

# **Non-traditional applicants for higher education**

## **– a study of the 25:4 scheme**

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### **Abstract**

The selection system for higher education in Sweden could be seen as a two-step system. Firstly the eligibility is assessed through varying measures, to secure that students have the ability to take the course or program in question. Secondly, if there are more eligible applicants than study places, a selection process is undertaken based on partly other measures.

The focus of this paper is the first step, the eligibility, and particularly the 25:4 scheme, a measure for eligibility that was introduced to widen access to higher education in the 1970s, and which is now on its way out. The scheme means that an age of 25 and 4 years work experience are the main criteria in an alternative track for basic eligibility. The aim of this exploratory study is to identify characteristics of applicants in the 25:4 group and to compare them to groups of applicants with other types of eligibility from upper secondary school and adult education. What are the characteristics of 25:4 applicants? In what ways do they differ from other applicants?

The analysis is based on a material consisting of data from the admission rounds in 2007 and 2008, the last admission rounds when the 25:4 scheme was still fully useful for potential applicants. The results identify differences and similarities in forms of courses/programmes applied for as well as in background factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic status. The results indicate what influence the 25:4 scheme has had on the admission of traditional and non-traditional students in Swedish higher education.

### **Introduction**

Sweden has a long tradition of an inclusive educational system. The Swedish system provides broad opportunities not only for young people but also for adults. Different initiatives have been taken to give adults a second chance and to provide opportunities for recurrent education and lifelong learning. These opportunities cover all levels of education, including higher education.

In higher education, varying initiatives have been taken to widen admission of what is often called ‘non-traditional’ students. These initiatives have been successful to the extent that these students are no longer non-traditional but mainstream. Totally 50% of the students are over 25 years old – 20% are between 25 and 30 years old, another 20% between 30 and 40, and 10% are over 40 years old. Thus, ‘non-traditional’ students are as common as ‘traditional’ students (traditional in the sense that they have a background of direct transition from upper secondary school) (Ministry of Education, 2004). This ‘success’ in the widening of admission has even been seen as a problem, as it means that younger applicants might have to wait before they are admitted to programmes with a high demand.

The selection system for higher education in Sweden could be seen as a two-step system of eligibility and selection. Firstly the eligibility is assessed through varying measures, to secure that students have the ability to take the course or program in question. There is a requirement of basic eligibility in relation to higher education in general, and requirements of special eligibility in relation to specific courses/programmes. Secondly, if there are more eligible applicants than study places, a selection process is undertaken based on partly other measures. The focus of this paper is the first step, the question of eligibility, and particularly the basic eligibility, but this is also related to the results of the selection process.

There are different ways to qualify for the basic eligibility for higher education. The traditional track is upper secondary school where young people normally study at the age of 16–19. There are other opportunities for adult students, as alternatives or as supplementary to a ‘half’ upper secondary school education. Municipal adult education provides formal education with courses equivalent to upper secondary school. Folk high schools provides non-formal education, where the general course could give eligibility for higher education. Foreign education could also give eligibility for higher education in Sweden.

In the 1970s, the 25:4 scheme (initially 25:5) was introduced as a measure to widen access to higher education, in terms of a different basis for eligibility. The scheme means that an age of 25 and 4 years work experience are the main criteria in this alternative track for basic eligibility. The additional criteria are grades in Swedish and English on upper secondary level. However, this scheme is now on its way out. A policy decision has been taken which means that since July 2008 it is no longer possible to qualify for this type of eligibility, but it is possible for a person who had achieved the 25:4 eligibility by the end of June 2008 to use it until the end of 2011.

When discussing ‘non-traditional’ applicants in this paper, the focus is partly on age, partly on educational background. Based on the interest in the 25:4 scheme, those younger than 25 are in one sense seen as ‘traditional’, even if it is not a matter of direct transition from upper secondary school to higher education. The educational background is defined in terms of the type of basic eligibility for higher education, where upper secondary school is the ‘traditional’ background, and formal adult education, folk high school, and 25:4, are the main types of ‘non-traditional’ background. The latter definition includes those younger than 25 as non-traditional, if they do not have the background from upper secondary school.

Thus, the focus of this paper is the role of the basic eligibility, and particularly the 25:4 scheme, in the application process for higher education. The aim of the exploratory study is to identify characteristics of applicants in the 25:4 group and to compare them to groups of applicants with other types of basic eligibility, particularly from upper secondary school and adult education. What are the characteristics of 25:4 applicants? In what ways do they differ from other applicants?

Eligibility, and particularly the 25:4 scheme, has not been in focus in research on admission to higher education. The implementation of the 25:4 opportunity (initially 25:5, requiring 5 years of work-life experience) in the 1970s was described and analysed by Kim (1982). She describes outcomes in terms of admissions during the early years, and the motives of the scheme. Initially, when the idea turned up, the motive was mainly related to the work life, to provide opportunities for competence development in higher education for employees. However, when the scheme was formally introduced, there had been a shift, and the motives

had a focus on widening access for previously underrepresented group the promotion of 'intergenerational social mobility' (Kim, 1982, p. 44). Kim (1982) also points out a lack of follow-up of the scheme concerning for example 'the social and educational background of 25/5-students e.g. their own social status when entering higher education and the proportion of 'pure' 25/5's' (p. 68). There seems to be such a lack until the present study, which presents the first results of an analysis of the recent outcomes of the scheme. The implementation of the 25:4 scheme was also part of the 1977 admissions reform in Swedish higher education, a reform of the admission system as a whole that has been analysed by Kim (1983, 1998).

The selection process has been more in focus than the question of eligibility. The Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test, SweSAT (see e.g. Wedman, 1994), is of particular interest in the present study, as it was introduced parallel to the 25:4 scheme, as a selection instrument for non-traditional applicants, that is applicants lacking the grades from upper secondary school that normally are used not only to secure eligibility but also as a selection instrument. For example, the influence of gender and socioeconomic background on the SweSAT test results have been analysed (see e.g. Stage, 1990, 1993, 2005). The influence is low for both variables, but somewhat higher concerning gender – in favour of male test takers. Here it should be noted that there are differences also when it comes to grades from upper secondary level, but the differences in grades are in favour of female students. Another example is Cliffordson and Askling (2006), who analyse the influence of different selection instruments on recruitment and achievement in the case of medical education. Comparing grades, SweSAT, and step-wise procedures, they show that step-wise procedures promote study efficiency best but also favour applicants with upper-middle-class and Swedish background. On the other hand, the use of upper secondary grades as selection instrument promotes diversity as well as study efficiency, while the use of SweSAT scores contradict both study efficiency and diversity.

When the removal of the 25:4 was decided, the new way to get basic eligibility outside the school system was an individual assessment of 'real' (actual) competence, that is, it should be decided individually, based on claims provided by the applicant, if s/he has the competence necessary to enter higher education. It has been shown how this new initiative is part of a shift in discourse. In the 1950s, the idea of the 'reserve of talent/ability' was much discussed and promoted, an idea focusing general, individual (egenskaper) as an argument for a broader admission to upper secondary school and higher education. In the 1970s this idea of the reserve of talent was instrumentalised in SweSAT (the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test), as a test similar to an intelligence test. At the same time, the 25:4 scheme also had this general focus, but on experiences in general and independent of contents. However, the later policy initiatives, concerning 'real competence' and recognition (validation) or prior learning is part of a discourse with a focus on specific experiences and particularly competences (Andersson & Fejes, 2005).

### ***Design of the study***

Sweden has a central selection and admission system, where the Swedish Agency for Higher Education Services (Swedish abbreviation, VHS) takes care of most of the admission process for Swedish higher education. Since 2007, the system covers the admission for shorter courses as well as longer programmes. The present analysis is based on a material consisting of data from the admission rounds in 2007 and 2008, that is the last admission rounds when the 25:4 scheme was still fully useful for potential applicants. These data include information concerning eligibility, priority between alternative courses, institution of higher education where the course is situated, length of course in terms of credit points and study pace,

teaching form, and result of the admission/selection process, for the whole population of those who have applied through the system of VHS, and these data have been provided by VHS. The data have been anonymised and made available for analysis by Statistics Sweden, which also has provided supplementary background information on the applicants. In the present study, background data concerning age, gender, socioeconomic background, and foreign/Swedish background are used.

In most cases, data have been transformed into new variables and categories useful for the present analysis. The following variables/categories are used:

- *Gender*. Female and male.
- *Age*. Applicants have been categorised in age groups based on their age by the end of 2007.
- *Socioeconomic background*. The categorisation of socioeconomic background is based in the socioeconomic classification from 1990. The categories in the classification are grouped as follows, based on own and parents' education and employment: upper-middle-class (SOC I), lower-middle-class (SOC II), and working-class (SOC III). In the analysis, the applicant is put in the highest social group registered for father, mother or him/herself.
- *Foreign/Swedish background*. Here, Swedish background means that the person and at least one of the parents were born in Sweden. Foreign background includes persons born abroad, and persons born in Sweden if both parents were born abroad.
- *Eligibility*. When it comes to the variable of basic eligibility, the following categories are used:
  - Upper secondary school (Upsec)
  - Formal adult education (AE)
  - Folk high school (FHS)
  - Foreign grades (Foreign)
  - 25:4 eligibility (25:4)
  - Other pre-education (Other) (mainly eligibility based on prior participation in courses in higher education)
  - More than one eligibility, including 25:4 and Upper secondary school (25:4 + Upsec) (might include more than these two alternatives)
  - More than one eligibility, including 25:4 but not Upper secondary school (25:4 + more, not Upsec)
  - More than one eligibility, not including 25:4 (More than one, not 25:4)
- *Type of higher education institution*. The institutions are categorised as universities, prestigious institutes<sup>1</sup>, or university colleges.
- *Length of course/programme*. Courses/programmes applied for are categorised in groups based on the length in terms of credit points, where 15 credit points should equal 10 weeks of full-time studies.
- *Study pace*. Courses/programmes are categorised based on the study pace, in per cent of full time.
- *Teaching form*. Normal or distance.

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<sup>1</sup> The prestigious institutes are institutes in the areas of technology, economics, medicine, arts etc. There was an ambition to separate between institutes in the areas of on the one hand technology, economics, and medicine, and on the other hand arts, music etc. However, there were very few application in the latter category in the material. Applications in these latter areas are rarely administered through the central system, but through a local process of selection tests etc.

- *Result of selection process.* The final result of the central admission process, here for the first priority in applications. The categories are admitted, substitute, or crossed out.<sup>2</sup>

In the material, some data are missing, depending on the quality of data in different background variables. The analysis mainly applies descriptive statistics to explore the data and illustrate the distribution of applicants on different categories. In addition to this the data are analysed in a logistic regression analysis.

## Results

The results will identify differences and similarities in types of education applied for as well as in background factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic status. Firstly the whole population of applicants from the years 2007–2008 will be described. Secondly, as an example, focus is put on those who applied for the admission round of autumn 2007, the type of courses they have applied for, and the results of the selection process.

### The population of applicants

There are totally 511,032 persons who applied through the system of VHS during the period 2007–2008, including six admission rounds – spring, summer and autumn admission each year. The autumn round is the most encompassing, as most courses and programmes start in the autumn. A high number of courses and programmes also start in the spring term, while the summer term offers a more limited number of shorter courses. The persons in the population of applicants have applied for a study place one or more times during these rounds. All in all, 963,655 applications are registered in the data (table 1).

**Table 1. Number of applicants in different admission rounds.**

Admission round	Number of applications	Percent
Spring 2007	164441	17,1
Summer 2007	28370	2,9
Autumn 2007	276776	28,7
Spring 2008	177027	18,4
Summer 2008	28055	2,9
Autumn 2008	288986	30,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>963655</b>	<b>100,0</b>

It should also be noted that in these applications, each applicant can apply for a number of ranked alternatives. In the case of the autumn 2007 admission round analysed later, the focus is on the first priority among applicants' alternatives.

The background of the population of applicants shows that 64,5% are female, and 15,3% have a foreign background. The age of applicants (table 2) varies from 16 to 91 years. It should be noted that even if the group of 16–24 years old is the biggest group, more than half of the applicants belong to the 'non-traditional' group of 25 years and older, who potentially could

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<sup>2</sup> There is also a local selection process, after the central process is finished. If there are late cancellations of applications, the local university could admit new students among the substitutes. Applications are crossed out for example if the demands on special eligibility are not fulfilled.

have the 25:4 eligibility.<sup>3</sup> However, the educational background in higher education is not included in the present analysis. It is possible to study shorter courses for a longer period to get a degree, which means that a number of applicants already are university students, and their applications are not a matter of entering higher education but to continue studying.

**Table 2. Age group distribution of applicants.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	16-24	234878	46,0	46,4
	25-34	153867	30,1	30,4
	35-44	75355	14,7	14,9
	45-54	32437	6,3	6,4
	55-64	8325	1,6	1,6
	65 and older	1766	,3	,3
	Total	506628	99,1	100,0
Missing	Missing	4404	,9	
<b>Total</b>		511032	100,0	

The socioeconomic background (table 3) shows a distribution where half of the applicants are classified as lower-middle-class, and one fourth each as higher-middle-class and working-class respectively.

**Table 3. Socioeconomic background of applicants.**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	SOC I	120540	23,6	27,4
	SOC II	216317	42,3	49,2
	SOC III	102911	20,1	23,4
	Total	439768	86,1	100,0
Missing	Missing	71264	13,9	
<b>Total</b>		511032	100,0	

As described above, there are a number of different types of eligibility, and one applicant can also have more than one type of eligibility registered. The dominating group is those with an eligibility based on upper secondary school grades (73%). 3,4%, or 17,265 applicants, only have the 25:4 eligibility. However, a large number (14,6%) have more than one type of eligibility, which includes another 13,3% (68,168) who have the 25:4 eligibility. 3,9% only have an eligibility from formal adult education or a folk high school (table 4).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that there are a few persons with 25:4 eligibility in the 16–24 years group, which is a result of an age variable based on age by the end of 2007, i.e. a few persons reached the 25:4 eligibility before the later 2008 admission rounds.

**Table 4. Different types of basic eligibility of applicants.**

Type of eligibility	Frequency	Percent
Upsec	375339	73,4
AE	14027	2,7
FHS	6236	1,2
Foreign	15658	3,1
25:4	17265	3,4
Other	7607	1,5
25:4 + Upsec	62005	12,1
25:4 + more, not Upsec	6163	1,2
More than one, not 25:4	6732	1,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>511032</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The different background variables have been related to the varying types of eligibility. This analysis shows that there are more men than expected among those with only upper secondary school or formal adult education eligibility, while there are more women in all other groups (table 5).

**Table 5. Distribution of female and male applicants on different types of eligibility.**

			Gender		Total
			Female	Male	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	231731	143079	374810
		%	61,8%	38,2%	100,0%
	AE	N	8651	5330	13981
		%	61,9%	38,1%	100,0%
	FHS	N	4013	2187	6200
		%	64,7%	35,3%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	8735	3524	12259
		%	71,3%	28,7%	100,0%
	25:4	N	12137	5029	17166
		%	70,7%	29,3%	100,0%
	Other	N	5143	2396	7539
		%	68,2%	31,8%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	47176	14747	61923
		%	76,2%	23,8%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	4657	1392	6049
		%	77,0%	23,0%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	4769	1932	6701
		%	71,2%	28,8%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	327012	179616	506628
		%	64,5%	35,5%	100,0%

Further, concerning socioeconomic background, the result shows that non-traditional applicants – including those with an eligibility from formal adult education, folk high school, 25:4, or 25:4 combined with some more type of eligibility but not upper secondary school – have a working-class background to a higher extent than the other groups of applicants (table 6).

**Table 6. Socioeconomic background of applicants with different types of eligibility.**

			Socioeconomic background			Total
			SOC I	SOC II	SOC III	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	95307	161856	76688	333851
		%	28,5%	48,5%	23,0%	100,0%
	AE	N	2383	4661	3340	10384
		%	22,9%	44,9%	32,2%	100,0%
	FHS	N	1053	2220	1522	4795
		%	22,0%	46,3%	31,7%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	1285	1279	530	3094
		%	41,5%	41,3%	17,1%	100,0%
	25:4	N	2407	6837	4266	13510
		%	17,8%	50,6%	31,6%	100,0%
	Other	N	1847	2962	1197	6006
		%	30,8%	49,3%	19,9%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	14249	31996	12617	58862
		%	24,2%	54,4%	21,4%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	560	1779	1367	3706
		%	15,1%	48,0%	36,9%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	1449	2727	1384	5560
		%	26,1%	49,0%	24,9%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	120540	216317	102911	439768
		%	27,4%	49,2%	23,4%	100,0%

We can also see that applicants with a foreign background have attended Swedish upper secondary school to a lower degree than those with a Swedish background, and therefore could be seen as non-traditional applicants in that sense (table 7). This probably reflects the fact that quite many of them have come to Sweden as adults. Nevertheless, upper secondary school is the most common type of eligibility even among those with a foreign background.

When we see how applicants with varying types of eligibility are distributed on different age groups (table 8), we can see that non-traditional types of eligibility, i.e. not upper secondary school, are more common in the non-traditional age group of 25+. This is of course the fact concerning 25:4, which requires an age of 25. However, what could particularly be noted is that eligibility from formal adult education or folk high school is more common in the age group 25–34, while the 25:4 eligibility is more common in the age group 35–44.

**Table 7. Foreign/Swedish of applicants with different types of eligibility.**

			Foreign/Swedish		Total
			Foreign background	Swedish background	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	46876	325406	372282
		%	12,6%	87,4%	100,0%
	AE	N	4022	9886	13908
		%	28,9%	71,1%	100,0%
	FHS	N	1429	4744	6173
		%	23,1%	76,9%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	9381	2695	12076
		%	77,7%	22,3%	100,0%
	25:4	N	4590	12494	17084
		%	26,9%	73,1%	100,0%
	Other	N	1851	5619	7470
		%	24,8%	75,2%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	4453	57077	61530
		%	7,2%	92,8%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	2889	3128	6017
		%	48,0%	52,0%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	1333	5330	6663
		%	20,0%	80,0%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	76824	426379	503203
		%	15,3%	84,7%	100,0%

**Table 8. Distribution on age groups of applicants with different types of eligibility.**

			Age group						Total
			16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	221249	109252	28186	11497	3719	907	374810
		%	59,0%	29,1%	7,5%	3,1%	1,0%	,2%	100,0%
	AE	N	4392	6556	2109	814	102	8	13981
		%	31,4%	46,9%	15,1%	5,8%	,7%	,1%	100,0%
	FHS	N	2064	2785	853	407	85	6	6200
		%	33,3%	44,9%	13,8%	6,6%	1,4%	,1%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	4955	4691	1987	534	76	16	12259
		%	40,4%	38,3%	16,2%	4,4%	,6%	,1%	100,0%
	25:4	N	71	3892	6796	4668	1400	339	17166
		%	,4%	22,7%	39,6%	27,2%	8,2%	2,0%	100,0%
	Other	N	189	2576	2437	1653	589	95	7539
		%	2,5%	34,2%	32,3%	21,9%	7,8%	1,3%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	222	19358	28727	11152	2115	349	61923
		%	,4%	31,3%	46,4%	18,0%	3,4%	,6%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	28	1491	2996	1347	167	20	6049
		%	,5%	24,6%	49,5%	22,3%	2,8%	,3%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	1708	3266	1264	365	72	26	6701
		%	25,5%	48,7%	18,9%	5,4%	1,1%	,4%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	234878	153867	75355	32437	8325	1766	506628
		%	46,4%	30,4%	14,9%	6,4%	1,6%	,3%	100,0%

## Applications for autumn 2007

When we look closer at the admission round of autumn 2007, and the first priorities of the applicants, the first focus is what type of institution the applicants want to go to (table 9). The distribution is quite similar between eligibility groups. However, what is evident is that applicants with a 25:4 eligibility applies for courses/programmes in university colleges to a higher degree, and courses/programmes in universities and prestigious institutes to a lower degree, as compared to other groups of applicants. There is a similar, but not that clear-cut, tendency also for applicants with an eligibility from formal adult education, folk high school, or 'other pre-education'.

**Table 9. Type of institution applied to in different eligibility groups.**

			Type of institution			Total
			University	Institute	University college	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	127624	13233	58150	199007
		%	64,1%	6,6%	29,2%	100,0%
	AE	N	4447	497	2749	7693
		%	57,8%	6,5%	35,7%	100,0%
	FHS	N	2080	119	1134	3333
		%	62,4%	3,6%	34,0%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	5494	897	2089	8480
		%	64,8%	10,6%	24,6%	100,0%
	25:4	N	5399	318	4011	9728
		%	55,5%	3,3%	41,2%	100,0%
	Other	N	1139	66	697	1902
		%	59,9%	3,5%	36,6%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	22163	1439	15655	39257
		%	56,5%	3,7%	39,9%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	2242	275	1586	4103
		%	54,6%	6,7%	38,7%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	2071	165	1035	3271
		%	63,3%	5,0%	31,6%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	172659	17009	87106	276774
		%	62,4%	6,1%	31,5%	100,0%

If we look at the length of the course applied for, in terms of credit points, we can see some other interesting differences (table 10). Those with only 25:4 eligibility, or 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, applies for short courses (maximum 15 credit points) to a higher extent than all other groups but one – those with 'other pre-education'. As the main type of 'other pre-education' is eligibility based on prior course studies at university level, this probably means that the group in question mainly consists of 'course students'. Other non-traditional groups do not show this pattern.

**Table 10. Length of course/programme applied for in different eligibility groups.**

			Credit points					Total
			0-15	16-30	31-60	61-180	181-330	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	61039	41787	8947	46013	37139	194925
		%	31,3%	21,4%	4,6%	23,6%	19,1%	100,0%
	AE	N	2075	1770	339	2016	1364	7564
		%	27,4%	23,4%	4,5%	26,7%	18,0%	100,0%
	FHS	N	831	792	175	769	720	3287
		%	25,3%	24,1%	5,3%	23,4%	21,9%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	2126	1830	445	2215	1705	8321
		%	25,5%	22,0%	5,3%	26,6%	20,5%	100,0%
	25:4	N	4284	2434	571	1389	862	9540
		%	44,9%	25,5%	6,0%	14,6%	9,0%	100,0%
	Other	N	974	530	151	173	53	1881
		%	51,8%	28,2%	8,0%	9,2%	2,8%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	17872	8507	2521	6001	3607	38508
		%	46,4%	22,1%	6,5%	15,6%	9,4%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	1385	828	244	928	652	4037
		%	34,3%	20,5%	6,0%	23,0%	16,2%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	958	664	130	680	788	3220
		%	29,8%	20,6%	4,0%	21,1%	24,5%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	91544	59142	13523	60184	46890	271283
		%	33,7%	21,8%	5,0%	22,2%	17,3%	100,0%

An analysis of eligibility in relation to the study pace of courses (table 11) further shows that the groups that choose short courses to a higher degree also are those who apply to courses with a low study pace – maximum 25% of full time studies. That is, these groups apply for short courses with a low study pace to a higher extent than other applicants.

The type of studies applied for is also indicated by the teaching form – either ‘normal’ (on campus) or ‘distance’ studies (table 12). Even here the groups of 25:4, other pre-education, and 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, stand out in terms of a different choice. The difference is that they apply for distance courses to a higher extent than other eligibility groups. Furthermore, it should be noted that the group of applicants with 25:4 combined with something else than upper secondary school also has a comparatively high degree of applications for distance courses and courses with a low study pace – but with the difference that this group does not apply for shorter courses to the same degree as the other groups mentioned above.

**Table 11. Study pace in courses/programmes applied for in different eligibility groups.**

			Study pace				Total
			1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	12272	40607	673	145455	199007
		%	6,2%	20,4%	,3%	73,1%	100,0%
	AE	N	388	1529	30	5746	7693
		%	5,0%	19,9%	,4%	74,7%	100,0%
	FHS	N	201	597	7	2528	3333
		%	6,0%	17,9%	,2%	75,8%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	363	1430	22	6665	8480
		%	4,3%	16,9%	,3%	78,6%	100,0%
	25:4	N	1475	3840	47	4366	9728
		%	15,2%	39,5%	,5%	44,9%	100,0%
	Other	N	383	947	16	556	1902
		%	20,1%	49,8%	,8%	29,2%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	5966	16949	205	16137	39257
		%	15,2%	43,2%	,5%	41,1%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	406	1289	25	2383	4103
		%	9,9%	31,4%	,6%	58,1%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	213	743	9	2306	3271
		%	6,5%	22,7%	,3%	70,5%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N		67931	1034	186142	276774
		%	%	24,5%	,4%	67,3%	100,0%

**Table 12. Teaching form of course/programmes applied for in different eligibility groups.**

			Teaching form		Total
			Normal	Distance	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	168343	30664	199007
		%	84,6%	15,4%	100,0%
	AE	N	6316	1377	7693
		%	82,1%	17,9%	100,0%
	FHS	N	2749	584	3333
		%	82,5%	17,5%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	7353	1127	8480
		%	86,7%	13,3%	100,0%
	25:4	N	5938	3790	9728
		%	61,0%	39,0%	100,0%
	Other	N	1062	840	1902
		%	55,8%	44,2%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	23442	15815	39257
		%	59,7%	40,3%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	2746	1357	4103
		%	66,9%	33,1%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	2607	664	3271
		%	79,7%	20,3%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	220556	56218	276774
		%	79,7%	20,3%	100,0%

The data also include the result of the admission process, and in this study we focus on the result concerning the first priority. Here we can see that those with 25:4, or 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, are admitted to a higher extent than other eligibility groups (table 13). A reasonable interpretation of this, based on the results concerning course length, study pace, and teaching form, is that these groups apply for courses where it is comparably easy to be admitted, as compared to groups that prefer longer courses/programmes and a higher study pace.

**Table 13. Result of selection process in different eligibility groups.**

			Result			Total
			Admitted	Substitute	Crossed out	
Eligibility	Upsec	N	104960	21239	72808	199007
		%	52,7%	10,7%	36,6%	100,0%
	AE	N	3800	848	3045	7693
		%	49,4%	11,0%	39,6%	100,0%
	FHS	N	1497	491	1345	3333
		%	44,9%	14,7%	40,4%	100,0%
	Foreign	N	4215	822	3443	8480
		%	49,7%	9,7%	40,6%	100,0%
	25:4	N	5511	967	3250	9728
		%	56,7%	9,9%	33,4%	100,0%
	Other	N	893	158	851	1902
		%	47,0%	8,3%	44,7%	100,0%
	25:4 + Upsec	N	22977	4013	12267	39257
		%	58,5%	10,2%	31,2%	100,0%
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	N	2104	651	1348	4103
		%	51,3%	15,9%	32,9%	100,0%
	More than one, not 25:4	N	1471	551	1249	3271
		%	45,0%	16,8%	38,2%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	147428	29740	99606	276774
		%	53,3%	10,7%	36,0%	100,0%

We can also see how the result of the admission process is related to some other background factors. There are very small differences when it comes to social background (table 14).

**Table 14. Result of selection process for applicants with different socioeconomic background.**

			Result			Total
			Admitted	Substitute	Crossed out	
Socioeconomic background	SOC I	N	35993	6684	23473	66150
		%	54,4%	10,1%	35,5%	100,0%
	SOC II	N	63352	11623	41245	116220
		%	54,5%	10,0%	35,5%	100,0%
	SOC III	N	29285	6264	19738	55287
		%	53,0%	11,3%	35,7%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N	128630	24571	84456	237657
		%	54,1%	10,3%	35,5%	100,0%

However, those with a foreign background are admitted to a somewhat lower extent than applicants with a Swedish background (table 15).

**Table 15. Result of selection process for applicants with foreign/Swedish background.**

			Result			Total
			Admitted	Substitute	Crossed out	
Foreign/ Swedish	Foreign background	N %	20556 47,9%	6173 14,4%	16182 37,7%	42911 100,0%
	Swedish background	N %	125673 54,5%	23263 10,1%	81559 35,4%	230495 100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N %	146229 53,5%	29436 10,8%	97741 35,7%	273406 100,0%

The gender differences are also small, but men are admitted to a slightly higher extent than women (table 16).

**Table 16. Result of selection process for female and male applicants.**

			Result			Total
			Admitted	Substitute	Crossed out	
Gender	Female	N %	93022 52,5%	20900 11,8%	63112 35,6%	177034 100,0%
	Male	N %	53765 54,9%	8669 8,9%	35490 36,2%	97924 100,0%
<b>Total</b>		N %	146787 53,4%	29569 10,8%	98602 35,9%	274958 100,0%

The results of different age groups (table 17) show an interesting pattern. The admittance rate is higher for older students than for younger students. This is most likely also related to the type of courses that different age groups apply for.

**Table 17. Result of selection process in different age groups.**

			Result			Total
			Admitted	Substitute	Crossed out	
Age group	16-24	N %	69212 51,1%	16809 12,4%	49317 36,4%	135338 100,0%
		N %	44069 53,9%	7833 9,6%	29876 36,5%	81778 100,0%
	25-34	N %	21123 56,6%	3328 8,9%	12894 34,5%	37345 100,0%
		N %	9175 58,4%	1324 8,4%	5207 33,2%	15706 100,0%
	35-44	N %	2474 64,3%	244 6,3%	1129 29,3%	3847 100,0%
		N %	734 77,8%	31 3,3%	179 19,0%	944 100,0%
	45-54	N %	146787 53,4%	29569 10,8%	98602 35,9%	274958 100,0%
		N %				
	55-64	N %				
		N %				
	65 and older	N %				
		N %				
<b>Total</b>		N %	146787 53,4%	29569 10,8%	98602 35,9%	274958 100,0%

Finally, the results are brought together in a logistic regression analysis (table 18), to identify significant differences when the results are adjusted for the influence of the other variables. The results are in line with what is presented above, but some matters could be noted. This

analysis also shows that applicants from the oldest groups are more likely to be admitted than those in the youngest group – there are significant differences for the age groups 55+, while the groups of age 25–44 show a significantly lower likelihood. There are also significant differences in favour of male applicants, and applicants with a Swedish background. The socioeconomic background, however, shows no significant influence.

**Table 18. Adjusted odds ratios showing the likelihood of applicants being admitted on their first priority.**

		Odds ratio	s.e.	p-value
Age group	16–24	1,000		
	25–34	0,875	(0,01)	***
	35–44	0,950	(0,02)	***
	45–54	1,009	(0,02)	
	55–64	1,187	(0,04)	***
	65 and older	2,171	(0,09)	***
Gender	Female	1,000		
	Male	1,184	(0,01)	***
Foreign/Swedish	Foreign background	1,000		
	Swedish background	1,238	(0,02)	***
Socioeconomic background	SOC I	1,000		
	SOC II	1,010	(0,01)	
	SOC III	1,018	(0,01)	
Eligibility	Upsec	1,000		
	AE	0,949	(0,03)	
	FHS	0,785	(0,04)	***
	Foreign	1,098	(0,05)	
	25:4	1,109	(0,03)	***
	Other	0,693	(0,06)	***
	25:4 + Upsec	1,225	(0,02)	***
	25:4 + more, not Upsec	1,089	(0,04)	
	More than one, not 25:4	0,792	(0,04)	***
Type of institution	University	1,000		
	Institute	0,773	(0,02)	***
	University college	1,261	(0,01)	***
Teaching form	Distance	1,000		
	Normal	1,090	,013	***
Study pace	1–25	1,000		
	26–50	1,103	,018	***
	51–75	0,749	,072	***
	76–100	1,725	,021	***
Credit points	0–15	4,097	,016	***
	16–30	3,674	,015	***
	31–60	1,941	,022	***
	61–180	1,272	,014	***
	181–330	1,000		

\*\*\* p < .001

231,500 of 276,776 applications in the admission round autumn 2007 were included in the analysis.

When it comes to the matter of basic eligibility, we can on the one hand see that there is a significantly higher likelihood to be admitted for applicants with the 25:4 eligibility, and for those with 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, as compared to those with only upper secondary school. Thus, this difference is not only a matter of that they apply for courses where it is easier to be admitted, for example shorter courses. On the other hand, eligibility from a folk high school, from other pre-education, or where two or more types (but not 25:4) are combined, means a significantly lower likelihood to be admitted. There are also significant differences concerning type of institution, teaching form, study pace, and length of course/programme applied for. Not surprisingly, there is a higher likelihood to be admitted to a university college compared to a university, and a lower likelihood to be admitted to a prestigious institute. Thus, the status of the institutions is reflected in the likelihood to be admitted. What could also be noted is the high likelihood to be admitted to a short course, as compared to the longer programmes – the length of course/programme shows the biggest differences in terms of odds ratios.

## **Conclusion**

We can see that a majority of the applicants are non-traditional in the sense that they are 25+ in age. Furthermore, it is not only among applicants that there is a high proportion of more or less old persons. The result shows that the admittance rate is higher for older students than for younger students. Even if this is also related to the type of courses that different age groups apply for, it indicates that there is a high number of older students too. However, the present study does not include an analysis of to what extent the applicants in this ‘cohort’ actually enter higher education and if they continue to study or drop out. These latter factors, and the type and subject contents of courses/programmes, have to be considered to be able to discuss the outcome of the selection process in relation to the ‘risk’ mentioned initially that younger students are not admitted in favour of older groups.

There is a high number of non-traditional applicants, in terms of age. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the traditional background from upper secondary school is the far most common type of basic eligibility. With this said, it is still a fact that basic eligibility based on the 25:4 scheme is the most common ‘non-traditional’ category. 1 of 6 applicants has the 25:4 eligibility, even if it in most cases is combined with some other type of eligibility. Concerning the different types of ‘non-traditional’ eligibility, it could also be noted that the eligibilities from formal adult education and folk high school are more common in the age group of 25–34, while 25:4 is more common in the age group of 35–44. Among the applicants with the 25:4 eligibility we can also see that there are more women than expected.

When we look at the socioeconomic background, the study indicates that applicants with a non-traditional type of eligibility have a working-class background to a higher extent. However, when it comes to the admission rate, the differences are small, and with a small favour to those with a middle-class background, and the socioeconomic background does not show a significant influence.

Analysing the contents of the applications, and focusing of the first priorities, we could see that 25:4 applicants in particular, and other non-traditional applicants to some degree, apply to university colleges rather than universities. Further, those with only 25:4 eligibility, or 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, applies for short courses (maximum 15 credit points) to a higher extent than all other groups but one – those with ‘other pre-education’ – while other non-traditional groups do not show this pattern. The fact is that these groups apply for short courses with a low study pace, and distance courses, to a higher extent than other

applicants. In relation to this pattern, we can also see that those with 25:4 eligibility, or 25:4 combined with upper secondary school, are admitted to a higher extent than those from other eligibility groups. A reasonable interpretation of this, based on the results concerning course length, study pace, and teaching form, could be that these groups apply for courses where it is comparably easy to be admitted, as compared to groups that prefer longer courses/programmes and a higher study pace. However, even the final analysis, where the influence of other variables is adjusted for, shows a higher likelihood for these eligibility groups to be admitted.

Finally, it should be noted that the contents of applications in terms of course subjects was not taken into account in the present analysis. Neither are the second and lower priorities included in the analysis. These factors will be in focus in forthcoming analyses.

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