In Sweden the concept of University Continuing Education (UCE) has gradually shifted during the last three decades - from the provision for adult education to lifelong learning, to recently life-wide learning. UCE in this sense could be defined as Higher Education given within a context of non-regularity with very often no academic accreditation attached to it. The governmental policy has recently shifted from a supply-oriented model to a more needs-oriented and individual learning model. UCE is thus under rapid development in Sweden and UCE programs and courses will be distributed nationwide through the upcoming Swedish Virtual University. Recently the Council for Higher Education (Sw. Högskoleverket) also commissioned a research report on Lifelong Learning in Sweden (Askling, Christiansson, and Foss- Fridlizius, 2001). This report together with the article Lifelong Learning and Higher Education: the Swedish case (Askling & Foss- Fridlizius, 2000) has been the main resources for this article.

The context of UCE in Sweden

The primary assumption behind continuing education is that all human beings are capable and motivated to learn in a lifelong perspective. However most learning activities are not institutional related but takes place in ordinary life activities. This approach falls well into the category of life-wide learning as a broader concept of life-long learning. Rubenson (1999) claims that this approach leads to a reorganisation of HE as such and that the ‘informal knowledge’ of the student also has to be validated in the UCE context.

According to Griffin (1999) the context for lifelong learning has gradually shifted from a progressive-policy influenced approach (Social Democratic party) to a more neo-liberal welfare influenced approach and thus more oriented towards a learning market. This shift will also gradually affect the provision of UCE as well as the structure of HE institutions.

Today UCE in Sweden encompasses adult education as well as all forms of recurrent education. So far the context has been to offer non-regular courses for UCE. This due to how universities and the Government have defined the mission of Higher Education/tertiary education. To define this mission according to the ideal of the Humboldt university has but recently changed (1977 and 1999) to also encompass a variety of academic vocational training of learning activities.

Ulrich Teichler (1999) makes following remark on the capability for HE institutions to meet the new requirement from policy makers:

*Higher education is the educational sector most genuinely embedded in lifelong learning./…/higher education fosters questioning, critical and reflective thinking, and provides primarily the foundations of knowledge for future professional tasks.* (Teichler, 1999 p 38 )

© Lennart Badersten and Eva Wigforss, 2001
In the context of Higher Education Continuing Education has been defined (EUCEN Conference Proceedings, 1991) as 'any form of education, vocational or general, resumed after an interval following the continuous initial education' (Thomas, 2000).

At the end of World War II there were less than 14000 students in HE in Sweden. About 50 years later we have about 319 000 students in HE (Tengner, 2001). Today three quarter of the Swedish population have at least completed upper-secondary programs, which places Sweden in the top third of the scale for the OECD countries (Tengner, 2001). We can take these figures to represent the growth of HE in Sweden. However this so far mainly concerns regular HE courses and programs.

During the 70th recurrent education became a political issue and seems to have been first manifested during an OECD meeting in Paris 1969. During that period the European Commission used the concept "permanent education" and UNESCO lanced the concept "life-long learning" or "life-long education". Common for these concepts are the recurrent aspect of employment and studies. Important aspects when the demand for more and better-qualified workers is needed (Husén, 1999). This means also a development towards a closer interaction between universities and private enterprises.

In the 1977-year’s reform plan for the provision and access to Higher Education, new admission rules made it possible to open up more courses to new groups of students. However UCE constituted a small and optional obligation of the HE institutions and UCE was perceived as something extra to fulfil when the other more important missions (like regular programs and research) had been met.

The Swedish Government declared 1999 that the Council for Higher Education and its institutions should provide the society with knowledge and practice for a changing society where demand on new competencies will lead a growing need for UCE. The quality, capacity and effectiveness of HE would play a major role in reducing unemployment and to hamper social segregation. HE institutions should also provide a regionally balanced development and thus contribute to health, culture, environmental development and employment. However the system had to be built within the same institutions that provided the younger generation with regular university education. There has never in Sweden been a policy towards separate HE institutions like in Britain - the Open University. The People’s University (Sw. Folkuniversitetet) has never become a complete alternative for UCE. The amount of courses offered there were too few for it to become an alternative to regular courses offered by HE institutions.

However today the Swedish Government is eager to take further steps forward to be able to provide it citizens with UCE that is provided through distance learning using new technologies (Bladh, 1999). In the Budget Plan 2000 the Swedish Government explicitly states its expectation for HE institutions to provide the society and its members with lifelong learning. Lifelong learning thus aiming at deepening the democratic societal goals as well as the continuing upgrading of the labor force.
Structural arrangements for UCE

One of the questions rose in the report by Askling & Christiansson & Foss-Fridlizius (2001) is whether the Swedish HE system is organized in the best manner to meet the requirements of lifelong/life-wide learning? The authors have operationalized some structural components that have to be considered. Those are (in our English translation):

- Access to higher education
- Supply of courses and programs
- Selection and structure of the knowledge
- Forms for distributing the courses
- Teaching and learning methods
- Validation of the students results and achieved competencies

(Askling & Christiansson & Foss-Fridlizius, p 46, 2001)

During the last decades we have seen an expansion of UCE due to the political statements cited in the former paragraph. However there has been a drawback during a period where financing of regular courses competed with financing continuing education. This has lead to a discussion and the organization of more commissioned continuing education to meet the demands for UCE in the late 90th. We have seen the raise and fall of several initiatives due to the previous ambivalent financing of continuing education like the different Consortium for Distance education. Some of the Swedish universities have previously been more involved in UCE than others. But today we believe that most Swedish HE will aim at offering a sufficient amount of UCE courses to meet the governmental policies.

In 1995 Lund University set up a special office for continuing and distance education in order to develop and offer courses for UCE. The university board has also put forward a policy document (2000) concerning the aims, support-structure and maintenance of Lund University Continuing education. So far this initiative has been successful, especially due to its early adoption of ICT in distance education. The Office for Continuing and Distance Education (OCDE) provides teachers and students in UCE with support for course development. The model adopted has been described in the following documents (Wigforss & Badersten, 2000). The unit does not offer courses but provide the societal environment with courses on demand. Recently also a university owned enterprise was set up for commissioned UCE (Lund University Education - LUE http://www.lue.lu.se). The aim of this enterprise is to commission courses from the departments and to ‘sell’ them to enterprises and authorities for their staffs need for in-service continuing education.

The provision of UCE

OECD has in its ”Education Policy Analysis 1999 ” raised the question of funding for the lifelong learning (OCDE 1999). In 1996 the Council for Higher Education (Sw. Högskoleverket) completed a report on how commissioned UCE was financed. UCE in its commissioned form is not included in regular HE financing and the Council was worried about the status and quality of this education. The accreditation for the students was unclear and it was thought that external financial interests would collide with governmental interest of providing HE for free. (Carlsund, 2001 p 28)
Due to the fact that most UCE so far has been non-regular courses and that the throughput has been weak it has not been an existing enterprise for universities to develop such courses within the regular financial university system.

In a document from the Council for Higher Education (Sw. Högskoleverket) in 2001 we can see following strategic concerns for the provision of UCE:

- The development of UCE from a needs-oriented perspective
- The development of an alternative admission system with emphasis on the validation of informal competencies
- An adoption of a governmental financial system that encourage HE to provide more non-regular courses

In the Budget Plan for 2001 the Government has followed-up these strategic perspectives by the formation of a national Swedish Virtual University. The aim of this university is to, through collaboration between existing Swedish universities, to provide more needs-oriented UCE for lifelong learning in Sweden.

There are virtually no private providers of UCE in Sweden and the need for commissioned UCE will be met by the newly established university-owned enterprises.

**Trends in UCE development**

*The influence of new teaching initiatives to UCE*

The major impact from UCE on teaching and learning is the strong emphases on active or flexible learning and the use of new media (ICT). Another effect is the demand for shorter courses or rather course modules. So defining smaller Learning objectives seem to be a more appropriate approach for universities engaged into UCE today. There is also a tendency towards a development of course modules in English since the collaboration between the European countries within the Socrates framework requires this development. In this sense HE today, through international UCE collaboration gets more teaching input from international scholars in the Internet-based UCE courses.

*The Swedish response to the European Commission’s Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (2001)*

The Swedish Government’s response to the EU Memorandum of Lifelong learning was commissioned from the Council for Higher Education (Sw. Högskoleverket). The overall report (Högskoleverket, 2001) includes also the more specific responses from several Swedish HE institutions. Since it could be claimed that Sweden has been in the forefront of this initiative concerning lifelong learning the overall response to the Memorandum is positive. However it is stressed in the report that the Memorandum should had emphasised more the role of UCE to provide training for democratic values – shortly to strengthen the ideal of the Humboldt university tradition.
A Swedish Virtual University as a major provider of UCE

The recent Governmental initiative towards the creation of a Swedish Virtual University (SVU) will provide UCE with an organisation (a consortium of universities interested in providing UCE through distributed (flexible learning). The development of distributed distance education using ICT started up already 1995 and has resulted in several initiatives (SOU, 1998). The role of distributed distance learning in UCE will became more and more important in the years to come. Eventually this will also bring regular courses given with ICT support closer to the non-regular courses given within the SVU. This integration of UCE in the SVU setting might be THE needed step for getting a god provision of UCE in Sweden.

References


