

**~~Theme 2: the application of research-based skills from your doctoral studies~~**

~~E1. What have you done with the research skills and knowledge you developed for your doctoral research?~~

~~E2. What insights would you like to make about applying the research skills and knowledge you developed in your doctoral research after graduation?~~

**~~Theme 3: the application of learning experience arising from your doctoral studies~~**

~~F1. What aspects of the doctoral learning process as a personal experience have you been able to pass on to others?~~

~~F2. How significant was your learning experience in doing the doctorate? To what extent have you been able to continue to apply the doctoral learning experience to other situations?~~

**~~Theme 4: the experience of personal empowerment arising from your doctoral studies~~**

~~G1. What evidence can you produce to show that the personal growth that took place while doing the doctorate has made you feel more empowered in your professional and personal life?~~

~~G2. Apart from how others have perceived you after gaining the doctorate, what have you felt about yourself?~~

**~~Theme 5: the creation of professional, occupational and business opportunities arising from your doctoral studies~~**

~~H1. In your assessment, to what extent has achieving doctoral status, as well as the actual knowledge and skills you acquired, connected with any subsequent business and career opportunities, either directly or indirectly?~~

~~H2. Looking back, to what extent did you consider that doing a doctorate might provide a kind of platform or jumpstart for further opportunities in your professional and personal life?~~

**~~In conclusion: looking back at the experience of 'the long march'~~**

~~J1. What for you were the most memorable aspects of your doctoral journey?~~

~~J2. To what extent have your original motives for doing a doctorate been satisfied by personal and professional outcomes after graduation?~~

**~~Final reflections~~**

~~K1. What else could you write about the professional and personal outcomes you have experienced since gaining your doctorate?~~

## The relative value of investment in 'second chance' educational opportunities for adults in Sweden and Australia: a comparative analysis.

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*The article presents a comparative analysis of educational policy and provision in Sweden and Australia, with particular emphasis on the relative investment in continuing and further education in both countries. The authors investigate the extent to which further education opportunities provide a 'second chance' at learning for adults and contribute to social and economic capital.*

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## Introduction

Some interesting comparisons exist between the education systems of Sweden and Australia. Both countries place much importance on investing in education but from different historical, economic and social perspectives. Sweden, like Australia, is a constitutional monarchy with three layers of government: central, regional and local. The major difference is in the distribution of control, authority and funding of education at various levels, namely, school, vocational education and training, and higher education. For example, there is one law for schools in Sweden (see below) whereas in Australia each 'state' can make laws that affect compulsory schooling. In Sweden the government decides on the policy and rules for all types of education but local government has control of the financing and running of compulsory schooling. In the case of tertiary education, most universities in Sweden and Australia are regulated by the central government, although Australian universities are increasingly placed in a position of competing for diminishing pools of funding tied to various measures of performance.

Vocational education is also funded by the two central governments but the way in which this sector is organised and managed differs. The two countries also differ in terms of adult education in general. The Swedish government has legislation that controls the system but education itself is provided by over a dozen adult education organisations which offer study circle programs, long-term residential education and short-term vocational and recreational courses. In Australia the adult education system is a regional or 'state' concern.

Another major historical difference is that compulsory schooling in Australia is grounded in denominational difference. Although the colonising power introduced a state school system this was challenged by the churches who insisted on establishing their own schools. By the late 1800s there were in effect two types of schools – state schools and church-run schools. In Sweden, where a unified government was

created in the sixteenth century, Lutheranism was adopted as the state religion. Religion was an important part of schooling but over time schools have been secularised and it is only recently that some so called 'free schools' have been established.

A major difference between the two countries' systems is that all sectors of education in Sweden are free, whereas in Australia fees are charged for all types of post-compulsory education. Sweden's approach to education has been driven by the government's strong social democratic ethos and its belief in the importance of building social capital. In Australia education provided by the state has been strongly influenced by economic imperatives, with a private education sector growing steadily, and it could be argued that this has been a direct result of a more economic rationalist approach in public education policy.

The greatest similarities between the two countries exist at the elementary school level. A comparison of secondary, vocational and post-compulsory education provision shows some fundamental differences that have implications for a range of social indicators – family life, work life, career opportunities and the achievement of qualifications. Opportunities for adults to undertake further (or continuing) education (FE) also have an effect on these indicators. However, this area of education is a little more difficult to define, ranging as it does from informal liberal arts courses based on interest, to formal and accredited programs aimed at giving adults the opportunity to re-enter pathways to educational qualifications and meaningful work. The latter is sometimes referred to as 'second chance' education. Further education is also often 'hidden from view' as it can take diverse forms which make it difficult to identify, measure and evaluate. However, for the purposes of this paper, further education (hereafter FE) will refer to a range of activities associated with lifelong learning – adult education, continuing education, adult basic education, adult community education and

labour market training. Vocational training will also be discussed under the broad rubric of FE; for even though in both Australia and Sweden it is now incorporated into upper secondary curricula, the fact that it generally incorporates adult learning methodologies and is clearly focused on the adult labour market makes it relevant to the discussion.

This article maps the similarities and differences between educational provision in Sweden and Australia, investigates the opportunities for second chance further education in both countries, and analyses the extent to which such opportunities contribute to the enhancement of work and family life. In doing so, we draw on statistical and other data from both countries and locate our investigation in the current literature. Our investigation focuses on the following questions:

- What formal and informal FE opportunities are available?
- What are the similarities and differences in funding, provision and outcomes?
- What are the characteristics of adults undertaking FE in terms of age, gender, educational attainment and so on?
- What is the effect of FE for adults on vocational and life outcomes in both countries?
- To what extent does FE contribute to social capital and economic benefits in both countries?

We conclude that there is value for both countries in investing in second chance education, but for different reasons and with varying outcomes.

### Education policy and provision in Sweden and Australia

The Swedish Education Act states that education shall:

... provide the pupils with knowledge and, in co-operation with the homes, promote their harmonious development into responsible human beings and members of the community. (Skolverket 2005:1)

This act also extends the right of education to adults, which is provided at the municipal level and is known as *komvux*. By contrast, school education in Australia is a state responsibility, and consequently each of the six states and two territories have their own education acts with the result that there is no national consistency in school curriculum, secondary school certificates, registration of teachers or even compulsory years of schooling. All school students in Sweden learn English as a second language in addition to Swedish, but while many Australian schools teach a variety of languages in addition to English, the country is officially monolingual.

Despite a recently launched 'National framework for values education in Australian schools', there has historically been no national vision for the education system in Australia. Unlike the Swedish Act, the 'National framework' does not refer to the development of responsible community members in cooperation with the home. This apparent lack of a unified national vision for education has been reinforced in a contemporary political debate about Australian values, what they actually might be, and whether they can or should be taught in schools (Myers 2006). The Federal Government's official position is that Australian values are defined by a right to vote in a democratic society (Commonwealth of Australia 2005).

Sweden is not only a democratic society, but it actually invests in the maintenance of democracy in a number of tangible ways. The education campaigns before the referenda on nuclear power in the 1970s and the adoption of a European monetary system more recently are examples of this. Another example (already mentioned) is that public education is free – there is no charge to parents for teaching materials, school meals, health services or transport. Social welfare funding policies that support working parents through subsidised childcare and parenting leave arrangements also ensure equal access to meaningful careers in addition to contributing to the homelife, and by definition to social capital.

In Australia, by comparison, each state must provide subsidised public education, but there are fees for materials, no provision of meals, and variations in funding models based on socio-economic indicators. The growth of a second system of schooling most obvious in the development of the non-government sector indicates that many Australian parents are exercising choice and opting for alternatives to state educational philosophies and values. In this climate, independent or private schooling has flourished. In South Australia, for example, almost one-third of all school enrolments are in private schools and this is steadily increasing. This exodus is not only the result of parental preference but can be blamed on 'a grossly under-funded public education system and a radical shifting of government funds from public to privileged private schools' (Lygo 2004:1).

By contrast, in 2001, only four percent of Swedish school children were attending a privately-run independent school (Skolverkert 2005).

### Educational attainment

One way to judge the effectiveness of a country's education system is to measure the outcomes, or the number of people who complete schooling, at least in the compulsory years. An interesting statistic on Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is the level of educational attainment by persons aged 25–64 years for the reference year 2002, in which the following comparison can be shown (see Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of persons by level of educational attainment (OECD 2004)

	Below upper secondary education (to Year 10 in Australia, Year 9 or leaving certificate in Sweden)	Upper secondary education and post-secondary non-tertiary education (Year 12 and skilled vocational level in Australia; national learning certificate in Sweden)	Tertiary type B education (associate diploma level)	Tertiary type A education (bachelor degree or higher)	Total
Australia	39%	30%	11%	20%	100%
Sweden	18%	49%	15%	18%	100%

From the table it is apparent that in Australia a large proportion (39%) of the adult population aged over 25 in 2002 had left school before completing an upper secondary qualification or even a skilled vocational qualification such as a Certificate III in a trade area. Only 30% of this cohort completed 12 years of schooling, a proportion which has slowly increased, but not enough to stop early school leaving being a significant issue in many parts of Australia. State governments are currently addressing the problem by means of a range of integrated strategies. These strategies require agencies to work together, often at the local community level, in order to engage young people in either meaningful learning or work (Government of South Australia 2003; Smyth *et al.* 2000; Stehlik 2006).

By comparison, almost half of the adult population of Sweden had completed upper secondary education, which since 1971 has integrated both 'theoretical' and 'occupationally-oriented' course programs under the one system. This means that the academic gymnasium program and the vocational studies program both lead to a qualification with equal recognition – the 'learning certificate'. However, the rate of educational achievement in Sweden then drops

to such an extent at tertiary level that Australia is slightly ahead (20% compared to 18%) in the numbers of adults with bachelor and higher degrees. Advanced research programs are included in the latter.

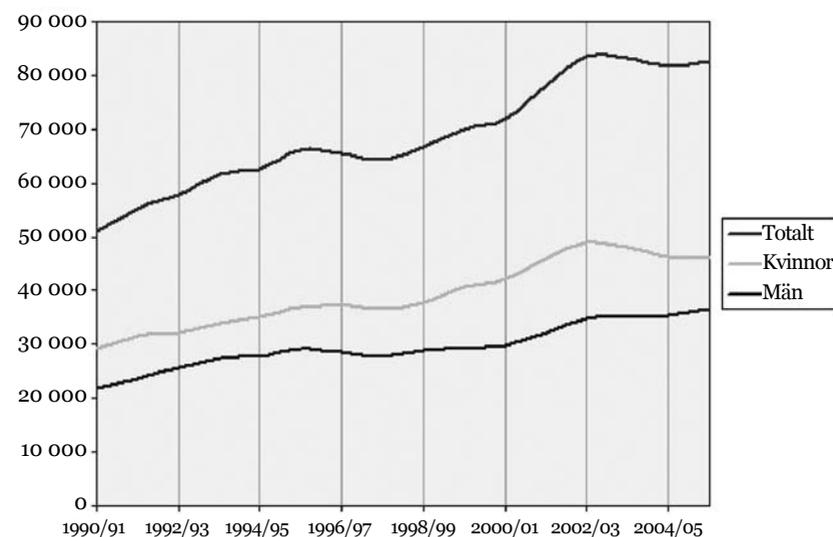
This is perhaps curious given the fact that there are no tuition fees for both local and foreign students in Swedish higher education institutions. There is a current discussion that foreign students should pay fees, but no immediate threat for Swedish citizens. One explanation for the slightly lower percentage of graduates in Sweden is that despite the lack of fees, a university education takes at least three years and during that time one tends to accumulate debt rather than earn money. In fact, there is a clear correlation with the state of the labour market – in times when the economy is slow and jobs are hard to come by, many school leavers consider university enrolment, while the opposite is true when the economy is strong. Comparing university enrolments with the state of the economy over the last decade tends to confirm this. Sweden is currently emerging from a tough economic period when many companies 'rationalised' their workforce or moved their operations to countries with lower wages, resulting in an increase in the unemployment rate (see Table 2). In the same period there has been a rapid rise in university enrolments. Looking at the eleven years from 1990/1 to 2002/3, there was a jump from 50,000 to 80,000 new enrolments. In the last few years a strong Swedish economy has put a brake on this (see Figure 1).

Table 2: Labour market indicators, Sweden 1990–98

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Employment to pop. ratio	84.4	82.5	78.7	73.9	72.8	73.5	72.7	71.7	72.6
Unemployment rate	1.8	3.2	5.8	9.5	9.8	9.2	10.0	10.3	8.3
Long-term unemployment	22.2	22.8	29.0	32.8	41.8	40.8	44.5	48.1	45.6

(Source: OECD, 1998)

Figure 1: Enrolments of first year students at university, 1990/01 to 2005/06



(Table taken from Statistics Sweden 2006. *Kvinnor* = women, *Män* = men)

The exact reasons for the lower numbers of Swedes graduating are difficult to determine, but there is a clear link between the state of the economy and student enrolments. At present not all the student places on offer are filled, despite there being no tuition charges and a generous loan system for living costs. Under the Bologna Accord (European Commission 2007), Swedish students can apply to other European universities and there is a clear trend that many avail themselves of this opportunity to undertake courses such as medicine, physiotherapy, dentistry and psychology – courses that demand extremely high secondary school grades.

Australian university students by contrast do not have access to free higher education and must pay fees either directly or indirectly through the taxation system, in addition to paying union fees and living expenses. Foreign students are charged up to three times the rate of domestic students, which does not seem to deter a large yearly enrolment of overseas students, especially from South East Asia. Students from Sweden and other Nordic countries can receive some financial assistance from their government if they choose to take a degree in Australia (currently around AUD \$100 a week). If they undertake a Swedish degree but pursue part of their studies in Australia, the state can cover tuition fees as well. Strangely, Australian students are not particularly interested in reciprocating by studying abroad in Scandinavia, even though they would pay no tuition fees. This is partly due to a perception that the cost of living in countries like Sweden is too high and that language would be a barrier.

### Further education opportunities for adults

#### Sweden

Whenever Sweden has been faced with crucial political decisions, the authorities have frequently turned to non-formal education associations in an effort to provide open, wide-ranging discussions among the citizens. (SV 2006:129)

Adult education in Sweden has a long tradition, particularly in the form of non-formal adult participatory education which has a history of more than 150 years and is summed up in the word *folkbildning*. Sweden is generally credited with introducing study circles as an approach to adult education for sharing information and knowledge, which in that country has historically contributed to democratic association and social change. Currently, adult education exists in many different forms and is organised by a range of different operators. It includes the following.

**Municipal adult education** (*Komvux*) which offers basic, upper secondary and continuing education programs for adults who have not completed compulsory or upper secondary schooling. As the name suggests, it is organised and funded at the municipal or local level, as the municipality has an obligation to provide basic education for adults who lack compulsory school equivalence. Upper secondary education for adults shares the same curriculum as that taught in upper secondary schools, but with adult learning methodologies including recognition of the skills and knowledge of adult students.

**Continuing education** takes the form of continued education in an occupation, or training for a completely new occupation, with programs being six to twelve months in duration and specialising in areas such as tourism or information technology.

**Advanced vocational training** has only recently (since 2002) become an alternative post-secondary education path, organised by a new national agency and run by municipalities, training companies and other institutions in cooperation with the workplace, where one third of the training period, which can vary from one to three years, is carried out.

**Education for adults with learning disabilities** (*Sär vux*) is a form of education on its own, run by municipalities for adults with learning disabilities using a specially adapted curriculum which

can lead to an equivalent compulsory school or upper secondary vocational school certificate.

**Swedish for immigrants (SFI).** Municipalities also have an obligation to provide Swedish language courses to newly-arrived adult immigrants.

**Adult education.** Sweden has a long tradition of *folkbildning* – providing courses that are mostly free, non-accredited and non-formal. These include courses of study that can extend over one or two years in adult education colleges (many of them residential) as well as shorter courses. The latter include evening courses and study circles as well as cultural activities for all levels of society in a variety of subjects. This educational provision is organised and regulated by a National Council of Adult Education (Christie 1996 & 1998). There are eight adult education associations in Sweden today. Each has a different profile depending on its historical development and religious or political connections. The three major organisations that organise and sponsor *folkbildning* are *Arbetarnas bildningsförbund (ABF)* which is similar to the Workers' Educational Association, *Studieförbundet* or 'Study Promotion Association', and *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan*. For example:

During 2003, Studieförbundet arranged 38,329 study circles in a variety of different subjects. We also arranged 27,427 cultural events such as concerts, lectures, exhibitions and performances. A total of 2,215,355 people participated in our study circles and events. (*Studieförbundet* 2006:1)

**Labour market training** targeted at the unemployed, to provide basic or supplementary vocational training, funded by the National Labour Market Board and delivered at the local level by a range of training providers.

Sweden also has recently established a national **Agency for Flexible Learning** which supports municipalities, folk high schools and adult

education providers to develop more flexible forms of education that will enable more adults to access education at a distance.

Australia

Higher levels of education can contribute to social capital, including greater equity, awareness and political stability. Education also contributes to economic growth through its effect on labour productivity, technological innovation and adaptation, economic, organisational and individual flexibility, and the investment environment. (Long 2004: 6)

Adult education in Australia has been influenced more by the English tradition of Workers' Educational Associations and Mechanics Institutes which arose historically out of the efforts of workers to educate themselves either within trades or guilds or for personal development, similar to the idea of *folkbildning* but without the widespread uptake and funding support. This type of continuing education is now more often associated with lifestyle-type courses in cooking, crafts, languages and coffee for middle class people with time and money to pay the fees. Adult education associated with social change and/or second chance education is found within two separate but connected sectors – adult and community education, and vocational education and training – and to a lesser extent within the public education system.

**Adult and community education (ACE)** is widespread in all states and territories in Australia, but more established and organised in the larger states such as Victoria and New South Wales. There is a national association (Adult Learning Australia) which once had branches in each state but has now adopted a unitary national structure, with a relatively small membership. ACE courses are characterised by being community-based, locally organised, accessible and relevant to the local community. ACE providers compete for a limited pool of public funding and are increasingly being drawn into the provision of vocationally oriented courses for financial reasons,

as well as becoming involved in collaboration with schools to deliver courses to secondary students, who have not traditionally been the age group accessing ACE programs.

The **vocational education and training** (VET) sector is a more clearly defined education sector in Australia, with a national system of TAFE (technical and further education) colleges, funded and organised at state level. Although TAFE accounts for the majority of VET provision, there are also many large, medium and small private providers of vocational education, also competing for the same funding as TAFE; as well as VET-in-schools programs where secondary schools offer vocational courses as part of flexible curriculum offerings, sometimes on campus but often subcontracted to a TAFE college or a private registered training organisation as the actual provider.

**Adult re-entry colleges** provide second chance school completion for adults and early school leavers, and can either be located within a traditional secondary school or in a stand alone institution. They are generally state funded and offer the state-approved secondary curriculum.

**Continuing education courses** are offered by some universities and adult and community education centres on a fee-paying basis to offset income as well as offer non-formal education to a wider section of society, and concentrate more on lifestyle and interest-based courses and study tours rather than vocational programs.

**Adult literacy programs** make up a big part of ACE provision in Australia, and are available in communities and workplaces as well as with public and private training providers, often in an ACE/VET partnership (Gelade, Stehlik & Willis 2006). The Federal Government funds the Adult Migrant English Program for new arrivals, and administers the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program which is designed to assist job-seekers improve their employment chances.

A free online education information service, **EdNA (Education Network Australia) Online**, provides a directory of education and training in Australia as well as a database of web-based teaching and learning materials, aimed at all four sectors of education – schools, ACE, VET and higher education.

### **Similarities and differences in educational funding, provision and outcomes**

An immediate contrast between the Swedish and Australian education systems is the way in which they are funded. All Swedes can enjoy free education from pre-school right through to higher education. Since 1994 even independent schools in Sweden have received full state funding, whereas in Australia, private independent schools must charge fees to the parents. For some families this can be the single biggest outgoing expense in the weekly budget, a fact which does not seem to deter a steady migration from the public to the private sector (Stehlik 2002).

While higher education in Sweden is also fully funded, students still have to cover living expenses and many take out the state sponsored student loan which does accrue a considerable debt. This is similar to the debt that Australian higher education students accumulate by having to defer their university fees through the taxation system, as only a minority pays them upfront. In addition however, Australian university students are increasingly working part-time to pay their living expenses, which can have an effect on study performance and course completion.

In the area of further education, Sweden has a more unified approach than Australia in terms of organisation and access. As noted earlier, Sweden considers FE and second chance education to be a democratic right available to all citizens and directly linked to the development and maintenance of a democratic society. This is clearly demonstrated in the number of *folkbildning* programs, organisations

and networks spread throughout the country and funded directly by local municipalities or *Kommun*, which is where the term *Komvux* originates – an abbreviation of *Kommunal Vuxenutbildning*, meaning adult education sponsored by the local municipalities. In 1998, 195,000 students participated in such courses, with over 80% accessing them in order to complete their upper secondary school qualification, or learning certificate (Statistics Sweden 1998). This has created pathway opportunities into higher education for many Swedes who had not completed school (OECD 1999).

Unlike Australia and European countries like England and Germany, Sweden does not have a tradition of apprenticeship schemes in collaboration with industry and commerce.

One of the main goals in Swedish education policy since the late 1960s has been to unify vocational and general education into a single integrated education system. (Lindell & Abrahamsson 2002: 4)

Therefore, a second chance at completing the upper secondary learning certificate also means being able to take a vocational pathway as well as move into higher education. Whether this equitable pathway will remain the same, however, will be open to question, as demand for more qualified tradespeople is about to force a change in this current system in Sweden. In 2010 students will be able to take one of three paths in their final years of high school. One path will lead directly to university; another will prepare students for vocational jobs, mainly within the schools; and a third will take the form of an apprenticeship system where students will spend most of their time in the companies where they have been accepted as apprentices (*Utbildningsdepartementet* 2007).

In Australia these concepts are still quite separate, as vocational education is an industry-based rather than a school-based system, and the majority of provision is via the TAFE colleges and private providers of VET. Despite various moves to address the issue – for

example, the review of the South Australian Certificate in Education (SACE) in 2006 – upper secondary education is still seen mainly as a pathway to university and professional careers, with vocational studies consequently cast as a lower status option, and trade apprenticeships perceived as an alternative pathway for young people but not for more mature adults. Yet at the same time Australia is experiencing a 'skills deficit' in some particular trade areas and having to import skilled workers from other countries to fill the gaps.

Educational attainment in Australia is improving: in 2004, 80% of teenagers had completed secondary school or a Certificate II or higher compared with 75% in 2002. However, school leaving figures for 2004 show that 30% of Australian students had left school before completing Year 12, and in the first year after leaving school, 28% of this early leaving cohort had commenced post-secondary education and 36% were employed, though nearly 30% were not employed. In May 2004, 84,400 (29%) of teenagers who left school in 2003 were not in study and were either working part-time, unemployed, or not in the labour force (ABS 2005).

The first three years after leaving school are recognised as crucial for successful transition to further education or employment. By contrast with Australia, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education, 'almost 45% of upper secondary students continue to higher education within three years after completing their upper secondary school examination' (Lindell & Abrahamsson 2002: 5).

### **Characteristics of adults undertaking further education**

In May 2005, 2,420,600 Australians or 18% of the population aged 15–64 years were enrolled in a course of study. Approximately 896,600 (37%) of these enrolled persons were attending a higher education institution, 695,000 (29%) were at school, 546,200 (23%) were at TAFE institutions, and 282,800 (12%) were at other educational institutions (ABS 2005). Therefore the uptake of

studies in further education was almost equivalent to that of higher education, and exceeded the number of people aged 15 and over studying at school.

Approximately 96% of the persons who were enrolled in a course of study were in a course leading to a qualification, reinforcing that in Australia, non-formal studies without accreditation account for only a very small percentage in contrast to the picture in Sweden, with its tradition of *folkbildning*.

A further breakdown of level of current study above Year 12 level and below bachelor degree level by age group in Australia shows an interesting age and gender distribution (Table 3).

*Table 3: Persons enrolled in a course of study leading to a qualification, level of education of current study by age, Australia (ABS 2005)*

#### Males

	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	Total
Diploma	14,700	25,300	17,700	13,800	10,300	81,800
Certificates III/IV	71,000	54,700	29,500	22,400	16,800	194,300
Certificates I/II	8,000	1,600	4,900	4,000	3,600	22,100
Certificate level not defined	8,000	12,700	8,900	13,500	10,000	53,100
Total	101,700	94,300	61,000	53,700	40,700	351,300

#### Females

	15-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	Total
Diploma	25,100	32,000	35,200	20,400	18,700	131,300
Certificates III/IV	22,400	27,300	37,000	27,500	21,800	136,000
Certificates I/II	9,800	8,500	7,400	6,500	9,100	41,300
Certificate level not defined	8,800	9,000	11,800	18,400	8,900	57,000
Total	66,100	76,800	91,400	72,800	42,300	365,600

The figures reinforce the statistic that more females than males are enrolled in studies at all levels of education overall. Furthermore, for the levels of education which represent the further education sector, the proportion of females studying at the higher level of a Diploma qualification far exceeded males (62% compared with 38%); and is also greater at the lower Certificate I and II levels. However, qualifications at the Certificate III and IV levels, where trade certificates or full apprenticeships in industry are located, show that this is still clearly a male dominated area overall (59%) – though not at all age levels.

For example, within the age groups of 25 years and over, more females are accessing further education at all levels. It is only the large numbers of 15–19 year old males undertaking Certificate III and IV studies, at a rate more than three times that of females, which gives the large overall proportion for this level, and is consistent with the picture of young male apprentices undertaking training in trade areas.

The overall picture of post-school qualifications in Australia is that more females (30%) are qualified at bachelor degree level than males (25%), and less qualified (18%) at the trade certificate level than males (38%). This is reinforced by the figures showing the main field of education, which for around one-third of males is 'Engineering and related technologies', an area which encompasses trade areas such as manufacturing, construction, plumbing and so on. Less than two percent of females studied in this area; instead, their largest main field of education is 'Management and commerce' (31%), an area which encompasses retail sales, banking, book-keeping and clerical work (ABS 2005).

In Australia the uptake of apprenticeships by females more than doubled in the decade 1995 to 2005 from 11,200 to 24,400, in comparison with male apprenticeships which increased by about 40%. However, the overall numbers of males undertaking

apprenticeships in 2005 was still six times the number of females, though it is interesting to note that for both cohorts nearly 15% of new apprentices were in the age group 25–54 (ABS 2005).

Figures for Sweden in vocational training are buried within the statistics for general upper secondary education and not so easy to extract for comparison, and industry-based apprenticeships are limited. However, the National Agency for Education (1999) in Sweden estimates that about 150,000 pupils per year are involved in Initial Vocational Education within upper secondary schools.

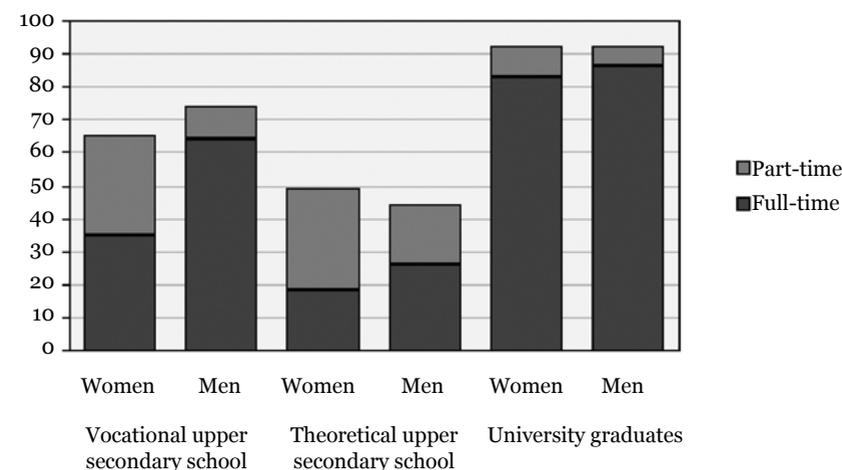
Of more interest are the figures for Swedes involved in municipal adult education, where the largest cohort is clustered around the age group 19–25 years which accounts for 54% of participation. This goes against any assumption that *komvux* is mainly for older adults and those with no other main activities in life, as the figures for 2003 also show that, for around half of all men and women participating in *komvux*, their main activity was employment, and for around one-quarter, their main activity was higher education (Statistics Sweden 2006).

### The effect of further education for adults on vocational and life outcomes

If a connection can be drawn between municipal adult education and higher education in Sweden, and there is a link between higher education and labour market participation as argued above, then there is arguably a beneficial effect on employment opportunity for Swedes undertaking the range of courses offered through *komvux*.

A statistically clear connection between gainful employment and higher education in Sweden is shown in Figure 2, which also indicates an interesting distinction between the employment outcomes of upper secondary students in both the vocational and the theoretical programs, with the former apparently being a vocational pathway in the literal sense.

Figure 2: Share of gainfully employed three years after graduation in March 2004 and share of full-time and part-time employment. Percentage breakdown by educational program and sex



(Source: Statistics Sweden 2006)

Also discernible in this table is the gender distribution in type of employment, with more Swedish women working part-time than men, particularly those without university qualifications. For those who are university graduates, it is interesting to note that equal numbers of Swedish men and women are gainfully employed as a result, and even more interesting to note that this distribution is almost identical in Australia (ABS 2005).

Higher education in Australia continues to be the single biggest determinant in the labour force participation rate, and in 2002 was around 87%, however the rate for those with VET qualifications was not far behind at 84% (ABS 2002). The same figures show that early school leavers are the single biggest cohort in the unemployment rate at 10%.

While the link between education and employment can undoubtedly be made, a closer look at the figures for Australia shows that the actual *number* of people with fulltime jobs varies significantly with age cohorts. In the decade 1995 to 2005, the number of young people aged 20–24 in fulltime work had actually decreased by 10%, while the number of teenagers had remained about the same. By comparison, fulltime jobs for adults aged 25–64 increased by 18% over the same period of time (Long, 2004). However, the years 2004–05 have seen an increase in the number of fulltime jobs for the cohorts aged below 25, and an increase at a faster rate than the rest of the population, indicating that higher levels of education are only part of the bigger picture of access to employment opportunity which is also determined by fluctuations in the labour market. This is also reinforced by the increasing levels of young people aged 15–19 who are not studying and only able to access part-time employment, despite seeking more secure employment opportunities (Long 2004).

This combination of labour market unpredictability with debts accrued from the cost of education have a number of flow-on effects for society and the economy, as for example young people in Australia are less able to afford to enter the housing market, while at the same time delaying having families – since the year 2000 the average age for a woman to give birth to her first child is over 30 and increasing (ABS 2002) – and it has been suggested that there is a link between higher education and lower fertility rates (Yu 2006). Furthermore, since the late 1970s, the average hours worked by fulltime employees in Australia has increased, and this combined with 'a dramatic increase in the employment rate of mothers' is impacting on the family life of those who do have children (Weston *et al.* 2004: 2), so that juggling work, family and education commitments has become even harder.

Internationally there is also:

... concern that the state often supports a vision of lifelong learning and adult education only in terms of its economic

ideals and that social inclusion and equality is merely rhetoric underpinned by economic intent. (Fleming 2004: 15).

This economic imperative can be seen in some European Union projects such as 'KeyNet' funded through the Leonardo da Vinci program, which addresses competence development as a means to increase employability in four countries: Germany, Greece, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The project concentrates on the development of 'key skills' with the target groups of young people (16–25) and older unemployed people (40+), to give them a second chance to start training, get a job and continue learning throughout life (Key skills project 2006).

However in this case, competence development refers to the promotion 'on a life-long basis, of creativity, flexibility, adaptability, the ability to "learn to learn" and to solve problems' (Key skills project 2006: 1). These are not so much vocational skills as lifelong skills, and the concept of lifelong learning is one that recognises the importance of all forms of learning at all levels of society in building social capital.

### **Conclusion: The contribution of further education to social capital and economic benefits**

While this paper has been able only to skim the surface of the issue, it concludes that there is a discernible contrast between Australia and Sweden in terms of the contribution of FE to society and the economy. In Sweden with its history of *folkbildning* and central policy of state-funded education for all, FE can be said to contribute to social capital and cultural development. Examples include SV (*Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan*) and *Studiefrämjandet* which promote study circles, events and performances which encourage community capacity building as well as individual development. By comparison, Australian FE has been sidetracked (some would argue, hijacked) by vocationalist and rationalist agendas promoted by a conservative federal government, and while one can still take a course on coffee at

the Workers' Educational Association, it is geared towards individual development rather than social development and one will be charged market fees for participation.

There is also a difference in the 'front-end' of the Australian education system that is geared towards early specialisation and streaming into either university or vocational pathways, with clear status differentials and employment opportunity outcomes, in a two-tiered system of VET versus university reinforced by a static Australian Qualifications Framework. By comparison, Swedish educational policy has recognised the value of giving vocational and theoretical upper secondary studies equal status.

However, there are signs that the Swedish system is also being hijacked by a new vocationalism, as

... there has been a conceptual transformation of recurrent education, and its early focus on equity and access in the light of second-chance policies has given way to a much stronger economic perspective. (Lindell & Abramsson 2002: 9)

This has been highlighted by very recent developments in Sweden since the 2006 change of government from social democratic to conservative values, such as policies to cut back on funding places in *komvux*, especially for those in need of a second chance (Svensson 2007). It is ironic given that Sweden had built a continuing education system in order to strengthen democracy, especially in light of its proximity to communist Russia. It was willing to pay for this and established it as a national policy. Today the new conservative government is tending more towards the economic rationalist model observable in Australia. As well as changes at the top, the consumers of recreational and second chance education have put pressure on adult education organisations to grade or at least provide some kinds of credentials for education which historically was undertaken for its own sake and for the wider benefit to society, not for individual credentialism.

In conclusion, the concept of 'second chance' learning really applies to everybody, and therefore should be subsumed under the rubric of *lifelong learning*, where it is recognised that continued learning throughout life is inevitable given the dynamic social, economic and labour market environments. Rather than second chance learning then, further education in all its forms more appropriately represents 'continuing chance' learning.

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## ~~'I'm not stupid after all' – changing perceptions of self as a tool for transformation~~

~~Ms Julie Willans  
Central Queensland University~~

~~Ms Karen Seary  
Central Queensland University~~

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~~'The greatest revolution in our generation is that of human beings,  
who by changing the inner attitudes of their minds can change the  
outer aspects of their lives' (Ferguson 2006).~~

~~When adult learners return to formal education after a period of  
absence, coping with change is a constant and often omnipresent  
challenge. As they come to break down previous barriers to  
success in an educational arena, many adult learners are able  
to change the perceptions they have of themselves as learners.  
Previously held assumptions are often challenged and perceptions  
of how individuals come to hold these views undergo scrutiny.  
Using Cranton's (2002) phases of perspective transformation as  
a framework, this paper explores the notion that some learners  
can and do change their perspectives regarding their abilities as~~