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# **Widening access to higher education in Sweden: changing political ideologies, changing tactics?**

**Elisabet Weedon,**

**Honorary Research Fellow**

**Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity,**

**University of Edinburgh**

[www.creid.ed.ac.uk](http://www.creid.ed.ac.uk)



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# Overview

- ❖ Higher education, tuition fees and student support in Sweden
- ❖ Routes of access to higher education
- ❖ HE and school reforms from the 1960s – from social democratic policy to neo-liberal
- ❖ Widening access in higher education in Sweden
- ❖ Sweden in Europe
- ❖ Conclusion – exploring the tensions between top-down social democratic and neo-liberal institutionally driven measures for widening access



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# Higher education, tuition fees and student support in Sweden



- ❖ 16 universities, 14 higher education institutes (högskolor), 5 creative arts institutions and 13 other more specialised higher education - oldest university dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> century
- ❖ Tuition is free at all levels for home, EU/ES, Swiss students
- ❖ Student support for FT and PT students (min 50% studies) up to the age of 56 **normally** max 240 weeks
- ❖ Consists of non-repayable student bursary and a student loan - **basic** amount FT 100,160 Swedish Kronor for 40 weeks made up of a non-repayable bursary of 28,480 (£2,762) and a loan of 71,680 (£6,864).
- ❖ Means tested on student's own income not parents



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# Current routes of access to HE



- ❖ ‘Traditional’ entry route by completion of upper secondary education or equivalent
- ❖ Accreditation of prior learning – but this does not attach credit to specific learning – applicants using this route are advised to use third route
- ❖ Högskoleprovet (Scholastic Aptitude Test) – cost around £40 and can be taken twice a year and there is no limit on the number of times
- ❖ From 1992 a basårskurs (access course), initially only for shortage subjects, from 2003 opened up but still only in areas of labour market need – highly flexible courses



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## HE reforms in the 1970s

- ❖ University expansion post war – 14,000 students in 1945 – 125,000 by 1970 led to reform of 1977
- ❖ Stable social democratic government with strong emphasis on equality, increasing participation and the needs of the labour market
- ❖ Regional access improved through new HE institutions
- ❖ 25/5 rule (over age 25 and 5 years' work experience) introduced for those without relevant qualifications
- ❖ Högskoleprovet (scholastic aptitude test) introduced for those without relevant qualifications



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# School reforms in the 1960s

- ❖ Strong emphasis on equality led to school system changing from selective to comprehensive – grundskolan was introduced in 1962
- ❖ Vocational education became part of the school system in 1971
- ❖ Vocational education included ‘general’ education to ease transfer to higher education
- ❖ In addition, provision of adult education was strengthened
- ❖ Earlier school reforms contribute to improving access to higher education



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# HE reforms from the 1990s onwards

- ❖ Neo-liberal government move towards new public management and deregulation – shrinking the role of the state – indicators on outcomes as well as enrolment – greater emphasis on individual choice
- ❖ Further regionalisation to improve access
- ❖ Högskoleprovet opened up to all removing its ‘protected’ status for those with no prior qualifications
- ❖ 25/4 rule (which granted extra bonus in Högskoleprovet) removed
- ❖ From 2006 changes to entry conditions potentially limiting access for some (Nylund, 2012)



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# School reforms from the 1990s



- ❖ ‘Loosening the grip of the state’ (Lundahl, 2002) with emphasis on parental power and choice of schools
- ❖ Free schools introduced
- ❖ Vocational education courses increased to 3 years (from 2) in response to poor outcomes for some young people
- ❖ Reform of 1991 had a mixed message – loosening state control and focus on individual choice whilst strengthening the academic aspect of vocational education to avoid ‘dead ends’ (Nylund, 2012)





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# 'Breddad rekrytering' Widening access – new focus



- ❖ Since 2001 – student population should reflect general population
- ❖ Resources provided to support institutions
- ❖ Institutions required to develop a a plan to widen access and report on this (2002 to 2010) – 2 evaluations showed mixed success
- ❖ Universitets och Högskolerådet (Swedish Council for Higher Education) formed in 2013 and commissioned to document and analyse widening access measures at institutional level – reported in 2016
- ❖ Parental level of education: HE or non-HE is now used as measure – widening access focused on those from non-HE background (as the rest of Europe)



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# UHR's recommendations to institutions



That institutions:

- ❖ develop strategy for widening access and participation
- ❖ develop methods to gather data on their student populations
- ❖ demonstrate how they intend to achieve goals identified in strategy
- ❖ show how they plan to support underrepresented groups prior to entry, during course and on entry to labour market
- ❖ indicate how they intend to use alternative selection tools (e.g. assessment of prior learning)
- ❖ demonstrate how they follow-up on students after labour market entry

Finally to support the institutions – that they (UHR) be given the task of monitoring widening access progress in the institutions

Very similar to outcome agreements but without legal backing



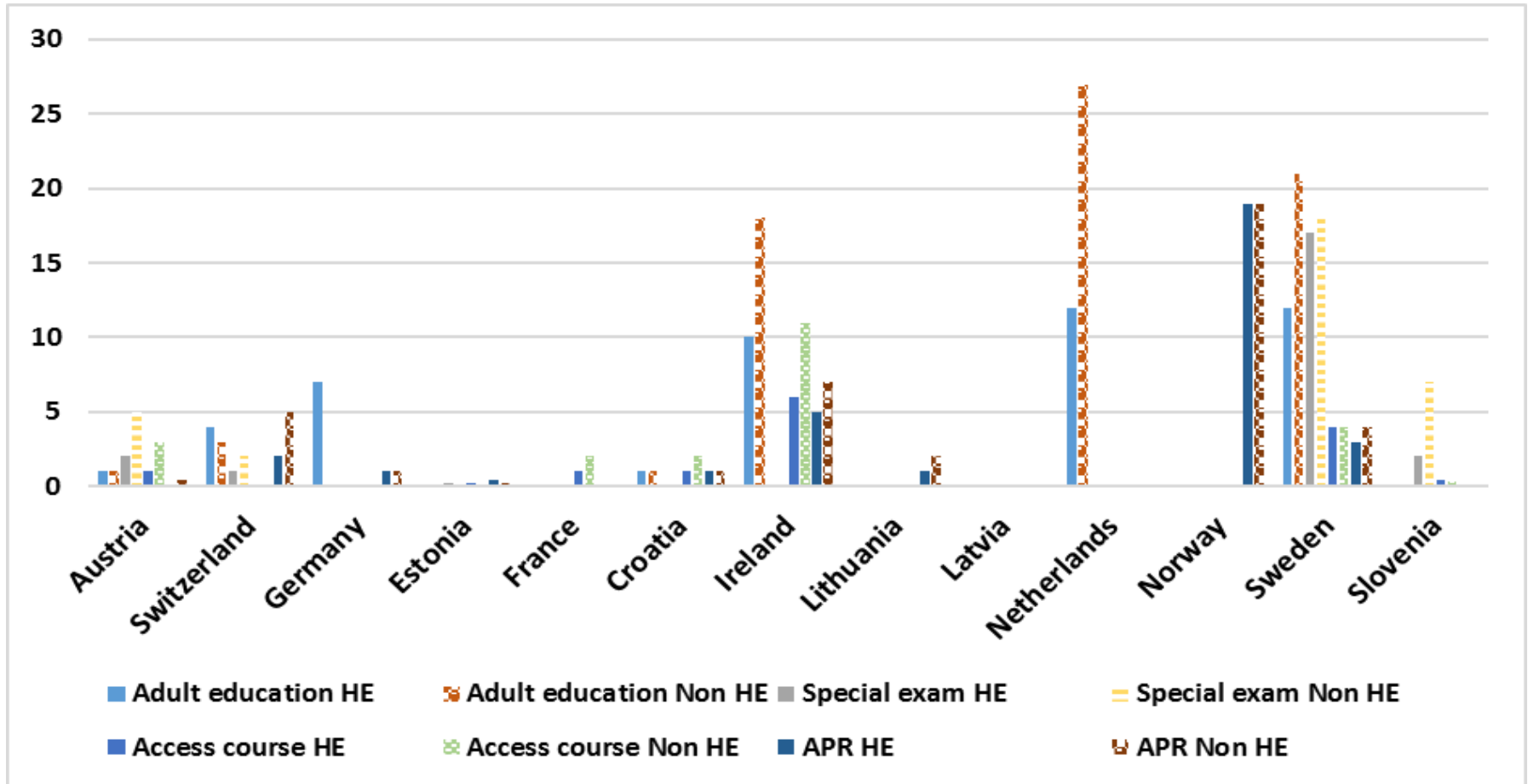
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# Summary so far

- ❖ 1960s and 70s educational reforms were top-down with great focus on equality and removing social class differences
- ❖ Access routes to HE were introduced for those lacking formal qualifications and adult education strengthened
- ❖ Reforms from the 1990s focused on decentralisation and individual choice and access routes not preserved for those lacking in formal qualifications
- ❖ Adult education opportunities reduced
- ❖ Concerns over widening access (re)emerged in the 2000s culminating in report of 2016 but focus still on institutions and removal of 'protected' alternative routes not discussed ...
- ❖ BUT in comparison to others in Europe Sweden is doing relatively well ...

# Eurostudent survey V: alternative routes to higher education (Hauschildt, et al 2015)





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# Routes of access to HE

(Orr and Hovdhaugen, 2014 from Eurostudent Survey IV)



	All students	Students from low HE background
Upper secondary school diploma (Gymnasieskolan)	71.5%	58.8%
<b>Adult education at upper secondary level (Kommunal vuxenutbildning)</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>27%</b>
Other education (Annan utbildningsform)	3.8%	2.9%
<b>Work experience (25:4) (Arbetslivserfarenhet)</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>
Recognition of competences (Validering a reell kompetens)	2.5%	2.7%
	100%	100%

# Alternative routes of entry Eurostudent V – changes emerging

	Students with high HE background	Students with low HE background
<b>Adult education at upper secondary level (Kommunal vuxenutbildning)</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Special exam for certain groups of students	17%	18%
Special access course (basårskurs)	4%	4%
Accreditation of prior learning and or vocational learning	3%	4%



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# Conclusion

- ❖ Sweden has been at the forefront of opening opportunities for non-traditional students but concerns about widening access remain based on data showing lack of progress in last two decades; stratification in access similar to the UK and other Western European countries
- ❖ Different political ideologies employed somewhat different tactics:
  - ❖ Early social democratic measures provided special entry routes for those lacking relevant qualifications – later social democratic governments have done little to reverse changes made by conservative governments
  - ❖ Neo-liberal policies emphasise choice and open up these routes to all, removed the 25/4 entry route as well as reduced adult education
- ❖ It is not possible to directly compare the two time periods due to data differences – but lack of progress since 2000 suggests that current measures based on neo-liberal ideology are having limited impact and that middle-class concerns of unfair advantage for some have had an impact which limits access for those most disadvantaged