

To  
The Commission

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## **Statement from the National Federation of Study Associations regarding the EU budget review**

The National Federation of Study Associations, Folkbildningsförbundet, is the umbrella organisation behind nine adult education associations in Sweden. The position adopted by the Federation regarding the EU budget review is based on the specific role of adult education associations in society, and reflects the citizen's perspective on democracy and learning. The non-formal adult education system in Sweden provides the country with its largest forum for people seeking personal development and improved knowledge. Every year, almost half of Sweden's population meet in various forums to share knowledge, exchange views and discuss opinions.

The EU is facing a number of important challenges and a joint effort will be required to address these. At present, only 20 per cent of the budget is used for joint measures and initiatives, whereas agriculture and regional aid account for almost two-thirds. The view of the National Federation of Study Associations is that a shift in balance is required in order to prepare for the challenges ahead.

The National Federation of Study Associations takes a positive view of the principle expressed in the Treaty of Lisbon describing the EU as a participatory democracy. Active citizenship is a prerequisite for a successful democracy. Non-formal and informal learning are fundamental to the development of active citizenship and help strengthen civil society's organisations and in doing so reinforce the democratic infrastructure for citizens. The role of non-formal adult education is to provide forums for people who are keen to develop and have a say in their lives and the society in which they live. Adult education associations can channel the needs and views of citizens through to political decision-makers and government agencies and they can function as a democratic resource when decision-makers want to inform citizens and hear their opinions. In other words, adult education associations can help bridge the gap between the people and their elected representatives.

**The National Federation of Study Associations recommends that the EU in its budget gives greater priority to the task of developing communication channels between the people and their elected representatives in the EU. In its contacts with the Government, the National Federation of Study Associations has proposed that an adult education conference be held on this theme during the Swedish EU presidency.**

Joint strategies and political measures will be required in areas such as climate, energy, and food and beverages in order to achieve the goals for a sustainable Europe in the long term. But greater knowledge and a change of attitudes among citizens will also be required. One-way public information campaigns will not solve the problem. To bring about a change in behaviour, citizens must be stimulated and motivated to collectively seek knowledge and exchange experiences about the contributions they can make. The study circle is an excellent environment for achieving this.

**In order for the EU to achieve success in important areas such as employment, integration, climate, energy, culture, poverty reduction and education, there should be a shift in the emphasis of the EU's budget, with fewer resources allocated to agricultural aid and more resources allocated to developing knowledge.**

Education will be key for achieving the goal of making the EU a competitive and dynamic region in the global market. The 2008 Status Report regarding implementation of the work programme



“Education and Training 2010” states that “*Adult participation in lifelong learning is no longer on track to achieve the EU benchmark. Greater efforts are still required to raise skill levels in the population and to achieve flexibility and security across the labour market.*” Under the heading Preparing for post-2010, the report states “*Given the crucial role of education and training to the Strategy for Jobs and Growth, they must be closely associated with the future development of the Lisbon process*”.

The emphasis of the current initiatives is on formal learning. The National Federation of Study Associations is convinced that greater efforts in the field of non-formal learning are required if the EU is to succeed in the above-mentioned challenge and motivate people to learn. This is particularly true for marginalised people and those with only limited education. Study circles ensure that many participants have the strength to move on to formal learning and the labour market. Yet lifelong learning is obviously about more than merely economic benefits – it also provides individuals with opportunities for personal development and access to democratic forums.

**The National Federation of Study Associations recommends that the EU allocates more resources to non-formal learning.**

One of the goals stated in the action plan on adult learning *It is always a good time to learn, 2007* is to increase the possibilities for adults to go “one step up” – to achieve a qualification at least one level higher than before. The non-formal adult education movement in Sweden is best poised to reach the adult section of the population. This has been demonstrated by the “Knowledge Boost”, public information campaigns prior to the referendums on the EU and EMU and the adult education associations’ efforts to bridge the digital gap – one of today’s greatest democratic challenges.

A fast and efficient way of addressing the challenge to raise skill levels in the workforce generally, and in particular to upgrade low-skilled workers (80 million in 2006), would be to invest in a European-style Knowledge Boost similar to that carried out in Sweden.

In many countries in Europe, movements corresponding to the Swedish non-formal adult education system enjoy a vaguely official recognition. Sweden (along with other Nordic countries with a long tradition of non-formal learning) can play an active part and be used as a resource by virtue of its long tradition of both non-formal and informal learning.

The Swedish EU presidency would be an appropriate moment for Sweden to make use of its extensive experience and successful track record in non-formal adult education to push for a European-style Knowledge Boost knowledge drive in an aim to get more people into the labour market, raise general skill levels and help ensure that employment and growth targets are met.

**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STUDY ASSOCIATIONS**

Umbrella organisation for non-formal adult education in Sweden

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