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# Bridging the Gap:

WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN SWEDEN AND ENGLAND

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# **Bridging the Gap: widening participation in Sweden and England**

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**CONTINUUM**  
WIDENING PARTICIPATION

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**ISBN 1-874210-29-2**

Publisher  
Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research  
Drottning Kristinas väg 33 D  
114 28 Stockholm

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## **Continuum**

Continuum is the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies based at the University of East London. Continuum is the first research centre of its kind providing a focus for the development of a critical understanding of widening participation policy and practice.

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## PREFACE

Widening participation in higher education is a contested issue at stake in many countries. When OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) recently published its 2005 version of the annual *Education at a Glance* the main conclusion was a call for broader access to post-school education and training. "People are facing growing pressures to go on developing skills and knowledge over their working life-time as job mobility increases and job tasks become more complex, and governments in many countries need to do more to foster education and training at all stages of people's lives". The ongoing development of higher education in Europe, the so called Bologna process, is also increasingly focusing on the social dimension. The communiqué from the 2005 meeting in Bergen points to "the need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access".

Sweden and England are two countries that have recently pursued policy initiatives in order to widen participation in higher education. This project started out as a study comparing the government financed widening participation projects in the two countries. The process revealed essential differences in the countries approach to widening access to higher education and the result reported here is a comparative study of the general policies for widening participation to higher education in Sweden and England. The focus is on the development during the last decade and the conclusions drawn are mainly from a Swedish point of view.

The study clearly shows that the measures taken in order to broaden access have been more pronounced and broader in scope in England than in Sweden. The policies applied reflect not only the different educational structure but also the different goals set up for Fair Access in each country. The UK approach is characterised by the use of selective measures in a diversified higher education system while the Swedish approach is closer to mainstreaming reform within a uniform structure.

The report consists of five parts

Firstly we set out the general points of departure for the study stressing the need for using a lifecycle approach of widening participation covering the whole spectrum of educational provision from preschool to higher education.

Secondly we offer an overview of the English approach to widening participation.

Thirdly we give an overview of the Swedish approach to higher education.

Fourthly we draw a comparison of the national reform policies in the two countries ending up in twelve recommendations, lessons for Sweden to learn from the UK experiences.

A concluding discussion tests some ideas that have arisen in the context of this comparison challenging quite radically the way higher education is organised and financed in Sweden.

A preliminary draft of this report was presented at a seminar on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2005 in Stockholm with the participation of the former chairman of the Special

Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education, colleagues from the higher education sector in Sweden and the four authors.

We wish to thank the Swedish Government and the Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education for their financial support which made the study possible. We would also like to thank Liz Allen, policy consultant at Action on Access, who contributed significantly to the section on English policy approach to widening participation.

It is our hope that this report will become a useful contribution to the continuing discussions on effective ways to widen participation to higher education in Sweden as well as in England.

Enrico Deiacò  
Director of SISTER

John Storan  
Director of Continuum

*With new types of learners, greater programme diversity and more mobility across Europe, improved guidance and counselling (before and during higher education), flexible admission policies and customised learning paths are of growing importance. They are key determinants for broadening access, supporting student commitment and increasing success and efficiency – whether admission is competitive or not. Grant/loan systems, affordable accommodation and part-time work or assistantships are also important for universities to be attractive and accessible to a suitably wide range of learners – thus breaking the link between social origin and educational attainment.*

*(Mobilising the brainpower of Europe, Commission of the European Communities 2005)*

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Sweden and England are two countries that have recently been actively pursuing policy initiatives in order to widen participation (WP) in higher education (HE). Both countries share a common target of 50 per cent participation rate in HE by the end of 2010. The aim of this study is to examine and learn from recent experiences of special interventions for widening participation in Sweden and England, in particular from the special programmes undertaken by the Special Committee for Recruitment to HE (SCR) and the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE). Study visits to England by Swedish practitioners during the work of the SCR helped to initiate the comparative focus on WP activities in the two countries.<sup>1</sup>

International policy comparisons are always difficult to undertake, especially in the field of social equity. Not all countries share the same conceptualisation of disabilities, learning difficulties or social disadvantage. Interventions to widening participation may vary in their degree of similarity but they operate in different national contexts. What succeeds or fails in one national or historical context does not necessarily produce the same results in another. Changes are not confined to the higher education sector. Policy reforms and developments in other areas like schooling, vocational training and general economic and social conditions are also of importance as is the general structure of the educational system in each country. The countries compared must be similar or at least comparable in relevant aspects and at the same time sufficiently different to make comparative aspects interesting and stimulating for analysis and discussion. This seems to be the case in policies for WP to higher education in Sweden and England, and the broad scope of action for WP in England in recent years may give a lot of food for thought to policymakers in Sweden. While there will also be initiatives on the Swedish side that could prove interesting in England, the conclusions in this report will be drawn substantially from a Swedish perspective and informed by consideration of the English experience.

It must, however, be kept in mind that there are fundamental differences between England and Sweden in terms of cultural and social conditions and in traditions and educational structures, e.g. in the provision of private education, autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs), funding, tuition fees and student support as well as in transfer and completion rates among young and adult students in higher education and much else. A comparative analysis of policies for WP in the two countries has to be done in the light of such differences.

The discussion of WP touches upon many intriguing problems that have long been the subject for policies and practices both pre-HE and also in HE. As a starting point therefore we will briefly review some of these problems.

### Growth and the 50 per cent target

One of the most striking features of HE development worldwide is the expansion to large volume participation. Recent rates of increase in headcount enrolment have been substantial over the last 15 years both in Sweden and the UK (see Figure 1). In both countries the number of students enrolled in tertiary education has doubled since the beginning of the 1990s (+ 90% in UK and + 107% in Sweden). This level of growth suggests participation from a more diverse pool of potential students but part of the

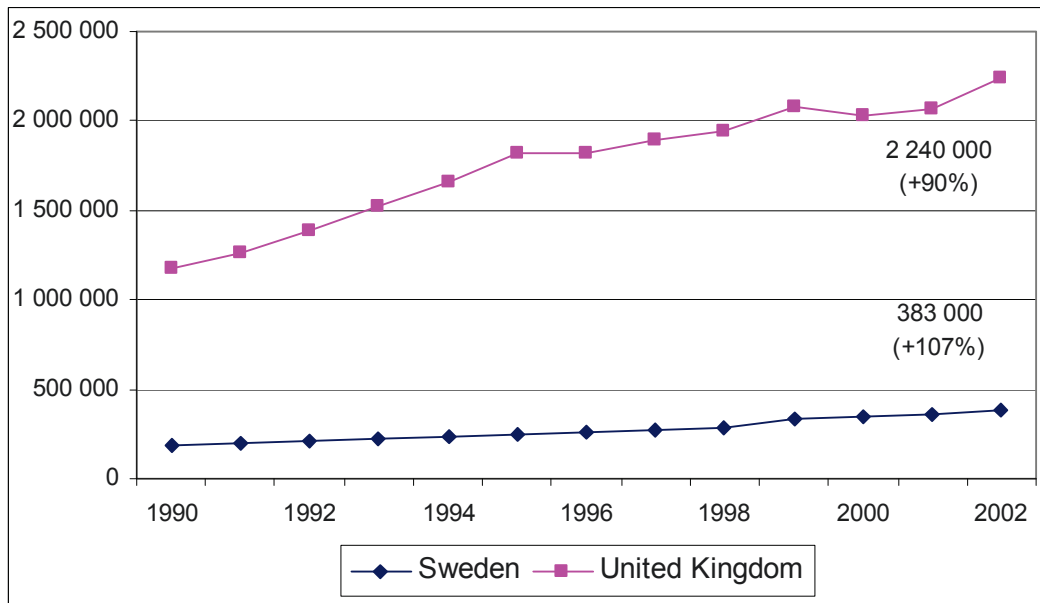
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<sup>1</sup> The comparative focus was triggered by the cooperation between SCR and the University of East London and its Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies, Continuum, and Professor John Storan.



expansion is in fact due to upgrading of programmes and institutions at post compulsory school level. Although the development has resulted in broader recruitment in terms of both age and social background most of the prior patterns of enrolment persist. In addition new challenges have arisen with the growing number of immigrants and international students.

Figure 1. Number of students enrolled in tertiary education (vocational education included) in Sweden and the UK 1990-2002. (Source: OECD Educational Database, online)



This increase in enrolment is often referred to as massification of HE with reference to the well-known typology by Martin Trow (1974) of “elite, mass and universal access to higher education”.<sup>2</sup> Trow uses this typology to describe the foreseeable transition of European higher education from elite to mass higher education and subsequently towards universal access, a transformation in the direction of a more diversified HE system like the one in USA. The Bologna process seems to add further weight to Trow’s view, although somewhat later than expected. Clearly, England and Sweden are presently in their different ways shifting to the stage of universal access with a participation rate moving towards 50 per cent where higher education constitutes a necessary qualification for the majority of young people. This is most evidently expressed in the 50 per cent targets set up by the governments in both countries. These targets are not exceptional in an international perspective. According to recent calculations every second young person in the OECD area will enter tertiary type A-programmes (academically oriented education) during his/her lifetime - assuming that current entry rates continue (OECD 2004b).

However, massification is not only a question of quantity; it has an impact on every form of activity and manifestation in HE. Above all it means diversification of the forms and functions of HE. A high participation rate is therefore but one aspect of broader access to HE. An important part of Trow’s model is that the movement from elite, to mass and then

<sup>2</sup> According to Trow the three phases are, in Max Weber’s sense, ideal types. They are abstracted from empirical reality or any single country, but designed to define and illuminate the problems of higher education common to a number of countries.

to universal higher education does not imply that forms and patterns of prior phases disappear or are transformed. They survive in some institutions or part of institutions while the system as a whole evolves to carry the larger number of students and more diverse functions. This means that we still have to care for the elite and mass functions of HE in the present state of transformation to universal access, a task as difficult as broadening access to HE. How this is done is, however, an issue open to different approaches.

The 50 per cent target is expressed in somewhat different terms in Sweden and the UK. The UK target is that 50 per cent of all 18-30 year olds should have some experience of HE by 2010. This should be achieved through reforming and expanding HE, progress in schools and new activities in further education. The percentage of HE students from lower social class should increase and there should be no unjustified variation between HEIs in terms of proportion of students from lower social groups or from different types of upper secondary education (public or private). However, this widening of participation must not be achieved at the expense of increase in the non-completion rate, instead present differences in completion rates between social groups should be levelled out (HEFCE 2005a).

The progress towards the 50 per cent target in UK, measured by the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR), has risen from 41 to 43 in the last five years, female rates growing while there has been no change in the much lower male participation rate (38% compared to 47% for women).<sup>3</sup> According to HEFCE better measures of participation are required and a review of the feasibility of disaggregating the HEIPR by ethnicity, disability, social class and religion will be published soon (DfES 2005). A recent report based on new data sources and more sophisticated methods has revealed that there was only a marginal increase (2%) in participation of young students (aged 18-19) in the 1994-2000 period. Participation rate for young people (comparable to the "direct transfer rate" in Sweden) is around 30 per cent in England and has not changed much in recent times. Inequality of the sexes in young participation has risen steadily and young woman are now 18 per cent more likely to enter higher education than young men. There are also deep divisions in the participation chances of young people depending upon where they live (in affluent or poorer areas). Around the middle of the period covered by the survey the student grants were replaced by loans and tuition fees were introduced<sup>4</sup>, but no evidence is found that this had any material effects on participation (HEFCE 2005b).

The Swedish target is expressed in a slightly different way: 50 per cent of each age cohort should begin studies in HE by the age of 25. All students should have equal access to higher education irrespective of their background, place of residence, sex, ethnic origin, and disability. The proportion of young people going into HE should increase and every institution must actively promote and widen participation in HE (Prop 2001/02:15). The overall completion rates are rather low in Sweden but there are no significant differences in this respect between students coming from different social backgrounds.

The expansion in the 1990s and up to 2004 has led to a rapid increase in participation rates in Sweden and the 50 per cent target seems almost to be attained. At least this is

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<sup>3</sup> The HEIPR covers English-domiciled, 17-30 year old, first time entrants, enrolling on courses expected to last at least 6 months who stay on their course for six months or more.

<sup>4</sup> General tuition fees were introduced in UK in 1998 and from 2006 HE providers will be able to vary fees for full time undergraduate courses up to a certain limit (so called top-up fees).

the official statement.<sup>5</sup> The number of young students who enter higher education at the age of 25 has increased from 26 per cent of those born in 1968 to 43 per cent of those born in 1978 (the latest cohort for which longitudinal data can be obtained). There are, however, great variations in transfer rates between groups, the same kind of differences between male and female students as in the UK (49 per cent for females compared to 37 for male students) and also great variation depending on students social background and parents educational level (SCB 2004). Geographical distance also seems to play an important role as transfer rates vary between counties (higher transfer rates in university counties). The rise in the size of the age cohorts of young people in the coming years will make it difficult to reach the target and even to keep the present level of transfer from upper secondary school to HE. The number of 20 year olds in the population will rise by 30 per cent by 2010. A considerable expansion of higher education is required if the rate of transfer is not to decline. The number of places offered to new entrants at HEIs will have to increase by at least 15 000 (equal to 60 000 full time equivalents) to attain the admission target of 50 per cent (NAHE 2005a).

So, although the number of students has increased dramatically in both countries in the last decade the 50 per cent target by 2010 still seems far away. There are ambitions, in Sweden as well as in the UK, to also increase the participation rates for lifelong learning opportunities among adults over the age of twenty-five. The course-based university system in Sweden plays an important role in this respect. Half of the Swedish students are older than 25, one-third are older than 30, and the number of older students is still increasing. The figures include people starting their HE study late in their lives but also people in need of further training. The UK pattern of transfer from secondary to higher education is quite different and most students start at the age of 18-19. However, enrolment of adult students, not least in further education, is gradually increasing in the UK. Although policies in recent years have been focussing on participation rates of young students it is important to include measures to improve lifelong learning when comparing policies for WP in Sweden and the UK.

## Equality and Fair Access

Social mobility and equality in education have once again become issues of political and social concern after a period of "despair" in the 1980s. The issue of under-representation in post compulsory education of children from low socio-economic families is now high on the equity agenda in many countries. Expansion and diversification do not seem to have had the desired impact on the relative chances of the worst-off, even in those countries that have tried hard to create more equal learning opportunities for all (OECD 2001). Students from higher social backgrounds have a higher participation rate compared to students from lower social strata. First generation immigrants have lower participation rates compared to those without immigrant backgrounds. Increased attention is also given to students with disabilities. Gender inequity, however, is not so much about participation rates but rather about differences in orientation within the educational system. These general international trends seem to apply both to Sweden and the UK.

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<sup>5</sup> The measure most often used in Sweden is the participation rate based on the summing of age-specific rates from different cohorts (like the HEIPR in UK), which is presently about 47 per cent. Participation rate calculated in this way decreased somewhat in 2004. But such data are vulnerable to demographic changes and rate of expansion, which may distort trends. Comparisons between countries should therefore refer to real cohort data like the one reported by Statistics Sweden or the above mentioned HEFCE study of young participation in the UK.

Before discussing the development of widening participation in Sweden and the UK we have to consider the meaning of equity in education. There are four basic understandings of equity which can be applied to educational policy and practice (OECD 2003):

- Equity of access or *equality of opportunity*
- Equity in terms of learning environment or *equality of means* (treatment)
- Equity in production or *equality of achievements* (or results)
- Equity in *using the results* of education

Rawls (1973) in his *Theory of Justice* argued that to achieve society's equity goals institutions should be biased in favour of the disadvantaged in terms of resource allocation. Special actions in the favour of the so called unprivileged groups of students are interventions based on these principles, which is contrary to the idea of equal treatment. The difficult question is how to decide the extent of the available resources that should be provided for students with special needs and what treatment will have the desired effects.

How, then, can the present policies for WP in Sweden and UK be defined according to these different interpretations?

In Sweden the equity goal is expressed as "a decrease in the uneven social recruitment to higher education" (*minskad social snedrekrytering*). The Swedish interpretation of equity in HE is an even distribution of HE participation between groups with differing social, economic and educational background and between generations. The measure of equality refers to entry into HE, not to achievements (completion of degrees, employment or income after study). Efforts are made to achieve social, class and ethnic distribution in entry to HE reflecting that of the population at large. The aim is "collective fairness", which does not necessarily imply (nor exclude) fairness from the individual point of view and policy is based mainly on the principle of equality of treatment. Social equity is to be achieved by mainstreaming, through reforming the structure and rules applied to all students and institutions. The setting up of the Special Committee for Recruitment to HE was a deviation from this general policy approach.

The stated policy aim for widening participation in England is "to provide opportunity of higher education to all those who could benefit from it". It is a more individual centred approach based mainly on the idea of equality of opportunity (fair access). No numerical targets have been set in relation to social class or parental background of students and the aim is closely related to the expansion of HE. The stress is less on equal distribution of educational participation but more on increasing access to groups who have been under-represented in higher education in the past. In the English definition of social equity there are clear elements from the fourth OECD interpretation of social equity (equity in using the results of education) and from Rawls's theory of justice if student support system and tuition fees are taken into consideration.

### The student lifecycle approach

Access to HE is no longer a question of young students transferring from (upper) secondary school to university. The diversification of educational provision and the development of lifelong learning have turned this issue into a complicated process involving many actors and stretching out over the lifespan of the individual. WP activities and interventions cover the whole spectrum of education provision and are not just confined to the school- HE transition.

HEFCE has used a model for the student life cycle period to support the activities for WP (Figure 2). The location of different points in this process make it possible to place the recruitment activities on a longitudinal continuum along the student's life cycle; from the initial phase, where aspirations are planted through the phase in which the student is enrolled in the system and may need support, to the successful ending (which in turn may affect the aspirations for further learning). Progress in broadening access to higher education may be the result of actions taken at the right phase, and the opposite, failures may be due to interventions at the wrong phase of the lifespan of the individual. Focus has often been on the admission process, on students' choice of study and on the selection of students at entry, while the critical periods for under-privileged students may come about in compulsory or even pre-primary schooling or after being admitted to HE. Policy and research on WP seems to be moving away from the admission process to what happens earlier in life when students' attitudes and values are formed and to students' success in further studies and working life. There is a change of focus from attrition to retention.

At all stages of the life cycle there are barriers to overcome. Inequities in choice of study and participation in HE may be caused by different types of barriers: institutional, economic, social and cultural, and motivational. Reforms aiming at WP have up to now often tried to lower the institutional barriers, such as the formal rules of admission, the study support scheme or the accessibility (location of HEI, distance learning etc). These attempts have not given the expected result and there are reasons for looking more at barriers related to the life situation of the individual or dispositional barriers such as motivation, self-esteem and expectancies.<sup>6</sup> Such factors can usefully be analysed through a life-cycle perspective.

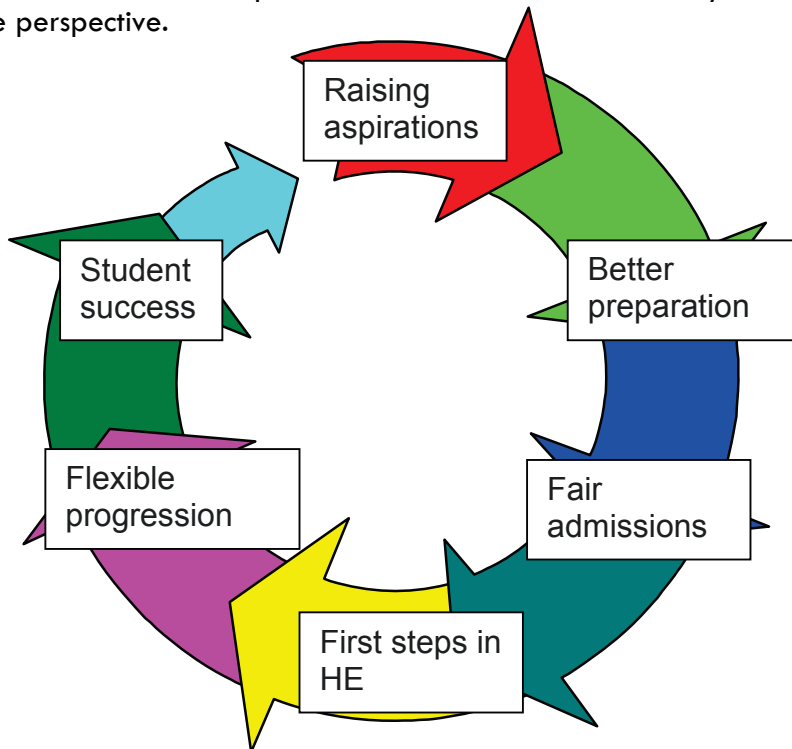


Figure 2. Supporting widening participation at all points of the student life-cycle (Source: HEFCE strategic plan 2003-08)

<sup>6</sup> A recent Canadian study found substantial differences even in peoples *perceptions* of the costs – not the actual costs – and economic returns of university education and that these differences are primarily income-related (Usher 2005).

## Measures of widening participation

Changes in educational inequality are difficult to analyse. Methodological problems are raised when assessing trends in widening participation in higher education, within, as well as between, countries. The traditional indicator, social (or parental) background of students in HE, is no longer regarded as sufficient to give a fair account of ongoing developments. Comparable as they may seem at a first glance such data often refer to different contexts, different educational traditions and structures as well as to different social, economic and cultural conditions. OECD, for instance, has not published any comparable data of this kind for several years, the last being in the Education Policy Analysis 1999, where trends towards extending the benefits of higher education to new groups were analysed in a comparative perspective. The point of departure was the recent expansion of tertiary education in the member countries and the concern with persistent differences in participation by socio-economic status. The organisation tried to grasp the enrolment trends of groups earlier under-represented in higher education in different countries measured by an “unequal chances ratio” (based on survey data on parents’ educational level from 1995). The picture was mixed, but the ratio was about the same for Sweden and the UK. Data should be read with caution owing to difficulties in definition and measurement, according to OECD (1999).

As the perspective on WP has changed, international comparisons have become more cautious and sophisticated. Instead of trying to grasp the development of students’ parental background organisations like OECD study policies for new patterns of participation and new learning options, the development of lifelong learning, adult education and conditions for learners with special needs in different countries. Focus is also shifting from participation rates to educational achievements and outcomes. Within the European Union (EU) social inclusion has now become an important policy objective, crucial to the achievements of the Lisbon goals, and the social dimension is emphasized in the communiqué from the recent Bologna meeting in Bergen (Communiqué, 19-20 May 2005). Initiatives are taken to improve accessibility to comparable data on equality in higher education. Progress towards the common EU objectives will be measured by a set of new indicators, some of them related to WP, like e.g. adult participation in lifelong learning, treatment of learners with special needs, educational attainments of non-EU nationals and learning outcomes of different socio-economic groups. Parental background of tertiary students will also be an indicator based on labour market survey data (Commission of the European Communities 2004).

Another crucial point when comparing access policies is that changes in participation in HE must be analyzed both from the perspective of the individual and the institution. Access is dependant both on student’s “choice” and on the “selection” carried out by the admission procedure (be it competitive or not). Often these problems are analysed only from one angle. The matching of “choice” and “selection” has remained a black box in research on participation to higher education (Kim 1998). In our efforts to compare Sweden and England we try to recognise the conditions for WP from both angles.

## Reviews of access policies under way

Changes in patterns of HE participation do not occur over night. They take time and must be studied in a long-term perspective. Enrolment trends in the 1990s may therefore not reflect recent reforms. This report has been written at a point of time where the effects of the special programmes for WP in Sweden and England cannot be traced in broad

numbers and national statistics. The outcome has to be judged preliminary on the basis of summary reports from the projects financed by SCR and HEFCE. Conclusions may therefore serve mainly as an input to further follow-up and evaluations of actions for WP. Besides, further changes in access policy are on the way both in Sweden and in UK.

In a recent bill *New world – new university* (Prop 2004/05:162) the Swedish government (in cooperation with the Left party) has proposed changes that may affect participation in higher education in the future. The bill is based on an overall strategy for internationalisation of higher education, the aim being to make higher education in Sweden more comparable, more attractive and more marketable internationally by changing the structure of programmes and degrees according to the ongoing Bologna process. The bill also contains propositions for more “fair access”. Simpler and clearer admission rules are supposed to reduce the social bias in recruitment and to signal to aspiring students that learning pays. An increased proportion (20%) of the annual intake to higher education will be decided at the institutional level, implying more flexible admission rules where qualifications and experience that are particularly relevant to the programme will be given credit. General work-experience will no longer be a selection criterion. The locally decided admission tools may enable the identification of real academic potential among wider sections of the population supplementing the traditional methods of selection based on school leaving certificates and the national university aptitude test.

The proposals put forward in the bill suggest a slight break with some ideas that have up to now been guiding admissions policy in Sweden, although uniform and centralised admission procedures will still be the general rule. According to the bill a national support scheme for WP will be established by expanding the mission of the Swedish Net University. The new agency will support HEIs in their work with broadening access and continue the project work done in recent years by the Special Committee on Recruitment (SCR) and the National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE) in this area. These activities will be reviewed on a regular basis by the National Agency for Higher Education. WP work in Sweden will be done on a more permanent basis but still on a very limited scale.

The bill will go before Parliament in autumn 2005. The centre-right opposition has already announced that they put “quality before quantity” and that they want to abandon the 50 per cent target. They also propose higher entrance requirements, less uniform admission criteria and more funding to graduate programmes and HEIs attracting more students. As the bill is worked out by a parliamentary minority the outcome of the political process is still open.

The various initiatives and funding developments which aim to widen participation both to and in English HE have taken place against a broader set of changes. Such changes include: recommendations to HEIs on admissions and fair access which arose from the work of the Schwartz Committee. It is important to note that in English HE admissions is almost entirely a matter for each HEI to manage for themselves. Sector wide support from the national coordination team for WP – Action on Access, has and is playing an important role in the development of admissions arrangements that take account of the policy objectives of fair access. The independence of HEIs to decide upon and implement their particular approaches to admissions raises of course a range of challenges not least the impact that the introduction of variable fees might have. The arrival of a variable fees regime is therefore another major change in the uncertain consequences for both the national policy targets relating to WP and equally those objectives set by HEIs through

their strategic WP plans. The introduction of variable fees is seen as a step towards the creation of a full market approach in which the cap on fees will be lifted completely. A third change which is accompanying variable fees is the establishment of the Office for Fair Access – OFFA. The essential role of OFFA is to ensure, through the approval of access agreements with each HEI intending to levy the new fees in 2006-07, that bursary and other financial support is provided for low income students. Taken together the three changes described illustrate a significant policy shift towards an HE market. This shift brings with it the prospect of different relationships emerging between learners and HE providers and a much greater emphasis on the increasing levels of debt and what this will mean for widening participation. The next section will provide a more detailed account of these and other changes.



## THE ENGLISH APPROACH TO WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Widening Participation to Higher Education in the UK has been a major focus for government policy. This section provides a summary account of a range of both policy and practice, which broadly characterises the principal feature of the approach to WP in Higher Education in England over recent years. Although much of the thrust of policy activity relates to the government's target of 50% of 18-30 year olds to have experience of HE by 2010 there has been a proliferation of policy and practice developments which are suggestive of wider and deeper reforms both across the HE sector and beyond. Taken together the summaries presented offer an overview of the ways in which WP has become an increasingly important part of the changing landscape of HE in England at a time when fundamental changes are taking place in the way it is to be financed in future. It is interesting to note that the span of widening participation interventions is considerable and by no means confined to the HE sector alone. Although an early emphasis for the current policy included project funded initiatives in HEIs similar to the approach taken in Sweden both the form and scale of policy and activities have rapidly moved on. The comparative section of this rehearses what some of the implications might be for Sweden from the English experience.

One of the defining features of WP in English HE is not only that it transcends HE itself but also that it encourages serious questions to be asked about the responsibilities of HEIs and also the types of relationships needed between HEIs, other education providers and communities of learners currently under-represented in HE. Much of what is covered and in particular the measures introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have been informed and shaped by the recommendations relating to WP made by the Dearing Committee in 1997. This committee undertook the first full national review of HE since the Robbins Report in 1964. It made a number of proposals related to widening participation. However, the following quotation captures breadth of reform the Committee felt was needed,

*"We recommend to the Government and the Funding Bodies that, when allocating funds for the expansion of higher education, they give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation, and have in place a participation strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress, and a provision for review by the governing body of achievement."*

(HE in the Learning Society, Ron Dearing, 1997)

This particular recommendation has given rise, as will be reported, to the enactment of some important changes being introduced across the HE sector in England. The importance of funding mechanisms and indeed the role of the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) are central to the approach which has been adopted. There has been an increase in student numbers within HE, and as recommended by Dearing this has increasingly involved links with progress on WP. One challenge this has resulted in is the tension for some HEIs between the national policy objectives and their specific missions.

The growth of English HE is part of a pattern towards what Trow describes in his typology as a Mass or Universal System. However, this move towards a high participation system characterised by policy interventions to promote and extend access to under-represented

groups has brought with it the need for sector wide reform within which HE funding for WP has been a significant factor.

In the context of English HE, Widening Participation is often taken to refer to activities and interventions aimed at creating an HE system that includes all who can benefit from it, learners who might not otherwise view HE learning as an option, or who may be discouraged by social, cultural, economic or institutional factors. It is important to distinguish *increasing* participation from *widening* participation as, despite periods of expansion in HE, the former has not usually resulted in the latter. Widening participation is also discussed in terms of particular groups that are under-represented within higher education across the board – or within a particular kind of institution or curriculum area. Social class differentials in English HE participation rates are key to understanding under-representation and to taking steps to widen participation in HE, although no numerical government targets have been set in relation to class.

### History and background factors

There is a long history in England of reforms and developments, which have sought to widen participation in HE. The fact that actual progress has been limited is perhaps a tribute to the deep rootedness of elitism in English HE as much as it is a reflection on the measures that have been tried. These measures and initiatives have taken a variety of forms and been driven by different motivations. Recent government interest seems to have been largely motivated by both a concern with equality of opportunity on the one hand and economic growth on the other. In fact most government pronouncements in this area are usually based on a convergence of these two with the latter usually being given priority. Both are advanced as social goods with educational achievement and participation at pre-HE levels seen as a necessary if not sufficient condition. Recent history in WP developments has had a variety of foci with major differences in participation between the rich and poor. So for example between the early 1980s and the late 1990s the proportion of children from the richest quarter of families who had completed a degree by the age of 23 went up from 20 per cent to almost 50 per cent. During the same period the number of graduates among the poorest quarter of families edged up from 6 per cent to 9 per cent. The relationship between educational attainment and family income is crucial to understanding the challenges faced by policies designed to widen participation to HE. The “Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America” (Blanden *et al*, 2005) report makes precisely this point in examining the overall impact of New Labour’s education policies. The report says, “The strength of the relationship between educational attainment and family income, especially for access to higher education is at the heart of Britain’s low-mobility culture.” Although as suggested equality of access to HE is not a new concern, the forms that it has taken have certainly changed over time. One early focus was on the participation of women and gender inequality within HE. In the ‘80s mature students were a target. The 1990s saw a shift of policy to learners with a disability and minority ethnic groups. Over recent years the emphasis has been on younger students (18-30 year olds) from lower socio-economic groups, low participation neighbourhoods and schools with low rates of progression to HE.

#### *Social class*

The HE participation of young people from social class V is significantly lower than from social classes I and II. The social class V participation rate has more than doubled since 1991-92, but increases in participation by all have left poorer classes filling the same share of the student population. Recent research demonstrates that young people living in

the most advantaged 20 per cent of areas are five to six times more likely to enter higher education than those living in the least advantaged 20 per cent of areas. It also shows that young women are 18 per cent more likely to enter HE than young men – and that this inequality is more marked for young men living in the most disadvantaged areas (HEFCE 2005b). (The social class definition is based on parental occupations using the standard occupational classifications: I = Professional; II = Intermediate; IIIN = Skilled non-manual; IIIM = Skilled manual; IV – Semi-skilled; V = Unskilled.)

#### *Attainment in schools and colleges*

The single most significant factor in the social class division in HE participation is differential attainment in schools and colleges. While around 43 per cent of 18 year olds from higher socio-economic backgrounds gain two or more A' levels, only 19 per cent of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds do so. 9 out of 10 people with 2 or more A-levels go on to HE by the time they are 21. However this doesn't mean that the "solution" to widening participation lies solely in increasing A' level attainment – work is being done to create alternative progression pathways into HE based on vocational qualifications, recognised by parents, students and admissions officers, and to encourage more HE institutions to consider students with vocational qualifications at level 3. At the moment only 40-50 per cent of those with level 3 vocational qualifications progress to HE, compared with 90% of those with 2 or more A' levels. Added to this, applicants to universities from poorer social classes are less likely than average to succeed in converting their applications to accepted offers, whereas applicants declaring disabilities are as likely as others to do so. Both groups have particularly low success rates in applications to specific subject areas i.e. to study medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, and their participation rates in these subjects are also low. There are large variations among institutions in the relative success rates of applications from groups with low overall representation in higher education. Some institutions have low participation by these groups because they do not attract many applications from them, while the problem for other institutions is a high failure rate of applications from these groups. A study of application data from the year 1996-7 showed that minority ethnic applicants had lower rates of success during the applications procedure than their white counterparts, and this was particularly so for black Africans. For instance, applications yielded 70 per cent initial offers and 65 per cent firm offers for white students, whereas the corresponding figures for black Africans were 57 per cent and 38 per cent (Shiner & Modood 2002).

#### *Disability*

An 18 year old with a disability or a health problem is 40 per cent as likely to enter higher education as an 18 year old without a disability or a health problem. Some young people with disabilities may delay entry to higher education, while learning difficulties may make higher education impractical for others. The proportion of students reported as declaring disabilities has increased by 50 per cent in five years. The most common disability among students is dyslexia. Others relate to mobility, hearing and sight.

#### *Ethnicity*

A report published in 2002 (National Audit Office) showed that minority ethnic groups form a growing share of undergraduate students, making up 15% of all students. This picture masks a more complex situation where rates of participation vary between different minority ethnic groups and types of institution. Some groups, such as Indian, Chinese, African and Asian Other, are much better represented than others. Some groups – Black Other, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are under-represented compared to their

position in the population at large. Minority ethnic students are better represented in the universities established after 1992, in more vocationally and professionally oriented subjects and in Greater London. There are pockets of very low representation in certain subjects, in some pre-92 universities and specialist colleges, and in some more rural regions (Connor *et al* 2003).

Individuals from poorer backgrounds face a range of disadvantages to HE participation. The main obstacles, identified from cohort studies and focus groups, are:

- Early disengagement from education, making these groups less likely than others to obtain the entry qualifications for higher education;
- Poorer educational opportunities prior to higher education, making these groups less likely to obtain high grades in entry qualifications or demonstrate other qualities that higher education providers seek;
- Concerns about completing and benefiting from higher education, making these groups less confident that higher education would be the right choice for them;
- Difficulties in securing financial support, where groups with low representation face greater uncertainty and complexity than others, including limited entitlement to loans or help with fees if they study part time.

## Government and HEFCE reforms and initiatives

HEFCE has been given by government a clear mandate through its annual grant letter to intervene sector wide through funding and related initiatives to increase and widen HE participation in line with government targets. Widening Participation is therefore an integral part of the HEFCE strategic plan. “Widening access and improving participation in HE are a crucial part of our mission. Participation in HE will equip our citizens to operate productively within the global knowledge economy. It also offers social benefits, including better health, lower crime and a more tolerant and inclusive society” (HEFCE 2005a). It is important to note the significance of the role played by HEFCE as the dominant agency of sector wide change. However it also works with other funding bodies and agencies to influence developments in, for example, the schools sector and in relation to teaching and learning through establishing the Higher Education Academy. It also commissioned Action on Access to act as the national coordination team for WP to provide operational and strategic support to HEIs to take forward HEFCE's policy aims. The following initiatives and policy changes provide a brief overview of national developments including particular measures introduced by HEFCE.

### *Performance indicators*

Published annually since 1999, the indicators provide comparative data on the performance of institutions in widening participation, student retention, learning and teaching outcomes, research output and employment of graduates. They cover publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK. The indicators published in 2004 were published by the HE Statistics Agency (HESA) and were the sixth set of performance indicators for UK universities and higher education colleges. In previous years, the HEFCE published them on behalf of the four UK funding bodies. The indicators demonstrate different patterns of recruitment and completion amongst students in different groups of institutions and raise questions about definitions of student success. The performance indicator data provides HEIs with important data which can be used to inform the strategic objectives HEIs set in relation to WP. Furthermore as the data is in the public domain it also contributes to the public accountability of the HE sector.

### *Equality legislation*

Discussion on the 50% target often focuses on social class because the inequalities in access to participation are so persistent and so marked. But there are also issues of equal opportunities and fair access – either to HE itself, or to particular courses and subject areas– in relation to gender, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability. Key legislation includes the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 in particular, places institutions under a positive duty to promote race equality – which means looking at all aspects of the student experience, including curriculum issues. Such legislation also covers staff in institutions, as does legislation on part-time and fixed term working.

### *Variable tuition fees and bursaries – the DfES*

From 2006 HE providers will be able to vary fees for full-time undergraduate courses up to a limit of £3000 a year (part-time fees are already unregulated). In order to do this they will have to make an agreement on fees and bursary support with OFFA (see below). At the same time fees payment for full-time students will be deferred until graduation and the levels of student support available in the form of grants and loans will change.

The introduction of variable fees will mean that HE providers will be better funded, and some of this funding will be available to be spent on teaching and learning, and student support. However there are fears that differential fees and bursaries will have a differential impact on students from different income groups and from groups with different attitudes to debt, and on institutions taking larger numbers of poorer students. There are also concerns that part-time students are being treated inequitably – and that there will be an inequitable impact on the institutions with the highest numbers of part-time students. Part time students will not be able to defer payment of fees. A further complication exists for FE colleges providing higher education, some of which will be able to set their own fees (those directly funded – see overleaf) and some of which will have to set fees determined by their HE partners – of which they have more than one, each setting different fees and offering different bursaries. Because FE colleges often offer provision to local, less well-off students, some may choose to keep fees lower.

### *Fair Access – OFFA and Access Agreements.*

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is an independent, non departmental public body which aims to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for under-represented groups in light of the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-07. OFFA is led by the Director of Fair Access. The Director will require all publicly funded providers of higher education in England who decide to charge tuition fees above the standard level to submit an access agreement. This agreement should set out how they will safeguard and promote fair access - in particular for students from low income groups - through bursary and other financial support and outreach work. Access agreements regulate fees for full-time, home/EU, undergraduate students only. Without an access agreement approved by the Director, an institution will not be able to charge tuition fees for full-time students above the standard level.

### *HEFCE funding for widening participation*

The HEFCE funding to English HE providers is intended to reflect the costs associated with the two main aspects of the student life-cycle. This allows the widening participation allocation to be used for both raising aspirations and supporting student success. The

allocations are determined on the basis of students who complete their year of study. The two aspects are:

- pre-application costs (the costs of widening access and aspiration raising) and post-application costs (the costs and risks that institutions are incurring by recruiting students that are more likely to drop out, otherwise known as funding for student retention).
- The formula funding for the widening participation allocation for both full-time and part-time students is split: approximately 20 per cent for widening access and 80 per cent for improving retention.
- The funding for widening access weights undergraduate new entrants according to either young HE participation by ward for full-time undergraduates under 21 on entry, or average educational achievement by ward for part-time and mature undergraduates.
- A measure of prior educational attainment of full-time students is used to determine the levels for the improving retention part of the widening participation allocation.
- HEFCE also makes a mainstream disability funding allocation reflecting the proportion of students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance.

#### *Funding HE in Further Education*

In England around 12 per cent of HE is delivered by Further Education colleges (FECs). Of these around 160 FECs are directly funded by HEFCE for their HE provision. The rest of the HE provision in FECs is indirectly funded (and some FECs may have direct and indirect funding) which can be via single or multiple HE partners, through franchising and consortium arrangements.

The 2003 White Paper made it clear that the government sees FECs as being significant in delivering their HE widening participation objectives, mostly in terms of sub-degree and foundation degree provision, organized through structured relationships between FECs and HEIs. FE colleges largely recruit locally and serve students who may not have been successful through traditional, academic routes. Added to this, the so-called “mixed economy colleges” with substantial levels of both FE and HE tend to make progression to HE a strategic priority. All this means that HE provision in FE is a critical part of widening participation and opening up provision. Nonetheless the funding of HE in FE throws up real problems for FECs, as identified in the report of the Mixed Economy Institutions (HEFCE, 2004).

Problems identified include:

- Discrepancies in funding and support for directly funded FECs, which don't receive HEFCE capital funding, benchmark statistics or the same levels of enhancement support (although this latter is being addressed)
- Different funding for "non-prescribed" HE, which can affect progression opportunities
- Indirect funding from multiple partners leading to different levels of support and demand from HEIs, resulting in different experience for students in the same FEC, and a lack of control for the FEC over student numbers and fee levels

Overall very different levels of funding between FE and HE which mean that staff pay and conditions result in widely varying levels of scholarship and professional development for staff delivering HE which impacts the student experience will be extremely variable.

#### *Fair admissions – the Schwartz report*

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills, commissioned Professor Steven Schwartz, Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University, to lead an independent review of the options which English institutions providing higher education should consider in assessing the merit of applicants for their courses, and to report on the high-level principles underlying these options. Professor Schwartz and his Steering Group published their final report in September 2004. It contains advice to institutions and the sector on admissions policies, qualifications and applications. It recommends the setting up of a national centre of expertise on admissions issues, including vocational qualifications, and the further consideration of issues with relevance to part-time students. It notes that many institutions are not conversant with vocational and level 3 qualifications other than A levels. The report overall recognises the need for changes to be made to existing admissions arrangements to achieve a fair process. Whilst the report recognises that diversity benefits staff and students alike, it also makes the point clear that institutions do not make achieving diversity a strategic objective of their admissions procedures.

#### *Curriculum change - the Tomlinson review of the 14-19 curriculum*

The Government commissioned a review of the qualifications framework for 14-19 year olds, and the review group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, reported in October 2004. The report proposed a new diploma framework which would allow young people to progress at their own pace. Diplomas would be awarded at four progressively more demanding levels: entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced, and would facilitate a mix of vocational and academic study. 14-16 year olds would continue to study national curriculum subjects, though their diploma would not depend on achieving a specific grade in those subjects. All students under 16 would take open diplomas to avoid narrowing their options too soon. Detailed transcripts of a young person's performance would be available to employers, universities and colleges. Some changes, such as a reduction in the assessment burden, reforms to A' level and improvements in vocational programmes could be achieved within five years. There could also be early progress towards improving basic skills. But the report recommended that the first diploma programmes should not be fully introduced for at least 10 years to allow the changes to be fully piloted.

Although the immediate implications impact on schools and colleges, the scope for young people to apply to HE with a mix of vocational and academic qualifications would have significant consequences for admissions to HE, and for widening participation amongst groups more likely to come through vocational and work-based routes.

## Partnership working: Factors and features

A key component in thinking about how to widen participation and reach groups of potential students that have hitherto not considered higher education is partnership working between higher and further education, schools, employers, advice and guidance networks, parents, community groups and training providers. Initiatives such as *Aimhigher*, *Lifelong Learning Networks*, and *Foundation Degrees* are all based on partnership working. Indeed the growth of cross sector partnerships is in many ways a distinct feature of WP policy trends since the Dearing Report of 1997. The focus on partnership working is in one sense a recognition that a joined up approach is both desirable and necessary. The challenge for WP in HEIs is one that begins long before applications for HE entry are made, has also come into sharp relief through collaborative WP initiatives (Allen & Storan 2005).

### *Aimhigher – HEFCE, the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)*

*Aimhigher* is an integrated programme (including Excellence Challenge), supported by HEFCE, the DfES and the LSC, to promote partnership working between schools, FE colleges, HE institutions, employers and others, to raise aspirations and increase applications to higher education amongst under-represented groups. It is the biggest programme to support WP that has ever taken place in England and involves every HEI. The government intends that the integrated *Aimhigher* programme should become the national outreach facility to support widening participation. Most activity in the integrated *Aimhigher* programme will operate on a sub-regional basis, with some co-ordinated at a regional level. HEFCE are also allocating up to £7 million for national projects: £5 million initially and £2 million as part of a rolling programme. The funds will support either activities that cut across regions and would operate more effectively at a national level, or examples of innovative practice which it would be beneficial to roll out nationally. This model differs from the Swedish WP projects which had a more institutional focus.

*Action on Access* is the national co-ordination team appointed by the HEFCE and the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to support their Widening Participation strategies for England for the three years up to December 2005. The team also supports the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DELNI) in Widening Participation. The team supports the *Aimhigher* initiative funded jointly by the HEFCE and the LSC. *Action on Access* works with further and higher education institutions and supports individual institutions with their widening participation strategies.

### *Lifelong Learning Networks – HEFCE and the LSC*

In June 2004 HEFCE and the LSC invited institutions to consider establishing Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs), to provide a focus on vocational routes into and through higher education, in the context of lifelong learning. Potential networks have been offered development funding of between £10,000 and £30,000 to produce a full business plan. HEFCE has invited National Institute of Adult & Continuing Education (NIACE) to work with them to take forward three key themes for LLNs. These reflect the importance attached to ensuring that learners can move between programmes and institutions, the need for changes in what higher education has to offer to accommodate vocational learners, and the contribution that LLNs can make to the wider aims of lifelong learning. The three themes are: progression accords between network partners, changes in the higher



education curriculum needed to support LLNs and the qualities and characteristics of lifelong learning.

LLNs' claim to distinctiveness is that they will bring together different HEIs and FE colleges, creating a network that reconnects the sectors for the purposes of progression; at a time of some uncertainty about market pressures stemming from the introduction of variable fees HEFCE is particularly concerned to engage FE colleges more closely.

#### *Collaborative provision: FE and HE*

Collaborative provision between FECs and HEIs is a key element in delivering HE opportunities to those who may wish to study locally, who may progress to higher education via vocational, and work-based routes, and who may have returned to learning through the familiar setting of an FE college. The nature of the relationship with the accrediting HEI is critical, given its role in determining fee level, student numbers, progression opportunities, and the levels and style of student support on the transition from an FEC to an HEI. Relationships between staff in FECs and HEIs can be productive and beneficial on both sides, and the provision of effective support and development, in particular for academic staff in FECs, who have less access to scholarship and research opportunities, is key.

#### *Foundation Degrees*

Foundation degrees were launched in September 2001. They were designed to be a new intermediate vocational HE qualification, developed in partnership between FE colleges, HE institutions and employers. Foundation Degrees are required to make provision for those achieving the two-year foundation degree to progress to a full honours degree. The Government envisages them as a key component in achieving the 50% participation target (see above) and in assisting with widening participation in HE from students more likely to follow vocational routes. They depend on partnership between institutions and employers.

### Learning, teaching and institutional management

At the same time as developing specific initiatives around widening participation, higher education is directing more attention to teaching and the support of learning, in recognition of the fact that a more diverse group of students will require greater attention to learning and teaching (L&T), and at the same time fee-paying students will in general make greater demands on their institutions. Initiatives include the setting up of the *Higher Education Academy (HEA)*, moves towards developing reward strategies for L&T, a professional standards framework, more attention to professional development, and the new *Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning*.

#### *The Higher Education Academy and professional standards*

The Higher Education Academy, launched in 2004, is taking forward work to accredit and support learning and teaching in higher education, via a number of initiatives, including the subject centre network. The Academy recognises the inter-relationship between teaching and widening participation which is identified as one of their key themes. Work started in 2004 to consult the sector on the proposal to commission work through the Higher Education Academy on the development of professional standards for academic practice and continuing professional development (CPD) that will support teaching and learning in higher education (HE). This work will need to integrate considerations of the implications of widening participation for teaching and supporting

learning in HE. The Academy will take forward work done through the old Institute for Learning & Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) to accredit programmes of initial teacher training within institutions, and to develop a framework for the registration of accredited teachers within HE.

#### *The subject centre network*

The HE Academy also hosts the subject centre network that aims to support staff in teaching and learning in relation to their subject and discipline area. Some of the subject centres have addressed widening participation areas directly, and the Academy is drawing together information in this area.

#### *Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)*

Following a bidding process, HEFCE has announced the creation of 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) to promote excellence across all subjects and aspects of teaching and learning in higher education. Funding of £315 million over five years from 2005-06 to 2009-10 for CETLs represents HEFCE's largest ever single funding initiative in teaching and learning. A complete list of CETLs and brief descriptions are on the HEFCE web-site.

Although the focus of the CETLs varies widely, a number are specifically concerned with issues to do with widening participation and linked issues such as e-learning and distance learning.

#### *Rewarding and Developing Staff*

Improving teaching and learning in order to enhance widening participation and student success means paying attention to recruitment and reward strategies and to the development and support of a diverse staff, alongside a diverse student body.

Concern that human resource management within higher education was patchy and needed in many cases to be more professional, combined with a recognition that institutions need recruitment and reward strategies that place a higher value on teaching and learning – particularly in institutions where research funding is limited led to the introduction of Rewarding and Developing Staff - a HEFCE funding stream that, *inter alia*, was intended to get institutions to address issues of rewarding good teaching, and gender and race discrimination in pay and staffing policies. At the same time campaigning by staff unions brought issues of inequitable pay and reward systems to the fore. The funding is now to be consolidated into teaching funding and HEFCE is consulting on the introduction of a self-assessment tool to aid institutions in assessing their recruitment, retention and reward strategies.

Staff unions continue to campaign for more equitable reward strategies and to the ending of pay discrimination on the ground of gender and race – work goes forward together with the Equality Challenge Unit.

### *Summary*

In summary the English approach to WP in HE has developed in significant and interesting ways certainly since the proposals made in the Dearing Report. Coupled with a firm political commitment and driven forward most notably through the HEFCE we have seen HEIs across the sector actively engaging in a variety of activities concerned with WP. The use of targets and the provision of high quality baseline and ongoing data by HEFCE has been highly significant to making and judging progress made at national and on institutional level. Add to this the use of institutional WP strategies and earmarked funding; the complexity of the organisational and structural changes involved becomes much clearer. At the present time we are beginning to see a different approach beginning to take shape. In a large part this is being precipitated by a reordering of the political emphasis on WP and changes to the role and remit of the HEFCE given the resources that will flow directly to HEIs for outreach and financial support once variable fees are introduced in 2006-07.

# THE SWEDISH APPROACH TO WIDENING PARTICIPATION

## The ideology and history of WP in Sweden

Widening participation to higher education has been a political goal for a very long time in Sweden. Policies were based on the following key elements:

- Liberal entrance requirements (only necessary qualifications should be required)
- Recognizing informal learning and non-academic qualifications
- Equality of treatment (strict rules and centralised admission procedures)
- Increasing geographical accessibility (by setting up new regional universities)
- Expanding intake capacity to both pre-HE and HE
- Upgrading of non-university HE (vocation oriented tertiary education)
- Giving adult students not able to benefit from earlier educational reforms a “second chance”

Several of these elements guiding policies for WP relate to admission and admission reforms, have been an important and a controversial part of higher education policy for several decades. It was used as a tool for breaking class privilege and to even out the prevailing differences in social recruitment to HE. Furthermore, entry regulations to HE have a major impact on education at lower levels and on adult education, where students' life chances and decisions on further studies are formed. So, the history of WP in Sweden is much the same as gradual reform of admission regulations and procedures. During the last 40 years at least six government commissions have been dealing exclusively with such problems and frequent changes in admission rules were decided at the political level. However, they were all within the same centralised model.

An important feature of Swedish higher education is its homogeneity, uniformity and centralisation. Accordingly, the Swedish policy for WP has been to integrate the so-called new groups of students on equal terms with traditional students. This is in accordance with the general principles of mainstreaming and avoidance of selective measures in Swedish welfare policies. Students suffering from physical disabilities are in fact the only ones receiving special treatment or extra funding in the Swedish HE system. In contrast, actions taken for remedial adult education outside the HE system have been more selective.

The first Commission with the task of reviewing the admission system was set up in the mid 1960s. It was a continuation of the comprehensive school reforms of earlier decades and the beginning of a new policy for WP. The commission invented the so called 25/5 rule implying that adults aged 25 or over with at least five years of work experience had the right to enrol in certain “open” fields of study at the universities. The aim was to bridge the generation gap that followed earlier school reforms by increasing the recruitment of adult students. In the uniform and centralised HE system in Sweden it was a matter of course to solve the problem of adult access to higher education by means of general admission rules. The 25/5 rule, with its general and easily and intelligible design, was often referred to as a pioneering example in an international context. However, the effects were often exaggerated. In the 1970s a considerable change in enrolment patterns emerged in a relatively spontaneous way within a formally unchanged structure (Kim 1982, Cerych & Sabatier 1986).

At the start, widened access for adult students was based on the notion that experience and knowledge from working life and non-formal education were, in some respect,

*equivalent* to formal schooling qualifications, although it was recognised that qualifications of adult students were *different* from those of young students. “Different but equal” was a main point of departure for the reforms of the 1960s and bridging measures were part of the reforms. But when the egalitarian motives became more emphasized the demand for individual assessment of qualifications was dropped, as was compensatory measures like counselling, introductory courses etc. The financial student support scheme was also gradually made more uniform for all students regardless of parental income, family situation, children etc. With the last reform in 2001, aiming at “more uniform and less complicated scheme”, HE students were included in the general welfare system, grants were considered as pensionable income and students were directed to social security for children and housing allowances. The possibility to work part time during study periods was somewhat enlarged but the limit for such additional income has remained.<sup>7</sup>

When Sweden in 1977 integrated all HE at the undergraduate level into one coordinated system of colleges and universities it was not only a continuation of the comprehensive school reforms of earlier decades but yet another step towards uniformity. An important aim of the reform was to promote social equity by broadening access to HE, especially among underprivileged groups and regions, by upgrading non-university institutions, and by the establishment of regional HEIs. Higher education was expanded throughout the country in order to increase access and accessibility. The new universities were supposed to play a crucial role in reducing regional discrepancies in participation. Insofar as they have contributed to general expansion they have been part of the achievements of WP, but apart from that opinions differ as to what extent they have really promoted equality of educational opportunity (see e.g. Josefsson & Unemo 2003).

Ever since the reform in 1977 the Swedish HE system applies a unique combination of restricted admission and mass higher education. There are restrictions on intake to most programmes and a large number of applicants are rejected each round of admission. In legal terms the whole HE sector is subject to *numerus clausus* by intake or economic restrictions set by the government. General eligibility for higher education does not, like in many other European countries, give access to university training, just the right to participate in the competition for entry. Students who want to enter highly competitive programmes stay on in school (or adult education institutions) in order to maximize their grades, which lead to lottery and delayed entry for some students. The policy debate on admission is therefore more on selection among high achievers than on admission of students with non-formal qualifications. Lately, the competition for entry was eased due to the rapid increase of intake capacity and a fairly low number of 19 year olds in the population at large. Available places in less attractive programmes and institutions were not always filled. The expected growth in numbers of school-leavers in the years to come will again increase competition for entrance and focus interest on the selection process and on admission to higher education.

### Enrolment patterns<sup>8</sup>

For more than ten years no in-depth scientific research on educational inequalities had been undertaken in Sweden, the last attempt being the analysis undertaken by Robert

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<sup>7</sup> There is a big difference between Sweden and UK in the view of the students' dependence on their parents and in the general welfare policies applied to HE students, partly related to the fact that HE students are much younger in the UK.

<sup>8</sup> Enrolment data reported in this chapter come from the Annual Report on higher education (NAHE 2005a) and Statistics Sweden (SCB 2004).

Erikson and Jan O. Jonsson on government request in the beginning of the 1990s. The study is closely related to the Swedish interpretation of social inequality as is the statistical data on students' social background published regularly by Statistics Sweden. The focus is on the distribution of new entrants between groups with differing parental background.

### *Social class*

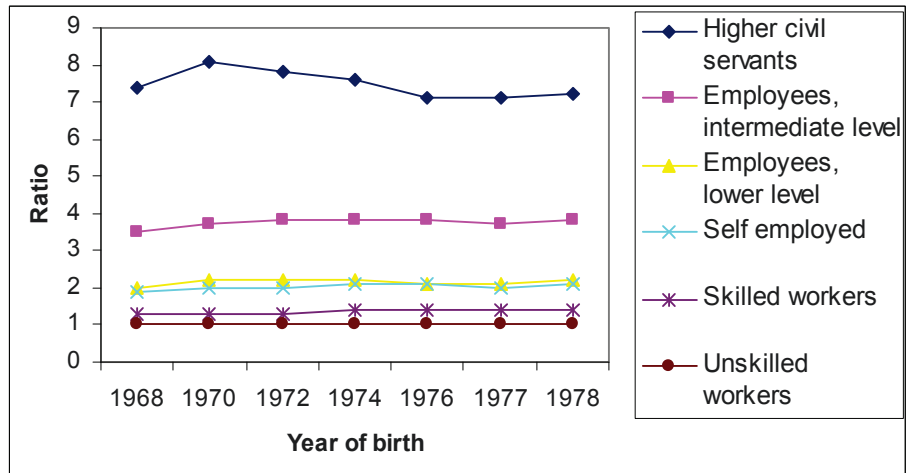
Erikson & Jonsson (1993) were commissioned to undertake a study of how social origin affects transitions to HE. They found that class-related educational inequalities decreased in Sweden during the period 1930 to 1970 but remained fairly stable from the early 1970s up to the early 1990s despite several reforms aimed at an equalisation in access to higher education. The selection process had moved upwards in the school system but remained strong, more pronounced in transition to upper secondary level than to tertiary level. When comparing with other nations Eriksson & Jonsson (1996) found that the pattern of inequality was very much the same in Sweden as in other industrial nations, even if the degree of inequality was somewhat lower. What made Sweden an outlier regarding educational equality was the combination of a reduction in class-based educational inequality in a fifty year historical perspective and a fairly high general level of equality. The outlier status was supposed to depend mainly on relatively low costs, no early selection and the lack of elite institutions. Their policy recommendations for further improvement were expansion of tertiary education, a more open and equal school system, active recruitment activities and generous student support schemes.

Since the time of this study the pattern of enrolment has changed. The expansion of the HE sector in the 1990s and early 2000s has, finally, broadened recruitment in terms of social background. The proportion of new entrants from working class background has gone up from 18 per cent in 1993/94 to 24 per cent in 2003/04, whereas students from higher social classes have decreased their share from 33 to 28 per cent. The distribution according to social class in the population at large has been stable in the meantime, which indicates a levelling of social inequalities in recruitment to higher education in the period. Still, the social background has a considerable impact on both students choice of study and educational outcome. Contrary to the situation in UK the differences in students' social background are bigger between programmes than between institutions. Institutions like Karolinska Institutet (KI), housing mostly highly competitive programmes like medicine and dentistry, do recruit more students from upper social class, but when it comes to nursing training the differences between KI and less prestigious institutions are not very big. Additionally, there are no significant differences in success rates in Sweden between students from different social backgrounds if you consider the differences in fields of study. Inequalities are rooted far back in the school system.

However, looking merely at shares is not enough when there are changes in the parental generation. Statistics Sweden also calculates how the "relative chance" of entering HE is changing. Figures are based on longitudinal data for cohorts of young people. According to this measure the relative chance of entering tertiary education at the age of 25 has decreased in recent years for people coming from the upper social class but remained fairly stable for other groups (Figure 3). This may be suggestive of slightly decreasing inequality. But among young people born in 1978 (the last year for which data are available) the relative chance is still seven times higher for upper middle class students than for working class students. The difference is even greater when broken down by parents' educational level. Among students from upper middle class 70 per cent have

reached the 50 per cent target compared to less than 30 per cent of working class students.

Figure 3. Relative chance of entering higher education at the age of 25 for young people born 1968-1978 by social background (Source: SCB 2004)



The "relative chance" (odds ratio) is a measure of the probability of entering higher education (before the age of 25) for an individual coming from higher social background compared to someone coming from working class (unskilled worker =1). The measure refers to first time enrolments regardless of the student's choice of programme.

The social discrepancies stand out more clearly when choice of study is taken into account; middle class students more often study in highly competitive programmes leading to high status jobs whereas young people from lower social classes often enrol in shorter vocationally oriented programmes. In some of the more prestigious programmes, where competition for entry is high, there has been only a marginal increase in working class participation or no increase at all. Probably, this is just the logic of expansion which transfers inequalities from the point of entry to the distribution of students *within* the HE system.

Although recent developments seem encouraging in many respects there are also trends pointing in a negative direction. Several studies published recently argue that educational inequality is again increasing as achievements in compulsory and secondary school are going down. The results reported in the national evaluation of compulsory schooling (NAE 2004) indicates deteriorations or insufficient goal attainment in some basic domains of knowledge such as reading comprehension, mathematics, chemistry and social studies. The results of the international comparative assessment studies, PISA (OECD Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), point in the same direction. The number of students leaving compulsory school without eligibility to continue at secondary level has increased and the gap between high- and low-achievers has been enlarged. Some people fear that the upper secondary reforms of the 1990s may have reinforced the sorting mechanisms. Vocation oriented steams have been transformed in a more theoretical direction in order to make all students eligible for higher education. The effect is, according to Olofsson (2005), that more students drop out, in particular students from low educated and low income families. Most of them are boys and many have an immigrant

background. So, there are clear indications that the reform of upper secondary school in the 1990s may have increased the social disparities and deteriorated the conditions for vocational training, contrary to the political intentions.

Some other disappointing conclusions are drawn in a background study on educational equality recently performed for the Ministry of Finance ((Josefson & Unemo 2003). The redistributive aim of the present system (from high to lower income groups) is effective only in a short time perspective. In a longer term perspective the high degree of subvention of higher education study is mainly favouring young people from high income families, the same type of argument put forward by Alison Wolf in her famous book *Does education matter?* (Wolf 2003). Neither expansion, nor the regional distribution of higher education has had much impact on educational inequality, according to the Swedish analysis. The authors recommend further research into the effects of the present study support scheme and more supporting activities at an early stage in school. Their findings support the idea that the cause of inequality in access to higher education may be found in - and worked against - in the school system. Interventions in upper secondary schooling or just before applying for admission may come too late and even miss the target.

### *Lifelong learning*

Substantial numbers of older adults are participating in tertiary education beyond the usual study period in Sweden. This has been the case ever since the 1970s and up to recently the Government policy has been to reinforce this development in different ways. The highest enrolment rate is now in the 21-24 age group while the 19-20 age group is severely under-represented. Lifelong learning is offered to a large extent by HEIs. So-called non-traditional students (over 25 at the start, studying part time or making interruptions) make up more than half of the student population (Brandell 2003). Many students wished to take part of a full programme and on average only half of all new entrants complete a university degree. The numbers of students aged 25 or older is still growing faster than the younger age groups. This could be one reason for decreasing inequalities; older students tend to come from under-represented groups and tend to be female.

### *Gender*

Gender inequality is primarily a disadvantage to males, not female students – at least reflected in the overall figures. Female students make up more than 60 per cent of the total enrolments in Sweden and female participation is going up year by year. The level of tertiary attainment is clearly in favour of woman but significant gender differences continue to exist in specific areas. Young men in rural areas are identified as being disadvantaged students and public intervention may be necessary to reverse the present development.

### *Ethnicity*

The link between ethnic background and transfer to higher education is complex: the cultural differences are added to the general social dimension. In the academic year 2003/04 about 17 per cent of those admitted to higher education (exchange students not included) had foreign background, i.e. were born abroad or had parents born abroad. This is about the same share as in the population at large which indicates that there are no big differences in the overall transfer rate to HE between people with Swedish background and those of foreign descent. Due to social and cultural factors there are however big differences between nationalities. This is affecting children's upbringing, especially in the metropolitan areas. Good knowledge in Swedish is



important and the counties are responsible for delivering language courses to all immigrants.

### *Disabilities*

The number of students in need of special support due to disabilities has increased in recent years, in particular students with dyslexia. In the year 2004 a total amount of SEK 67 million was spent on support to students with disabilities and 3500 students got help from sign interpreters. All HEIs are obliged to set aside 0,3 per cent of their basic funding for this kind of special support and this sum has increased by four times in the last eight years.

### Recent Government reforms and initiatives

Swedish HE is now gradually moving towards increased diversity and growing differentiation between institutions, programmes and students. Expansion is an important factor in this development. However, the wave of expansion started somewhat later in Sweden than in most other European countries. The 1980s became a decade of stagnation and the growth in student numbers did not start until the beginning of the 1990s. Since then, as already mentioned, the number of students has more than doubled.

One important reason for expansion was the economic recession in the beginning of the 1990s. Unemployment increased and actions were taken in order to raise the educational level of the population at large, especially in the fields of technology and natural science. In the mid 1990s a massive investment was made in adult education, the so called Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*). More than 400 000 people were enrolled in this programme in the period 1997-2001 (SOU 2000:28). People without an upper secondary education were given the opportunity of obtaining necessary qualification for admission to higher education and the pool of possible applicants grew.

The transformation of Sweden into a multicultural society with increasing immigration and mobility of students put diversity high on the policy agenda in the 1990s. When changes were made in the national leadership of the higher education sector at the end of the decade new initiatives were taken in order to broaden access to higher education. The newly elected chancellor of the Swedish universities, Sigbrit Franke, started an evaluation of HEIs work with social and ethnic diversity, "Franking" in popular speech (NAHE 2003). The new Minister of Education, Thomas Östros, appointed a special Commission on diversity in higher education (*Utredningen om social och etnisk mångfald i högskolan*). The proposal from this commission was that a considerable amount of money – SEK 500 million a year for a five year period – should be allocated for development work and pilot projects for WP in the coming five year period (SOU 2000:47). Preparatory courses of different kinds, language courses, more flexible admission procedures and several measures to improve the situation for foreign students and staff were recommended. The commission suggested that diversity was to be looked upon as a criterion in quality assessment, more as an asset than a problem.

The outcome was twofold, a new Commission was set up to review the policy and regulatory framework for admission to higher education and extra funding was set aside for a Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education – but on a much lower scale than suggested (see below). These initiatives were put forward in the Government bill *An Open Higher Education System* (Prop. 2001/02:15), where the 50 per cent target was set

forth in detail. The bill contains an outline of the Swedish policy for WP and is still valid. The following is summary of the main part in this strategy.

#### *Action plans for widening participation*

Every HEI was obliged by law to work out a local plan of action for their student recruitment activities and to develop more consistent and valid indicators of progress in this area. A follow-up study by the National Agency in 2003 revealed that this obligation (and probably the possibility to get funding from the Special Commission on Recruitment) had evoked intense activities. Most HEIs, but not all, had developed a plan for their WP work. Attitudes towards these types of activities had become much more positive and the student organisations often acted as a driving force in this development. Some HEIs had set aside large amounts of money but it was difficult to judge whether it was for broadening the social and ethnic composition of the student body or just for enlarging the income base. The plans were not always concrete and indicators to measure success and follow-up of WP activities were seldom in place. Universities were recommended to make better use of available statistical data and research. The main reflections made by the evaluators concerned the future of WP work within the institutions were that it has to be part of the regular structure and not dependant on special funding or personal engagement by individual staff (NAHE 2003).<sup>9</sup>

#### *Bridging/preparatory courses and “college programmes”*

An introductory year to higher education, successfully tried in science, has been introduced also in other subject areas. These preparatory courses are open to students lacking the formal qualifications to enter higher education studies and should be initiated primarily in areas where the number of qualified applicants is too low. So called “college education” in co-operation with local adult education institutions, has also been offered on a broader scale. The upper secondary part of this training is meant to improve the student’s basic knowledge and eligibility. The higher education part should strengthen students’ general qualifications and improve their chances of succeeding in their studies. The intention is that the participants in college programmes shall continue to study at university level but no guarantee for admission was possible to give within the present system. The division of labour between secondary schools and HEIs has always been very strict in Sweden the general policy being to direct students to municipal adult education (*Komvux*) in order to get the necessary qualifications to enter higher education. The college programmes meant a break with this tradition.

Bridging courses of different kinds have been growing in scope and quantity but the number of participants has not been very large in relation to the annual inflow of students.<sup>10</sup> Twenty institutions offering college programmes in the academic year 2003/04 report a total of 400 successful participants, half of which were still involved in higher education after two years. The introductory courses enrolled about 3,500 students in the same year. About 70 per cent of these students continued their studies at tertiary level. Other kinds of bridging arrangements (distance or integral elements in general programmes) were also offered by many HEIs but on the whole these arrangements remain a marginal phenomenon. (NAHE 2005 d, 2005 e)

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<sup>9</sup> Similar problems of accountability were found in the mid-term evaluation of the Committee on regional cooperation in higher education conducted by SISTER (interim report).

<sup>10</sup> Some of these courses, but not all, were financed by SCR. The Swedish funding system based on student numbers and credit points achieved in degree courses does not apply to this kind of preparatory non-credit courses.

### *Accreditation of prior/experiential learning*

The responsibility of HEIs to validate the applicant's prior learning to see if it matches the admission requirements has been improved – but not at the expense of the lowering of standards. Accreditations of experiential or non-formal qualifications (comparable to APEL/APL in the UK) apply to students who lack formal qualifications but have acquired the knowledge required to follow the programme. Development of procedures and norms for such assessment work was supported in different ways. However, up to now this opening up of new routes to higher education has had a rather marginal effect on student recruitment. In total 5600 applicants (of about 80 000 new entrants) were asking for admission on the basis of non-formal qualifications in the year 2004. Experiential learning was mainly counted for in admission to vocation-oriented programmes such as nursing and teacher training. In the centralised admission system a lot of practical difficulties arise when non-formal qualifications are to be assessed and the tools available to validate the qualifications and assessing the applications from these students are still not well performed (NAHE 2005c). Work goes on and a Commission on Validation has been set up to improve the development in this area.

### *Alternative rules of selection*

The admission rules have been made somewhat more flexible by the introduction of a “free quota”, which means that HEIs can apply their own rules of selection to 10 per cent of their intake capacity - a remarkable break with the principle of uniformity in admission. The main argument put forward for this reform was the present social and ethnic bias in recruitment. So the alternative admission rules were mainly to be used for selecting students from groups under- represented in higher education. The whole thing became more of a system of fixed quotas for various groups of students than a possibility for HEIs to experiment with new methods in order to select the most able students regardless of their formal qualifications (grades and aptitude tests).

Alternative modes of selection have been used on a limited scale for students from college programmes and for students gaining access on non-formal qualifications. Quotas based on ethnic background were used in admission to law at some universities (to increase the number of lawyers with non-Swedish background). This led to a heated debate on discrimination. The use of ethnic quotas was said to be in opposition to the Swedish constitution. This was later on confirmed by court. All in all, only a small number of students (about 500 each year) were enrolled on the basis of alternative rules of selection in 2003 and 2004 (NAHE 2005 c). So, the attempts to deviate from the uniform Swedish model of admission do not seem to have had much impact on WP. The responsibility for this rests not only with the strict government regulations but with the HEIs, who could have made better use of the new possibilities opened up for recruitment of non-traditional students. The recent Government bill on higher education may indicate a policy change in this respect.<sup>11</sup>

### *The Net University and distance education*

A Net University came into being in 2002 with the task of coordinating IT-support distance courses run by HEIs.<sup>12</sup> It was a continuation of attempts to broaden recruitment

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<sup>11</sup> The recent Government Bill on higher education (Prop 2004/05:162) has a slightly different approach to this issue. HEI should be free to admit 20 per cent of their students on the basis of more diversified and individual based admission procedures, no quotas are allowed and the real competence of applicants should be taken into consideration.

<sup>12</sup> HEI running net courses have up to now been given an extra disbursement from the Government. The sum is decreasing and will disappear according to the recent bill on HE.

through distance education going on for several decades, often supported by local authorities in more remote areas. The number of students taking distance courses has increased more rapidly in recent years and students studying at a distance now constitute about 15 per cent of the total number of undergraduate students. Many students combine distance courses with regular university studies. The Net University has considerably increased accessibility to higher education. A total of 38 000 students (one tenth of the total number) were enrolled here for the autumn term of 2004. In general the Net students have a different background compared to traditional campus students; more students have a working class background, come from scarcely populated areas, are older and have family (NAHE 2005b).

#### *National schemes supporting WP*

A Special Committee on Recruitment to higher education (*Rekryteringsdelegationen*) was set up with the task of stimulating recruitment activities at HEIs. The Committee was given SEK 120 million to support activities for WP in the period 2002-04. A more detailed report is given below and statistical data on applications and projects are reported in the Appendix. Parallel to this initiative another Special Committee on regional cooperation in higher education (*Samverkansdelegationen*) was set up in order to stimulate sustainable economic growth through regional cooperation and increased enrolment in higher education. Both committees were given about the same amount of money to spend over a three year period, they worked in a similar way and some activities overlapped. The latter committee was mainly funding experiments involving local authorities, companies and organisations of different kinds, but HEIs were also involved in these activities. One quarter of the projects supported networking between HEIs and local or regional partners to investigate individual and labour market demands for education. Financial support was given to “learning centres” (*studiecentra*) for regional cooperation in student recruitment and post-compulsory education (*Delegationen för regional samverkan om högre utbildning* 2005).

#### The Special Committee on Recruitment (SCR)

Setting up special commissions with the task of supporting projects in various policy areas is a new way of implementing change when general reforms seem ineffective and “out of date”. The work of such commissions may be characterised as policy exploration rather than policy implementation. The Special Commission on Recruitment to higher education (SCR) is but one such taskforce set up in recent years. Accordingly, resources and authority within the area of WP were transferred from the national educational agencies to an external committee with considerable scope for experimentation.

The aim of the Special Committee on Recruitment was

- To support HEIs in their active recruitment to higher education,
- To stimulate and provide financial support for further development of the emerging “college system”, serving as a bridging device between upper secondary and higher education,
- To stimulate and provide financial support for partnership projects bringing together HEIs, municipal adult education centres, folk high schools and the regular school system.

The committee had SEK 120 million to approach these issues during a three year period. In relation to the total funding of undergraduate courses it is less than one per cent. The

aim of this additional funding was not to increase enrolment but to widen participation to social and ethnic minorities under-represented in higher education.

There were three separate opportunities to apply for financial support from the SCR in 2002-2003 and an additional application round in the autumn of 2003 for student unions. The Committee received a total of around 600 project applications. Approximately one-sixth were approved. The 108 projects receiving funding and support from the committee had different focus: raising aspirations before school, bridging courses for students trying to enter HE and supporting measures for students already enrolled in HE. The spread of information was also considered an important aspect. The committee became a catalyst and meeting point between those working with WP projects by organising conferences and seminars at the regional and national level and exchange visits for people engaged in WP work in cooperation with the University of East London and its Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies, Continuum. In total almost 16,000 people were actively involved in the projects with information campaigns etc., an estimated 400,000 people were targeted.

No evaluation of the committee's work has been done but a summary report was published by the end of the working period (Rekryteringsdelegationen 2004 b). The general judgement, based on on-site visits and a questionnaire sent out to all project leaders (Rekryteringsdelegationen 2004 a), was that most projects had been successful and enhanced the engagement in activities aimed at widening participation. Referring to the three years of experience, the committee made recommendations about future policies and actions to be taken at national and institutional level, e.g. the establishment of a new national agency for development of HE, a review of the funding principles for undergraduate education and more active support and follow-up of WP activities within HEIs. Other recommendations put forward by the committee were to elaborate clear and measurable goals and indicators for the development of WP and alternative teaching and learning methods responding to the needs of a more heterogeneous student group.

We are not repeating the findings of the committee in more detail. Instead we have made some additional research based on the applications, project plans and final reports delivered at the end of the working period. Overall, there is a general lack of quantitative measurement and outcome data and it is difficult to get an overview of the effects. This demonstrates a lack of interest for following up and learning from the experimental work.

#### *Strategy and way of working*

The guidelines for the committee allowed for a flexible interpretation and the criteria for the project applications were fairly open. In this way SCR hoped to receive new and inventive ideas on how to approach the topic of WP and to increase the enthusiasm for recruitment activities. However, the quick and unconventional approach left little room for further considerations on target groups and ways of approaching WP. Research in the field was not utilised. Nor was much attention given to the development of key indicators, as was suggested in the government bill and guidelines for the committee.

Ear-marked funding for special actions tends to initiate experiments but money is sometimes used for financing activities already running. In the beginning many applications to the SCR were just aiming at filling up empty student "places". In order to integrate actions for WP in the regular development work the committee decided that all

projects had to involve at least one HEI as an active partner and additional financial support by at least one HEI was made a necessary condition for funding.

The committee interpreted their guidelines about encouraging active recruitment and widening participation primarily as a need for increasing the number of students with working class or foreign ethnic background. The target groups were not clearly defined by the committee and SCR more or less disregarded other minority groups such as students with mental or physical disability, sexual orientation and gender under-represented in certain field of studies. Actions with the intention of changing attitudes towards minority groups among students and staff in HEIs were not prioritised.

Certain priorities were however clear from the very beginning; support should be given to projects working with “college courses” as well as networking between educational institutions. The most frequent type of network existing at the outset was partnerships between HEIs and upper secondary schools, which caused the committee to encourage projects with preschool, high school and adult education institutions. The SCR also decided to support projects initiated at institutions not previously involved in multicultural activities. Those already engaged in widening participation to ethnic and socio-economic under-represented groups did not receive financial support for their ongoing work. Priority was also given to student involvement in the WP work, which led to a special round of applications from the student associations.

Recruitment to HE is influenced by individual and structural factors. Family attitudes and expectations as well as norms communicated via friends and peers are all influential factors. The structural focus refers to conditions such as admission rules, the student support scheme, geographical location of HEIs, curriculum content, and to some extent the social environment. The SCR policy approach was to concentrate on the individual aspect in order to increase applications from groups under-represented in higher education and to support pre-entry and initial activities for these students. Structural issues were not seriously considered and most projects focused on influencing individual choice rather than analysing the impact of different factors.

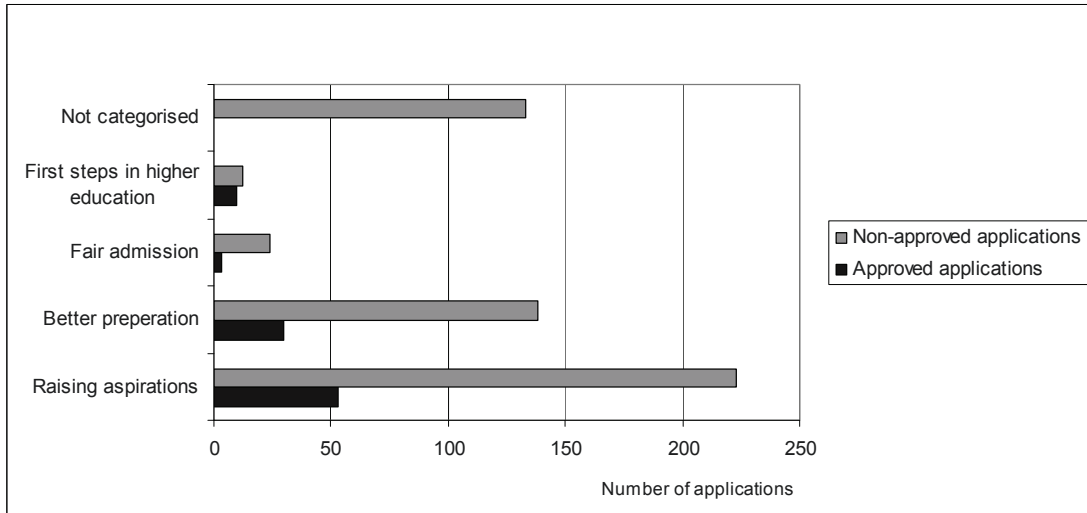
SCR tried to avoid overlapping with other projects and committees working within the same area, e.g. those trying to encourage young people’s interest in technology and science or to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. Project applications that could be directed to other state authorities were not considered for financial support. For that reason the validation of prior learning (APL/APEL) was not high on the committee’s preference list. The ongoing review of the admission system kept the committee and HEIs from trying to experiment with alternative admission procedures. The effect was that many students participating in the projects funded by SCR were rejected entry to higher education after having participated in preparatory and aspiration raising activities. Some projects were even dismantled for the same reason. The possibility to use the “10 per cent quota” and SCR funding for experimenting with alternative admission procedures were not fully utilized.

#### *Focus on raising aspirations*

When the applications for funding are grouped according to student life cycle periods it seems clear that the SCR focused mainly on activities aimed at raising students aspirations (Figure 4). Almost half of the project applications focused directly on aspiration raising activities followed by activities preparing the students for entry. Only a few applications concerned admission rules or supporting activities during the studies. There were no big

differences in the refused rate among different kinds of project applications except for the few applications for supporting activities during the student’s first steps in higher education. Most applications of that orientation were approved.

Figure 4. Applications to SCR and approved projects by student lifecycle periods



What kinds of activities were performed under these headings? And what kinds of experiences were reported?

*Aspiration raising activities* are a common denominator of different types of actions for WP with the aim to evoke curiosity and eagerness for higher education studies and for cooperation between different institutions. The projects funded by SCR were partnerships- or subject-related often with a big university as the main actor. The intention of the partnerships was to increase participation of under-represented groups through networking, most often an HEI working with an upper secondary school situated in a high-risk area. The aim of the subject related projects was to increase recruitment to specific subjects, most often in science. The latter approach seemed to be rather top down oriented with many academic professionals involved concerned about the ongoing decrease in recruitment to science-based programmes. Also the faculty of law participated actively in this type of activity with the aim to increase the enrolment of students with non-Swedish background. Law students were often actively involved in promoting such projects.

The target groups for the aspiration raising activities were students enrolled in compulsory and secondary school or adult education institutions. Similar tracking methods were used for reaching the different target groups. One way was to study statistics about entry rates to higher education in different areas and select a group with a low entry rate. So-called “student ambassadors” were often used to inform and evoke interest among high school and upper secondary students. The student ambassadors were preferably in the early years of their higher education and had a similar social background as the target group. They were meant to serve as “role models,” portraying the slogan, “if I can, you can.” Playful activities were used to attract younger students whereas more serious forms of discussion-based seminars and site visits were used to evoke older students’ interest. These activities were reported as an efficient strategy for reaching out to schools in low-participation areas. The student ambassadors helped with

homework and engaged in information activities. This was much appreciated by the school children. Furthermore, the upper secondary students seemed to be more prone to listen to young HE students and happy to get an opportunity to ask more basic questions about student life and studies in general. The students probably felt more secure when they found that the student ambassadors came from the same area and that “ordinary people” could continue to higher education. Student counsellors were also engaged in these activities, which improved their knowledge of different tracks and learning options.

The networks between schools and HEIs were successful and rewarding especially for the upper secondary schools. The schoolteachers took great pride in cooperating with a university and they received a positive response in caring for their students’ academic futures. Heads of upper secondary schools also showed considerable interest in the WP work. The exchange of practices between teachers and institutions at different levels provided a fruitful exchange. The WP projects sometimes developed into more permanent exchange of teachers between institutions. However, the attitudes varied. Many project leaders at HEIs did not receive enough active support from colleagues and managerial bodies, whereas project leaders from schools and adult education institutions met positive attitudes from their co-workers. The networks between HEIs and adult education institutions had many organisational barriers to overcome but on the whole the effects were positive. Universities developed a deeper understanding for the work carried out by adult education institutions, it was easier to evaluate the bridging courses and the regional perspective was broadened on both sides.

The target group for the second biggest category of projects funded by SCR, *the pre-entry activities*, was students aspiring to enter HE. They had to be approached and influenced during the process of reaching the necessary qualifications for admission. Preparatory courses and “college programmes” were used to attract these students and facilitate their transition to higher education. Bridging courses were often established through regional partnerships between different educational institutions. The purpose was twofold, to fill educational gaps and to make higher education seem less intimidating for students from non-academic backgrounds. In many cases successful completion of a bridging course made the student’s admission process easier. While aspiration rising was mainly in the interest of the big universities the pre-entry activities was an issue for many new universities and also for adult education institutions such as the folk high schools. For the sake of status and survival they were eager to facilitate these students transfer to higher education studies.

Only a few SCR projects chose to work with *the admission process*. This may be due to the ongoing review of the admission rules mentioned above, but it may as well be an effect of the Swedish tradition of centrally regulated admission procedures. The few projects funded by SCR concerned either validation of student’s prior learning or alternative admission requirements for certain programmes. (It would have been possible for HEIs to use the 10 per cent “free quota” for experiments or to make exception from the rules!)

The low number of applications regarding *supporting activities during HE studies* reveals that such activities were not given particular attention. The focus was on recruitment activities. However, by some applicants it was considered important to support students after their first initial semester in order to avoid “drop outs”. Language support was the most common type of activity in this category. The so called “language workshops” (*språkverkstäder*) were meant as a guide to self-help for both Swedish and foreign students.



### *Location of institutions responsible for the projects*

Since every project application had to involve at least one HEI the universities became principal actors responsible for the majority of the projects approved by SCR. Schools and adult education institutions were not as deeply involved despite the efforts by the committee to reach out to other educational providers. Figure 5 illustrates the type of institutions responsible for the projects.

Half of the recruitment activities were connected to a certain field of study and science was the most common field for such activities depending on previous difficulties in recruiting students. Teacher training was another field of study emphasising actions for WP. Accordingly, it may seem as if HEIs were more concerned with filling their empty study places than actually broadening student recruitment. Teachers and students in law and business administration, however, were engaged for different reasons. Aware of the fact that they were going to meet a clientele increasingly consisting of different ethnic groups made them more engaged in WP activities.

Figure 5. SCR projects by type of institution responsible for the project

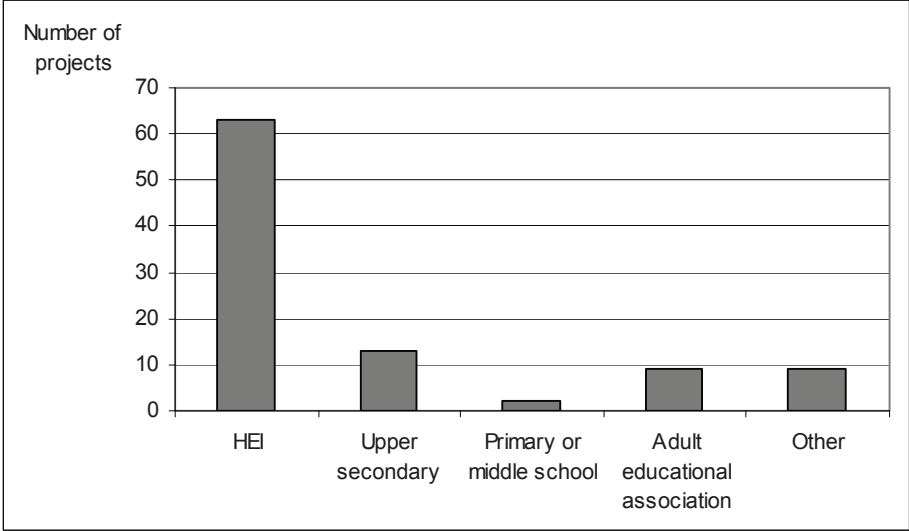


Figure 6. Number of approved SCR projects by regional location (Source: Rekryteringsdelegationen 2004b)





The geographical location of the WP projects are of interest since relevant target groups are to be found in schools in rural communities as well as in the suburbs of the big cities. The SCR activities were spread out around the country; half of the projects were located close to the university towns and the rest in other parts of the country. However, there was an over-representation of projects located around HEIs in the Stockholm and Gothenburg areas (Figure 6).

#### *Targeting under-represented groups*

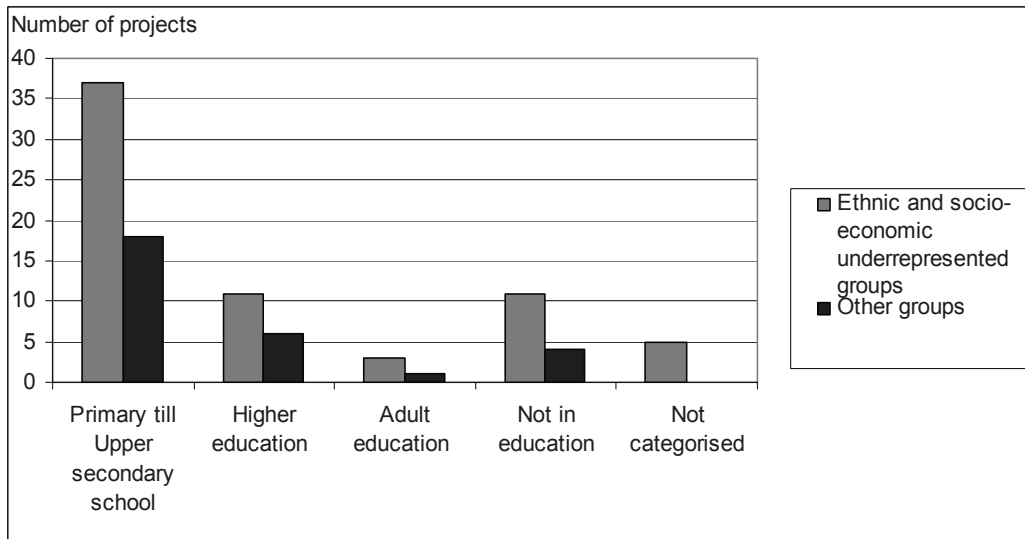
Due to the open guidelines for the applications the projects approved by SCR represent a variety of target groups and tracking methods. The distribution according to educational level comes close to the lifecycle perspective reported (Figure 7).

Approximately half of the projects were focusing on compulsory or secondary students, i.e. individuals preparatory to higher education, the majority being upper secondary students. Only a few projects worked with children in primary school with the intention to stir up their interest for higher education studies at an early age. Seventeen projects in total had the ambition to work with students already enrolled in higher education. These projects focused on students experiencing difficulties with their academic work assuming them to belong to the under-represented groups.

The SCR focus was predominately on youth from ethnic and socio-economic groups that traditionally do not enter higher education. However, the committee did not make any attempts to clarify the exact meaning of this definition. Neither did the committee make any distinction between ethnic groups and socio-economic groups—the belief being that the two groups benefit from the same recruiting activities. To highlight an upper secondary school in a high-risk area was supposed to reach both. Figure 7 illustrates to what extent the projects approved by SCR were explicitly targeting the ethnic or socio-economic groups under-represented in higher education. Around 50 per cent of the projects focused on these groups, in particular those run by HEIs.

Very few activities supported by SCR focused on adults enrolled in education outside the higher education sector, mostly students enrolled in the voluntary sector lacked qualifications for higher education. They were often mature students who experienced difficulties with regular studies on campus due to personal commitments such as children or full time employment. Or they needed qualifications to enter higher education and looked for possibilities to have their previous education and knowledge validated. Immigrants holding a secondary or higher education degree belonged to this category.

Figure 7. SCR-projects focusing on different educational levels and ethnic or socio-economic under-represented groups



#### *Barriers experienced in the project work*

From the final reports delivered by the project leaders it is possible to learn from the barriers experienced in the WP work. Such experiences may point at factors overlooked at the outset of the committee work. A summary is given below.

- Young students' lack of maturity has caused concern among project workers. Project workers did not foresee the challenge in approaching young people not prepared for questions relating to HE and they often felt dissatisfied with the information sessions. Some tailored their approach to the student's maturity level but still experienced the work as frustrating when the level of discussion became too basic. School pupils tended to rate study visits at HEI on the level of fun rather than the relevance of the information received. Printed information was ineffective; information delivered in person had better effect on students.
- Support activities were occasionally difficult to organise and start up. The gap between the student's knowledge and the course requirements was sometimes alarming. It was also difficult to find a suitable environment for the support activities within the institutions. Students often relate the support service with academic failure, and consequently they preferred the service to be discrete. This attached a certain stigma to the supporting activities.
- Many students in contact with the WP projects were concerned about the financial aspects of HE participation and many questions were raised about the conditions for grants and loans to cover the living expenses during study periods. The fear of running into debt still seems to deter some working class students from enrolling in higher education. Participating in pre-entry activities extends the study period to be covered by grants and loans and increases the economic burden for the individual. Arguments were put forward for a more diversified student support scheme.
- Only one third of the projects were expected to continue after the experimental period. The uncertain financial situation seemed to be the main problem for those involved in the WP projects. Study support projects more frequently expected future

funding from the regular HEI budget. Enough time for WP activities was also regarded as a problem; the project work had taken more time than expected. Co-partners were cautious with their time devoted to project work and teachers did not want the recruitment activities to interfere with their ordinary schedule.

- Some university staff possessed negative attitudes towards the new student groups. They believed that non-traditional students would demand more social responsibility from the university staff, be a threat to the traditional role of university teachers and hence impair the quality of education. Some university teachers were obviously afraid that new groups of students would result in new demands on teaching style, more close to that in upper secondary schools.
- Projects dealing with admission met lots of bureaucratic barriers. Formal complications and disagreements between the project partners involved made the validating procedure complicated. One project tried to validate overseas nursing degrees in order to find a more effective way to integrate foreign nurses into the Swedish education system, a well justified aim. But the project could not continue due to bureaucratic barriers. Also projects working with aspiration raising activities experienced barriers related to the admission procedure. A common attitude among students was “What’s the point, I won’t be accepted anyway.” Students were eager to find “short cuts” to enrol in the desired programme and the student ambassadors received many questions and comments regarding admission. Project leaders found it frustrating to encourage students’ ambitions and not being able to fulfil their plans due to the strict admission rules. Students with full upper secondary schooling sometimes preferred to participate in pre-entry activities just in order to enhance their chances of being admitted to a programme. Critical attitudes have appeared towards “college students” getting unconditional offers to participate in high competitive programmes. This demonstrates that admissions policy is a question of power and authority which needs to be addressed in further WP work.

### *Reflections on the outcome*

The main *strengths* of SCR’s work may be summarised as follows:

The aspiration raising activities, which were given priority in the experimental work, seem to have reached out to the target groups and positively influenced the participants’ attitudes. Furthermore, networks were established and regional cooperation increased. A foundation for more permanent teacher cooperation and exchange was also laid.

Supporting methods for people in need of language training were elaborated and tried out in the language workshops supported by SCR. As a result the committee highlighted the need for advanced support in oral and written work.

The individual centred approach of the committee meant that important structural issues were overlooked, yet problems and weaknesses within the system were revealed. The main advantage of the committee work was, however, the fact that special funding was put aside on the national level for WP actions allowing for different kinds of initiatives to get financial support without interfering with regular activities and current rules.

There are also some *critical* factors in SCR’s work, summarised as followed:

The lack of a firm research base was probably a disadvantage for the whole programme. One example is the unsophisticated operational definition used for the main

target group, i.e. “young students from ethnic and socio-economic under-represented groups”. A more elaborate definition of the target groups would have helped in the committee work since different minority groups may have benefited from different types of activities.

The whole programme did not result in any significant new approaches on how to work with WP more efficiently, which was one of the ambitions behind setting up a special committee and funding project work instead of traditional reform methods.

Not much attention was given to issues such as admission regulations or the need for new learning and teaching methods in line with a more diverse student population. The students' financial situation was also overlooked, even though many projects indirectly confirmed the belief that some socio-economic groups hesitate to take loans and don't see the point of long term investment in HE.

## COMPARING THE POLICIES

The different structure of higher education in Sweden and the UK is repeatedly mentioned in the text. History and traditions differ but the gap is diminishing. A cross-national comparison of reform policies and changes in higher education in recent decades (Kogan *et al* 2000), came to the conclusion that the two countries started from different points but were affected by similar challenges facing their systems of HE, in particular the increasing demand and growing student numbers.

The aim of this study is to learn from comparing recent policies for WP in Sweden and the UK, mainly from a Swedish point of view. From the previous chapter it appears that the attempts to change the present inequalities in access to HE have been more pronounced and broader in scope in UK than in Sweden. But Sweden has a much longer history of WP, especially in the field of adult education. Recent developments and in particular the setting up of the Special Committee on Recruitment has put Sweden much closer to the UK policy position in the field. The project work by the committee is comparable to the first step taken in the late 1990s in the UK. This is one reason why Sweden ought to learn from the English experiences.

We start our comparative analysis by looking at some aggregate OECD statistics and then turn to analyse some relevant policy aspects.

### Participation rates in Sweden and England

According to the 2004 edition of Education at a Glance Sweden and UK are quite close in terms of most OECD-indicators relevant to the issue of WP<sup>13</sup>. The two countries are on the same level e.g. in expected years of schooling, in entry rates into tertiary education (if we include vocationally oriented higher education), in country profiles on transition from education to working life and in the situation of the youth population with low levels of education. Trends in educational attainment of the adult population are going in the same positive direction and both countries are above the OECD mean in this respect. The percentage of 25-34 year olds which have attained tertiary education is, however, higher in Sweden (39%) than in the UK (31%). Gender imbalance at undergraduate level favours woman in Sweden. On the other hand the completion rates in academically oriented higher education is much higher in the UK (85%) compared to Sweden (41%) as is the percentage of foreign students in tertiary education (an effect of the old Empire).

In broad terms the UK population is more class divided than the Swedish, but no comparable data are available on the social disparities in education. Enrolment data presented in previous chapters indicate that both Sweden and UK have been subject to rapid expansion and a slight trend towards less inequality in access to HE in the last decade. Although both countries have been rather successful in this respect there are still barriers to overcome, in particular within the most attractive parts of the HE system. In a mass higher education system the overall participation rate in tertiary education may conceal important social disparities *within* the system, between different types of programmes and institutions. This is one reason why we need more sophisticated follow-up measures of WP activities.

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the data refer to the year 2002.



## Different approaches to WP

The seemingly high level of similarity between UK and Sweden in most basic performance indicators is surprising bearing in mind the different approaches to WP reported in the preceding chapters. The policies applied reflect the different goals set up for Fair Access in each country. Obviously, to “give access to HE to all who can benefit from it” (as in UK) is something else than to “achieve more equal distribution among new entrants in HE from different social groups” (as in Sweden). The UK goal is closely related to expansion and implies a more diversified structure of HE adapted to the needs of different student groups. The Swedish goal is more in line with general welfare policy and equity between citizens in utilisation of public good.

Widening participation in HE can be achieved by changing the system or by changing the attitudes and priorities among potential students. A mixture of the two strategies have been applied in both countries, but when it comes to practise the emphasis has been more on the structural side in UK and more on the attitude side in Sweden (albeit the UK interventions being on a much bigger scale). The UK approach is characterised by the use of selective measures in a diversified HE system while the Swedish approach is closer to mainstreaming reform within a uniform structure – with the Special Committee on Recruitment as an outstanding exemption. Efforts to change deep-rooted attitudes like the ones supported by the SCR committee may have effects in the long run. However they are less challenging from a political point of view. In order to really affect the enrolment pattern structural reforms like the ones conducted in the UK are probably needed.

The introduction of selective measures in order to widen participation would mean a break with the Swedish ideology of equal treatment. When more than 50 per cent of young people are going to enrol in tertiary education, and when higher education is no longer looked upon as a privilege but a right for “all who can benefit from it”, the uniformity of the HE system in Sweden will be challenged. A more individual approach to WP will be necessary and the educational provision more diversified. Interesting to note is the statement made by the chairman and some of the members of the SCR (in an article published in one of the daily newspapers in Sweden, here translated into English) saying: “We have to get rid of some of the outdated views on education. If higher education is to be open to everyone we have to be brave enough to treat students differently, looking at each and everyone’s qualifications and needs” (Nilsson et al 2003). However, only minor tracks of this ideological change are discernable in the recent Government bill on higher education.

## The span of WP interventions

Widening participation is not just raising the student numbers but adopting teaching, financing and student support strategies that cater for a more heterogeneous student population. WP work is costly. Economic support is needed for information and aspiration raising activities as well as for supporting measures. It is more costly to teach a more heterogeneous student population, as was the message from the former Commission on diversity (SOU 2000:47).

The whole programme for Widening Participation in UK is much broader in scope and in economic terms than the Swedish one. Actions in UK are more coordinated and integrated in the strategic planning at the national policy level and also at regional and local level. WP actions are linked to funding, and to the decisions on student numbers, and to the development of teaching and learning for example. The central authority, HEFCE, has a

clear mandate to intervene sector wide through funding initiatives in order to increase and widen HE participation. It works with other funding bodies and agencies to influence developments in the school sector and in further education institutions. As reported in the previous chapter a network of initiatives, bodies and special arrangements have been introduced to improve opportunities for HE participation amongst under-represented groups; these include Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks. Compared to the authority and power envisaged for the new national agency in Sweden the scope of action is impressive.

The Swedish tradition is to impose change through nationwide reform (for instance in admission to HE). Setting up special commissions working close to the Government, like the SCR, is a new phenomenon. Committees of this kind can support experimental work and start up projects on a limited scale at the side of the annual budget without interfering with the principle of uniformity. However, such experimental activities run the risk of being marginalized and dependant on the individual project leaders (often people deeply engaged in the task). The lack of support from leadership and managerial bodies in HEIs is clearly written in the final reports from the SCR projects. Our conclusion is that WP work is in need of more long-term commitment and must be integrated in the general HE policy and in the daily work at the educational institutions involved.

### Economic incentives

In contrast to the situation in UK, there are no selective measures at all in the basic funding of undergraduate education in Sweden. And no economic incentives were up to now used in the Swedish strategy for WP. The only extra funds were for the SCR projects. No changes are discernible in this ideology of “equal treatment of institutions” at the moment. A review of the present system of funding of undergraduate education was published recently (SOU 2005:48); the proposal goes in the direction of increased uniformity and less performance based funding.

Economic incentives may be important also at the individual level. The rather generous – but different - student support schemes in Sweden and the UK are supposed to have played a positive role for the development towards less inequality in both countries. The general economic tightening in recent years has put the economic conditions for HE students at the fore. It appears from the SCR projects that financial study support is of great importance, especially for students from poorer backgrounds. The UK study support scheme and fees are closely related to the income situation of the student (including their parents) and the introduction of top-up fees from 2006 will be supplemented by measures in order to safeguard and promote WP – in particular for students for low income group (through the Fair Access initiative). There are no such selective measures in the Swedish support scheme.

### Growth and WP

Opinions differ about the relationship between expansion of HE and educational equality. According to OECD (2001) the evidence shows that expansion of education opportunities alone does not appear to reduce differences in participation rates between socio-economic groups. But according to other judgements the trend in Sweden towards less inequalities in access to HE from the 1990s is mainly due to the rapid growth of the HE sector (SOU 2003:96). No doubt, the two periods of decreasing social inequalities in UK and Sweden, in the 1960s and the 1990s, have coincided with periods of rapid growth of the HE sector (see also Kogan et al 2000). These findings do not prove, but

may indicate, a causal relationship between expansion and decreasing social inequalities in access to HE. Growth of intake capacity seems to be an important prerequisite for the widening of participation already taking place in Sweden and the UK.

As long as social disparities remain, i.e. students from higher social strata more often continue to HE than students from lower strata, the principle of “order of arrival” seems to be valid (meaning that new groups won’t enrol until traditional groups have reached a certain degree of saturation). Also simple numerical calculations indicate that increasing equality in access, measured by parental level of education, can only be reached by expansion. If and when expansion comes to an end, educational inequality will increase automatically. One reason for the remaining inequities in access to higher education may therefore be that the appropriate stage of saturation has not yet been reached in our countries. Maybe, the recent development towards “universal access” will move both UK and Sweden closer to the point where further expansion will have more profound equalizing effects.

The conclusion is that further growth of the tertiary sector is necessary if recent trends are not going to stop or reverse. The present stagnation in student enrolment in Sweden and many other European countries may otherwise end up in increasing educational inequality.

## Pre-HE and WP

The student lifecycle approach means that activities for WP in UK cover the whole spectrum of educational provision from pre-school to higher education. The UK approach has a wide institutional breadth and the participation of schools and further training institutions is of the utmost importance.

The Special Committee on Recruitment in Sweden also tried to involve other educational providers but became more or less dependant on the participation of HEIs. The HEIs were not always clear on, or ready to take on their responsibilities for WP, as is demonstrated in the project reports. Not many HEIs were interested in using their “free quota” or their right to validate prior learning or to try new entry procedures in order to make admission to higher education easier for non-traditional learners. These are tools in the hands of the HEIs that could be used more effectively.

Attainments in pre-HE can have a great impact on young people’s attitudes and interest in further training and also on their possibilities to be admitted to HEIs. In particular this refers to achievements in upper secondary school. This is why the review of the qualifications framework for 14-19 year olds has high priority in the UK approach to WP. The effects of the ongoing reforms of secondary education in Sweden are not yet known but preliminary reports are not encouraging. In particular the growing differences between high- and low-achievers may affect the social disparities.

If Sweden wants to go in the UK direction more interest should be directed towards achievement and attitudes shaped in pre-HE and the social stratification early in the student’s lifecycle. HEIs responsibility for WP should be limited to their frame of action, i.e. admission, introduction and supporting activities during HE studies.

## Supporting activities, links to teaching and learning

There has been a change of focus in the UK strategy for WP from concentration on access to combining this with an equal concern with retention. The fact that 80 per cent of the special HEFCE funding for WP is used for improving retention tally with the statement: "An approach which focuses exclusively on recruitment without addressing retention will, in the long run, fail" (McClaran 2003). An important part of the specific initiatives around widening participation is now directed to teaching and the support of learning. Several steps have been taken in order to improve the development of learning and teaching in HE and to stimulate professional development among the academic staff (see the UK report).

In Sweden the aim of WP has always been defined in terms of increased opportunities to start higher education studies, less interest were devoted to the students' performance and their professional career and life chances. Accordingly, the Swedish Council for the Renewal of Higher Education was not involved in the SCR work and, as mentioned before, only a minor part of the projects focused on supporting activities during studies. For further progress it might be necessary not just to let new groups of students in, but to develop support strategies that cater for a more heterogeneous student population. The national subject centres (*ämnesdidaktiska centra*) built up in recent years could also, like in the UK, be utilised in the strategy for WP.

## Partnerships and regional cooperation

Differences in structure make it difficult to compare partnerships and regional cooperation between educational providers, municipalities, regional boards and HEIs in Sweden and the UK. In Sweden all state funding goes directly to the HEIs and the WP work is completely dependant on their initiatives. The regional perspective on HE development and the modes of cooperation at regional and local level are less developed and there are formal barriers towards more integrated cooperation between different participants in the educational endeavour.

In the UK the regional level and local authorities are more closely involved in HE planning. Funding for HE is also regionally distributed to some extent. The report on WP policies in UK gives several examples of activities where the regional level is involved, like the Learning and Skills Councils and the Lifelong Learning Networks. In Sweden actions for WP will in the future be directed towards schools and adult education institutions, which are under the authority of the municipalities. English experiences are of course not transferable to the Swedish setting but we could study and learn from the UK model of partnership and cooperation.

## Research based knowledge and performance indicators of WP

Measurements and follow-up routines have not developed in pace with the recent activities for WP, neither in the UK nor in Sweden. Research based knowledge in the area is also weak. For more than ten years no in-depth scientific research on educational inequalities has been undertaken in Sweden. The stance taken by SCR was that old knowledge about class differentials was not transferable to the present situation due to the changing social environment. However, this is true only to a certain degree. More research is definitely needed e.g. about the effects of early schooling on aspirations for HE, about ongoing reforms of upper secondary education and about the study support schemes, how these changes affect equality in education. HEFCE has paid attention to the

lack of knowledge and recently decided to provide funding (£2 million over three years) for research into widening participation issues. A consultation process is running involving researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and other potential users of the research. The aim is to support high quality, ground-breaking research with the potential to underpin future policy and practice relating to widening participation.

The use of indicators for the follow-up of WP is primarily a question for the relevant national agencies in Sweden. In the UK this is to the responsibility of HEIs themselves and performance indicators have long been used as an instrument in supporting the planning system at both national and institutional level. Sweden could learn from the UK experience of developing performance indicators and using them in educational planning. Swedish HEIs could become more proactive producers and users of such information. It would make them more visible actors in the development of new actions for WP, not just passive receivers of centrally produced statistics on participation in HE. Why not start a joint project with HEFCE about performance indicators and research on Widening Participation in HE?

### Lessons from the UK

Sweden has much to learn from the UK experiences of several years of WP work. Most important is the lesson that actions for WP must impact throughout educational policy and planning, from funding to the development of teaching and learning. Words must be translated into deeds if things are going to change. The following is a brief summary of lessons to learn for Sweden from the comparisons made above.

- Swedish mainstreaming policy may not be enough; more selective measures for WP are needed including economic incentives - for HEIs and for individuals.
- Interventions for WP should be broad in scope and may, in the short run, be costly.
- Funding mechanisms that encourages and supports WP should be considered in the Swedish context.
- The meaning of Fair Access should be reconsidered in light of the UK experience. A more diversified HE sector will need more diversified measures of intervention.
- Continued growth of the tertiary sector will be needed if the development towards WP is not going to stop or reverse.
- Actions for WP should be coordinated and integrated in educational planning at national, regional and local level. Partnerships and cooperation between educational providers should be encouraged and facilitated.
- HEIs responsibility for WP should be defined in terms of their frame of action and include admission to HE.
- More interest should be directed towards achievements in pre-HE and towards social stratification early in the students' lifecycle. Effects of the ongoing reforms of secondary schooling should be analysed in more detail.
- Actions for improving learning and teaching for non-traditional students should be made an important part of WP work.
- The aim of WP should be shifted from only focusing on recruitment to include also supporting activities for those already enrolled. And progress in WP work should be measured not in students entering HE but in students successfully completing their studies.
- WP interventions should be based increasingly on evaluations and research.
- Performance indicators should be used for follow-up of WP and part of the planning process.



## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Comparing countries is never easy. Traditions and historical circumstances differ. Institutions and legislation are dissimilar. This is also why comparisons are useful and often illuminating. In the previous chapters the different policies and policy measures from recent years have been outlined in some detail. Some of the results and consequences have been sketched, in so far as they appear in any clear sense; in many respects it is still early days, and sometimes too early for a balanced and well informed judgement.

In this final section we shall attempt some more general considerations and draw a number of conclusions on what could be learnt from the past decade of attempts to achieve widening participation in the UK and Sweden. One central question is whether the two countries can learn from each other. Policy learning is to be distinguished from sheer adoption or imitation of policy measures taken from other countries. We certainly do not expect either of the countries to benefit from simply borrowing methods or systems. There are always local circumstances to consider.

The focus is on Sweden, because this project has been funded and conducted from the Swedish side and with an eye to the Swedish situation. While we do believe that a number of policy features of Sweden may be useful in the British context, it seems clear to us that in the present phase of development in European and international higher education it is the UK experiences that provide the most interesting challenges for policy analysis and change. Given the relative closeness in policy orientation and in political ambitions a case could be made for potential policy learning. Already, quite a bit of policy learning is going on, current trends we believe are reinforcing that.

In the case of Sweden and the UK we can discern a number of factors that have created a certain convergence in recent years. Both countries have adopted ambitious widening access policies and both have achieved a widened access, although mainly as a result of the expanding higher education sector rather than as an effect of tailored policy measures. Both countries are also part of the converging European schemes for higher education that are connected under the headline words Bologna and, on the Research & Development (R&D) side, Lisbon. As we saw in the previous chapters there is also a reasonably high level of similarity in performance in many basic indicators. Clearly, however, there are also country-specific developments that provide fertile ground for comparison.

What follows below is intended as something of a “thought experiment.” We have consciously made an attempt to test ideas that have come up in the context of this comparative study. While the focus remains on widening access we have opted to put our focus on the funding regime. Short term campaigns and well-intended policy declarations do play important roles in changing attitudes and paving the way for change. Still, broader changes of behaviour in institutions are hard to achieve if new incentives and funding principles are not applied. When we focus on those aspects it should not be interpreted to mean that other approaches are less valid; rather that we can not see substantial and sustained progress being made if basic incentives do not work in support of the policy goals. Some of these ideas challenge quite radically the way higher education has been organized in Sweden. It is obvious that these ideas should not be interpreted as full fledged proposals in the usual sense. We present them in the hope that

they will spark off reflection and discussion about fundamental goals in Swedish higher education and about the instruments to reach them.

### UK as a policy innovator

Since the early 1990's the UK stands out as a policy innovator in European higher education and research. It is important to note, however, that this was not the effect of the UK taking any leading role in the transformation from elite to mass higher education. On the contrary, in comparison with both continental and Scandinavian countries, the UK higher education system was not characterized by higher enrolment figures and the differentiated and sharply hierarchical British system remained with the Russell group universities taking the top end of the spectrum, headed by old elite institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge, and with the large number of polytechnics in significantly different roles. The different schools traditionally catered to radically different strata of the population, and the class and gender asymmetries of that system were stronger than in other parts of Europe, although it should be clear that social class has been a persistent distinguishing factor in most countries, Sweden as well.

Instead, the significant change to policy leadership in Europe came with the breakdown of the binary divide and the creation of a significantly new funding and normative regime. The principal equality of the circa 140 institutions of higher education meant in the first place that all of these were qualified *de jure* to carry out research and to award master and doctoral degrees, although in practice PhD programmes were unrealistic for many schools in many of their fields.

The dismantling of the binary divide affected research and research funding. Since the UK's role as a policy innovator has much to do with the overall structure of the system for higher education and research we will briefly give an outline of the research funding mechanisms as well.

When the binary divide was removed it was obvious that the previous mechanisms for the distribution of public research funds, with block grants to old guard universities and very limited guaranteed funding for the polytechnics, would not work. In the early 1990's the UK government therefore introduced a competitive funding scheme that was open, and indeed mandatory, for all institutions with Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) at five year intervals. This *ex post* distribution of funds was complemented by traditional *ex ante* evaluated funding through the research councils. This change has utterly transformed British higher education and it has radically improved research performance at least up to 2003, the latest year for which there are figures available. It may be interesting to note that the Swedish centre-right government made some attempts to introduce performance related funding for PhD training in Sweden at about the same time, but they were not a high priority (compared to the major issue at the time which was to introduce research funding foundations) and the proposals were quickly taken off the political agenda.

The UK competitive policy for research was later on complemented with a series of reforms and policy measures concerning widening participation (WP) and the transformation to a broader knowledge-based society. The WP policy has used a number of instruments over the past decade, as have been described in previous parts of this report, including both the general expansion of the higher education system and selective funding. WP may be interpreted as an ideologically motivated move by the



New Labour government from 1997 onwards, although, as we have seen, expansion started earlier.

The policy reflects wider policy changes in the 1990's undertaken in many countries following the logic of globalisation and attempts to enhance competitiveness with a higher portion of academically trained people in the workforce. In combination with the introduction of top-up fees in 2006, which is unique – as a national policy – in the European higher education system, the UK leadership is clear, although it is also clear that there is a general pattern to these changes that is discernible in many OECD countries (Hazelkorn 2004). The selective and competitive research funding on the one hand and the WP policy on the other may seem contradictory at first glance. Indeed, they are not. They are a fairly logical result of an ambition to raise the general level of education, which requires distribution of funds to many institutions, while at the same time retain competitiveness in research, which requires concentration. The policy challenge is to allow quality enhancing instruments to work in both areas.

### Sweden follows but funding principles differ

The Swedish policy changes in higher education and research are not as far reaching as the ones in the UK, and they seem to come later and in a more “light” version, but they follow overall the same general pattern and direction. They are also motivated with similar arguments. During the 1990's the widening access policy was conducted, but in a way that differed quite radically from the UK model in particular the use of selective funding. In 1993 Sweden introduced a funding mechanism for undergraduate education that combined demand and delivery - roughly half the total funding per student was received as a result of enrolment and the remaining half as a result of completed course or programme. This ratio has by and large remained since then. Thus, it contained competitive elements which indirectly would, theoretically, stimulate quality. However, in terms of overall distribution of funds very little changed. There were caps on student demand in two principal dimensions: area of study, and location of study. The state made, as it had always done, gross dimensioning of enrolment for science, humanities, medicine, the arts, engineering. The state also put a ceiling on how much each institution could earn for undergraduate teaching.

The result of the Swedish demand/delivery system has been that growth in enrolment has followed a solidly and politically decided regional pattern whereas the effects on social class, ethnic groups, and gender, have been less significant, although there have certainly been changes there as well. To put it bluntly: the state has prioritized the geographically distributive policy goal (*where* higher education takes place), which comes through guaranteed annual funds (provided students are enrolled and educated), whereas the state has largely disregarded the socially distributive policy goal (*who* is benefiting from higher education).

### Funding structure and incentives for change

As is evident from earlier sections of the report, both countries have transformed from rules to incentives in the higher education and R&D sectors. It may therefore be useful to look further at this area for the near future. One striking feature of the British policy repertoire is that it is increasingly rewarding quality not only in research, but also in education. HEFCE's educational budget contains a substantial share (currently 10 to 15 per cent) of competitive funds that are given out to quality enhancement schemes. The focus here is not only on the performance of the institution but also on the learner. Funds

are distributed so that they are likely to favour the best possible quality and the best value for the individual.

In contrast, the Swedish system seems rigidly preoccupied with distribution of funds – between institutions, regions, and different categories of students. Whatever the outcome for the individual, the funds are distributed according to regional and topical (area of study) ratios that are fixed politically and based on a combination of tradition and regional policy. There is not even a conscious and transparent link between availability of research funds and volume/level of undergraduate teaching. There is, however, a procedure against abuse of funds that rests with the National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE), which conducts regular assessments of quality. Not disregarding the generally disciplining effects of a comprehensive reviewing system, it is also a fact that the Agency's only substantive authority *vis à vis* the autonomous universities (they are, all of them, formally public agencies) is to withdraw examination rights in the cases where minimum standards are not met. There are no incentives, financial or otherwise, in the undergraduate assessment enterprises that work towards increasing competencies. When combined with fixed quotas on income from enrolment and examination this becomes a system which tends to reward average performance in undergraduate training. With the political pressure and emphasis on research and innovation there is little systematic defence of increased quality of undergraduate teaching.

This general reasoning only stands in an indirect relation to widening access but may still be significant. If, as is now reported by the National Agency, quality of undergraduate teaching can be questioned in some areas in Sweden (NAHE 2005f), it does so at precisely the moment when access is widened to non-traditional groups. It is an interest of all students that quality of education is high, but this interest is increasing most rapidly in the new groups which were hitherto not much represented. Even though there is little evidence of generally falling standards quality in higher education remains a critical issue and should become even more important as the system widens and differentiates to make sure that previous injustices in participation do not resurface as quality differentials along the same class, ethnic, or gender boundaries.

Further, there may already be some differentiation of funding, status and quality of the higher education system that stand in some relation to this point. Clearly, there is an over-representation of the upper social strata – and an under-representation of working class students – in longer academically oriented programmes which carry high costs per student ( for example, architecture, art, medicine). To the extent that higher education implies a redistribution of taxed income from the bottom to the top of the income scale, and it almost invariably does in publicly funded systems, this pattern does not seem to have changed much.

One may also argue that decreasing quality of higher education is more likely to incite a debate on tuition fees. The argument that higher education is under-funded is easy to make: teaching hours per course/programme are going down; the student per teacher ratio has gone up. Instead of a debate on tuition fees that is bound to be politically complicated and will probably take a very long time from idea to implementation, Sweden may wish to consider stronger quality enhancing incentives under the existing norms and a remaining state-funded structure.

How is this to be achieved? Below we present some key structural mechanisms that make use of both British and Swedish experiences that could be brought to bear on the

continued development of Swedish higher education and its widening participation ambitions in particular.

## Quality enhancing mechanisms

### **1) The most obvious would be to introduce a mechanism that relates undergraduate funding to quality over the long term.**

That mechanism could be found in a structure similar to the funding stream that universities receive for research. This would also create a counterpart to the dynamics of research and increase the focus and intensity on teaching quality in HEIs.

A possible way of organizing this mechanism would be to follow the British RAE model but transplant it to education. One part of the education income would then come from quantity and quality performance based on *ex post* assessment. (RAEs are conducted with *circa* five year intervals and reward institutions according to their performance in a national competition.) Another part would come from *ex ante* proposals, just like in the new funding stream for quality in the HEFCE system.

This approach would not exclude the possibility of a remaining structure of demand/delivery funds for undergraduate training. Nor does it exclude the political target setting, both nationally and by institution, although with time there would be limits to which politicians can sustain directing funds to less well functioning institutions. Nor does it exclude state protection of certain key education sectors and special schools.

A tentative way of (national) budgeting for higher education could be to allow 60 per cent to be demand/delivery driven and work along the present principles (A), 30 per cent to be distributed according to assessment results and other quality indicators (B), and the remaining 10 per cent to be distributed to quality enhancing projects and programmes (C). The last category, C, could be announced annually, whereas B would be redistributed for longer time intervals, possibly in the order of five to eight years. A would work as it does today, although it would probably be an advantage if the measuring windows of performance could be extended to at least three and maybe as much as five years. Obviously, if these are gross-figures for national budgeting, institutions will vary, over time as well as between each other, as to which portion each funding stream occupies in their respective funding portfolio.

A works, this we know. Our concern is that it does not contain incentives to enhance quality. Ideally it should therefore shrink. C will probably also work. A small prototype has existed under the Council for the Renewal of Higher Education, which was established by the Swedish Parliament in 1990, and has provided project funding. It would probably be necessary to increase the C-portion of total funding gradually; the Council at present distributes funds worth less than one per cent of undergraduate funding.

The joker in this game is B. It seems desirable to relate funding of teaching over the long term to improved quality. The problem is how. It would be necessary to develop specific and transparent quality indicators/criteria to go from the current assessment model to one with real resource distributing power. Criteria could be translated into a set of aggregate levels along the lines of the RAEs and funding correlated to those. A special set of criteria could be strictly related to WP. The relative weight of WP criteria, and of other criteria, should ultimately be politically decided.

## **2) Widening participation should be implanted as one of the key issues in such a quality driven system of remuneration.**

If institutions received a portion of their funding related to enrolment and performance of non-traditional and underprivileged groups they would have clear incentives to enrol those groups and to cater for their studies. If these groups are not easy to recruit, or if they are less competitive students, the universities have incentives to find ways of improving the chances of these students to reach competitive levels. A separate funding stream could be considered to create further incentives for such activities (and could be made part of C above). Universities are also free to collaborate, institutionally and economically, with external agencies (secondary schools, folk high schools, adult education organisations, the municipal adult education or others) in order to improve enrolment and WP. The state may also wish to reconsider its policies toward the adult education sector in the light of the proposals made here. Some of the widening participation work could be transferred to adult education as has already been successfully attempted in the college system described above.

Two conditions seem crucial in order to make such a funding system work smoothly. The first is a set of criteria and corresponding performance indicators; the second is new principles for admission and much increased sense of responsibility on the institution level for the success of overarching policy goals.

### **Statistics and performance indicators**

In order to function, a system such as the one outlined above requires transparent assessment criteria and excellent statistics and performance indicators. At the moment, these differ widely between the two countries. The UK has the most detailed statistics on widening access performance (see above section 3 on the UK experience). Each institution must report back on the extent to which they have enrolled underprivileged groups and from which social backgrounds their students come, down to block or neighbourhood level.

In Sweden, statistics of this kind is used on a disturbingly low scale, despite the fact that statistical background information exists in abundance and despite the fact that Sweden has one of the most excellent national statistical databases in the world for tracking individuals, before, during and, perhaps most crucially, after higher education, when income, work, mobility, and other indicators could be used as measures of success of their education. The universities also have a lot of information stored on their students' background and performance in their own databases. However, as has been pointed out in previous sections of this report, Sweden has a lot to learn from the UK when it comes to the use of performance indicators in following up on general policy goals for higher education.

### **Admission policies**

In the 2005 bill for the Swedish higher education sector there is a proposed increase of the percentage of university decided local admissions from 10 to 20 per cent. It is a step in the right direction, but will it suffice? In order for universities to widen participation they would still have to follow criteria set by central authorities, and that does not give them the responsibility for fair access.

Admission is one area where UK and Swedish systems perhaps are most different. At present Swedish admissions to degree programmes operate under a few simple and crude criteria, set by parliament, with the aim to achieve formal justice and equal

treatment for all Swedish citizens (and, where applicable, other applicants from EU or from overseas). The guiding idea, or metaphor, is that all students could be expressed as pearls of different quality on a very, very long string. The most valuable pearls, with the “best” results (in four applicant categories), are entitled to choose freely their programme and place of study with highest priority. Those with less strong merits may be entitled to their second highest priority, perhaps in a second ranked location. There are also large groups that will have to make do with the best available options, perhaps a third ranked programme in a second ranked location, and finally there are students that are rejected entry altogether, on the average an astounding fifty per cent of the applicants.

Up to now the ranking has been based mainly on school grades and aptitude tests, uniform across the higher education system. This system seemingly precise in quality adjustment, is utopian and rigid, and it is already compromised by the threat of inadvertencies or “inflation” of grade setting in secondary schools also by extended study periods in further training institutions. It promises to be improved with the current bill, which allows for more flexibility and more area specific demands on knowledge, but its basic features will remain.

In the UK the admission process is decentralized. Each institution selects its own students according to criteria they determine. This has contributed to an uneven distribution of applicants in terms of social class for example. It has also in recent years been a system that seems capable of dealing with mobility and differences in demand and needs among students.

There is much to be said for giving responsibility to HEIs for admissions. If a university decides which students it admits, it is more likely it will take its greater responsibility for the result and for the performance of students. The admission of students becomes one of the chief instruments for the development of the quality of the institution.

More importantly in the context of the present study: the admission process could serve as a main driver for progressing WP policy goals. If institutions are given clear and strong incentives, as outlined above, they see WP as a major strength. This would imply WP to be combined with overall quality, which is a challenge, but precisely the kind of incentive needed if WP is to climb the list of universities’ priorities. If this proposal is combined with economic incentives it could be a real basis for institutional change. They could opt to select top ranking students, but if they do, and if that means low scores on WP and underprivileged groups (for example), they would find that their teaching becomes less well rewarded economically. If, however, institutions select students that need additional support but score highly on WP and other criteria, they will receive more income to fund their training.

We believe that such reforms could add to equality and social justice. A similar pattern has been experienced to some extent in the UK, where some institutions have specialised in seeking incentive funding for non-traditional students. On the other hand, the experience of the UK shows that if the incentives are too small they tend not to attract the interest of all institutions. If elite institutions have very large income streams from research and overseas students the incentive of marginal rewards for WP runs the risk of being neglected. The lesson is that if Sweden does not want to experience decades of little or no progress on WP it should provide substantial funding incentives.

It is important to consider how changes along these lines would affect secondary education. With more diversity and local admissions, we can foresee an increased need

for active information in schools. Unexpected consequences may occur, some negative, some positive. A likely positive scenario is that universities and colleges become much more interested in the performance of the secondary schools and form alliances and special incentive schemes to make sure that they are likely to get the students that they want; creativity will be released.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CETL(s)	Centre(s) for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
CPD	Continuing Personal/Professional Development
DELNI	Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EU	European Union
FEC	Further Education College(s)
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution(s)
HEIPR	Higher Education Initial Participation Rate
HESA	HE Statistics Agency
ILTHE	The Institute for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (now Higher Education Academy)
LLN	Lifelong Learning Network(s)
LSC	Learning & Skills Council
NAE	(Swedish) National Agency for Education
NAHE	(Swedish) National Agency for Higher Education
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise

SCB Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån)  
SCR The Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education  
SISTER Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research  
WP Widening Participation

## APPENDIX:

### The Special Committee on Recruitment 2002-04

#### – applications and projects approved

By Maria Johansson

##### Project applications to SCR

There were two opportunities to apply for financial support from the SCR during the spring of 2002 and a third opportunity in the spring of 2003. An additional round in the autumn of 2003 invited student unions to apply for funding. The table below gives an overview of the application period and the number of received applications, approved projects and total amount of funding.

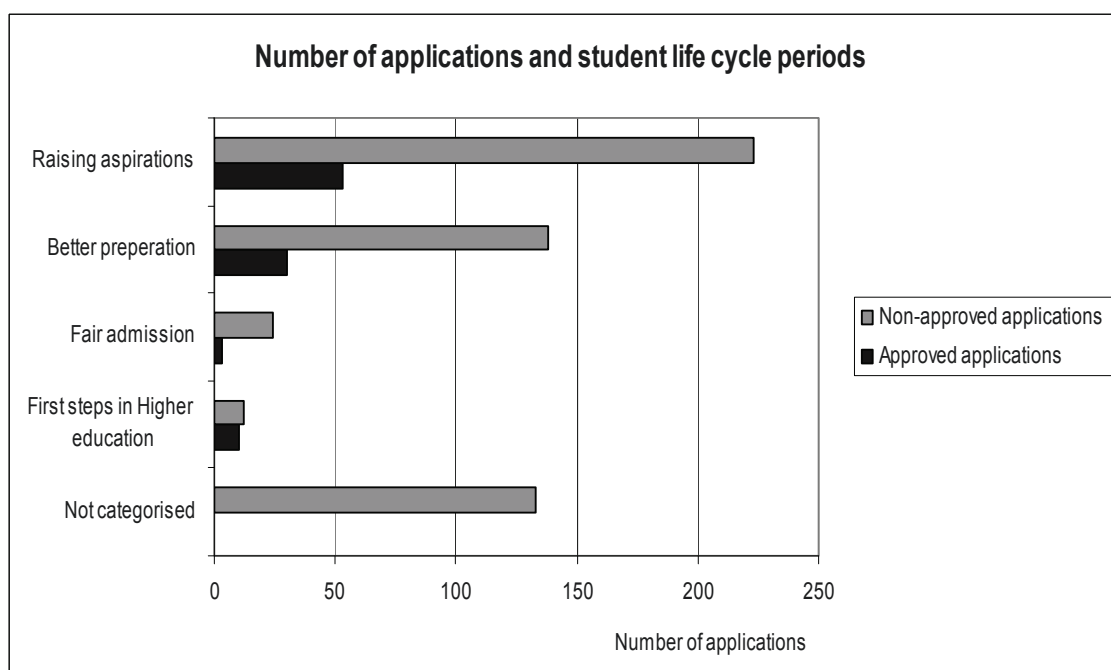
The SCR received a total of 603 project applications, 108 were approved, which is approximately one-sixth of the applications. Two thirds of the approved projects result from new networks and ideas, which means that people working within the project had not worked together before.

Round of application	Number of received applications	Number of approved projects	Total amount of funding ( Million SEK)
1 <sup>st</sup> of March 2002	166	30	34,3
15 <sup>th</sup> of May 2002	265	41	45,0
31 <sup>st</sup> of January 2003	156	29	23,2
Student unions (2003)	16	8	2,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>105</b>

The total number of applications<sup>14</sup> has been grouped into four different stages of *the student life cycle*, which is illustrated in the figure below. The majority have focused on raising aspirations followed by activities for better preparation to higher education. The SCR has preferred to approve projects from the two previously mentioned periods but some concern has also been given to the first steps in higher education. This generally means supporting activities.

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<sup>14</sup> The analysis of the project applications and final reports is independent of the SCR's work. The data differs slightly from the information reported by the SCR (2004). This is due to counting each project application separately even if the application is a modified version of a previously sent application. Furthermore, 10 of the approved projects were not implemented and have therefore not been accounted for in the data reported.



*Raising aspirations:* A majority of the project applications discuss the issue of raising aspiration among upper secondary students. This period is emphasised by big universities such as the universities in Lund, Stockholm and Göteborg, the Royal Institute of Technology and the Karolinska Institute. The goal is most often to start an interest for higher education studies through partnerships within the municipality.

The SCR favour project applications where the activities are either partnership- or subject-related. Partnership related projects mainly aim at developing widening participation through networking, most often an HEI working with an upper secondary school situated in a high-risk area. Subject related projects aspire to increase recruitment to specific subjects, mainly science but law is also believed to increase the integration of students with other ethnic backgrounds. Law students are active in raising aspirations among upper secondary students and appear to be involved in the decision-making process of the project. This is different to science, where the approach seems to be top down oriented with several academic professionals involved.

The target groups vary between students enrolled in compulsory school systems and tertiary education outside the higher education system. Statistics that demonstrate different area's entry rates to higher education is studied and the groups with low enrolment rate is emphasised in the application.

So-called student ambassadors are often used to attract high school and upper secondary students. The student ambassadors are usually students enrolled in the early years of their higher education, preferably from a similar social background as the target group. They are meant to serve as "role models," portraying the slogan, "If I can, you can". Playful activities are a popular device to attract younger students whereas more serious forms of discussion-based seminars are used to evoke older students' interest.

*Better preparation:* Many applications intend to concentrate on the student period prior to entering higher education. Target groups are approached with different options of preparatory courses or “college programme” (sometimes referred to as bridging courses). The courses are often established through partnerships between different educational institutions in the municipality. The purpose of the courses are twofold, to fill educational gaps and to make higher education seem less intimidating. It also makes the student’s admission process easier.

The big universities such as the universities in Lund, Stockholm and Göteborg, the Royal Institute of Technology and the Karolinska Institute have not been as committed to pre-entry activities as to raising aspiration. Instead adult educational associations and folk high schools lift the issue and appear to be eager to offer their graduates a possibility for future higher education studies.

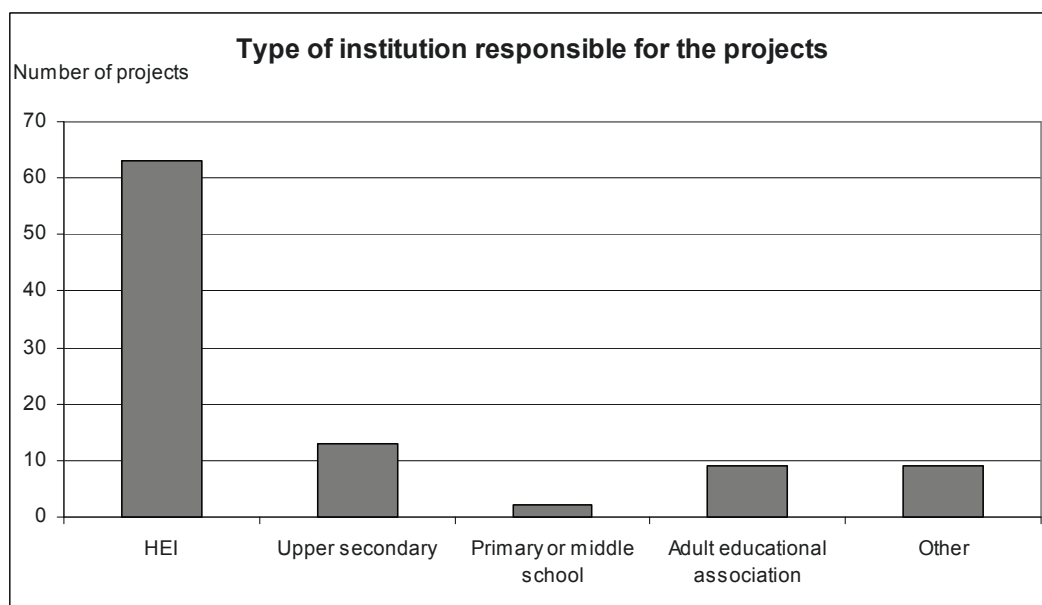
*Fair admission:* Few projects have chosen to work with questions concerning admission. The few projects that concentrate on admissions either validate the student’s prior learning for entry into an academic programme or try to adjust admission rules to specific higher education programmes.

*First steps in higher education:* It is considered important to support new students through and after their first initial semester to avoid “drop outs”. Language support is the most common type of support activity and is meant as a guide to self-help rather than staff proof-reading of student papers. Still, few projects have chosen to work in this period.

## Approved projects

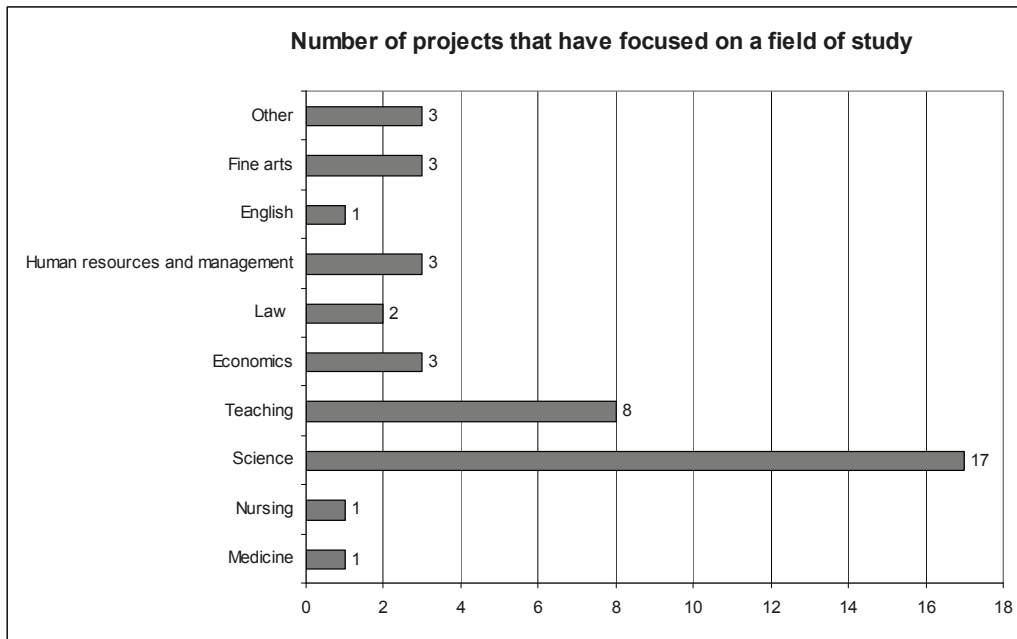
### *Type of institution*

The figure below illustrates what *type of institution* that is responsible for the projects approved by the SCR. The figure clearly demonstrates that a HEI is responsible in most projects and in the cases where another type of education institution serves as the main part, a HEI still must serve as an active project part.



### *Field of study*

42 projects, out of the approximately 95 finished projects, connected their recruitment activities to a *field of study*. In many cases these institutions appear to be more concerned with filling their empty study places than actually broadening the student groups. Science is the field of study mostly occurring in the projects, which probably depends on previous difficulties in recruiting students to the subject. Teaching is also an area that emphasising widening participation. Law and human resources and management, are areas that experience an increasing clientele of different ethnic groups. This is highlighted in their projects and stated as a reason for widening participation to the fields.



### *Educational level of target groups*

The definition of the target groups varies in the project applications. How to track the target groups also varies. One significant method is to define the groups by the individuals' *present educational level*. By doing so, it shows that more than half of the projects are focusing on pre- to upper secondary students. Within these groups the majority focus on upper secondary students, followed by high school students. A few projects work with children in primary and secondary school intending to stir up an interest for higher education studies at an early age. One project has, for example, emphasised young children's interest for learning by presenting and relating playful learning activities to higher education studies. Projects that focus on upper secondary students try to make the gap between upper secondary and higher education less intimidating for the students.

17 projects have the ambition to work with students already enrolled in higher education. These projects focus on students experiencing difficulties with their academic work. Several projects expect this target group to consist of students from groups that normally do not enter higher education due to socio-economic or ethnic background.

Few projects are concerned with students enrolled in tertiary education outside the higher education sector. They often address students enrolled in education in the voluntary sector

lacking qualifications for higher education, which mostly relates to mature students experiencing difficulties with traditional studies on campus. Personal commitments such as children or a full time employment is often the reason for their difficulties to follow a campus based education.

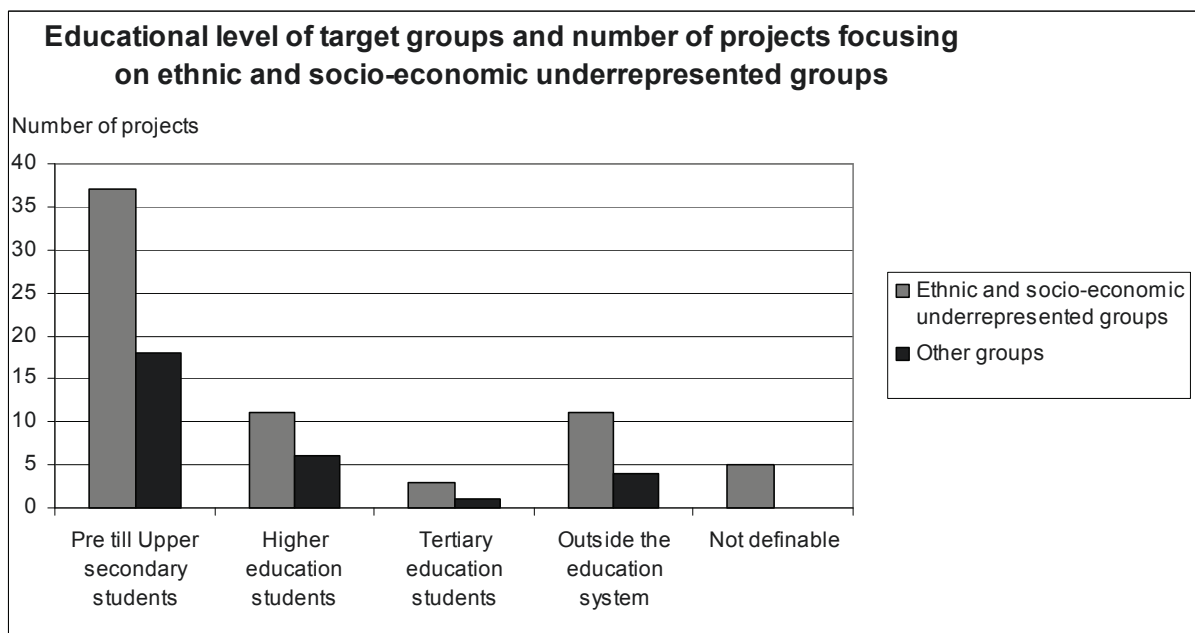
Almost the same number of projects is targeting students outside the Swedish education system. These are adults that for different valid reasons are not enrolled in any education and need qualifications for continuing with higher education studies in Sweden, or alternatively need to have their previous education and experience validated. The target group mostly consists of immigrants with an upper secondary or higher education degree but can also include manual workers and unemployed.

Five projects were not definable since the target groups were being too general or focused on more than one group.

*Ethnic and socio-economic under-represented groups*

The SCR 's focus has predominately been on youth from ethnic and socio-economic groups that traditionally do not enter higher education, which has also been emphasised in the project applications. Unfortunately, there is a lack of a more distinguished definition of the group and neither the projects nor the SCR have made any attempts to clarify the exact meaning of the expression “teens from socio-economic and ethnic groups that are under-represented in higher education”. The SCR makes no distinction between ethnic groups and socio-economic groups—the belief being that the two groups benefit from the same recruiting activities. In most cases it is assumed that the correct target groups will be reached when the project involves an upper secondary school in a high-risk area.

The figure below illustrates to what extent the approved projects target the recruitment of teens from ethnic and socio-economic groups under-represented in higher education and the target groups present educational level. Between 65-75 per cent of the projects focus on these under-represented groups through all educational levels as well as the majority of the projects working outside the formal education system.



## FINAL REPORTS

### Success in reaching the project goals

Most projects have produced a final report; 82 of those have been available and evaluated. There were no strict guideline set up for the report writing but each project was asked to describe:

- Expected and unexpected barriers
- Whether the finance was sufficient
- If there would be a continuation of the project

The general impression is that most projects have performed well according to their set targets but not all final reports answered the set questions to the same extent. Some describe vividly what they experienced, how they performed and whether their project will continue, whereas others showed less ability to present their work. Overall, the general lack of quantitative measurement is disappointing. Consequently, it is difficult to get an overview of the effect of the project and it also demonstrates a lack of interest for following up the work. One exception is the projects working with information activities. In many cases they have tried to estimate how well their information has reached the target group and according to their quantitative measures it seems likely they have reached large groups of students and other relevant people.

### *Student ambassadors*

In areas with low enrolment rate to higher education, student ambassadors are reported as a very efficient strategy for reaching out to school students. Most student ambassadors use a lot of their own spare time to help students with homework or engage in information activities, which is something both the ambassadors and the students appear to have enjoyed. Furthermore, the upper secondary students confidently listen to higher education students and dare to ask more basic questions about student life and such. Students were often surprised and relieved to find that the ambassador in some cases came from the same area as themselves. Upper secondary students commented that they felt more secure and less alienated when knowing that “normal people” could enter higher education. The involvement of study guidance counsellors has also been positive. Their work knowledge appears to improve through their role as informants of different study alternatives and HEI as a whole.

### *Networks*

Networks between HEIs and adult educational associations have been a positive experience. Universities and colleges developed a greater understanding for the work carried out by the associations and it made it less complicated for the HEI to evaluate the introductory year. The networks have broadened the perspectives and knowledge on both sides. Between upper secondary schools and HEIs the work has been successful and rewarding, especially for the upper secondary schools. Upper secondary teachers have taken great pride in working with a HEI and the upper secondary schools have received a lot of positive response in caring and working for their students' academic futures, for example, the heads of upper secondary schools increasingly showed interest in the WP work. Areas of co-operation have expanded and the use of student ambassadors has sometimes resulted in different educational institutions arranging “teachers' exchange”. The exchange of practices between teachers and institutions at different levels has provided fruitful experience for both parts. Some upper secondary school teachers felt that the university teachers put much time and effort into their co-operation, and regarded this as very positive feedback to their own work.



## Barriers experienced in the project work

### *Attitudes within the institutions*

The attitudes to the project leaders' work varied. For example, project leaders from HEIs did not receive much active support from colleagues or managerial bodies and indicate that WP's low status within the HEI is problematic. On the other hand, project leaders from schools and adult educational associations experienced positive attitudes from their co-workers when working with WP.

### *Students' lack of maturity*

High schools students tend to rate study visits at HEI after the level of fun rather than the relevance of the received information. Young students and their lack of educational maturity have caused concern among project workers. Some project leaders did not foresee the challenge in approaching younger age groups, hence were not prepared for problems relating to too large student groups. Consequently, they felt dissatisfied with the information sessions. Some tailored their approach to the students' maturity level but still experienced the work as frustrating since the level of discussion became too basic. Other information work has been perceived as challenging. The target groups sometimes rated the printed information as uninteresting and impersonal. However, once information was delivered in person the positive effect was apparent and rewarding.

### *Slow start up*

It was occasionally difficult to start up support activities. After an announcement of the service was published in the student newspaper one project noted an increase in student attendance, mostly since several teachers called and asked if they could refer some of their students to the language service. The teachers were extremely concerned with the increasing gap between the student's knowledge and the course requirements.

Occasionally it was difficult to find a suitable environment for the support activities within the institutions. Students sometimes connect the support service with academic failure, and consequently wished for the service to be discrete. This attached a certain stigma to the project work.

### *Financial issues for continuation*

Approximately one third of the projects will continue with their work in some form. The financial situation within higher education is the critical factor for continuation. Projects working with study support more frequently receive financial funding from the HEI budget than other types of activities. Examples of other financial contributors are the university board, and the Swedish National Labour Market.

Lack of financial support and time are general concerns within HEIs. It appears that the project work has generally taken more time than expected. Parts involved in the project often appear cautious with the time they devote to the work and teachers do not want the recruitment activities to interfere with their ordinary schedule. They rarely allow their students to miss any of their scheduled lessons to outside curriculum activities despite its relevance for WP. Similar attitudes are spotted among other groups within the municipalities. Middle managers, for instance, disallow their staff to miss work for participating in recruitment activities.

### *Negative attitudes from staff*

Some university staff hold negative attitudes towards new student groups. It is argued that new student groups will demand more social responsibility from the teachers and staff, which in turn will have a negative effect on the quality of education and the teachers' role. It is clearly expressed that university teachers fear that new groups inevitably demand a change in teaching style, reminding of the upper secondary teachers role with less independence from the students. The educational staff are also critical to the idea of letting "college students" get an unconditional offer at an HEI, which is one experimental method of admission procedures.

### *Bureaucratic barriers*

Projects dealing with admission have experienced several bureaucratic barriers, for example:

- One project aimed to modify the admission procedure to a teacher training programme by developing an interview model. The idea was to validate the student's previous knowledge before the interview process and to use guidance counsellors to follow up on the interview procedure. Formal complications and disagreements between project partners complicated the validating procedure.
- One project tried to validate overseas nursing degrees in order to find a more effective way to integrate foreign nurses into the Swedish education system. The work could not continue due to bureaucratic barriers.
- One project aimed to recruit students to vocational training programmes, but since it is impossible to influence the admission regulations the project leader commented that it was pointless to work with certain aspects of the project.

### *Hopelessness among students*

Projects working with raising aspiration have also experienced barriers related to the admission procedure, mostly connected to students' attitudes. Student ambassadors received several questions and comments regarding admission procedures. The usual attitude among students was "What's the point, I won't be accepted anyway". Students expressed that they wanted to find other "short cuts" in order to enrol in the desired education programme. One example is to increase their grade point average through studies at Municipal Adult Education.

There are projects that have attempted to put forward a proposal to the university board suggesting a modification of the admission rules. One project leader stated that it was frustrating to encourage the study ambition within the students without being able to fulfil it due to programmes strict entry criteria and suggested a special entry quota applying to students from areas with low entry to higher education.

An interesting observation is that students with full upper secondary schooling have preferred to participate in the introductory year, which is generally offered to students lacking basic requirements. A more tactical choice has been to successfully complete their introductory course and enhance their chances of an unconditional place by using their "college degree" in the application process. Still less than half of the students that were allowed to use this opportunity did so.

The table overleaf summarises strengths and weaknesses demonstrated in the projects applications and final reports.

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## Reflections on the projects outcome

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### Benefits

Information has reached out to a large number of people

The projects have raised aspirations

Study counsellors and “student ambassadors” role is being recognised as essential for WP

Established networks between HEI, schools and adult educational associations

### Weaknesses

Lack of information regarding important structural aspects of WP, like admission and student loans

Not developed any new methods for working with WP

No quantitative measures for follow up studies

Projects have a short time period

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