keep-fit measures, tourism and so forth. A few are vocational, such as the youth recreation leader and journalist training programmes. Short courses are offered in a number of different subjects and emphases.

Tuition at folk high schools is characterised by process-oriented pedagogy, in which active participation by the students is emphasized, such as in the form of theme and project work in small groups. Many adults apply to folk high schools and therefore considerable weight is placed on taking advantage of their previous experiences and using their needs as a basis of tuition.

Many folk high schools are boarding schools, which allow students to live at the school during the course. Tuition is free-of-charge and students can apply for financial aid for their studies.

Public support for folkbildning

Swedish folkbildning is largely financed through funding grants from the state, county councils and municipalities. There is a broad political consensus that the state should provide economic support to folkbildning.

The Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) has established overall objectives for the activities. They can be summarised such that the activities of folkbildning shall:

- strengthen and develop democracy,
- make it possible for people to influence their life situation and create participative involvement in societal development,
- bridge educational gaps and raise the level of education and cultural awareness in society,
- broaden the interest for and increase participation in cultural life.

Based on these objectives, the study associations and folk high schools are free to shape the goals of the activities on their own.

In 2006, a unanimous Riksdag decided on the folkbildning policy of the future. Seven activity areas were emphasized as motives for state support of folk high schools and study associations. This applies to efforts to protect society's common fundamental values, the challenges of a multicultural society and the demographic challenge of increasing numbers of elderly, and where the possibilities of life-long learning must be maintained. Furthermore, the importance of cultural activities is emphasized, as well as the significance of reaching people with disabilities. Lastly, support for folkbildning is motivated by the meaningful efforts in public health and for sustainable development and global justice, pursued in the study associations and folk high schools.

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education has been charged by the Government and Riksdag of Sweden to distribute the national grants to folk high schools and study associations. Furthermore, the council shall follow up and evaluate the activities of folkbildning.

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education has three members, all of which have close ties to study associations and folk high schools. These are:

- The Swedish National Federation of Study Associations – an interest association for the study associations.
- The Interest Organisation of Popular Movement Folk High Schools, RIO – which gathers the folk high schools operated by popular movements and other organisations.
- The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SKL – which represents the folk high schools operated by county councils and regions.

Current figures on folkbildning (2008)

Every year, the study associations arrange:

- Approximately 285,000 study circles with a total of almost 2 million participants

- Approximately 250,000 cultural programmes with more than 15 million participants

Every term, the folk high schools have:

- Approximately 26,500 participants in extended courses
- Approximately 80,000 participants in short courses

Public grants to folk high schools and study associations in 2008:

- From the state: approximately EUR 328,565,000
- From county councils: approximately EUR 82,496,000
- From municipalities: approximately EUR 42,517,000