

# Facts on folkbildning in Sweden

A brief overview



Folkbildningsrådet

## Current figures on folkbildning

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

- approximately 279,000 study circles with a total of almost 1,8 million participants;
- approximately 314,500 cultural programmes with almost 16,5 million participants.

### Every term, 150 folk high schools have:

- approximately 28,000 participants in long-term courses;
- approximately 57,000 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**.

**Folk** means people and **bildning** means learning. Put them together and you get the word **folkbildning**, the Swedish form of non-formal adult education or liberal adult education. It refers to the folk high schools and the study associations. In Sweden we define bildning as an opportunity to learn for the sake of learning itself. What matters is the desire to learn rather than demands set by others.

Learning is a lifelong process on your own responsibility and on your own initiative. It encompasses so much more than learning in the formal education system, which only covers certain periods of our lives.

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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

The Swedish folkbildning organisations have initiated a broad debate on the future role and tasks of folkbildning. This work involves a revision of the previous common policy document *Folkbildning of the future, its role and objectives* from 2004, which was the result of extensive consultation between folk high schools and study associations.

In the process of drafting a new common policy document, *Folkbildning's choice of direction and intentions*, it has been important to identify important changes in folkbildning's surroundings and how they affect the future challenges that folkbildning faces. A strategic, forward-looking endeavour in which folk high schools and study associations independently formulate their role in Swedish society and a global context can contribute to greater confidence and support from the State and municipalities and, not least, the Swedish people.

## 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 2011 government grant**

<b>Study associations</b>	<b>€ 174,760,392</b>
<b>Folk high schools</b>	<b>€ 168,190,570</b>
<b>National Council of Adult Education</b>	
Authoritative tasks	€ 2,678,913
Flexible Learning	€ 903,602
<b>National Council of Adult Education, member assignments</b>	
Folkbildning Net	€ 568,738
Folk High School Information Service	€ 776,034
Folkbildning – Learning for Active Citizenship	€ 106,306
Folk High School Council of Student Rights	€ 106,306
<hr/> <b>TOTAL AMOUNT</b>	<hr/> <b>€ 348,090,861</b>

## Study associations

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

In total, the study associations have more than 372 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 279,000 study circles are arranged throughout the country, with approximately 1,8 million participants.

Cultural programmes of various kinds comprise the other major branch of activities for the study associations. Approximately 314,500 programmes are arranged every year, with close to 16,5 million visitors/participants. Lectures are the most popular form of cultural programme.

During 2010, the study associations arranged approximately 62,000 events with 732,000 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 333 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 279,000 study circles were arranged in 2010.

The aesthetic subject area of art, music and media is dominant, with 61 per cent of circle activities, as counted in study hours. Within this subject area, music, theatre and dance activities are dominant with 45 per cent of study hours.

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 2010

### Study circle activities

	<b>Circles</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2010</b>	279,100	1,809,300	783,000	1,026,300
<b>2009</b>	281,500	1,890,300	810,800	1,079,500
<b>2008</b>	275,600	1,909,400	797,200	1,112,200

### Other group activities

	<b>Events</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2010</b>	62,000	731,900	254,100	477,800
<b>2009</b>	63,100	743,200	271,000	472,200
<b>2008</b>	59,900	688,800	242,600	446,200

### Cultural programmes

	<b>Events</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>2010</b>	314,600	16,466,200	7,068,700	9,397,500
<b>2009</b>	310,900	17,079,600	7,439,200	9,640,400
<b>2008</b>	284,600	16,277,900	7,022,800	9,255,100

Some of the participants take part in several different circles. According to the specific reporting of participants 973 407 people have participated in study circle or other group activities in 2010. Beyond the government subsidy financed activities, the study associations also provide training on assignment.

## Folk high schools

There are currently 150 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 12,200 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 2010 government grant

to become a youth recreation leader, drama pedagogue, journalist, cantor or treatment assistant.

There are slightly more than 16,000 participants in the special courses every term. The folk high schools also have approximately 57,000 participants per term in short courses of various kinds.

Beyond the government subsidy financed activities, the folk high schools also provide training on assignment.

Course type	Participants		Women		Men	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
General course	12,360	12,020	8,450	7,260	4,910	4,760
Special courses	15,940	15,830	10,560	10,370	5,380	5,460
Supplemental ed.	90	110	40	70	50	40
<b>Long-term courses</b>	<b>28,390</b>	<b>27,690</b>	<b>18,050</b>	<b>17,700</b>	<b>10,340</b>	<b>10,260</b>
<b>Short courses</b>	<b>56,770</b>	<b>56,700</b>	<b>32,910</b>	<b>32,880</b>	<b>23,860</b>	<b>23,820</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>85,160</b>	<b>84,660</b>	<b>50,960</b>	<b>50,580</b>	<b>34,200</b>	<b>34,080</b>
Cultural programmes	125,270	104,380	72,530	57,950	52,740	46,430



## 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. We have also conducted folk high school participant surveys. 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 Adult Education Association (SAEA), the Interest Organisation for Popular Movement Folk High Schools (RIO) and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). 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 SALAR 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 150 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.

## FOLAC: Folkbildning – Learning for Active Citizenship

FOLAC promotes the interests of the Swedish Folk High Schools on the global, European and Nordic level and stimulates their transnational cooperation. FOLAC is represented in the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) and the Nordic Folk High School Council (NFR).

## The Folk High School of Students Rights

The Folk High School Council of Student Rights (FSR) works to strengthen the students' legal standing at Sweden's folk high schools. This is done on behalf of the members RIO and SALAR through support and information efforts directed at folk high schools and students. Additionally, students at the folk high schools' long-term courses can turn to FSR with complaints regarding a number of issues.

FSR's work is based on the folk high schools voluntarily becoming affiliated by signing an agreement with FSR and developing a student rights standard for their own school. The standard describes the students' rights and obligations in a number of areas. When a complaint is received by FSR, assessments are made based on the school in question's own standard. Students at schools that are not affiliated can also file complaints with FSR.

## 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)**
- **FOLAC: Folkbildning – Learning for Active Citizenship**  
**[www.folac.se](http://www.folac.se)**

- **The Swedish Adult Education Association (SAEA)**, 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.rio-org.se](http://www.rio-org.se)**
- **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)**, 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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