



The Adult Education Initiative

An overall investment in adult education



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The National Agency for Education
Sweden 1999

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The Adult Education Initiative is the largest adult education investment initiative ever undertaken in Sweden. All the municipalities in Sweden are taking part in the project which began on 1 July 1997 and is set to continue up to and including 2002. Its aim is to raise educational levels and to reduce unemployment. The development and renewal of the form and content of adult education is also one of the initiative's aims.

The Adult Education Initiative is primarily aimed at adults who are unemployed or who lack full three-year upper secondary qualifications. The idea is that those adults most in need of education should be given a chance to catch up and add to their stock of knowledge. Improved levels of skill and increased self-confidence will help them to strengthen their position in the labour market. As access to qualified labour increases, the opportunities for economic growth increase accordingly. Those currently employed who have only benefited from a short period of education may also be eligible under the scheme.

Evaluation and exchange of knowledge based on experience between municipal authorities will help to highlight good ideas and spread them further. In the 21st century a new, reformed system of adult education will be developed, better adapted to the needs of individuals, the labour market and society in general.

The overriding aims of the Adult Education Initiative are to:

- reduce unemployment
- develop adult education
- reduce educational divisions
- promote growth

Aims and
target groups

Various forms of education

The Adult Education Initiative encompasses upper secondary adult education. This education can take a number of different forms: various types of education and training organisers are involved, the aim being to provide flexible solutions wherever possible. In order to offer as wide a variety of courses as possible, municipalities, county authorities, national schools for adults, adult educational associations, folk high schools and training companies are all working together.

The traditional general courses offered by the municipal adult education organisations (Komvux) have been supplemented by a large number of vocational courses. Part of the education can be spent in work placements, and it is also possible to combine upper secondary courses with studies at an elementary level, or with one of the programmes organised by the National Labour Market Board for the unemployed. Courses which prepare students for higher education and which confer special qualifications may be organised in the form of a foundation year. For those who have been away from study for a long time and who feel uncertain as to the level of study which would suit them, special orientation courses are provided.

Focus on the individual

The intention is for all education which takes place under the initiative to be governed in form and content by the needs, wishes and capacity of the individual. The education should help to improve the individual's opportunities in the labour market and provide an option for further studies. It must be demand-led, both in terms of organisation, planning and the actual courses provided. Every individual should have ample scope for personal choice in terms of the type of study they require and the timing and location of that study.



Lifelong learning

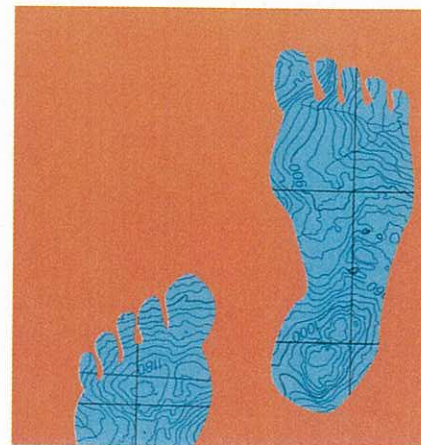
The expression lifelong learning refers to people's opportunities for seeking new knowledge throughout their lives. Individual desire for personal development and learning are to be encouraged, and at the same time the labour market will be able to satisfy its need for new skills and a capacity for change. A good basic education lies at the heart of lifelong learning.

Personal competence is not solely based on academic qualifications. Non-formal knowledge and learning not reflected in school grades or recorded in other documents is also of major importance. Any competence development which derives from working life is also significant. Validation means the assessment and recognition of skills and competence gained through study, participating in the community and working life. In other words, it is a recognition of both formal and non-formal qualifications.

Validation may allow students to shorten the time they spend in study.

Guidance and study plans

There is an emphasis on the importance of guidance. Qualified guidance both before and during studies is intended to ensure that everyone is in an equal position to make well-founded choices. Guidance results in an individual study plan which specifies what students aim to achieve in their studies and the ways in which their aims can be achieved. The plan is drawn up according to the students' previous education and on the assessments which have been made regarding their other skills and knowledge. The study plan should be revised if necessary.



Various forms of study assistance are available to those studying under the Adult Education Initiative:

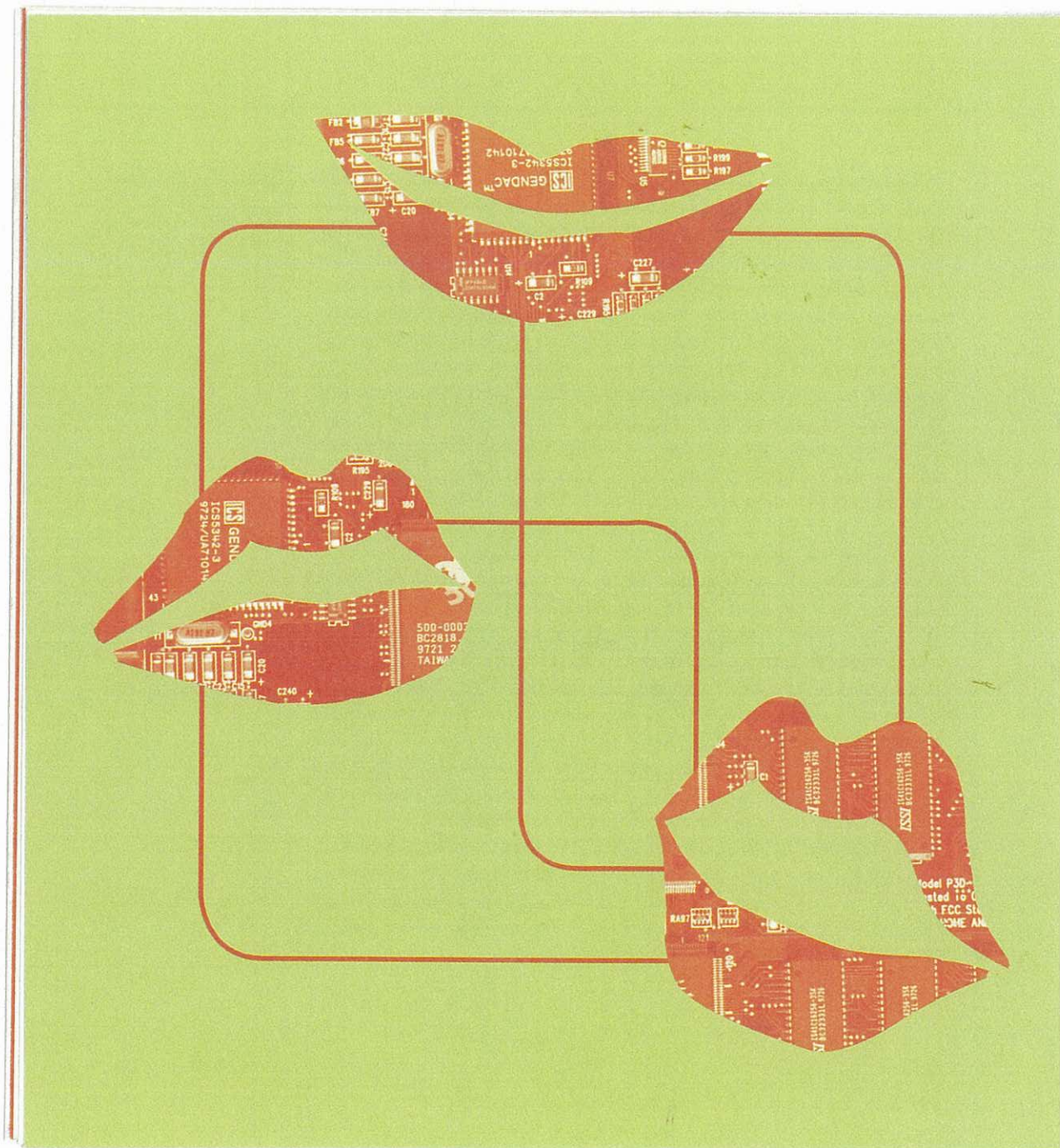
- The special grant for education and training (UBS) for adults who are unemployed or in work who have a short education. The grant is available on condition that the person in question is aged 25–55, is studying at elementary or upper secondary level and fulfils the criteria for receipt of unemployment benefit. The grant is equivalent to this benefit and is payable for a maximum of one year. In the case of a person in work, the employer must fill the vacancy created with an unemployed person.

- Special adult study assistance (SVUX) is intended for people with a short education who take leave of absence from their job to study at elementary or upper secondary level. The support takes the form of a grant and a loan. Those eligible are people who have been in work for at least four years and whose maximum age is 50.

- Special adult study assistance for the unemployed (SVUXA) is available to those aged 21–50 who are unemployed and registered job-seekers who intend to study at elementary or upper secondary level, on condition that they have previously been in work for at least three years. The assistance takes the form of a grant and a loan. Those above the age of 50 who have special circumstances may be eligible for SVUX or SVUXA.

- Study funding in the form of a grant and a loan. This is primarily intended for students in higher education, but also for those adults who are studying at elementary or upper secondary level.

The National Board for Student Aid (CSN) can provide further information. Visit their website at www.csn.se



Responsibility of the municipalities

The municipalities and the state are jointly responsible for the Adult Education Initiative. Financing takes the form of state grants, yet each municipality is individually responsible for organisation, planning and implementation.

The exchange of ideas and knowledge gained through experience between the municipalities is encouraged in various ways. Each municipality may opt to organise the education and training by themselves or in conjunction with other municipalities. It is also possible for them to purchase the services of other providers of education and training and to work together with them.

The Adult Education Initiative has provided municipalities with increased responsibility for creating an infrastructure for adult education. New forms of co-operation are developing between municipalities, job centres and employers. Similar effects can be noticed within the municipalities themselves, for example between libraries, social services, immigration administrators and the business community. The same curricula and grades criteria apply to the Adult Education Initiative as to other elements of upper secondary education. The municipalities are also responsible for admissions under the initiative.

The Adult Education Initiative is intended to make things easy in every way for those who are unaccustomed to study. This requires effective efforts to interest potential students in the scheme, often by working closely with trade union organisations. It also requires an efficient use of channels of information, and the provision of thorough guidance and a sound introduction to studies.

Flexibility and unconventional solutions are encouraged, together with an approach to education based clearly on the needs of adult students.

Responsibility of the state

The state contributes some SEK 3.5 billion every year to the Adult Education Initiative, equivalent to 100,000 annual study places. The folk high schools also receive assistance for 10,000 places within the initiative.

Since 1 July 1998 the National Agency for Education has been responsible for contacts between the state and the municipalities. For the Agency this involves administration of the municipalities' applications for grants, and distribution of places and funds based on the following criteria:

- The level of unemployment and education in each municipality.
- The aims and scope of the municipality's programme in orientation courses, general courses and vocational courses.
- The municipality's initiatives for the renewal and development of adult education.

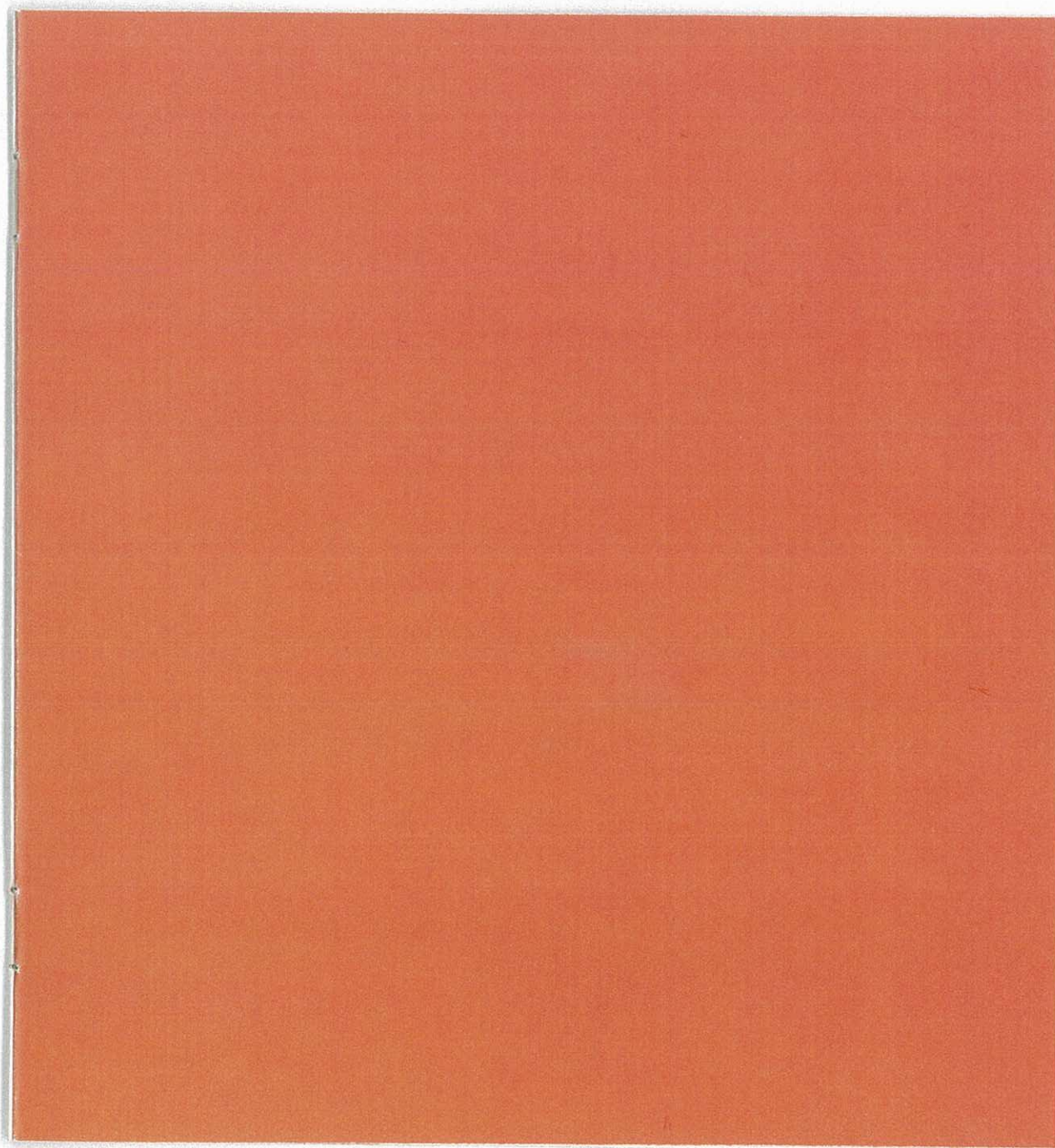
The state grant should be used by the municipality to achieve its aims in terms of the orientation, scope and quality of the education provided.

Responsibility of the National Agency for Education

The general duties of the National Agency for Education include development, follow-ups, evaluation and supervision in pre-schools, schools and adult education. In addition to these duties, the National Agency for Education has been commissioned to manage and monitor the Adult Education Initiative in the municipalities. The Agency is to support and encourage efforts to develop the initiative and to distribute state funding on an annual basis.

This work within the National Agency for Education takes the form of a special project, comprising a central project group and representatives in various fields who have direct contact with the municipalities.

The Agency is running a three-year evaluation project to provide deeper insights into the development of adult education.



Further
information

Government proposal 1995/96:222, Measures to halve unemployment by the year 2000 (Vissa Åtgärder för att halvera arbetslösheten till år 2000) describes the background and aims of the Adult Education Initiative.

Regulations concerning state assistance for special adult educational initiatives (Förordning om statligt stöd till särskilda satsningar på utbildning av vuxna), SFS 1998:276, presents the terms and conditions which apply to the Adult Education Initiative.

The Adult Education Initiative website www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se contains information about the Adult Education Initiative. At the National Agency for Education website www.skolverket.se course plans and other information are available.

Skolverket
www.skolverket.se

