



Uppsala  
Senioruniversitet



# **Learning in later life for people 50 +**

**EU project “Educational Senior Network”  
funded by Erasmus +**

**Progress report from  
Uppsala Senioruniversitet, Sweden**

**Compiled by Björn Odin, February 2016**



## **Introduction**

EduSenNet is a project funded by the European Union in which research teams from U3A's in six different European countries are working together to develop new and better ways of helping older people (50 +) to meet their learning needs. All the members of the project team at Uppsala Senioruniversitet are themselves active senior learners over 65. For all of us it has been an interesting research oriented educational activity to take part in the survey.

During the first stage we have been working with a survey questionnaire designed to obtain basic information that will make it possible to plan suitable measures and proposals to ensure that many more seniors than those currently engaged in later life educational activities can benefit from educational programmes and other activities regardless of their background, their present living situation and mobility.

The results of the questionnaire, which are presented in this report, throws light upon the needs, restrictions, experiences and opinions of the respondents regarding different types of educational activities and how to be involved in them. The same questions have been put to respondents in all the countries who are partners in this project. Thus it will - in a joint future analysis and report - be possible to describe, discuss and compare differences and similarities in the group of seven Senior Universities/U3A's in Europe.

This national report will also provide basic data that can be useful for further development of the programme at Uppsala Senioruniversitet.

Uppsala in February 2016

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## The Survey

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part (A) provides information about the profiles of those interviewed referring to socio-demographical data: Age; Gender; Level of education; Domestic situation. The second part (B) provides data about the interviewees' relation to and views on further learning/education.

Before distributing the questionnaire we considered various methodological issues regarding the population we were going to address; how to do the sampling and how to address the respondents. We assumed that there would be a difference between people who had decided to live in some sort of specially organized living in special sets of housing such as residential homes (sample A) and people who were not living together with others of the same age in any organized form (sample B).

Both samples were divided into two categories. In **sample A1** we decided to address three groups in the city of Uppsala living in the same sort of residential home for seniors / "seniorboende", Ekeby Hus, Skogsblomman and Örnén which all have certain facilities for seniors as their own restaurant, some health service and other services. These have all existed for several years but are situated in different parts of Uppsala.

In **sample A2** we addressed two other groups in Uppsala with seniors living in modern buildings, specially constructed to suit older people (age over 55) but without any special services although they each have a guestroom and a room for social events. Those two buildings are close to the centre of Uppsala and recently built. "Seniorgården JM Kvarngärdet" and "Seniorgården JM Kungsängen 3".

In **sample B1** we decided to address people living in smaller municipalities 20 – 30 km outside Uppsala but not living in any organised housing form for 50+ people. The municipalities are Heby, Gimo and Östhammar, where the municipalities also have some sort of meeting point/"träffpunkt" for seniors in the municipality centre.

In **sample B2** we also addressed a small group who were meeting to practise linedance, which was organized by a "träffpunkt" for seniors in Uppsala. Those people were also living privately in ordinary housing.

We divided the work among us in the research team after discussing how to address the respondents. We tried to get some sort of personal contact and give information about the survey to all groups both orally and in writing. We produced a small folder/flyer to explain the purpose of the project and the idea behind the survey, which was very useful. We were all met in a positive way by the respondents. In December the team gathered to share experiences and decide upon how to proceed. Björn Odin got the task to compile a report, which we now are happy to be able to present to others.

In total we have 146 respondents. They are divided as follows in the samples:

Sample A1 – 61 persons

A2 – 50 persons

Sample B1 – 28 persons

B2 - 7 persons

The results are mainly presented as percentages (%) of the total number of respondents to each question with comments to most questions often referring to notable differences between samples. Comments by the respondents on some questions are included.

## Results

### Part A (Questions by number in the questionnaire)

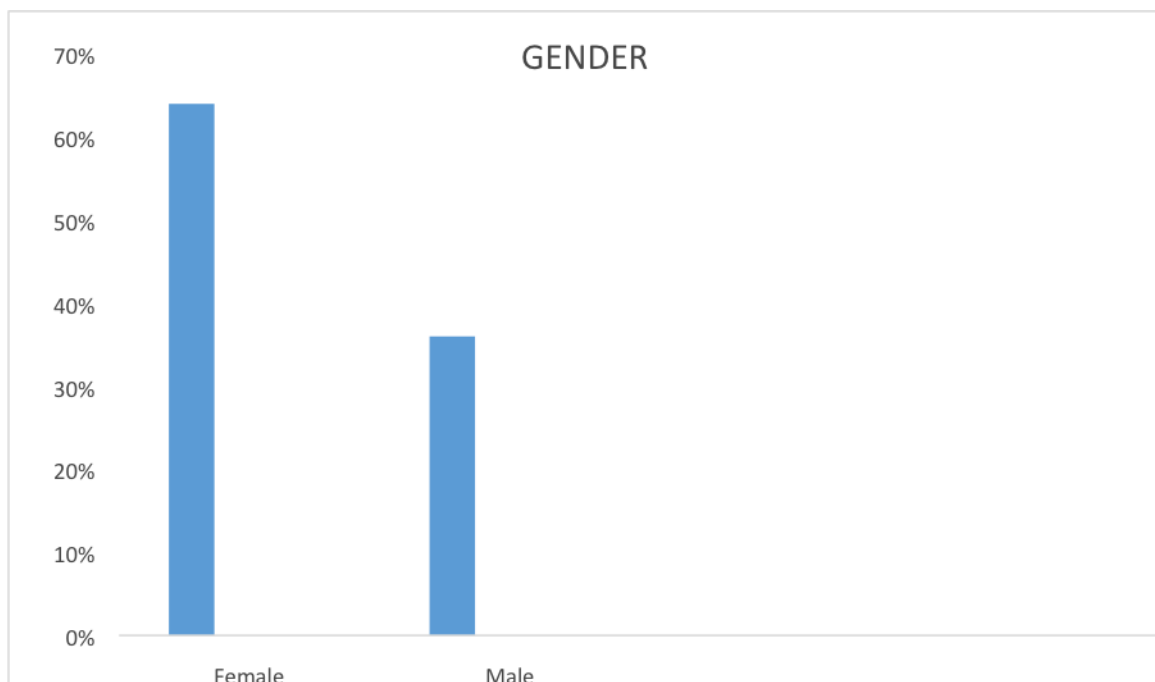
#### 1. Nationality

100% of the respondents are of Swedish nationality but 9% of them are born in another country, mainly Finland, and most of them came to Sweden as child refugees during the Second World War.

” I came to Sweden from Finland as a child.” ”I was born in Estonia”

#### 2. Gender

64% of the respondents are female; 36% are male



#### 3. Age

The age distribution among the respondents:

50 - 60 years old	2%
61 - 70	23%
71 - 80	50%
81 +	25%

In sample A2 people are younger than in the other samples. 6% are between 50 and 60 years of age and 34% are between 61 and 70 years old. Of all the respondent two persons were more than 90 years old.

#### **4. Educational background**

Primary	13%
Secondary	19%
University	65%
Other education	3%

In sample A1 82% had been studying at a university, while in sample B only 30% have studied at a university and many (35%) have primary education as educational background. This tendency becomes even more apparent in sample B1.

#### **5. Place of residence (geographically)**

Town/city	80%
Village/countryside	20%

The sampling itself is also reflected in the answers. In sample B2 some are living in a town and some in the countryside, but all close to Uppsala.

#### **6. Form of residence**

Alone in own apartment/house	10%
With family - ” -	19%
In residential home	68%
Other form of housing	3%

The sampling itself is reflected in the answers.

#### **7. Physical handicap**

Physical handicap or health problems that makes it difficult for the respondents to join learning activities:

Physical/health problems	11%
No physical/health problems	89%

Thus, most people do not have handicap/health problems that seriously constrain them from participating in learning activities. In sample B only 3% have this kind of problem.

”Back pain problems”. ”Doors and staircases”

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## Part B

### 1. Importance of learning.

The percentage of respondents who consider learning in later life important and who are interested in taking part in learning activities is:

Interested in learning	77%
Not interested in learning	23%

The majority of respondents in all the samples are interested in learning in later life and in taking part in learning activities. The positive answers are fewer in sample B (56%). When asked if they are taking active part in learning activities today, 31% said that they were taking active part in such activities.

"It is never too late to learn". "Keeps your intellect alive". "Keeps dementia away".  
"Important to continue to be curious". "It keeps the brain working". "I need courses in how to use a computer". "To be able to learn what I did not learn during my professional life".

### 2. Information about learning activities

Percentage of respondents who find out about learning possibilities through different sources of information:

Friends, family, colleagues	21%
Advertisements	25%
Internet	16%
Newspapers	25%
TV/radio	6%
Others	5%
Do not know	2%

Internet is less frequent in sample B (5%), whereas advertising is more frequent (38%).

### 3. Knowledge about U3A

Percentage of respondents who have some kind of information about any University of the third age:

Have knowledge	77%
No knowledge	23%

Outside the city of Uppsala, in sample B, 65% did not have any knowledge about a U3A. 42% of all respondents had been members of Uppsala Senioruniversitet at an earlier stage and some of them were still members.

#### **4. Other learning activities**

In Sweden there are a number of organizations that organize learning activities. Respondents are mentioning many of them (in Swedish studieförbund: SPF, PRO, Vuxenskolan, ABF, NBV, Medborgarskolan, Bilda) Senior Universities, Aktiva seniorer, Seniorsnet. In the countryside (sample B1) PRO is the most frequently mentioned.

#### **5. Suitable learning activities**

The most common answers are senior organisations like PRO and SPF. Senior University is mentioned as number three in a ranking list.

"It depends on the content – it does not matter who is the organizer". "I do not know".

#### **6. Reasons for taking part in learning activities.**

Percentages of respondents who mention the following reasons:

Getting new knowledge/information	35%
Improved social contacts	24%
Overcoming social isolation	3%
Being more active	13%
Improved quality of life	24%
Other	1%

"A good exercise for the brain" "Using time in an optimal way". "Travelling is important"

#### **7. The role of information and range of learning activities**

Percentage of respondents who think that more information and a wider range of learning activities would persuade them to take part:

Yes, it would	35%
No, it would not	26%
Do not know	39%

#### **8. Subjects of interest**

A long list of different subjects are mentioned. Almost all of them are available in the existing program for Uppsala U3A. On top of the list comes language and literature followed by health, philosophy and religion.

"Lack of political issues"

#### **9. Reasons for not taking part**

Percentage of respondents who mention different reasons/problems for not taking part in learning activities

Personal health problems	12%
Partner's health problems	4%
Lack of spare time	29%
Personal commitments	8%
Distance from venue	7%
Lack of suitable travel facilities	1%
Financial problems	2%
Not enough quality teachers	2%
Nothing	30%
Other	5%

Personal health problems are less frequent in sample A2 (5%). In this sample it is also more frequent to mention lack of spare time. Financial problems is a small problem but when it exists it is in sample B2.

Lack of travel facilities is not a problem but for very few people. It is remarkable that 30% are saying that there is nothing which really prevents them for taking part in learning activities.

"I am sometimes tired and do not have energy enough to go" "Someone has to watch my dog." "I am too lazy". "I am still working 60%". "Bad memory".

## 10. Type of education

Percentages of respondents who prefer different types of education:

Lectures	46%
Seminars	15%
Excursions	7%
Discussions	26%
Exercises, training	5%
Other	1%

Lectures is most popular in all samples, followed by discussions. There are only very small differences between the samples.

## 11. The social aspect

Percentage of respondents who think that the social aspect of learning activities is important:

Social aspect is important	58%
Social aspect is not important	42%

For most people - independent of sample- the social aspect is important, but not as important as is sometimes stressed in the general debate.

"Anonymity is a hinder for learning". The contact between teacher and student is important



## **12. New media**

Percentage of respondents who, either at home or in a groups, want to use new media for learning (e.g. courses on cd, live transmissions of lectures via internet):

Positive to new media 47%

Not positive to new media 53%

Sample A is more positive to new media (52%) than .sample B (31%)

"I cannot handle new technology". "Enough as it is". "If it is going to be difficult to come to the venue". "Independent of weather". "If my eyes were ok". "We need more IT knowledge". "We live in an internet society". "More effective". "For some topics – yes".

## **13. Measures to make it easier**

The respondents were asked to mention what measures they thought might make it easier to take part in learning activities. Here are the answers without any order:

"Better communications". "Better health". "Someone to push me". "More information". "More time". "Access to internet". "Personal contact with someone else who is interested". "It would be good with an open house where the teachers inform you about the different activities." "Lower course fees" "Support for inner motivation". "Information days needed". "Good acoustic situation".