

# Facts on folkbildning in Sweden

A brief overview



Folkbildningsrådet

## Current figures on folkbildning

### Every year, the nine study associations arrange:

- approximately 285,000 study circles with a total of almost 2 million participants,
- approximately 250,000 cultural programmes with almost 15 million participants.

### Every term, 148 folk high schools have:

- approximately 26,500 participants in long-term courses,
- approximately 80,000 participants in short courses.

When the Swedish term **folkbildning** is used in this text, it refers to **the folk high schools and the study associations**, i. e. the organisations that constitute the liberal non-formal and voluntary educational system in Sweden. The term 'folkbildning' is difficult to translate into English. It is sometimes translated as liberal or popular adult education. However the specific conceptual foundation of 'folkbildning' extends beyond the term 'adult education', which is why 'folkbildning' is used in this text as-is.

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# Folkbildning

Every year, several million Swedes gather to participate in Swedish liberal adult education, folkbildning. Writing courses, choir music, languages, environmental issues... study circles and folk high school courses are available in hundreds of different subjects. People want to learn and grow, not just in childhood and adolescence, but throughout life. Swedish folkbildning meets this need – and thereby contributes to quality of life, societal development and growth. But folkbildning also has an intrinsic value because knowledgeable and active citizens constitute the core of a democratic society.

In Sweden's study associations and folk high schools, people meet to discuss and learn together. Life-long, life-spanning and life-enriching learning means that people seek knowledge, continuity and insight throughout life. Peoples' reasons for seeking knowledge and fellowship through folkbildning vary. All of these reasons are meaningful, regardless of whether it is a question of personal development, finding a new job, or simply a desire to learn.

Folkbildning exists for everyone in society, but should primarily reach out to adults with little formal education. Its open climate of discussion, respect for different mindsets and democratic approach lower the thresholds to joining folkbildning's activities. Here, everyone participates on equal terms, but based on different backgrounds.

Study associations and folk high schools provide a rich offering of courses and educational pro-

grammes – everything from study circles where a small group meets a few times in their leisure time, up to multi-year, full-time courses of study at folk high schools. Folkbildning is also Sweden's largest organizer of cultural events, with thousands of concerts, lectures and public debates – nationwide.

## Folkbildning – concepts and pedagogy

Folkbildning's conceptual heritage stretches back more than a century. Folkbildning grew forth in a Sweden where the level of education was low and large groups of the population were excluded from higher education. Folkbildning became the answer to people's longing for knowledge and desire to influence societal development. Still today, a central concept is everyone's right to knowledge and development. A society with small educational divides is a central goal of folkbildning.

Study associations and folk high schools have always been a part of the non-formal education system. The government provides financial support, but folkbildning's organisations are free to shape their own activities based on overall objectives. This freedom is of central importance to understanding the role of folkbildning in Swedish society. Freedom from governmental control and the strong ties to the non-profit sector make folkbildning a force for societal change.

The common concepts of folkbildning are noticeable not least in its practical activities in a dynamic interaction with the participants. Folkbildning has the following characteristics:

- It is always voluntary for the individual to participate in folkbildning.
- The participants have considerable opportunities to influence the content of the activities.
- Folkbildning is characterised by an environment in which learning and social interaction go hand in hand. The circumstances and experiences of every participant are taken into account.
- Folkbildning contributes to strengthening civil society through close co-operation with volunteer organisations, associations and various types of networks.

## Important future missions

Recent years have entailed extensive conceptual work regarding Swedish folkbildning. In the publication *Folkbildning of the future, its role and objectives* (also available at [www.folkbildning.se](http://www.folkbildning.se)), the study associations and folk high schools have formulated a common platform for their future efforts. There is no doubt that folkbildning is facing major challenges in the future.

In *Folkbildning of the future, its role and objectives*, it is made clear that the overall mission of folkbildning is to develop Swedish democracy. A living democracy requires knowledgeable and active citizens. In their own activities, study associations and folk high schools shall be democratic role models – and also contribute to developing arenas and supporting the collective process, where the social interest and democratic involvement of people can be channelled.

A large number of other future missions are also brought up in *Folkbildning of the future, its role and objectives*, such as those in the areas of public health and culture, information technology and pedagogical renewal as well as promoting vibrant local communities, international solidarity and sustainable development.

# Public support for folkbildning

A fundamental reason for public support of folkbildning is that it contributes to democratic development in society. Conditions for the government grant to folkbildning are set forth in the Decree on Government Subsidies to Folkbildning (1991:977), last revised in 2007.

## Decree on Government Subsidies to Folkbildning

### Introductory provisions

**Section 1** In accordance with this decree, government subsidies may be granted to folk high schools, study associations and student organisations within folk high schools.

Matters concerning such subsidies are reviewed by the National Council of Adult Education.

The National Council of Adult Education shall also perform other tasks pursuant to this decree.

### The aims of the government subsidy

**Section 2** The government subsidies to folkbildning shall aim to:

1. support activities that contribute to strengthening and developing democracy,
2. contribute to making it possible for people to influence their life situation and create participa-

- tive involvement in societal development,
3. contribute to levelling educational gaps and raising the level of education and cultural awareness in society, and
  4. contribute to broadening the interest for and increase participation in cultural life.

Activities in the following areas constitute motives for government support to a particularly high degree:

1. the common set of fundamental values; the equal value of all people and equality between the sexes,
2. the challenges of a multicultural society,
3. the demographic challenge,
4. life-long learning,
5. culture,
6. access and opportunities for the disabled, and
7. public health, sustainable development and global justice.

### **The tasks of the National Council of Adult Education**

**Section 3** The National Council of Adult Education shall determine who will be granted subsidies in accordance with this decree and distribute available funds between them.

Every year, the National Council of Adult Education shall submit an annual report and budgetary documentation to the government. In doing so, the Council shall follow the regulations and instructions issued by the government.

The Council shall continuously follow up and

evaluate the activities in relation to the objectives stated in Section 2 and the terms stipulated for payment of government subsidies.

**Section 4** The Council shall submit to the government such factual information regarding the activities and such financial statements as needed for follow-up and evaluation, in accordance with the regulations and instructions issued by the government.

### **Conditions for government subsidies**

**Section 5** The activities shall have the emphasis stated in Section 2 Paragraph 1.

Government subsidies may not be used for activities with a commercial purpose.

### **Special conditions for government subsidies to folk high schools**

**Section 6** A folk high school shall have an accountable board. Two or more folk high schools may share the same board.

General courses, primarily intended for those who lack primary or upper secondary education, shall annually comprise at least 15 per cent of the activities.

Only those who turn 18 years of age during the calendar year the course begins or those over the age of 18 may be accepted to a general course that provides qualifications equivalent to those that can be obtained through the public school system. This notwithstanding, a folk high school may accept to

the course younger students who are attending an individual program in upper secondary school.

**Section 7** Tuition shall be free of charge.

### **Special conditions for government subsidies to study associations**

**Section 8** Study circle activities with joint, plan-run studies shall comprise the basis of the activities.

In every study circle or cultural activity, there shall be a leader who is approved by a local section of a study association.

### **Decisions on government subsidies**

**Section 9** Decisions on government subsidies shall include information regarding the amount of the subsidy, the conditions associated with the subsidy and the rules for disbursement.

### **Subsidy repayment**

**Section 9 a** The Swedish National Council of Adult Education may decide to demand repayment of a government subsidy in part or in whole if:

1. by submitting inaccurate information or through other means, the recipient of the government subsidy has caused the subsidy to be provided in error or in an excessive amount,
2. for any reason other than that stated in 1, the government subsidy has been provided in error or in an excessive amount and the recipient should have realized this,
3. the government subsidy is not used for the purpose for which it was granted, or

4. conditions in the decision on the government subsidy have not been followed.

### **Audit**

**Section 10** The government shall be provided the opportunity to appoint an auditor in the National Council of Adult Education. The National Council of Adult Education shall reimburse the costs of this audit.

### **Appeals**

**Section 11** The National Council of Adult Education's decision in subsidy matters may not be appealed.

## **National Council of Adult Education's distribution of the 2008 government grant**

<b>Study associations</b>	<b>€ 164,151,470</b>
<b>Folk high schools</b>	<b>€ 158,059,350</b>
<b>National Council of Adult Education</b>	
Authoritative tasks	€ 2,515,756
Special government assignments	€ 210,084
<b>National Council of Adult Education, member assignments</b>	
Folkbildning Net	€ 535,714
Folk High School Information Service	€ 744,223
Folk high school in EU and internationally	€ 105,042
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT</b>	<b>€ 326,321,639</b>

## Study associations

There are currently nine study associations to which the National Council of Adult Education distributes folkbildning grants.

In total, the study associations have more than 300 member or cooperating organisations at the national level.

Every study association has its own more or less pronounced profile depending on the popular movements and other organisations that are members of the respective association.

The study circle is the most characteristic form of activity for the study associations. In the study circle, a small group of people gather to learn together. Study circles are conducted in the most varied subjects depending on the participants' desires etc. Each year, approximately 285,000 study circles are arranged throughout the country, with approximately 2 million participants.

Cultural programmes of various kinds comprise the other major branch of activities for the study associations. Approximately 250,000 programmes are arranged every year, with close to 15 million visitors/participants. Lectures are the most popular form of cultural programme.

During 2007, the study associations arranged approximately 55,000 events with 647,000 participants in the activity form of "other group activities".

Study association activities are conducted in all of Sweden's 290 municipalities. Together, the study associations have 370 sections that carry out the external activities with study circles, cultural

programmes and other group activities - in part for the public, and in part for the members of the respective study association's member organisations.

## Subject distribution of the study circles

In total, approximately 285,000 study circles were arranged in 2007.

The aesthetic subject area of art, music and media is dominant, with 60 per cent of circle activities, as counted in study hours. Within this subject area, music, theatre and dance activities are dominant with a total of 660,000 participants.

The studies in the area of the humanities (languages, history...) accounted for approximately 14 per cent of the study hours while the area of social and behavioural science accounts for 6 per cent.

Personal services (which covers cooking, tourism, travel, preventative healthcare, sports, consumer science, etc.) and agriculture, gardening, forestry and fishing were other subject areas with considerable participation.

## Collective activities of the study associations 2007

### Study circle activities

	<b>Circles</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2007</b>	283,500	2,020,900	839,900	1,181,000
<b>2006</b>	263,800	2,010,800	808,600	1,202,200

### Other group activities

	<b>Events</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2007</b>	54,800	647,200	223,800	423,400
<b>2006</b>	42,400	486,600	174,600	312,000

### Cultural programmes

	<b>Events</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2007</b>	251,600	14,969,900	6,803,400	8,166,600
<b>2006</b>	239,500	14,298,800	7,073,500	7,225,200

Considering that a large group of the participants study in several different circles, it is estimated that approximately 1.25 million people have participated in study circle activities in 2007. Beyond the government subsidy financed activities, the study associations also provide training on assignment.

## Folk high schools

There are currently 148 folk high schools throughout Sweden. The folk high school is a form of study for adults, with a minimum age of 18 years for the general courses. The schools normally provide priority to applicants with little prior education.

The freedom of the folk high schools to formulate their courses based on the school's special emphasis and profile provides considerable opportunities for the course participants to influence the focus and content of the studies based on prior knowledge, interests and needs.

It is characteristic of the education at folk high schools that one often works with thematic studies and project work. Here, the participants' experience from work and social life is a major asset to the work.

The folk high schools have courses on various levels with various emphases. The long-term courses last from 1–3 years. All tuition is free of charge and national student aid is available.

General courses that can qualify for university studies are an important part of the activities and are offered at all folk high schools. The folk high schools have approximately 13,000 participants in general courses every term.

The folk high schools also offer many special courses, such as those in music, media, craftsmanship, theatre, languages, preventative healthcare and tourism, where a large part of study time is devoted to the selected subject area. Some of these courses are vocational. Examples include training

## Folk high school activities within the 2007 government grant

Course type	Participants		Women		Men	
	Spring 2007	Autumn 2007	Spring 2007	Autumn 2007	Spring 2007	Autumn 2007
General course	12,800	12,700	8,000	8,100	4,700	4,600
Special courses	13,300	14,100	9,000	9,400	4,300	4,600
Supplemental ed.	100	100	100	100	0	0
<b>Long-term courses</b>	<b>26,200</b>	<b>26,900</b>	<b>17,100</b>	<b>17,600</b>	<b>9,000</b>	<b>9,200</b>
<b>Short courses</b>	<b>75,600</b>	<b>85,000</b>	<b>43,300</b>	<b>48,700</b>	<b>32,300</b>	<b>36,300</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>101,800</b>	<b>111,900</b>	<b>60,400</b>	<b>66,300</b>	<b>41,300</b>	<b>45,500</b>
Cultural programmes	121,500	119,700	70,800	69,100	50,700	50,600

to become a youth recreation leader, drama pedagogue, journalist, cantor or treatment assistant. There are slightly more than 13,500 participants in the special courses every term.

The folk high schools also have approximately 80,000 participants per term in short courses of various kinds.

## Evaluation and quality work

Folkbildning is largely financed through joint tax funding, where the government sets forth overall objectives for the activities. The freedom from detailed control entails a major responsibility. Study associations and folk high schools must themselves analyse needs and carry out activities based on the government's objectives.

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education, which distributes the government grants to folkbildning, is charged by the government with following up and evaluating the activities in folk high schools and study associations. This task has been made more stringent in recent years, which has brought about intensified efforts, both with regard to own evaluations and requirements on internal quality and follow-up efforts in folkbildning organisations.

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education's evaluation activities primarily focus on the folkbildning activity's nature and effects, on individual participants and on society in general. The National Council of Adult Education conducts extensive participant surveys with participants in the study associations' study circle activities. Furthermore, evaluations are done concerning special areas, such as the possibilities for the disabled to participate in folkbildning activities, the conditions of the study circle leaders and distance training. The majority of the evaluations are conducted in cooperation with universities.

# National Council of Adult Education

The Swedish National Council of Adult Education is a non-profit association with certain authoritative tasks delegated by the government and the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament). The Council distributes government grants to study associations and folk high schools, submits budgetary documentation and annual reports to the government and follows up and evaluates folkbildning activities. The Council also works with certain assignments from the members.

The National Council of Adult Education has three members: The Swedish National Federation of Study Associations, the Interest Organisation for Popular Movement Folk High Schools (RIO) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL).

The National Council of Adult Education's office is located in Stockholm, at which some twenty people are employed.

## Organisation of the National Council of Adult Education

**The Representative Body**, the highest decision-making body, which meets twice annually.

**The Council Board**, which is appointed for two years at a time.

**The Office of the National Council of Adult Education**, of which the Folkbildning Net, the Folk High School Information Service (FIN) as well as Folk high school in EU and internationally are also a part.

## Folkbildning Net

On behalf of its members, the Council is responsible for the central operation and development of Folkbildning Net. The Folkbildning Net is a meeting place for folkbildning practitioners where they can meet in digital conferences and find pedagogical resources on the Internet for their studies.

It is also used as a resource for international projects tied to folk high schools and study associations as well as for some joint European projects regarding adult pedagogy. Folkbildning Net can be found at: [www.folkbildning.net](http://www.folkbildning.net).

## Folk High School Information Service, FIN

The National Council of Adult Education has been given the special assignment by the members RIO and SKL to be responsible for the central information efforts regarding the folk high schools' course offering through the Folk High School Information Service, FIN.

FIN's objectives are to increase knowledge in society about the folk high school as a form of study and to provide overall information about

folk high schools to prospective course participants and conveyers of information.

The information about the 148 folk high schools is presented on [www.folkhogskola.nu](http://www.folkhogskola.nu). FIN also produces and distributes course catalogues and other information material about folk high schools as well as information and guidance about folk high school studies.

## Folk High School in the EU and internationally

RIO and SKL have also commissioned the Swedish National Council of Adult Education to conduct folkbildning policy and information work with an EU and international perspective based on the needs of the folk high schools.

## Links

More information is available on the Internet:

- **The Swedish National Council of Adult Education**, with information about folkbildning in general, including information in English and other languages.  
**[www.folkbildning.se](http://www.folkbildning.se)**
- **Folk High School Information Service (FIN)**, with the course offerings of all folk high schools and links to the respective folk high schools.  
**[www.folkhogskola.nu](http://www.folkhogskola.nu)**
- **Folkbildning Net**, a meeting place for folkbildning practitioners where they can meet in digital conferences.  
**[www.folkbildning.net](http://www.folkbildning.net)**
- **Folkbildning Net's pedagogical resources**, with links to websites, articles, study materials, project descriptions, multimedia, etc. within life-long learning.  
**[www.resurs.folkbildning.net](http://www.resurs.folkbildning.net)**.
- **Swedish National Federation of Study Associations**, an interest association for the study associations, with links to the respective study associations.  
**[www.studieforbunden.se](http://www.studieforbunden.se)**

- **Interest Organisation for Popular Movement Folk High Schools (RIO)** which represents the folk high schools operated by popular movements and other organisations.  
**[www.rorelsefolkhogskolor.se](http://www.rorelsefolkhogskolor.se)**
- **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL)**, operators' association for the folk high schools operated by county councils or regions.  
**[www.skl.se](http://www.skl.se)**
- **Mimer**, National program for folkbildning research.  
**[www.liu.se/mimer](http://www.liu.se/mimer)**

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