

The Adult Education Initiative

– A unique programme for adult education

The Adult Education Initiative is a five year programme for adult education established on July 1st 1997. All municipalities in Sweden participate. The Adult Education Initiative is a part of the Government's strategy to halve unemployment by the year 2000. The aim of the state and municipalities is to achieve in a short period of time an overall boost in national knowledge thereby providing those with lower levels of education the opportunity to get a job and continue their learning. At the same time the Adult Education Initiative will contribute over a five year period to the reform of adult education.

Aims and target groups of the Adult Education Initiative

The Adult Education Initiative has four important perspectives - renewal of education and labour market policy, more equitable distribution and increased growth. These aims may be summarised under the following points:

Target groups of the Adult Education Initiative

The main target group is in the first instance adults who are unemployed and who either completely or partially lack 3 year upper secondary school competence. However, the Adult Education Initiative also focuses on the needs of employees with low levels of education.

Renewal of labour market policy

Education will be the instrument for providing better opportunities to get or change work. The unemployed who lack upper secondary school competence need education in order to secure a stronger position on the labour market. The Adult Education Initiative thus relieves the pressure on labour market policy. At the same time opportunities for co-operation and joint utilisation of resources at the national employment offices and municipalities will be improved.

The Adult Education Initiative is particularly important for those working in sectors that are adversely affected by the state of the economy and structural changes, e.g. in offices, health care and manufacturing industry. The Adult Education Initiative will also contribute to bringing a positive change to the gender distribution of work on the labour market.

Economic growth

The Adult Education Initiative should contribute to renewal and development of working life. New ways of organising work impose new demands on employees. As a result of increased access to a skilled labour force, there will be better conditions for economic growth.

Reforming adult education

The Adult Education Initiative should also contribute to the development and renewal of adult education both in terms of content and working methods. The pedagogy and working methods of adult education should be developed as well as the exchange of ideas and experience between municipalities and educational organisers. Over the five year period, adult education will be reformed and developed - so that it will be better able to meet the challenges that the individual, working life and society will be facing in the new millennium.

Putting the individual in the centre

Individual desires, needs and preconditions should be instrumental in steering and shaping the form and content of the activity. The education must thus be planned and organised to provide great scope for individual solutions in terms of orientation, structure and accessibility in time and place. In order to achieve an allround supply of education that meets the needs and conditions of the target group, co-operation between municipalities, county councils, the National Schools for Adults, folk high schools and other educational organisers is important.

New orientation for adult education

Municipalities have received increased and overall responsibility for drawing up an organisation and infrastructure for adult education. New forms of co-operation between municipalities, national employment offices and the partners on the labour market will be developed, e.g. through the boards of national employment offices, adult education councils and other networks.

- The Adult Education Initiative involves mobilising resources in order to lower the threshold for persons with little earlier experience to start studying, e.g. through more targeted recruitment and information activities, individual courses of studies, more guidance and orientation courses.

- Many different educational organisers are involved, where differences in terms of profile and working approaches are taken advantage of as well as encouraging the establishment of contact networks. Co-operation will be improved between upper secondary school adult education and labour market education.

- New forms of activities, unconventional organisational solutions, information technology and new pedagogical approaches should be applied. The supply of vocationally oriented courses will be increased in order to meet the requirements of the new groups. Workplace training (APU) and apprenticeship training can be arranged, as well as a combination of studies and labour market policy measures. The transition between different levels and types of schools should be made easier and accessibility to adult education should be based on the preconditions of participants.

Responsibility of the state

A special state grant will be provided for orientation courses and upper secondary school adult education. A limited number of municipalities will also receive support for basic adult education. Since July 1st 1998 The National Agency for Education has had the responsibility of organising and monitoring the work of the Adult Education Initiative. Project applications from the municipalities for upper secondary adult education are submitted to the National Agency for Education, which decides on how the funds are to be allocated. Distribution of state grants for the Adult Education Initiative is based on three different criteria:

- Unemployment and level of education in each municipality
- Orientation and scope of the municipality's programme in orientation courses, general courses and vocational courses
- Quality of the municipality's programmes for renewal and development of adult education in the direction described above

The state grant is submitted as a total sum to the municipality. By means of the state grant the municipality should attain the goals as regards the orientation, scope and quality of the education specified in its application to the National Agency for Education.

Responsibility of the municipalities

The Adult Education Initiative is a joint task for the state and the municipalities, but the municipalities are responsible for its implementation. The municipalities are responsible for organisation, planning and implementation and can choose between organising the education themselves or in conjunction with

other municipalities or educational organisers.

With the exception of education courses provided by folk high schools, the syllabi for municipal adult education and grading criteria, the ordinance on municipal adult education as well as other regulatory provisions for municipal adult education will apply, even where educational organisers other than the municipalities provide the education.

Follow-up and evaluation

Implementation will be followed up and evaluated on the basis of the goals of the Adult Education Initiative. Each municipality will be responsible for following up and evaluating their own activities. The National Agency for Education will regularly monitor, follow up and evaluate all municipal adult education. In addition, the Commission for the Adult Education Initiative has as its task to follow up the work in the municipalities and is responsible for ensuring that it is independently evaluated. In addition the Commission is responsible for the overall co-ordination of all national evaluation of adult education programmes.

Study financing

Under the Adult Education Initiative there are a number of different ways for students to finance their studies. For the majority of students the most advantageous study support is the special education grant which was introduced at the same time as the Adult Education Initiative. The grant is primarily intended for unemployed persons who have not completed a 3 year upper secondary education programme and who intend to study at compulsory or upper secondary school level. Persons aged 25-55 can apply for the grant. The grant is equivalent to the amount a student would have received in the form of unemployment benefit and is available for a maximum of 12 months. Other forms of study support a student can apply for are special adult study assistance for the unemployed (svuxa), special adult study assistance (svux) and study grants.

The Commission for the Adult Education Initiative

The commission is appointed by Parliament and has the task of proposing goals for the national adult education initiative, assessing what ongoing education and in-service training is needed by adults, making recommendations on the division of responsibility and financing of education for adults in addition to considering measures which would stimulate pedagogical development of adult education. The Commission has also been given the task in a supplementary directive to monitor the Adult Education Initiative.

The Commission for the Adult Education Initiative:

Telephone: +46.8.405 13 47. Fax: +46.8.405 41 11. Address: Regeringsgatan 32, 2 tr. 103 33 Stockholm, Sweden

More information about the Adult Education Initiative project can be found on the web site: www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se and the web site of the National Agency for Education: www.skolverket.se

More information on study support is available from the National Board of Student Aid (CSN) www.csn.se