

EU 2020

– The Swedish Adult Education Association’s views on the Commission’s consultation paper

To:

The European Commission

Copy to:

Ministry of Education and Research, Swedish Government

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Members of the European Parliament

The Swedish Adult Education Association – the umbrella organisation for the Swedish study associations – hereby submits its views on the European Commission’s consultation paper EU 2020. Where the proposals fall beyond the EU’s mandate, we urge the Commission to recommend that Member States prioritise the issues set out in this document.

Introduction

Education is a vital success factor for every society that seeks to be competitive. This is also true in the EU. Therefore the Swedish Adult Education Association supports the Commission’s priorities in the future strategy.

The Commission states that strengthening education is one of the most effective ways of fighting inequality and poverty. The Swedish Adult Education Association agrees, but emphasises the importance of society investing in education which is accessible for all, in all phases of life, permitting a second chance. This is a means to combat poverty and inequality effectively.

Considering that non-formal learning has four times as many participants as formal learning (‘Trends and issues study’ (2006), EAEA) it is both appropriate and essential for non-formal learning to receive a larger proportion of the education cake in the EU and its Member States.

Summary

First priority - Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

In the future strategy the Commission states that a spearhead is important to take research and development forward. The Swedish Adult Education Association supports this but also wishes to emphasise the importance of a broad knowledge base. With a stronger emphasis on non-formal learning, the Swedish Adult Education Association supports the first priority of the future strategy – creating value by basing growth on knowledge.

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Second priority - Empowering people in inclusive societies

The key to success for the EU as a competitive and successfully functioning region in a global society lies in integrating broad educational initiatives with initiatives to create involvement on the part of citizens. As the Commission writes in the future strategy, we need to rethink our education systems and our labour markets. The Commission writes that we must both enhance mobility and boost Europe's dynamism to unleash our innovative and creative potential. Furthermore, the Commission considers that new policies must demonstrably contribute to social cohesion, tackling unemployment, and fostering social inclusion. This is exactly what non-formal adult education can demonstrate that it does, and non-formal learning can thereby support the second priority of the future strategy – empowering people in inclusive societies (Evaluation of the study circle participant's experiences by The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2009, and Evaluation of Swedish non-formal adult education by the Swedish government, 2004).

Third priority - Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

Non-formal learning and non-formal adult education must be highlighted and recognised as an important producer of knowledge in society. The strength of non-formal learning lies in the fact that participants are learning for their own sake. They are attracted by a desire to learn rather than by a need to achieve grades. This creates a motivation and commitment which is hugely important to the knowledge results. The merits of non-formal learning are important for achieving the third priority of the future strategy – creating a competitive, connected and greener economy.

Proposals from the Swedish Adult Education Association

In conjunction with the review of the EU's Life Long Learning Programme, the Swedish Adult Education Association asserts that non-formal learning programmes should be expanded and better adapted to the working forms and teaching methods of the sector.

In the light of the knowledge challenges which Europe faces, the Swedish Adult Education Association particularly wishes to propose a broad and powerful investment in a European Knowledge Boost, for citizens' education and learning. Such an investment would also promote the aim of the Commission's Action Plan on Adult Learning "It is always a good time to learn" of improving the opportunities of adults to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before.

1. Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

Today there are huge differences in the level of education of the population and also in its educational opportunities. In parallel with the EU investing large amounts of resources in promoting research and strengthening the competitiveness of European universities, the EU should concertedly invest in raising the general level of education in the EU.

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The Swedish Adult Education Association proposes a joint European Knowledge Boost that invests in the education and learning of its citizens. Formal and non-formal learning need to work together on citizens' education and learning in the EU. The Swedish Adult Education Association is convinced that the Knowledge Boost model suits the EU's way of working and concretely supports the three priorities of the EU 2020 strategy. In November 2009 the European Association for the Education of Adults and the Swedish Adult Education Association handed over an appeal proposing a Knowledge Boost to Ms H el ene Clark and Ms Judit Safrany at the Directorate General for Education and Culture.

A Knowledge Boost would promote the EU's key learning skills, such as learning to learn, social and citizenship skills, cultural awareness, digital expertise and entrepreneurship.

The many citizens who for various reasons have failed to complete formal schooling or who have not been successful must be given a second chance. The non-formal learning which takes place in civil society offers a great opportunity to reach and motivate these people to start new courses of study which improve their chances of higher education or employment. Non-formal learning has four times as many participants as formal learning and this should be clearly recognised.

In the EU 2020 strategy the Commission emphasises the opportunities and challenges of the digital economy and considers that an ambitious Digital Agenda is required for Europe. The Swedish Adult Education Association agrees and urges the Commission to invest resources in promoting the digital inclusion of all citizens. If wide-ranging knowledge initiatives are not implemented immediately, the wide digital gulfs we are already seeing will only deepen. Non-formal adult education has tried and tested methods of arousing the interest of citizens in digital services – methods based on the individual's own interests.

2. Empowering people in inclusive societies

There are more dimensions to being involved in society than merely participation in the labour market. Finding a sense of belonging in local society and in organisations, clubs and societies are important aspects too. The strength of non-formal learning and civil society lie in their being derived from the needs, interests and situation of citizens themselves.

In the EU 2020 strategy, the Commission writes that mobility among citizens is growing. People swap between work and study and change sector and career several times. Some take longer career breaks to realise long-held dreams and ambitions. We see this as something positive.

A wide range of educational options and initiatives are required to facilitate and support mobility. Citizens must be offered education which can be flexibly adapted to their needs and which is in close contact with the society in which they live. Civil society actors and non-

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formal adult education organisations should therefore be given the tools to offer citizens education, courses and projects which facilitate the adult career, whatever form it may take.

If civil society is to successfully be able to generate social inclusion for Europe, decision-makers at EU, national and local level must learn from and raise awareness of the democratic work carried out by civil society organisations. Non-formal adult education really can play a crucial role in promoting active citizenship, but the political and financial support currently provided by the EU for this work does not go far enough.

A future strategy which seriously seeks to promote an inclusive society must emphasise and earmark political and financial resources for non-formal adult education in civil society.

3. Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

To achieve the goal of a greener economy sustainable in the long term, we need public awareness and an express commitment from citizens. A European Knowledge Boost in line with the model referred to above would be an effective means of reaching and involving many citizens in the process of transition. Here restructuring and reform of the industrial and transport sectors can also gain a foothold.

A Knowledge Boost would also prepare Europe for future challenges, such as the demographic challenge and climate change.

Non-formal adult education and civil society play a central role in teaching people about sustainable development. Non-formal adult education initiatives today will produce long-term benefits. Non-formal adult education, which arouses and develops people's participation in society, is an asset and a necessity for Europe, its Member States and its regions.

Stockholm January 14, 2010

Maicen Ekman
Secretary General

Enclosure:

Fact sheet on the Swedish Knowledge Boost
Appeal from the Active Citizenship in Europe Conference

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Summary:

The adult education initiative – the so called Knowledge Boost (1997-2002) - is the largest investment in adult education Sweden has ever seen. In the space of five years, the project reached 800,000 adults in all of Sweden's municipalities. For this the state paid the municipalities approximately SEK 3.5 billion a year, approximately SEK 17 billion in total (EUR 1,7 billion).

The purpose of the Knowledge Boost was to improve the skills of the unemployed and provide an opportunity for those with less education to obtain upper secondary education within the framework of municipally-run adult education. The aim was to raise the level of education in Sweden in general and reduce unemployment, which was high during the 1990s. The Knowledge Boost also sought to develop and update the form and the content of the adult education provided by municipalities.

Non-formal adult education in the form of study associations and folk high schools played an important role in the Knowledge Boost. Many people who did not fit into the traditional school system gained a second chance thanks to the unique teaching methods of non-formal adult education. The most popular subjects were computing, the Swedish language and mathematics.

Purpose and target group

The purpose of the Knowledge Boost was to raise the level of education in general and cut high unemployment. The idea was that adults with the greatest need for education would be given the chance to expand their skills and develop their expertise. With higher self-confidence and increased knowledge, those who participated in the Knowledge Boost would attain a stronger position on the labour market. At the same time, access to qualified labour would place Sweden on a firmer footing for economic growth.

The Knowledge Boost was primarily focussed on unemployed adults who had either entirely or partly failed to complete three-year upper secondary education. All Sweden's municipalities participated in the project.

Responsibility, financing and working together

The state paid SEK 3.5 billion per year to the municipalities for the Knowledge Boost, corresponding to 100,000 annual study places. Responsibility was shared between the state and the municipalities. Each municipality was responsible for its own organisation, planning and implementation. The Knowledge Boost resulted in increased interaction between the municipality, the Employment Service and the labour market partners. Many municipalities came to work more closely with study associations, libraries, social services and the Employment Service. Several unions ran outreach work and recruited students that way.

The Swedish National Agency for Education took responsibility for contact between the state and the municipalities and dealt with funding applications from the municipalities. The Swedish National Agency for Education took into account unemployment and education levels in the municipality as well as municipal initiatives to develop and update adult education.

Several players in the education arena

The Knowledge Boost also sought to change and develop municipal adult education. The municipalities were to share good ideas by means of evaluations and exchanging experiences. The aim was for new, reformed adult education to grow up, better tailored to the individual and working life in the 21st century. More players were to be incorporated in the education arena. The folk high schools received financial support for 10,000 student places. The study associations had no study venues of their own but were hired by municipalities and folk high schools to run courses.

The County Councils, municipalities, study associations, folk high schools and education companies worked together to provide a wide range of courses. Komvux's traditional general academic courses were supplemented by vocational courses. Some of the training took place in the workplace. It was also possible to combine upper secondary courses with the various programmes run by the Employment Service for the unemployed. A foundation year was also offered as preparation for higher education, as were orientation courses to determine an individual's level of study. The same syllabi and grading criteria applied as for other upper secondary adult education.

Qualified guidance and individual study plans

The Knowledge Boost took the individual as its starting point. Qualified guidance before and during studies enabled individuals to improve their opportunities in the job market. This guidance was to culminate in an individual study plan which could be amended as needs changed.

Results and evaluation

The Knowledge Boost is the biggest investment in adult education in Sweden ever. Over a five-year period 800,000 adults gained the opportunity to upgrade their skills under the Knowledge Boost umbrella. Many of them had been unsuccessful at upper secondary school and needed a second chance. Two-thirds of those who participated were women, the average age was 32, the majority had a maximum of two years of upper secondary education and 15 percent had foreign citizenship.

The study associations played a major role, reaching over half a million unemployed people in almost 65,000 study circles. Non-formal adult education was the player which received the highest marks in the evaluations. Malmö is an important success story. The study associations helped to halve unemployment there during the period.

The evaluations show that the Knowledge Boost had a positive impact on pay levels and employment. Many people gained higher qualifications and employers were increasingly able to recruit people with three years of upper secondary education. Many participants also went on to university. The likelihood of getting a job increased by five percentage points for Knowledge Boost participants. This was a significantly better result than the labour market training during the 1990s for example. It was mainly men who gained employment more easily thanks to the Knowledge Boost. This may have been because the men studied courses which were valued more highly in the labour market to a greater extent. Another explanation might be that the men who took part were harder hit by the recession in the 1990s, which meant that their situation improved more than that of women did when the economy recovered.

The Knowledge Boost in people's own words:

“Before, when you went to work you were stuck. Now you think and see problems differently.” *Sören Hjærtström, metal worker, Luleå.*

“Knowledge has made me a different person. I have gained incredible self-confidence and a new outlook on life.” *Jeanette Kaae, course participant, Malmö.*

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“We include as many of the ideas of non-formal adult education in the Knowledge Boost as we can. We try to improve self image and self-confidence in individuals so that they dare to form their own opinions.”

Leif Olsson, study secretary, ABF Västerås.

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Appeal from the Active Citizenship in Europe Conference

Active Citizenship in Europe is a unique European conference for non-formal adult education institutions, other civil society organisations and decision-makers at all levels, to be held in Gothenburg on 29-30 September 2009. The conference is organised by the Swedish Adult Education Association – the umbrella organisation for the nine Swedish study associations – and EAEA, European Association for the Education of Adults.

Summary:

The conference highlights the fact that non-formal adult education and informal learning promote active citizenship in Europe. Non-formal learning emphasizes empowerment, grass roots participation and is a driving force in civil society.

Challenge 1: Only four out of ten Europeans voted in the European election

Politicians have long talked about the need to increase the involvement of citizens in EU issues. However, only just over four out of ten Europeans put a polling slip in the ballot box, despite the fact that EU policy has a huge impact on their daily lives.

Option 1: Put more emphasis on non-formal adult learning

The EU's draft Lisbon Treaty sets out the intention of maintaining an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society. Active adult education organisations constitute, together with other civil society organisations, a foundation for a strong civil society. They form a structure of crucial importance for a sustainable democracy. Non-formal learning is an important tool for discussing and promoting the European idea itself. If civil society is to be capable of successfully generating involvement in Europe, decision-makers at EU, national and local levels must embody and pay attention to the democratic activities carried out by civil society organisations. Non-formal adult education and informal learning can play a crucial role in promoting active citizenship, but there is very little political and financial support available. We therefore suggest an extension of the EU Citizenship Programme to include a strong emphasis on non-formal adult learning. The parts of the European lifelong learning programme targeted at non-formal adult education should also be extended. The European leadership must move from words to deeds.

Challenge 2: Ignorance breeds extremism

Extremism in Europe is on the rise. Xenophobic and anti-democratic fractions are established.

Option 2: Support a citizens' Europe

We understand that the growing support among Europeans in favour of extremist parties is rooted in ignorance and a sense of powerlessness. To be able to combat extremist ideas, a functioning democracy needs well educated citizens with respect for human rights and a global awareness. The EU's

current education initiatives and programmes emphasize formal learning. It is high time to provide equal support for non-formal adult education and informal learning. For many people, non-formal learning is a stepping stone to, for instance, formal education or the jobs market; it also fosters personal development and provides meeting places for people from different social backgrounds and with different views.

Challenge 3: The financial crisis

The financial situation in Europe is tough. Public finances are increasingly under pressure and unemployment is rising, especially among young people.

Option 3: Time for an adult education initiative

Encourage the EU community to launch an adult education initiative, an initiative that invests in the education and learning of citizens. The initiative will promote the acquisition of the EU's key competences, such as learning to learn, social and civic competences, cultural expression, digital competence and entrepreneurship. This will promote social cohesion and more people will be able to join the labour market. It will also prepare Europe for future challenges such as demographic and environmental change. Non-formal learning is crucial for promoting learning for sustainable development. An investment in adult education now – despite and because of the crisis – will bring long-term benefits. Non-formal adult education and informal learning can reach out to people and foster a sense of community and citizenship. It is an asset and a necessity for Europe, its member states and its regions.