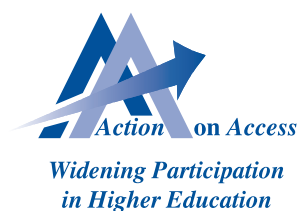


International Comparators of Widening Participation in Higher Education – Policy and Practice

Sweden, Its Universities and Vocational Education

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Series Editor: Mary Stuart



*Sweden, Its Universities and
Vocational Education*

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1. Series Summary - the research project

Context

Widening participation in higher education (HE) remains a Government priority in the UK. Each country in the UK has taken a slightly different approach; Scotland particularly focusing on progression, Wales specifically on community engagement, and England especially on young people's access to HE. Widening participation in higher education is therefore a diverse field with many different issues to be addressed. When international comparators are examined the field becomes even more diverse.

Action on Access is the national co-ordinating team for widening participation for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The team comprises a dispersed team of researchers and practitioners in the field of widening participation in England. As part of our contract with the HEFCE, the team planned to undertake international comparator research into widening participation practice.

The purpose of this research is to inform policy and practice in England by learning from other similar situations (e.g. OECD countries¹) to build the research capacity of practitioners in the field of widening participation so that they can understand their practice context in relation to other practice contexts and to develop a broader base of research material for future use in the field.

Rationale - globalisation, widening participation and learning from others

Since the 1960s, inclusion in HE learning has been highlighted by different policy initiatives, most of which were concerned about equality of opportunity, whether that be equality for Black students as in the USA and South Africa, or greater equality for working classes as in the UK. The global imperative to create more qualified workforces grows out of a concern for economic competitiveness. High-modernity or late- or post-modernity means that the industrial heartlands of countries such as the UK and USA have been devastated and, in order to compete in an increasingly tough global market, knowledge and professional skill development are important to the future of our societies. Jobs are more uncertain and individuals take risks as they move through their employment career. Higher education is seen to be one element of insurance and protection against risk (Beck, 1992). Globalisation impacts on countries but more importantly on the people within countries and it affects their experience differently. What is certain is that the poorest face the most risks in our society. In the UK, attempts to ensure social equity in higher education have not been very successful. Despite the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) creating a new form of HE, the Polytechnics, and the rapid expansion of HE numbers in the 1980s, the proportion of people from lower socio-economic groups has not increased. This means that they remain at risk of unemployment, of a less secure lifestyle, of less favourable life chances than their graduate peers, and their position in society remains focused on need rather than their ability to contribute. In England, a range of initiatives has been put in place in HE, from

¹ Although there are similarities between countries, there is no direct comparator, and it is important to take 'lessons learnt' with a degree of scepticism. It is not always applicable to transfer practice from one setting to another, though it is possible with caution to gain a better understanding of process, especially where countries have concerns about widening access.

the Universities Funding Council in 1991 providing funding for work with 'educationally-disadvantaged groups of adult returners', through to the current funding for Aimhigher for school-age young people and Lifelong Learning Networks focusing on vocational routes into and through HE. Many of these ideas have been tried in other parts of the world and, while it is always difficult to make comparisons, it is worth investigating how others have tackled issues of equality in higher education. This research project attempts to do just that; to explore competitor countries' approaches to widening access and participation, their successes and their challenges. We hope that the reports will provide cautionary tales, suggestions and inspiration to try to develop policy and practice that can provide answers for the future.

Research methodology

The project is led by Mary Stuart, Associate Director: Research and Curriculum for Action on Access. The project methodology consists of a series of research visits to comparator countries to examine practice in relation to the areas outlined above. Each visit had a team of researchers from Action on Access and each team took a specific area of interest in widening participation policy or practice, while keeping an overview of all areas of the student lifecycle.

The research questions that were examined were based on a typology drawing on current UK government policy for widening participation using the student lifecycle model (Action on Access, 2003), which highlights stages of widening participation practice such as:

1. Pre-HE interventions policy/practice
2. HE experience
3. Post-HE employment/development/lifelong learning

At all times the central focus was on what can be learned from other countries' experiences. Five visits are being undertaken² and the teams are as follows:

- South Africa: Chris Duke, Bill Jones
- Australia: Geoff Layer, Mary Stuart, Rhiannon Evans
- Canada: Sue Hatt, Phil Harley
- Sweden: John Harvey, Beth Scott, Pat Rayfield
- USA: John Storan, Liz Allen, Lucy Solomon, Liz Thomas

All teams named a visit leader who was responsible for ensuring that the visit is successful and that the report was written. The visit plan was agreed between Mary Stuart and the visit team to ensure consistency and assure the quality of the research. Key contacts were identified in each country to ensure that appropriate interviewees were identified.

Each visit consisted of semi-structured interviews with key policy makers and practitioners involved in WP activities and visits and observations of WP work. Each team

² The chosen countries and the number of visits is based on comparability in relation to UK HE systems and approaches. These vary but all have an aim to widen access as well as to address practical matters such as time, affordability etc and therefore there is sufficient connection to the UK system to make comparison appropriate.

gathered data from the country concerned including policy documents, mission statements and relevant statistics, all of which are used in producing their reports.

After each visit teams were required to complete a report on the visit and participate in a seminar to share their learning from the visit. This report forms the first of these international comparisons; further reports will follow later in 2005 and early 2006.

Mary Stuart, 2005

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2. Purpose and Context of the Visit

The Action on Access study visit to Sweden took place in June and July 2005. The particular focus for this visit was on vocational progression to higher education.

The visit coincided with a major policy review of higher education in Sweden following three years of widening participation project work and the publication of *'New World - New University'* a government bill on internationalisation, broader recruitment and admissions. At the same time reforms of the Upper Secondary (post-compulsory) school system had been proposed. This provided an interesting background to the study visit.

Three regions were visited including three universities (Lund, Blekinge Institute of Technology and the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm) and one satellite campus (Helsingborg) plus a meeting was held with representatives of most of the HE institutions in the Stockholm region. The team also met with partner organisations including Folk High Schools, municipalities and student representatives. Meetings were also held with the Ministry of Education and Culture, with the Schools Agency (Skolverket), and with Professor Kenneth Abrahamsson of the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research.

3. Sweden – the context

Despite being the third largest country in western Europe Sweden only has a population of about 9 million with some 85% living in the south of the country, especially in the three major urban centres of Stockholm (1.7M), Goteborg (800,000) and Malmo (500,000). The study team visited the south of the country - Lund/Malmo/Helsingborg in the South West, Blekinge/Karlskrona in the south east, as well as the Greater Stockholm region. Nevertheless a diverse range of social, demographic, and economic circumstances was encountered in which to examine work to widen access.

Before the Second World War Sweden was a fairly homogeneous country in terms of ethnicity with the Sámi (Lapps) being the only significant minority. Today over 20% of the population is either first or second generation immigrants. During the visit it became clear that there are very strong policies to integrate the 'foreign' population, including through education, and much widening participation activity appears to be with this target group.

The Social Democrats have been in power for most of the post-war period and currently hold 40% of parliamentary seats. This has a strong bearing on all social policies, including education, and it is noticeable that there is a much greater consensus in Swedish society towards fairness and equity than is the case in the UK. Of particular relevance when making comparisons with UK approaches to social justice and inclusion, it should be noted that Sweden devotes a much greater proportion of its GDP to the public sector than is the case in the UK and also has much higher levels of social mobility as well as a flatter distribution of income.

Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities (kommuner) and 21 County Councils (landstig) for local government purposes. Municipalities, as providers of compulsory and post-compulsory schooling, are significant partners in widening participation whilst the counties, which do have some educational functions, are less relevant.

Sweden joined the European Union (EU) in January 1995 following a referendum but remains outside the monetary union. The impact of the EU on both higher and vocational educational is significant. The Bologna Declaration (1999), which of course is wider than the EU, was at the forefront of policy and potential developments both at institutional and government level with, for example, curriculum redesign to focus on learning outcomes being a challenge to many academics. The impact of EU policies and co-operation in the field of vocational education and training was also evident. The Lisbon Strategy (2000) which aimed to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010" drives a number of the approaches to vocational education and training in Sweden, especially in the context of promoting social cohesion.

Compared to other countries, Sweden is characterized by an even distribution of incomes and wealth. This is partly due to the comparatively large role of the public sector. Public agencies employ nearly one third of the labour force. This approach is also reflected in the universal entitlement to free higher education, though student living costs are high.

4. The schools system

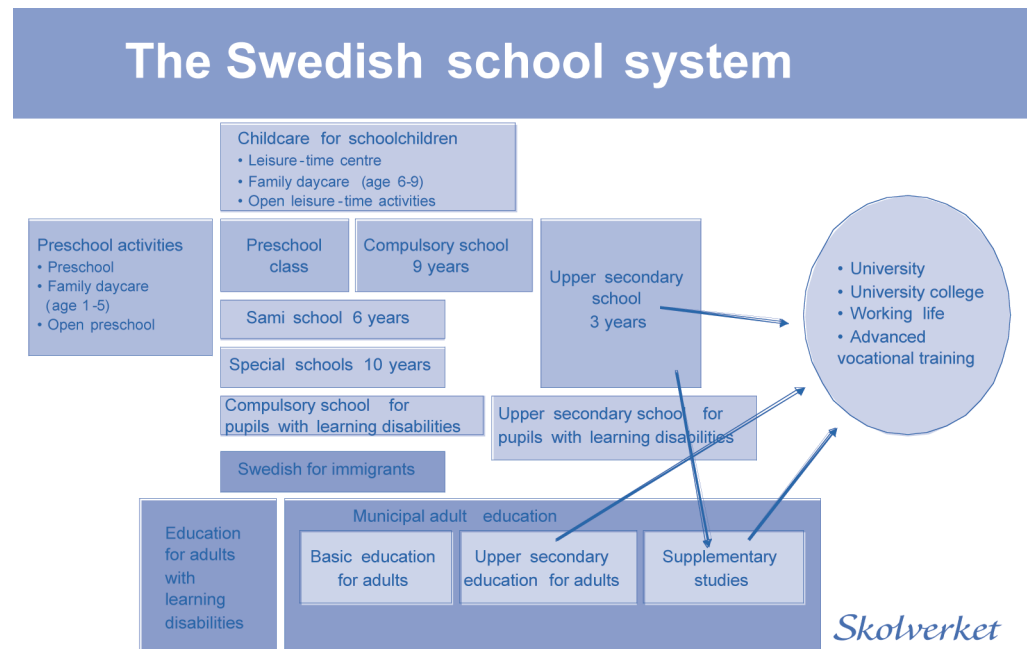


Figure 1. The Swedish education system

Figure 1 provides an overview of the education system in Sweden. Both Sweden and England are debating changes in the provision of vocational education. The effectiveness of the vocational programmes in terms of providing pathways to higher education was considered by the team. A factor of concern, for example, was the inability of all upper secondary schools to offer facilities and high quality teaching in all vocational areas. This reduces student choice because within any one geographical area there may not be adequate provision.

One feature of the Swedish system and culture is that it is quite normal for young people and adults to move in and out of the formal education system. Although progression to higher education from upper secondary school has increased over the last few years, with 45% of pupils progressing within 3 years only, 18% do so straight from school.

³ This is apart from Melbourne University which is now actively recruiting nationally.

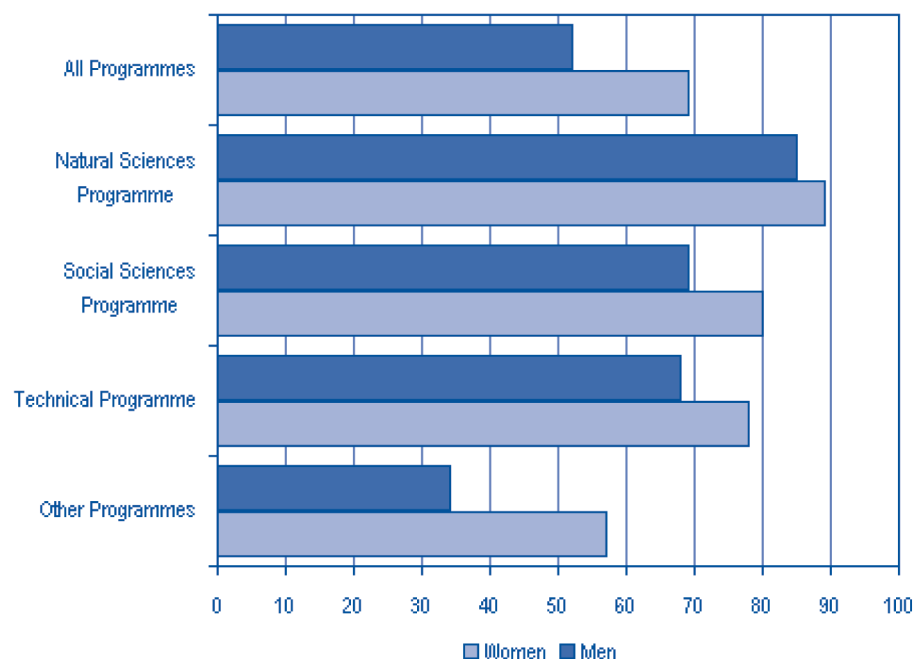


Figure 2. HE aspirations of upper secondary school students by programme and sex

Source: Statistics Sweden

These figures disguise a wide variation in progression from different programmes in the upper secondary system. Figure 2 shows the HE aspirations of students in the different programmes. It indicates that whilst between 85 and 90% of men and women on natural science programmes intend to go to HE within three years, only 35% of men and 55% of women on 'other programmes' (i.e. vocational programmes) intend to do so. Actual progression figures also show wide variation between the different vocational programmes. For example, although of the upper secondary pupils who completed in Spring 1999 42.6% began higher education within three years, 79.5% of those on the natural science programme progressed compared to only 14% from other, vocational programmes. As in England there were also wide geographical variations in progression ranging from 12% in Ockelbo to 61% in Övertorneå and Danderyd (National Agency for Education, 2003).

Overall the pattern is clear. Those high-performing students with higher education ambitions are on the natural science, social science and arts programmes and those of 'lower ability' are on the vocational programmes. As one senior academic in a prestigious university told the team; 'in theory vocational programmes give access to HE but in practice they don't'.

Current issues in the schools system regarding vocational education

As in other European countries there is a debate in Sweden about the organisation of initial vocational education. Sweden, unlike Germany and the UK, has a unitary system of post-compulsory education with the current upper secondary school (USS) curriculum of

17 programmes dating from 1991. There is no equivalent of the further education college. A government-appointed commission reported in December 2002 (SOU, 2002) and proposed reducing the 17 programmes to 8 sectors. The context was a desire to renew the upper secondary curriculum in recognition of its multi-function role of vocational orientation or preparation, higher education transition, and personal development, all within a policy framework of lifelong learning. To the surprise of many the government did not agree to reduce the number of programmes but instead chose to launch a general improvement programme, paying special attention to vocational education and to providing all pupils with high quality learning in the workplace relevant to their programme of study. In addition it is proposed to introduce a new system of upper secondary apprenticeship training. A final examination is also proposed to replace the present grading system.

It is clear that there are some serious issues about the upper secondary system. These include:

- 10% of the age cohort is not in education (majority are boys)
- A distinct hierarchy of status, with natural science at the top and vocational at the bottom and with certain vocational programmes, for example vehicle work, being perceived as very low status
- The fact that teachers in the system, unlike their compulsory school counterparts, are not expected to, or trained to, offer support to pupils in terms of guidance and counselling
- A forecast shortage of vocational teachers due to the retirement of 50% in 10 years time
- That since the 1980s there has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils on vocational programmes
- A mismatch between future skills needs and the present vocational programmes³.

Obvious comparisons can be made with the current debate in the English schools system about the Tomlinson proposals to develop a comprehensive diploma model, and the U.K. government's step back from this to exclude any reform which includes the 'gold standard' A-levels in an overarching 14-19 diploma. There are also similar challenges including the perceived lower status of the vocational pathway and, the much lower rates of progression to higher education from that pathway. At the same time a critique of the English approach to developing vocational education for young people argues that despite being driven by 'instrumental vocationalism' the quantity and quality of the vocational offer has declined and what expansion has occurred has been in the weak vocational offerings of the schools system. There are parallels here with Sweden (Hayward, 2004).

³ For a critique of the school reforms see Abrahamsson (2004)

5. Higher education and widening participation

The 2001 'Open Higher Education' Bill in Sweden introduced measures to widen access to higher education and resulted in the establishment of the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education, with a remit to actively support HEIs in their work to widen access. As in England the target was for 50% of the young cohort to progress to higher education. Over three years the Special Committee funded a range of projects falling within the broad areas of raising aspirations, bridging programmes, and student support within HEIs (Special Committee, 2005). All the institutions visited had benefited from some of this funding but recognised that they were now moving into the next phase of work to widen participation.

The political context for this can be summarised as:

'The more valuable education and knowledge become, the more important it is for the sake of equality to promote educational opportunities for all people....The knowledge society must be open to everyone, regardless of social background, ethnic origin, place of residence, gender, sexual orientation or disability....The work so far has been successful with a doubling of the number of students with working class background in ten years and the proportion of students with foreign background being equal to that from Swedish background'⁴.

There has also been a significant rise in the number of new enrolments which showed that by 2002/3 the transfer rate to higher education by the age of 25 had reached 48%, with 55% of women progressing but only 41% of men.⁵ However over the next 10 years the numbers in the potential transition cohort (age 20) will increase by 30%. This will require a major increase in higher education provision if transition rates are not to decline.

Socio-economic evidence as shown in the Swedish Universities and University Colleges Annual Report for 2004 show "the proportion of students from working-class backgrounds has risen from 18% of new enrolments in 1993/94 to 24% in 2002/03. (Högskoleverket, 2004).

The participation figures mask wide variations between institutions, courses, and regions. The continuing challenges as identified by the Ministry include:

- The uneven social recruitment amongst young students. Amongst 25-34 year olds the distribution by social background and by level of parental education is less uneven than for those aged under 22
- The numbers of students born in 1978 entering university at age 25 varies between 23% and 68% according to social background.
- The effect of parental education- with 73% whose parents had a tertiary education lasting three years or more progressing to HE compared with only 24% of those whose parents left school at the end of compulsory schooling or earlier
- The differences between programmes. The social distribution is much more uneven in longer programmes for which students require high marks to enter
- The marked differences between institutions. Newer university colleges without postgraduate and research programmes recruit more uniformly across social classes

⁴ Internal memo to the study team from the Ministry of Education, Research, and Culture.

⁵ Throughout the visit we were presented with issues about the underperformance of boys and men in the educational system

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- The more uneven social class recruitment of post-graduate compared to undergraduate programmes. For example in the 10 years 1993-2003 the proportion from working-class backgrounds remained fairly constant at 10-12% while those whose parents are in senior salaried positions had reduced from 49% to 45%.

New World-New University - the next phase of widening participation

Reflecting the previous three years' work on widening access and the internationalisation of higher education the government published its new HE Bill, New World-New University, in June 2005.

The bill has three key elements:

- internationalisation
- broader recruitment
- admissions.

Internationalisation

A regular feature of conversations with Swedish colleagues was the relative small size of Sweden, having a language spoken only by Swedes, and recognition that for the country to succeed it needs to look outwards. This was evidenced in all the visits, not only in the universally-spoken English language but in the institutions which all gave priority to international recruitment (international students currently have their fees met though this will change soon) and international links with some 30,000 Swedish students studying abroad. The new Bill will further encourage and support internationalism. It will also facilitate the biggest challenge to the system - the introduction of the Bologna Process which will require all HE programmes to be re-classified and credit-rated.

Broader Recruitment

The second area in the Bill is broader recruitment and, although there are twice as many working-class students as 10 years ago and the proportion of ethnic minority students matches the proportion in the population as a whole, there are still major challenges in terms of the variations between institutions and courses, in the performance of different ethnic groups (for example there are many Iranians in the HE system but few Somalis), and around gender where over 60% of new entrants are women. The new measures for broader recruitment will include an allocation of an additional SEK 30 Million (£2.5M) per annum to the Swedish Net University whose brief will be extended to include supporting HEIs to broaden recruitment, develop teaching methods and effect development work ahead of the new (Bologna-driven) structures for educational programmes and degrees.

To further broaden recruitment the Bill will encourage increased co-operation between HEIs and upper secondary schools. Although there will be no additional funding for this the HE Agency and Statistics Sweden will work to identify low-participation schools with which HEIs should work. The government is particularly concerned to challenge the social-class bias of recruitment to longer HE programmes and will issue special instructions to institutions concerning action to encourage more working-class students into these programmes. It will also require the National Agency for Higher Education to follow up and evaluate the work of HEIs to broaden recruitment over a three-year period.

Admissions

In the third area, admissions, the key principle is 'Fair admissions to send a clear signal to pupils'. From 2007 the new upper secondary school certificate will be aligned with the general HE entry requirements, there will be the same credit requirements for adults, the 25:4 rule is retained⁶, and HEIs will be able to determine selection criteria for a maximum of 20% of places for new students. In addition, specific work experience will count towards entry qualification.

⁶ Adults aged 25 and over with four years employment history are deemed to have attained the HE entry requirement.

6. Approaches to widening participation: practice and policy

If the Student Life Cycle model (Layer et al., 2002) is considered in the context of both Sweden and England certain similarities can be found. In particular these focus on issues around transition to HE, uneven recruitment to HE and on-course support. It is difficult to ascertain retention levels due to the more flexible nature of provision in Sweden where a generous entitlement to funding enables students to come in and out of education over a period of years. A Ministry of Education and Science enquiry in 2000 on diversity in HEIs recommended all universities to have a Diversity Plan and the 2001 'Open Higher Education' government bill focused on more active recruitment for social and ethnic diversity combined with more flexible access. Although project funds have been available since 2001, institutions do not receive premium funding specifically for WP as part of their core grants as they do in England. In spite of this there appears to be a strong commitment to the ethos of WP within the HE community.

The target groups that became clearer at this point in time overlap to a considerable extent with those in the UK: first generation entrants; entrants from working-class backgrounds; entrants from minority groups (determined by place of birth) and disabled students. Whilst there is a range of opportunities for second-chance learners (age 20 upwards), mature students do not figure as a specific target as more than 30% of all new entrants to HE are over the age of 25.

Emphasis on foreign and immigrant groups has increased as the numbers have grown significantly in recent years, and therefore the need for their integration into Swedish society and recognition of the potential they represent for the development of a skilled workforce. Ethnic groups, as in England, are generally well represented, but there are specific exceptions such as Somalis.

Since 2002 universities in Sweden have been required to produce a Diversity Strategic Plan (similar to the English Institutional WP Strategic Plan that was required prior to 2004/5). Unlike English practice no specific targets are set in Diversity Plans but simply an increase is required. Setting widening participation targets for individual HEIs was considered but rejected as being too divisive.

Clearly many of these issues are similar in England and Sweden and current legislation in both countries reflects the central drive by the respective governments for widening participation.

7. Pre-HE and HE interventions: policy and practice

Initial impressions from interviews and from visits to a range of quite different institutions painted a picture, as indicated above, of very familiar policies, targets and projects.

Projects started in many institutions as a result of funding from the Swedish government's Special Committee on Recruitment to HE over a 3-year period from 2002-2005, which had a modest budget of around £3M. Projects were in three broad areas - raising aspirations, bridging courses, and student support within HEIs. The committee especially encouraged co-operation with schools and adult education providers. This has influenced other projects in institutions based on top-slicing budgets according to their own university's diversity strategy.

Lund University

Lund University is the largest research and higher education institution in Sweden and as such it is easy to have preconceptions about such an institution's response and commitment to widening participation.

The commitment to widening participation is impressive - and at the highest level. The assistant vice-chancellor, with responsibility for widening participation, sees the previous three years of widening participation projects as a period in which the approach gained wider recognition and support within the institution - although there are still some issues. It is clear that, unlike in England, there is no public debate about widening participation in higher education - it is an accepted facet of government policy. There are, however, concerns about the new HE bill published in June 2005 and a perception that its message is blurred and puts Lund and other prestigious universities under special pressure given the existing competition for places.

Although there is a strong government emphasis on expansion and equity there is also much concern that this should not be at the expense of quality. At Lund there is a genuine commitment to equality of opportunities and to diversity on cultural, social, ethnic, sexual and religious grounds. 90% of campus buildings, for example, have disabled access. It was indicated to the team that there had recently been a significant attitudinal change to WP amongst the academic staff at Lund University. The assistant vice-chancellor said; "If we don't address diversity we become very narrow minded".

The University has top-sliced SEK 12 million to address these issues of widening participation. A disability budget is also identified and, in addition, a Diversity Manager had been appointed.

In Sweden a central admissions system operates though universities can choose 10% of their intake using local criteria (to rise to 20% following the new HE Act). Lund is now starting to implement this allowance but there are some restraints due to very tight government criteria which exclude any consideration of ethnicity or social class.

A three-phase approach is being taken to address widening participation: projects, collaboration, embedding. The current phase is the transition from collaboration to embedding. There are difficulties, however, in co-ordinating such diverse activity across a range of partners (as with Aimhigher in England)

A University Advisory Board oversees all widening participation activity within the institution similar to the widening participation strategic steering groups that have been established in some English universities. A raft of cross-faculty collaborative projects has

been established and includes work with HEIs (including University Colleges of Malmö and Kristianstad) and municipal schools, trade unions, Folk High Schools, parents, community groups and immigrant groups. Projects include the provision of promotional literature in six immigrant languages.

Lund has supported a range of pre-HE interventions, some of which are student-led. Outreach work includes a project run by students sending ambassadors to schools that often have large immigrant populations, a project to improve contacts between Lund Institute of Technology and upper secondary schools (USS), science shows for children, special projects on maths, theology and religion, and bridging courses. A Supplementary Instruction (SI) project runs as a peer-facilitated study system and uses students (often trainee teachers) to go out to upper secondary schools and help with problem-based learning focused on high risk courses (note - not high risk students), also raising interest in the University. This project has proved a good example of using widening participation work to develop students' leadership skills and has become self-sustaining by getting the schools to take this on themselves with the upper secondary schools now peer-mentoring in the compulsory schools. This works particularly well in rural areas and is now also established in Gothenburg and Stockholm. Whilst this has similarities to student tutoring schemes it has attracted wider interest, and links have been developed with Manchester University.

On course support is now available for students through a Centre for Skills and Language. Although some faculties have provided careers guidance a central service has not been available until 2004/5. Given the graduate employment difficulties in some disciplines, particularly science, the importance of good careers advice has now been recognised.

Lund has also co-operated with a range of Folk High Schools in southern Sweden where older students can study the same curriculum as at USS. The average student is 20-25 years old and has been unemployed or had only intermittent work since leaving school. A special project of 40 weeks duration has run to particularly help students from widening participation backgrounds to achieve university entrance qualifications, funded originally by special national project funding. There are also shorter 6-month specialist courses for those made redundant where 50% of the time is spent studying and 50% on job search. Most students are aiming to go into public sector areas such as nursing, the police, law and social work. FHS programmes are often seen as the last chance to carry on studying and as such are now attracting more applicants than there are places available. There is currently a national quota for the admission of Folk High School students into HE.

A more flexible approach to provision and better student funding allows Swedish students much more control of when and how they study. In addition, most students put their own courses together from a number of options, i.e. a much more individual student-orientated approach than that taken in England. Many Lund University students (2000 +) are e-students on specialist or post-graduate programmes. Also 50% are on other short courses that attract transferable credits. This precedent will help the University to address the requirements of the Bologna Agreement.

Whilst the main campus and associated institutions near Lund have a range of projects running and there is a university strategy for widening participation, overall there is still an impression that work is at a project stage and strongly led by a few enthusiasts. There is a recognisable need to move on and embed this work, and in particular link the

outreach work to support on throughput and employability. The 2006-2008 plan for Lund starts to move in this direction, with plans to:

- set measurable targets
- invest more in collaboration with schools with low participation rates
- improve student retention
- give students employability support
- increase staff development
- increase regional co-operation
- investigate the position regarding uneven recruitment to long programmes

Helsingborg Campus

A new campus, founded in 2000 by the University of Lund, in Helsingborg has an ethos of collaboration for social cohesion and economic development which is reflected in the strategic direction of the institution and its approach to widening participation.

Located in a former factory building, the campus represents a new approach for Lund and is a deliberate attempt to contribute to the economic regeneration of an area which suffered from industrial decline and whose population contained a low percentage of families with a tradition of going into higher education

The Rector has been recruited from industry. He sees his mission as providing cutting-edge, innovative and dynamic programmes. The campus is perceived as an area for the rejuvenation of HE, combining tradition and new ideas, and also being a driving force in regional development. The programmes on offer are, therefore, almost entirely vocational and 'match the reality of what is wanted'. Each programme has an Advisory Board from industry and the public sector. Particular attention is paid to programmes for immigrants.

It is easy to make comparisons with the UK where a satellite campus has been used to provide the bulk of the numbers of widening participation students, especially where it is hard for a traditional HEI to develop this 'third task' - working with the surrounding society. Nevertheless this model is worth further study and it was particularly exciting to see widening participation being successfully linked to some of the most innovative developments in working with industry and the local community. However one gap the Rector acknowledged was the need to work with schools and municipalities, contrasting with the English experience in Aimhigher where joint work with schools is central to the approach to widening participation.

The provision at this campus is a product of collaboration and complements that provided at Lund. A methodology for teaching teams to work across discipline boundaries has been developed to help broaden teaching staff awareness of student and academic diversity. There is recognition of the value of this approach but it is difficult to implement without the commitment of all staff

There are a number of widening participation projects based on this campus which include working with schools, Folk High Schools and municipalities. The foci vary from science, theology and religion to maths and music. The University had also recognised the need for a different approach to study and careers support, compared to that available on

the main campus, with the appointment of a study support co-ordinator who acts as the first port of call for students.

Blekinge Institute of Technology

The Blekinge 'science park' at Karlskrona in south east Sweden provides an insight into a contrasting style of institution and activity compared to Lund. Blekinge Institute of Technology (BIT) is one of three universities of technology in Sweden being distinctively profiled with specialisms in IT and engineering. It is linked with the local region and works closely with municipalities, although 50-60% of students are from other regions and there is a significant cohort of international students⁷. Of around 6000 students half are part-time. The university has four schools - Engineering and Management, Technology, Humanities and Planning, and Health.

The primary focus of the University is engineering (51% of all courses). The provision is particularly flexible to allow students to work and study and to come in and out of learning to fit with other commitments.

Komvux - a case study in co-operation

On the same campus, the Komvux (Municipal Adult Education) although not formally part of BIT, being a responsibility of the municipality, works very closely with BIT and is located in a new campus building close to the Library. Some 1400 students (full-time, part-time and distance learners), with an average age of 32 and 65% female, undertake the full or part of the USS programme. These programmes were regarded as both the door to university for second-chance learners and the start of Lifelong Learning.

A new joint programme with BTI is a one-year 'Introduction to University Studies' programme to give confidence to students, with 25% run at BTI and 75% at the Komvux. This is taken in parallel with the USS subjects required for university entrance. There are guaranteed progression routes to BIT with a Komvux quota for certain programmes (using the 20% flexibility the University has to offer places using local criteria). Progression to other universities in the region and in Sweden is normal and Komvux provides guidance and counselling services to support students.

The Komvux also runs shorter eight-week 'orientation' programmes at a lower level for students still uncertain about studying at all, and special programmes for immigrants which focused on language.

Although there is no exact parallel to the Swedish Komvux in the UK it has similarities to 'Access' provision in further and adult education. The main difference being that whilst the Access movement in the UK was 'bottom-up' and has only relatively recently received more national recognition (albeit still under review), the second-chance provision in Komvux was the result of a government initiative. Komvux students also receive free tuition and can obtain the same generous loans and grants to which all students over 20 have access.

⁷ Currently international students are treated as home students and pay no fees for HE. This is soon to change.

Stockholm Academic Forum Diversity Group

Whilst the team visit observed several examples of partnerships between HEIs and local industry and communities to serve their specific needs, the only example of partnership work with other HEIs, comparable to the English approach in Aimhigher, was provided by the Diversity Group of the Stockholm Academic Forum. Created in 1997 the Forum now has a membership of nine universities and university colleges whose aim is to facilitate and increase collaboration between institutions, business and the public.

The Diversity Group was formed in 2002 with the establishment of the government's 50% target. The Diversity Officers and WP Project Managers who belong to this Group realise that they 'are stronger if we all work together' and the meetings are used to exchange ideas and discuss issues. A very wide range of projects is run amongst all the institutions, largely initiated by the Special Committee's three-year funding. Examples include a touring exhibition on 'HE - a possibility for all', mentoring schemes, campus visits, summer schools, specific work in medical subjects, special courses in Swedish language and English for teacher training programmes, work to encourage greater employment of immigrants and increased activities with the disabled.

A familiar, but worrying, aspect of this work are signs that, now the three-year funding has ceased, projects are faltering as they have been unable to embed their work in mainstream activity. No further funding is forthcoming from government and it is clear that there are difficulties raising the funds from other sources, which threatens the future of the project work.

8. HE provision and Employability

Graduate employment and the labour market

Despite the economic downswing in recent years, many of those graduating from higher education gain a foothold in the labour market relatively swiftly, although there are major variations between those with differing qualifications. On the whole graduates have an advantage in the labour market in comparison with those who come straight from secondary school, who in turn, have a stronger position than those who have only compulsory schooling.

Of those who graduated from HE in the academic year 2000/01, 81% had established themselves in the labour market by between 12 and 18 months after graduation. This proportion is only one percent less than the previous year despite the downturn in the economy and rising unemployment. One explanation for this minor impact on labour market establishment for graduates is that many of them are aiming for the public sector where demand often develops differently from the private sector.

Doctors, nurses and engineers appear to have the least difficulty in establishing themselves with in the labour market. Those who experience more difficulty are those who graduate in the fine arts, humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

Overall about 30,000 graduates from HE enter the labour market each year, that is about 30% of the age cohort. In addition there are 10,000 students who have undertaken at least three years of HE study and who are therefore comparable with graduates. This significant annual input to the labour market up-grades the skills of the labour force and more than compensates for those retiring, many of whom did not have HE qualifications. In addition many older students retrain after completing vocational or further training at an HEI.

On average therefore the education system is producing more than enough graduates to fill the gaps left by retirement. The major expansion of the higher education sector in the last fifteen years will continue to increase the number of employees with high- level qualifications. Is this a case of "Over-education and under-learning" as Kenneth Abrahamson suggested to the team? Are there some serious imbalances and contentious issues to be considered and is the education system providing appropriate learning opportunities and skills development to sustain a vibrant economy?

How are HEIs and employers supporting, informing and collaborating to enhance the employability of graduates?

Not unexpectedly the team found that, due to the variation in type of institute visited, there are very different attitudes and approaches prevailing towards the issues of graduate employment and the role of HE.

Lund University

Although there is resistance from some academics regarding the concept of HE having a role in preparing students for employment, and therefore collaboration with employers, the University has a number of initiatives aimed at creating a better understanding between students and employers and to address employer bias towards particular social or ethnic groups.

For example, Business Ambassadors work within the faculties to foster greater awareness of the potential of different social, cultural or ethnic groups. There are, however, some

difficulties in getting academics to support the idea of this type of collaboration and although there is a government directive to encourage progress there is no carrot of targeted funding. This attitude is demonstrated by the staff statement that "Lund University does not drive the regional economy but Helsingborg does". This also reflects the perception that, although officially part of the University of Lund, Helsingborg is regarded as a separate institution by many staff based at Lund.

The proposed development of a comprehensive central Careers Service should help students with employment choices. This is particularly important for science students as there has been an expansion of provision without any evidence of an expansion of job opportunities.

Currently work-based learning is an element of only a very few programmes. However, as employability is perceived as part of Phase 3 activity to broaden participation, this will be developed further during 2006/08 and is reflected in the draft of the new diversity policy.

Helsingborg Campus

The mission of this campus reflects the commitment to training for work, and all programmes delivered receive an input from the regional industry and business community and the public sector in order to ensure provision relates to the regional skills agenda and labour force requirements.

Since 2004 the Helsingborg institution has worked with 10 of the 33 municipalities within the region of Skåne, Lund University and regional businesses to provide an immigrants' course. The objective is to engage the immigrant population in the workforce to reduce isolation and tap under-used potential. The course includes elements of language, Swedish culture, work-based learning and research. All students are assigned a business mentor, and employer input is also provided through an employer-led problem-solving project. Recruitment to the course has, however, been disappointing due to issues around funding, especially the need have a job, and from 2005 the course will be open to Swedes as well as immigrants.

On-course skills support includes employability and on completion 50% of Helsingborg students with the exception of marine biologists, find immediate employment.

Within the different faculties a variety of approaches is taken to employer involvement. For example, Service Management courses have very active Advisory Boards to which there is a high level of employer input. This approach enables employers to 'snap up' students as soon as they complete their courses. Within the Institute of Communication employer input is through involvement in the final thesis of students, again the result being good employment opportunities.

Blekinge Institute of Technology

As the approach adopted at Blekinge is one of technology and business integration, many joint projects are funded by regional bodies and a business consortia which contribute to 29% of activity.

Kvalificerad yrkesutbildning (KY) or Advanced Vocational Education and Training degree programmes⁸, with similarities to Foundation Degrees, are funded by the State and,

⁸ KY degrees can be seen as both relating to pre-entry as well as employability phases. Not technically higher education in the Swedish context but clearly at Level 4 and therefore included in this section of the report.

although run by the University External Relations Office, are separate from BIT in funding and student numbers. Courses last for between one and three years depending on whether full- or part-time with 75% of the programme in college and 25% in the workplace. KY is available in a wide range of disciplines (related to regional skills requirements) and has considerable employer input. Blekinge introduced KY in 1997 in co-operation with the communications company Eriksson, and was the first university to engage in this 'pre-HE' level of work now taken up by other HE institutions. Currently Blekinge runs 10 KY programmes with 650 students and although there are clear advantages for progression to HE (by the programme being located at and managed by Blekinge) there is no automatic progression and no formal credit transfer recognition, although there is an 'understanding' that KY degrees are at Level 4.

86% of students find employment directly after graduation whilst in addition many students return to study after a period of employment. This is possible through favourable student funding and the legal requirement for employers to allow students to return to study without jeopardising their subsequent employment.

9. Widening Participation – Issues and comparisons with the UK

General observations

The issues raised by the Swedish visit seem to very similar to those found in England, particularly in the difference of approach taken by “traditional” and “new” HEIs.

Although the range of institutional type is great, there appeared to be a genuine commitment to WP in all the institutions visited. This seems to be so in other institutions across Sweden. There was an holistic view of widening participation and the general acceptance that widening access was part of overall progress in the university sector. Even some of the most prestigious institutions were not over-emphasising recruiting 'the best' of the widening participation students - "Our aim is not only to bring in the best students, but for us to develop and become a modern university. If we only reproduce ourselves, we have failed".

Given that special funding for WP will cease in 2006 it will be interesting to see how this commitment will be sustained. It will be important for English policy makers to observe developments in Sweden and to learn from their experience, given the changes proposed for Aimhigher funding in England from 2006 onwards.

Swedish target groups for widening participation - social class, family background, disability - are now more aligned with those of the UK. As in the UK, family background in terms of parental educational experience and occupation is regarded as a significant factor influencing progression. There has, however, and will continue to be, a greater emphasis on 'immigrants' and their integration than is the case in the UK.⁹

As in the UK, gender imbalances in terms of achievement and progression are a major concern in all phases of education. The number of boys who do not enter further training or HE, or are unemployed, is high. There is, perhaps, scope for some joint work in these areas between Sweden and the UK.

Support for students throughout their programmes appears to be less developed than in England, perhaps because retention is less of an issue, as it is the norm to take study gaps or just study the modules that are required for a student's continued professional development. Nevertheless there is a recognition that counselling support and, especially, good careers guidance should play a greater part in their future plans.

Pre-HE interventions

Looking in general at the pre-HE interventions and policy, approaches were often similar to those in England. It is clear that lessons have been learned from the UK (perhaps helped by a number of government-sponsored study visits to see work in England). There are great similarities to the project approach to widening participation work going on in England some 3 years ago.

The team found a strong interest in the partnership working of Aimhigher and in the organisation of our summer schools in some Swedish institutions visited. The Swedish approach to monitoring and evaluation of widening participation was less well developed compared to England and there was, for example, no consistent approach to recording

⁹ It is tempting to make comparisons with the UK but that the Swedish approach to its minority populations is very different to that in the UK is noticeable, most obviously in the use of the words 'immigrant' or 'foreign' as opposed to, for example, our use of Black and Ethnic.

data on interventions, tracking and monitoring impact of their work. In all these respects we felt there were lessons to be learned from the UK.

The emphasis of the intervention work observed was slightly different. With no tuition fees and a generous grants and loans scheme to cover up to 6 academic years, there appeared to be no specific work going on to give advice and guidance at an early stage on financing higher education or on justifying a higher education for better employment prospects. Indeed, there was a refreshing honesty that a graduate may not necessarily obtain better-paid work, but may be unemployed less.

There was also more emphasis on working with immigrants and it has to be recognised that this is a rapidly expanding group and a relatively new phenomenon, in historical terms, for Sweden. No specific allowances are made at the admissions stage for an applicant's background. Everyone needs the same USS entrance requirements, even if entering as a mature student, and these include having Swedish and fluent English. Having two new languages to learn for most immigrants makes entrance to HE particularly difficult.

Compared to England, the flexibility of HE programmes, where more than 50% of students create their own programme and drop in and out of HE as a norm, also means there is less pre-entry work on entering specific degree programmes.

Vocational programmes

Sweden's unitary system of post-compulsory schooling has most 16 year olds progressing to the upper secondary schools. Superficially this offers a parity of esteem between the 17 academic and vocational programmes. In practice, however, there are similar concerns to those in the UK about ghettoising young people in vocational programmes which have very low progression rates to higher education. Both England and Sweden have recently taken 'conservative' approaches (perhaps for different reasons) to reforming existing school systems and it will be interesting to compare future approaches.

It appeared that KY programmes are at a similar level to Foundation Degrees in England, or Associate Degrees in the USA. As in England there is clearly an issue about the lack of guaranteed progression to degree programmes, which may be addressed when Sweden takes measures to conform to the Bologna Agreement. The entitlement to study leave in Sweden does however, exert a more positive influence. There is scope to learn from each other in this area of work.

In general it would seem that the more traditional universities are reluctant to run the more vocational programmes, whilst the newer universities, in common with English post-92 institutions, are much more aligned to their local economies and therefore perhaps provide their students with greater employment opportunities. In these regional economies we found a greater employer involvement in curriculum developments and employability strategies than is generally found in England.

Currently the government is discussing an increase in places on vocational programmes as the employment rate of these students on graduation is high,

As in the UK, students from working-class backgrounds have great difficulty breaking into the longer vocational programmes, such as Law, Medicine and Engineering and the new HE Bill, 'New World - New University', will give the prestigious HEIs a specific mission to widen access in these areas.

10. Conclusions

The UK and Sweden have adopted similar approaches to widening participation arising out of a social democratic principle of fair access. However there appears to be greater public consensus and support for this approach when compared to the UK. The ethos of lifelong learning strongly underpins much of the Swedish approach to education, including access to higher education. The backdrop to all the comparisons, however, has to be the long-term political stability of the Social Democrats, the larger proportion of the Swedish GDP invested in public services than in the UK, the small population and the generous Swedish system of funding child care, entitlement to study leave from employment and grants and loans for learners in higher education. There are also no plans to introduce tuition fees for home students.

The visit did not identify any overt policy to encourage the progression of vocational learners. There is an awareness of the inequalities in the post-compulsory school system which, as in the UK, is hugely biased in favour of the progression of 'academic' learners to HE and the new HE Bill does make some commitment to working with upper secondary schools with low HE progression rates.

Lack of data makes it difficult to measure the impact of the widening participation programme 2002-5. There has however been an increase in enrolments to HE during this period and the proportion of students from working-class backgrounds has increased significantly over the last 10 years, but it is not possible to measure the impact of the special programmes. Under the new Bill the National Agency for Higher Education will be required to do a three-year review of each HEI's widening participation plan and activities.

The visit did identify some co-operation between HE institutions on widening participation but this was not a major feature of activity and there was nothing comparable to Aimhigher partnerships. Likewise, the visit did identify some links and joint work between HEIs and schools but it was not consistent. Increased co-operation will be required under the new Bill, but as mentioned previously, there will be no additional funding for this work.

The visit noted some concern on the ground that in the next phase of widening participation, SEK 30 million extra per year was to go to the Swedish Net University, which is charged with supporting HEIs to broaden recruitment, develop new teaching methods, and support the development of a new degree structure which conforms to Bologna. The Net University will need to develop understanding and skills if it is to succeed in a role very different to that which it has at present

The Swedish approach has already been informed by practice in England and there are strong links with the UK at a policy level. On partnership working, gender issues and vocational progression there is further scope to develop the links between the two countries.

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For information on the Advanced Vocational Education Programme (KY) see www.ky.se/engelskainfo.html

For statistics on education and other sectors see Statistics Sweden, <http://www.scb.se>



Further information

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