

## **Summary**

### **Fair access – a matter of visions, incentives, and attitudes**

The Special Committee on Recruitment to Higher Education has been working for a three-year period. The mission has been to enhance the engagement, mainly from the Higher Education Institutions, in activities aimed at widening participation. Special emphasis was to be put on joint ventures with schools involved.

The interest has been quite impressive, mainly from universities, but also from schools and adult education institutions. About 600 applications were received during three application rounds, resulting in 100 different projects. The successful applications can be sorted into three categories: raising aspirations before school, bridging courses, and activities providing student-support within higher education institutions. Last thing not least important. If the Higher Education system is unable to meet the needs of a more heterogeneous group of students, the work for widening access will not be reliable.

The different projects have, overall, been successful. However, quite a number of the project directors at the universities indicate that they do not receive any active support from colleagues and managerial bodies, whereas project directors from schools and adult education institutions do. Their message is very clear: incentives are needed if the Higher Education Institutions are to be expected to give priority to long-term recruitment work.

The question of widening access is a complex one, with links to several areas of politics. Our view is that fair access is mainly an issue of class and social background. Ethnic background plays a role, but only in conjunction with the other factors, and is not per se of crucial importance for an individual's choice of higher education.

Referring to our three years experience of widening participation work we suggest:

- The establishment of a centrally organised agency for development within Higher Education that could enhance certain areas (equity, internationalisation, widen participation, pedagogical development etc). In Sweden there is The National Agency for School Improvement, but there is no equivalent for Higher Education.
- That the distribution of funding should include the consequences of a population of students with varying previous knowledge. Such considerations should be included in the ongoing review of the system for funding of higher education. – That regionally adjusted goals for widening participation should be decided at all levels in the education system.
- That the National Agency for Higher Education should follow the development of educational patterns and provide the Higher Education Institutions with locally specified statistics of transfer rates.