



***Choices and Responsibilities:  
Higher Education in the Knowledge Society***

**Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)**

WIDENING ACCESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH WORKING LIFE

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Dalarna University has doubled its student numbers during the past five years, and now has the highest proportion of students from non-academic backgrounds of Swedish universities (37%). The province of Dalarna combines steel and paper industry in a number of relatively small towns with large areas of sparsely populated countryside. By tradition, people in Dalarna have one of the country's very lowest rates of university-level education and the establishment of the university in 1977 did little to change this situation. This was true up until the late 1990s, when the University began to set up a number of steering councils together with representatives of different areas of working life. The external representatives chair the councils and have in practice a considerable amount of influence on both undergraduate programmes. The first of these, which was set up together with the education authorities in the region, has for example had a major impact on the structure of teacher education, on the types and rates of in-service learning and on the development of the schools themselves, combining research and practice. The Council for Educational Development was followed by similar bodies for the social services, for healthcare and for industry. The paper discusses the opportunities and hazards involved in a university establishing this type of body.

The paper also discusses the collaborative establishment of Learning Centres in the fifteen municipalities of the province and how these have contributed to major increases in tertiary participation, particularly in rural areas. Both these types of development make new demands of staff and university administration.