

The development of vocational training for adults in Sweden in the last fifteen years

When Sweden was in the throes of a deep recession at the beginning of the 1990s, the decision was made to use the regular education system, as well as labour market training and other labour market policy measures, as a step in the fight against high unemployment. During the period 1992-1997 the municipalities and the liberal adult education established *special education places for the unemployed* in municipalities.

These were usually full-time and one year in duration. The contents were often of a general competence promoting character with special emphasis on languages, natural sciences and technology. Also vocationally oriented education and supplementary education could be arranged with the help of the special state grant. The number of places was increased each year and in 1996/97 amounted to approximately 50,000 places. Study financing for participants was solved with the help of existing study support mechanisms, such as SVUX, SVUXA and study allowances. The organisation of these programmes was relatively traditional and the majority of participants had earlier received some form of upper secondary education.

In the autumn of 1995 the *Commission on the Adult Education Initiative* was appointed with the dual task of proposing goals for promoting a nation-wide programme for boosting adult knowledge and proposing a strategy for lifelong learning. The Government later gave the Commission supplementary directives to monitor the development of the Adult Education Initiative (*Kunskapslyftet*) and to take responsibility for the implementation of an independent national evaluation.

A five year programme in adult education, the *Adult Education Initiative*, was launched on 1st July 1997. The main responsibility for implementing this lay with the municipalities who would allocate funds for approximately 90,000 places. The folk high schools were allocated 10,000 study places by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education.

The Adult Education Initiative was the largest programme ever to be run in Sweden in the area of adult education. All municipalities were participating in the project and during the five years of the Adult Education initiative approximately 500,000 persons participated. The cost of the programme amounted to approximately SEK 15-20 billion. In addition, there were the cost of study support to participants, amounting to SEK 25-30 billion.

Amongst other things, the Adult Education has the following overall goals:

- Reduction in unemployment
- The development and renewal of adult education
- Reduction in educational gaps
- Raise educational levels

The education should consistently be based on the individual's needs, conditions and wishes and thus be driven by the individual's demands. Each individual should be able to find an individual solution for his/her learning. The intention was also that the individual's position on the labour market be strengthened prior to the commencement of studies.

The Adult Education Initiative was a joint task for the state and the municipalities. .

By means of a state grant municipalities could attain the goals concerning the orientation, scope and quality of the education specified in their application.

The municipalities had the overall responsibility for organisation, planning and implementation.

Many municipalities built up *counselling centre* or "*infotek*." Here adults could receive different kind of help and support such as the following:

- Individual guidance
- Participation in orientation courses
- Opportunity to set up individual study plans
- Evaluation of earlier knowledge

An important part of the Adult Education Initiative was to provide a range of alternatives based on the adult's needs and interests. This means that municipalities who were the principal organisers for implementing the programme subcontracted more than before organisers, other than their own municipal adult organisation, e.g. folk high schools, adult education associations and private organisers. Often these organisers worked in different ways. Sometimes it was quite possible for an adult within an education programme to receive different modules from one organiser whilst others may be provided by another organiser, in this way they were able to combine the best that is available from different organisers.

Another ambition was to provide as many *flexible study options* as possible. This meant that in many municipalities different education programmes contained the following study options:

- Daytime/evenings and during weekends
- During summer and traditional holidays
- Many different options for starting courses
- Distance studies.
- Flexible learning (different rates of studying, guidance)

Many municipalities either built up *study centres* providing options such as those mentioned above. Sometimes these centres co-operated with guidance centres.

One ambition was to *expand the proportion of vocationally oriented education* in upper secondary adult education. Many of the courses arranged under the Adult Education Initiative were vocationally oriented or provided a combination of general subjects and vocational subjects.

Of the 308,000 students in municipal adult education, 186,000 had an educational level lower than three years of upper secondary schooling before their studies. Approximately 61,500 persons are thought to have raised their educational level during studies. This corresponds to approximately 20 percent of all students. Of those with one year of upper secondary schooling, 50% raised their education by least one level, and the same applies to approximately 33 percent of those with compulsory and two years of upper secondary schooling. The study shows that lifelong learning is a reality the oldest person to have raised their educational level was 78 years old. Nearly 2000 of those who raised their level are 50 years old or more.

International evaluation of the Adult Education Initiative

To get a broader and international perspective on Swedish reforms in adult education and lifelong learning, the Commission on the Adult Education Initiative invited three prominent researchers and experts to study developments in Sweden and submit their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the Swedish system for adult learning and education.

The researchers were commissioned by the Commission on the Adult Education Initiative to examine adult education - especially the Adult Education Initiative - in three municipalities. They have also interviewed a number of politicians, including members of the Riksdag's education committee and a large number of civil servants at the central level of the Government office, the central authorities as well as the trade unions.

On the basis of their observations and interviews, they have written a report "*From the Adult Education Initiative to a Strategy for Lifelong Learning - A Perspective on Swedish adult education policy*". The report gives a historical perspective of Swedish adult education, but also provides international views and comparisons.

From the report the following emerges:

- There has been a *shift from education to learning* and competence is something more than just purely formal competence. Learning takes place not only in formal education but also in everyday life and working life.
- There is the lack of *a strategy for lifelong learning*, covering competence development in working life and learning in everyday life. There is a lack of *a strategy for validating knowledge*.
- The Adult Education Initiative has been *a success in quantitative terms*, but systematic evaluation of quality is lacking. Neither have any clear indicators or criteria for assessing quality been developed.
- The *specially assigned state grant* to the municipalities has made a substantial contribution to the success enjoyed by the Adult Education Initiative. It has also enabled adult education to be rapidly expanded.

The development after the AEI, during the years 2003-2009, is illustrated by the following description (a recent case study):

A Vocational training course for immigrants called JOIN - a case-study

This case represents a model of policy transfer, in that it is founded on the vast Swedish Adult Education Initiative, AEI, ("Kunskapslyftet") a five-year programme during the years 1997 to 2002. This example has its roots in the national guidelines expressed in the Government Bill from 2001 following the AIE.

The case presented here started in August 2005 and ended in July 2007. The project was called Job in the Residential Area, JOIN, ("Arbete i Närmiljö, AIN") and comprised 22 people in all. It was a tripartite pact concerning financing between the Municipality of Kristianstad, the Employment Agency of Kristianstad, and the European Social Fund. It has shown a capacity to give immigrants vocational training and to make them aware of the possibilities of lifelong learning.

In this initiative the individual's needs, living conditions and wishes are in focus, and thus the training is driven by the separate person's demands. Each individual should be able to find a solution for his or her learning. The intention is that the individual's position on the labour market should be strengthened. The municipality has had the overall responsibility for the organisation, preparation, and implementation of the programme.

Table 1: Sources of documentation

http://www.komvux.kristianstad.se/vlc/html/arbete_i_narmiljo.html

This site presents an overview in Swedish of the project and a detailed description of the day-to-day progress of JOIN - the logbook

<http://www.nordvux.net/object/17152/stegenutiarbetet.htm>

This site contains an article written by an NVL journalist. NVL, the Nordic network for Adult Learning is the operative unit concerning adult and lifelong learning of the [Nordic Council of Ministers](#).

<http://www.kristianstad.se/sv/kristianstads-kommun/Utbildning/Vuxnas-larande/Vaglednings--och-larcentrum/SIA-Laromedeo/>

On the website of the Municipality of Kristianstad, the text book written for the learners in JOIN by Marie Lundblad, the teacher of Swedish, is presented. The book is a beginners text book, with an orientation for

practical, technical occupational language.

<http://www.google.se/search?hl=sv&q=%22arbete+i+n%C3%A4rmlig%C3%B6%22+konferens&meta=>

The site reports from the final conference of the project in November 2006, in which the whole project was presented. Representatives of The Swedish Integration Board (currently The Swedish Migration Board) took part in the conference.

<http://www.ac.lst.se/files/eOOOOoo5.pdf>

On this website the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten presents 23 good examples of integration of language teaching with practice/work. JOIN is one of them.

<http://www.iqpc.com/ShowEvent.aspx?id=108760&details=108778&langtype=1033#DayTwo>

The programme for a national conference called SFI-forum (SFI=Swedish for immigrants) in 2008. During the conference JOIN was described as a concrete tool and an inspiring working method for high quality teaching of Swedish at all levels

2. Background

The Vocational Training Course for Immigrants is a practice that has been intended to break down barriers of entry into education of low-skilled immigrant workers with a formal low level of education, EQF Level 1, at risk of being excluded from the job market.

The targeted groups, male and female immigrants, were receiving social welfare benefits, or redundancy payments from the Employment Office.

The project is based on the guidelines of the Government Bill (Adult Learning and the Development of the Adult Education, prop. 2000/01:72) passed in the Swedish parliament ("riksdagen") in 2001. In this bill the following goals are presented: "All adults must be given the opportunity to broaden and deepen their knowledge and skills in order to promote personal development, democracy, equality of opportunity, economic growth and employment, and an equitable distribution of wealth."

The Government wanted to create a new infrastructure for adult learning constructed on the needs of adult learners. According to the Government, there are some key points that ought to be in place in order to give good support to a learner:

- 2 A desire to learn
- 3 The supply of education - freedom of choice and diversity
- 4 Counselling and guidance
- 5 Customising approaches to the adult's individual circumstances
- 6 A good study support system
- 7 Learning at the workplace
- 8 Customised pedagogical approaches
- 9 Validation of a learner's competencies and knowledge

As an extra means of stimulation for the municipalities, special funding were granted following an application. For the Municipality of Kristianstad this sum was 2,7 million SEK (about 270,000 Euros). As a result, Kristianstad could implement the idea about building a new innovative centre. The centre started its activities in the spring of 2003 through a separation between the Municipal Adult Education Centre ("Vuxenutbildningen"), and a new unit, the Guidance and Learning Centre, GLC ("Väglednings- och

lärcentrum, VLC"). The following were target areas for GLC:

- 1 Outreaching activities
- 2 Educational and vocational guidance
- 3 Validation of prior learning
- 4 E-learning
- 5 Orientation courses
- 6 Tenders concerning externally bought training courses with an innovative profile
- 7 EU programmes and other international contacts
- 8 Regional cooperation in Scania North East ("Skåne Nordost") - seven municipalities of about 200, 000 citizens in all.
- 9 Managing and chairing the Local Competence Council

In this context and with these target areas as a background GLC continued working with training issues for adult immigrants and particularly with a view of overcoming problems like insufficient language skills in Swedish, the lack of competencies in low-skilled citizens, and difficulties for these persons to get a job.

The analysis of the existing problems and of our resources to solve them resulted in the following:

Table 2: Problems to be solved

<p>Obstacles to participation in adult learning Education and training is not a first priority for many immigrants Many low educated immigrants cannot see the link between formal skills and the chance of getting a job The financing during a training course Immigrants often get different messages from different authorities and bodies</p>
<p>Obstacles to get a job Low skills in the Swedish language Low formal skills concerning education/training Immigrants are not familiar with conditions and demands on the Swedish Labour Market</p>
<p>Obstacles to integration Many immigrants are outsiders Immigrants lack experiences from and contacts with the Swedish labour market Many immigrants do not participate in the Swedish societal life</p>

3. Description of the solution that originated the good practice

The Vocational Training Course for Immigrants is a tool that allows immigrants to enhance their chances of getting a job and at the same time improving their competencies by participating in language and vocational training programmes. Accordingly a training course started in 2005 aiming at creating jobs as janitors in their own housing areas thus also creating better understanding between different ethnical groups of residents. The course was called Job in the Residential Area, JOIN, ("Arbete i närmiljö, AIN"). The course was a partnership project between the Municipality, represented by GLC and the Municipal Labour Market Unit, the Local Employment Office, and the Employers (representatives of different housing companies). This initiative was preceded by similar courses in health care and house cleaning.

The training programme started by outreaching activities to find the participants, following then the Swedish principle to offer a seat to the one who most needs it, in this case meaning jobless immigrants. At

this stage the future participant is informed about the course: its objects and how it is organised. After having been recruited to the training course an interview takes place with the counsellor. At this interview an individual study plan is produced in dialogue. The next step will be another interview with a counsellor to analyse what are the participant's prior competencies and knowledge. Portfolio methods are often used in order to bring about a thorough compilation of the person's prior knowledge. When the applicant is accepted to a study seat in the training programme a provider is normally contacted. As to arranging the training course any provider, private or public, can be used in order to make the course as optimal as possible, regarding flexibility and customizing.

Thanks to this set-up the individual is well informed and can make his own choices as to what training course he will choose and what arrangement would suit him or her best. The counsellor and the teachers are all the time at the student's disposal, in this way following up the student's progress and also being able to give advice and guidance.

During the preparatory course and the vocational training course the students can always discuss any issues with the teachers, the counsellors, and the assistant head of GLC. By the fact that the course leaders/teachers follow even the training course at the Lernia vocational centre they can discover any problems with the participants coming up.

After completion of the training course for janitors the coaching process starts. The course leader with a practical background is responsible for keeping contacts with the newly trained janitors in order to encourage and support them in their search for a job. In this process the Employment Office has the main responsibility for matching the immigrants to a job. The course provider, Lernia, has very good contacts with working life and can subsequently be of considerable help in the searching for jobs.

4. Methodology

The study and vocation counsellors together with teachers are responsible for the overall handling of the Vocational Training Course for Immigrants called "Job in the Residential Area" (JOIN). The most significant tools used for carrying out the programme are the following:

- A partnership between the Municipality of Kristianstad, the Employment Office, and Employers from the Housing Branch
- Co-financing between the Municipality, the Employment Office, and the European Social Fund
- An Individual Study Plan allows for the individual in dialogue with counsellors and teachers, to make independent decisions as to the choice of on-the-job practice, and the set-up of the training course.

The implementation of the programme was divided into six main phases:

PHASE I. The beneficiaries of JOIN were identified through one of the following outreach strategies:

a) In the case of subjects already enrolled in the Employment Centre the Guidance Counsellor conducts a first evaluation based upon the Individual Study Plan, in which the training needs relative to skills to learn or develop are highlighted. If the counsellor feels that JOIN could be the appropriate measure for individual training, he contacts the Employment Office to discuss a possible seat in the course and if the Office is willing to let the applicant keep the redundancy benefit.

b) In the case of beneficiaries who autonomously apply for JOIN the application is considered together with the others and the rules and priorities for admission will be applied.

c) In the case of immigrants who have been recruited through an outreach activity by the course leader these persons will be treated in the same way.

Most of the participants of JOIN were recruited by alternative c.

PHASE II. In the beginning the learners together with the counsellors make an Individual Study Plan. This process includes a compilation of the individual's competencies, on which the training programme (JOIN) is based. In addition any practical problems regarding study support, child-care matters, time-schedules etc are discussed and any possible adaptations are made to meet the individual's needs. The persons receive study and vocational guidance before applying for the training course. They are also offered to validate any prior competence or knowledge.

PHASE III. Forty participants were recruited with the knowledge level of C or D in Swedish for immigrants. Out of these twenty persons were selected for JOIN. The assistant head of GLC decided on the final admission to the course. This decision was made in dialogue with the applicants in order to find the best solution for him or her. This could also mean that the applicant withdrew his application.

Priorities for admission

1. The individual needs of the applicant
2. A low formal level of education
4. Unemployment
5. Personal suitability

PHASE IV. After Phase III the preparatory course starts. The course is managed by two teachers - one language teacher in Swedish and one teacher with knowledge of the technical areas in question. These two teachers work together throughout the project. The aim is to improve the learners' knowledge of Swedish and particularly the vocabulary concerning the professional areas in question. The text book used is one with general texts from the professional areas. During the course the language teacher wrote a text book for linguistically weak learners with pictures and an easy vocabulary. The course contains four different practice periods and the students are at different workplaces during these periods. A steering group was created consisting of the teachers, representatives of the future employers, and representatives of the partners.

PHASE V. The vocational training programme was carried out by Lernia and it was funded by the Employment Agency. During this phase one of the teachers from the preparatory course - the one with a technical background - followed up the learners, giving them support and also being the contact person in relation to the different work places involved. This step lasted one year.

PHASE VI. In cooperation with the partners the teachers were coaching the janitors to jobs in cooperation with the Employment Office and the course provider, Lernia.

5. Results and impact analysis

The project had several goals and objectives. The starting point was that the participants in the project must obtain a job and that they should achieve greater integration in the Swedish society.

Three months after completion of their training, 75 percent of the students had some form of employment. After one year 83 % (10) had a job and 8% (1) were studying. The rest were unemployed (1).

Concerning the aspect of better integration the evaluators said:

"An important aspect of the project was to create conditions for greater integration into the Swedish society. Integration is about meetings --- The course allowed the learners to create many new relationships. --- We note that through the project, students have created a better contact with Swedish society.--- On our question if they met any prejudices from Swedish people the students stated that this did not pose a problem. On the contrary, they said that Swedish customers showed interest and respect by asking who they are, where they come from, etc. When students reflect on this, they speak about the

project in its form (trainers, project managers, teachers, etc.) as a good basis to make it easier to enter and be accepted by the society”.

JOIN comprised a low number of learners. When the method of JOIN has been used in other training courses one gets the same results but for a larger population.

Another objective of the project is to develop a method for the teaching in languages for immigrants in interaction with future employers and to develop preparatory vocational courses adapted to Sfi Studies (Swedish for immigrants).

Table 3. A model of the process as it is used today

Individual Study Plan					
	Step 2		Step 3		Step 2
Activities	Step 4 Mapping by Guidance Councillors	Option - A assessment towards occupation	Option - brief an school certificate or an occupational branch certificate		Job and /or training
	E-portfolio/ Portfolio of Merits/CV	Job and /or training	Job and /or training		
	Job and /or training				
Personell	Study and Guidance Councillors Assistant - Councillor Coaches Responsible for training				
Place	The distance learning centre of GLC (preparatory training, education and training, distance education, CVs, e-portfolios, Portfolios of Merits) Municipal upper-secondary schools with vocational programmes (Brief assessment of an occupation, validation/RPL, training courses) Private enterprises (Brief assessment of an occupation, validation/RPL, training courses)				
Comment	Some steps may be omitted if a job or a training course could be reached without any form av validation.				

The mechanisms behind this success are found in the fact that managers responded to the needs for training immigrants in a flexible manner. All the stakeholders in fact responded to the needs for changes in attitudes towards immigrants and for the creation of supportive conditions to allow for both getting a job

and being better integrated. An important idea behind the overall strategy of JOIN is found in the metaphor "if the map does not correspond to reality, then reality will prevail" meaning a sound reality based training at a work-place. The course leaders had much freedom in choosing the most appropriate alternative and were not bound by formal regulations.

As the project met with considerable success invitations were received nationally to present the project at several conferences. At the same time the textbook was finalised by the language teacher. This textbook was printed at the number of 500 copies and has been marketed, sold, and distributed to different educators.

Table 4: Main findings

Significant factors in JOIN giving access to work and making possible an employment:
The steering group as the prolonged arm between the project and the Labour Market
The project leaders´ and the practice tutors´ involvement in the project
Coaching to jobs - a person well established in the vocational profession was supporting and coaching the participants into the labour market
A strengthened occupational identity and an increase of self-confidence
The creation of more meetings and contact points for the participants who could thus get to know the occupational area and also, from the integration aspect, more Swedish people
Language development - an improved ability to speak, write and understand Swedish
Long periods of practice at the same work place which gave the employers the chance of learning the strengths and weaknesses of the trainee.
A higher level of vocational training with a formal certificate from the public school system
Significant factors in JOIN for stimulating adults to lifelong learning:
Clear goals for the training course
The course leaders and the steering group have stuck to the most significant points and the core ideas of the project
Free working methods - consciously chosen and a flexible way of working
The tuition of swedish was very closely connected to the teaching of the occupation, both in the periods of theory and the periods of practice
A bottom-up perspective was applied as to the implementation of the project with the practice tutors being very involved in the progression of

the course and gradually also the learners

A good working climate

Handpicked project leader and Swedish tutor who were very engaged and "present" not only in classroom activities but also in the whole project.

GLC is a learning organisation with a focus on developmental and goal oriented focus which means that the project was pervaded by a process thinking - what has been good? what has gone wrong? What should we do about it?

The project leader and the Swedish language tutor had a holistic view on the project and took an overall responsibility for the project - its participants and its outcomes

Coaching to jobs