Higher Education in Sweden

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The Swedish community is often characterized as a welfare state. At present we may perhaps say that the welfare state is passing through a self-critical period. Both in public debate and in political work the failures which exist in our welfare services are meeting with considerable attention. It is nevertheless manifest that technical, economic and political developments have led to a quickly rising standard of living in our country and that the new resources that have been created have been used for a considerable social equalization. This has been made possible by active reform work primarily directed to

i) labour market policy aiming at full-employment,

ii) a social welfare policy which provides security for all, for example in sickness and old age,

iii) a policy which is able to take vigorous measures to guarantee employment and social service to its citizens.

Education is also one of the really important means for changing society. During the fifties and sixties we carried through reforms which have led to changes in the entire educational system. At all levels of the educational system the changes have followed a single pattern. The overall goals we have set up for our educational system can, with some simplification, be summarized under four points.

1. Education Has a Great Significance for the Economic, Social and Cultural Development of the Community

Professional skill and technical ability bring a considerable economic gain, as we know. Education is therefore generally a very profitable investment both for the community and for the individual.

Expectations of profitability are no doubt a main reason why most countries have made large investments in the extension of their educational system. In the future this motive will continue to be of significance. But we cannot allow educational policy to be governed solely by narrow criteria of profitability.

Increased knowledge has an important role also in progress in the social and cultural fields. Technical development may readily become an end in itself. Censure and suspicion are needed if the new resources which are created are to be used to bring about a more humane society. A high level of general education makes it easier for us to control the technical development. Through broadened education we can attain better communication and deeper relations between people, we can create a common cultural environment.

2. The Goal of Education Policy Is to Give Every Person the Chance of Developing His Inherent Potentialities

We have many roles in the world today. One is our working role, another our role in the family, a third in public activities. The
increase of leisure enables us to develop interests through which we can express our personality in a special way. Education is an important instrument to this end.

3. Education Is the Basic Condition for a Living Democracy
Only by following democratic principles can we create more equal conditions. To attain influence we must have knowledge. A small group of well informed people can easily retain their grip on social development if a relatively broad public remains in a state of ignorance.

Nor it is always a question simply of the quantity of knowledge, but of the ability to use knowledge for questioning and criticizing. Therefore the ability to give expression to one’s views is a goal for education at all levels.

4. Through Educational Policy We Strive to Create Equality in Society
In the past, most young people were excluded—owing to financial, social and geographical barriers—from opportunities of education. The school system often favoured those from families who were conscious of the value and had the habit of education. It was principally the rich and well educated families that could give their children a lengthy education. The modern school system should, on the contrary, work for social equality. We are now trying in every way possible to prevent education from being a privilege.

These are the four goals of our educational policy. The next question concerns the means we are using for the realization of this programme.

During the fifties and sixties we achieved a very quick increase in the supply of education. Twenty years ago there was still a very large group of young people who had had only six or seven years of basic education. Now we have a nine-year compulsory school for all. At the beginning of the fifties only about 15% of an age group continued beyond primary school. Today nearly 90% of our youth have two or three years of further education. At the same time there has been a great extension of adult education run by municipalities, educational associations and folk high schools.

This quick expansion of education has taken place simultaneously with a radical organizational change in the educational system.

At the end of the second world war we had a typical parallel school system. Young people who wished to continue beyond the compulsory school stage had a large number of choices. Each line of education had its special character. The schools had varying status, usually because they provided varying opportunities for continued studies.

We now have a uniform education for the nine compulsory years. After the revision of the curriculum in 1968 the division into lines at comprehensive school has entirely disappeared. The present principle is that pupils follow the same class up through the whole of their comprehensive school period.

From July 1 this year we shall also have a uniform school system at the upper secondary level. Those who leave comprehensive school have a choice of 22 lines of education. Some of these lines prepare directly for further studies. Others provide a complete vocational education. Some lines have a general vocational orientation and prepare for a wide sector of the labour market.

Through these organizational changes the amount of teaching that all pupils have in common has greatly increased. Those who choose a vocational course are also taught general subjects such as languages and social studies. The final choice of profession or course of study has been postponed to a considerably later age. We have placed emphasis on the equivalence of practical and theoretical lines of study.

Education will become more democratic only if we can offer to all pupils the same chance of making use of the means of study available. A considerable increase of educa-
tional grants in order to eliminate financial obstacles has therefore been a central motive for the educational reform work.

Great improvements in educational benefits have been brought about at the secondary and post-secondary levels. This may be illustrated by a figure. In 1963 we paid out of the national budget 200 million kronor in educational grants. Today the figure is nearly 1.5 milliard.

Equal in importance to this development of the capacity and structure of the educational system is the renewal of the internal work of schools which is taking place.

Collaboration and group activities are growing in importance. Self-activities on the part of pupils are stimulated. The pure learning of facts is limited in order to give more time for training of study methods. Teaching is individualized so that every pupil is able to work on the basis of his own talents and interests. Special attention is paid to those who encounter difficulties in their school-work.

In a democratic society in which education is to contribute to social equality it is unreasonable that only the one-fourth of young people who take higher education should have had a more profound course of general schooling. This must be available to all in the compulsory school or through adult education. The conclusion of this is clear: the task of higher education must be primarily to prepare for a future job on the labour market.

The number of students at Swedish universities and colleges has grown very rapidly in the last twenty years. In 1950 the number was about 17,000, in 1960 it had risen to 35,000. During the sixties the growth was still quicker. By 1965 the number had reached 65,000, today we count on twice that number, rather more than 130,000 students.

The main reasons for this vigorous expansion are the educational welfare reforms and the improvements in upper-secondary education which has qualified increasing numbers of young people for further studies.

In view of this development and the new role which the universities must have today it has been necessary to make a total survey of the goals and structure of higher education. The 1968 Education Commission (generally known as U 68) is at present dealing with questions of the capacity, organization and localization of higher education. Its investigations will be completed during next year.

In parallel with this overall long-term planning, innovations have been tried out and changes introduced in a number of fields. We are experimenting, for example, with new vocationally oriented courses of education. On the one hand we have introduced new directly vocational subjects such as labour market technique, environment conservancy and questions relating to the developing countries, and on the other we have tried different combinations of university studies and vocational education.

We are extending higher education to a number of places outside the traditional university towns. This development started in the mid-sixties.

As another experiment we have given new groups access to the universities. A number of educational lines have been opened for persons who lack traditional qualifications for higher studies, i.e. three-year secondary education, but who are at least 25 years old and have five years' experience of vocational work.

Two years ago an important change was made in the organization of studies at the faculties of arts.

The reason for the reorganization was the delays in studies among university students. It was thus to bring about a more rational utilization of our educational resources. The previous organization had several defects. Many students never reached the goals they set up for their studies. In other cases the periods of study were altogether too long. In the mid-sixties only every fourth student completed his studies within the normal period. The reason for many failures was to a large extent that the organization of studies was such that students did not re-
ceive the support they needed for finding their educational goals and planning their work.

The new organization is based on the principle of successive choice. The students need not necessarily decide on a given line of education at one time. They can decide the direction of their studies successively. As their studies proceed, they acquire a better knowledge of their own prospects and of what the various subjects demand. They also obtain, it is hoped, a better survey of the labour market.

Students who consider after a period that they have chosen the wrong line can change to another. For those who have special desires it is also possible freely to combine courses of study into a curriculum of their own.

A very common reason for interruption of studies has been that the students started on a new subject before they had completed a preceding one. In the new organization it will not be possible to go on to a new course before completing the main part of the earlier course. Rules concerning normal study periods have also been introduced. For studies which normally require two terms, a period of three terms is allowed. Those who have not completed their studies within the appointed time undergo a test of their prospects for further study. The test is made by an educational board which includes teacher and student representatives.

To prevent failures and to give guidance to those who have not completed their programme of studies, a considerable reinforcement of the educational advice service has been introduced. In two years the grants for this purpose at universities and colleges have increased from 5 to 12 million kronor.

The new organization of studies applies to roughly two-thirds of the education given at universities and colleges. The faculties of arts are the sector within higher education which is least vocationally orientated. They prepare for relatively wide sectors of the labour market. Other faculties and colleges have always had a more specific vocational direction and a comparatively fixed curriculum. I am thinking, for example, of medical training, schools for architects, journalists and social welfare workers—not to mention teacher training, which is the central question at this conference.

Now, accordingly, all along the line we are on the way to a more fixed organization and a more specifically vocational orientation. This is one of the tendencies which will make its mark on our future plans for higher education. I should like to consider a couple of questions which will have significance in this context.

The first is: Who should have access to higher education? This question becomes of particular importance in that we have created a uniform school for all upper secondary education and have placed special emphasis on the equivalence of different lines of education. If only a few of the 22 lines of the upper secondary school qualify for further studies, these lines will be specially attractive. If on the other hand, all lines give the same qualification, there is a chance that the choice of education will be governed by personal interests and not by qualification rules. But is it conceivable in practice to give those who have completed two years of vocational study at upper secondary school the same possibilities of higher education as those who have completed three years of preparatory study in the same form of school?

This is one of the questions relating to the immediate future on which we must come to a decision. We are at present examining within the Ministry the proposal presented by the Qualifications Commission.

The commission suggests that the general right to post-secondary study will be granted to all those who have completed upper secondary studies in one of the 22 lines of study. In practice this will mean that within a few years, almost every 19-year old youngster will have the right to be admitted. Most post-secondary study will, however, have to require some specific initial knowledge. For every post-secondary study a careful analysis is being carried out on the specific knowledge and experience required
for admission.

The commission also suggests rules that grant the right of post-secondary study to adults. Everyone at least 25 years of age, who has been at work in any job or set of jobs for 5 years, should have the general right of being admitted to university studies. During the trial period that is going on these rules apply only to a limited part of the faculties of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, but extensions of this experiment are already on their way. Adults have to meet the same requirements of specific initial knowledge as the younger people.

The new rules of admission, will increase the freedom of choice for a majority of young people. The flexibility in the connection between the secondary and post-secondary parts of the educational system will increase.

The equality objective is at the core of the admission problem. The central question is that of selection to education with a restricted intake. Up till now, Swedish selection policies have favoured those with high marks in the secondary school. For the future an analysis will be required to discover whether or not aptitude for study should be the prime criterion for admission. The equality objective seems to require a radically new philosophy. In Sweden, these questions have emerged as part of the problem of balance between adult education and youth education. In a future development towards recurrent education this will be a central theme.

Another important question of principle is the localization of higher education. We have four traditional university towns in our country with a relatively broad educational base. In the beginning of the sixties we set up a new university in northern Sweden, a region which at that time was very lacking in educational opportunities. Later in the sixties we also built a system of affiliated universities. Today we have university education at twelve places in Sweden, of which four are in northern Sweden. Counting also the schools of education and schools of social work and public administration, we have some twenty places which offer higher education.

We have two chief motives for this regional distribution of higher education.

In the first place it is a step in our regional policy, aimed at an all-round regional development.

In the second place it contributes to eliminating the geographical barriers which today exclude many from education. If we are to succeed in bringing about a wider recruitment, education must be brought to people in a more effective way than hitherto. Adults who go to higher education after a few years in a job often have difficulties, owing to family responsibilities and public engagements, in changing their place of residence during their period of study. In a system of recurrent education, localization will be a very central question.

Under a recent Act of Parliament, which has attracted considerable attention, a number of government offices are to be moved from Stockholm to provincial towns. This is being done in the conscious effort to diminish the growth of large cities and instead to develop the regional centres. Among educational units which are to be established outside Stockholm are the College of Forestry, a new School of Social Work and Public Administration, and a new College of Librarianship.

The U 68 commission is adopting the following model, which may be of interest to consider. The country is to be divided into 5—6 educational regions with the traditional university towns as centres of higher education. These will offer a representative selection of educational lines within the future system of higher education. Within each region there will also be a number of places with higher education. At these places, however, the choice of educational lines will be more limited. The character of education must vary from one place to another.

We have not yet finally decided on this model. But even if the programme is realized and we obtain a greatly extended system of permanent higher educational