Abrahamsson (Kenneth): *Adult Participation in Higher Education: A Study of Organizational Structure, Educational Design and Current Policies*. Stockholm, Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1986, 121 p. SEK 86.00
ISBN 91-22-00-850-0.

The theme of this short book is the increasing adult profile of Swedish higher education during the 1970s. Abrahamsson presents a statistical picture of the changes that have occurred to bring about the present adult majority in Swedish universities and colleges, and relates these changes to policy. His analysis is based on existing sources rather than new research, and is limited by a lack of data in a number of areas.

This analysis forms part of a cross-national study of adults in higher education in eleven developed countries, organized by the Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI). Three of the other national studies have recently been published in a separate volume (Schütze 1987), and this study has itself been summarized before now in an article (Abrahamsson 1984).

As Abrahamsson points out, Swedish higher education has been in a state of almost permanent transition since the early 1960s. Access to universities and colleges was widened in 1969, and shorter vocational courses were introduced in the early 1970s. The 1975 Higher Education Act and the Open Door policy begun in 1977 brought in greater changes. Under this scheme, students could demonstrate their eligibility to enter higher education by satisfying the '25:4' qualification — being 25 years or older in age, and having four years of work experience — as well as by more traditional means. Nevertheless, for some subjects and courses, special entry requirements had to be met as well, so the reforms were not quite as radical as they might at first have seemed.

The introduction of the 25:4 scheme was accompanied by an increased orientation of higher education programmes towards working life. Parallel changes also took place in the adult education system, with new institutions and programmes established, a new system of study finance and improvements in educational leave of absence regulations. Taken together, these measures worked to break down existing divisions in education, placing more emphasis on an all-embracing concept of recurrent education throughout life.

By 1979, those aged 25 and over comprised 62 per cent of all students in Swedish higher education, with those aged 35 and over alone accounting for 23 per cent. However, this represented a continuation of trends going back to the 1950s, now strengthened by policy, rather than a sudden development. In 1970, for example, 43 per cent of students were aged 25 and over, 7 per cent 35 and over; while in 1962 the figures were 40 per cent and 7 per cent respectively.

The impression created by these global figures is, though, rather misleading. Adults are more likely to take single courses rather than complete degree programmes, and this tendency is

reflected in their institutional distribution. Adult students are particularly concentrated in regional and municipal colleges, being a less common component in the universities and advanced colleges. Students under 25 years old remain in the majority on technology courses, and in the administrative, economic and social sector.

The increased importance of adult students has had an effect on study patterns, notably regarding the growth of part-time study. Sweden, like many European countries (but not the United Kingdom), does not recognize part-time study in its general statistics. However, a special survey of arts and science faculties in 1976 showed that 70 per cent of students were studying part-time. This tendency correlated strongly with age, with only 50 per cent of those under 25 studying part-time compared to 80 per cent of those aged 25 or over. Consequently, students' identities are changing:

"Today, Swedish students in higher education have a number of obligations parallel to their studies. Both young and adult students combine higher studies and work. Others have to find their learning strategies in a context of social restrictions and contradictory obligations, ie a limited time budget caused by family, work and other activities. Thus, many of these students have a part-time identity as a student." (p. 72)

Since the reforms of the 1970s, the policy pendulum has moved back to favour younger students more, but adults remain the majority in higher education and recurrent education is still the key concept.

Abrahamsson ends the report by posing a series of questions for further study and evaluation, focusing in particular on the need to understand better who the adult students are and what they want from higher education. I would also be interested to know how adults and younger students interact, and whether the intended closer linking between higher education and working life has had the consequences desired. Two quibbles to end with. First, the book is poorly organized, with no index and much important material split between the text and a series of appendices. Second, statistically — though not in terms of commentary — it adds little to the earlier article.

Malcolm Tight,
Birkbeck College, University of London

REFERENCES

- Abrahamsson, K. (1984), "Does the Adult Majority Create New Patterns of Student Life?: Some Experiences of Swedish Higher Education", *European Journal of Education*, 19, 3, pp. 283-98.
Schütze, H. (ed.) (1987) *Adults in Higher Education: policies and practice in Great Britain and North America*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International.