



# SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

## SWEDEN

### I. Description of the education system

#### 1. Education population and language of instruction

Almost half of the population in Sweden is involved in some form of organised education. In 2002 there were 1,068,000 young people of compulsory education age. Little over 30 per cent of people aged 20-29 years are enrolled in education. The main language of instruction is Swedish. There are also state schools for the Samic population in the north of Sweden, where the basic curriculum and the native language and culture are taught in both Swedish and Samic.

#### 2. Administrative control and extent of public sector funded education

In Sweden, all students attend publicly funded schools. However, 11% of schools, catering for 5% of enrolled students, are private institutions, so called independent schools. Independent compulsory and upper secondary schools are open to everyone, follow the same curricula and receive grants from the municipalities according to the same criteria as the municipality's own schools. There are a few private institutions within tertiary education, of which some receive state subsidies to assist with operational costs.

Education in Sweden is steered by a system of management by objectives. Within the Government, the Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for education and sets the framework for education at all levels, but the municipalities are responsible for providing and operating schools at basic, secondary and adult education level. The universities and university colleges are responsible for providing and operating tertiary education. The national framework consists of laws and ordinances, and for the school area, curricula, objectives and syllabi. In the tertiary education area there are no national curricula, but an appendix to the ordinance stipulates degrees that may be taken in undergraduate tertiary education and their requirements. Some responsibilities, especially regarding monitoring and evaluation of the system, have been delegated to government agencies.

The National Agency for Education is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and supervision of pre-schools, schools and adult education. The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement provides support to schools within nationally prioritised areas.

The National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and supervision and, among other things, the provision of information as well as international contacts in the field of tertiary education.

#### 3. Pre-primary education

The municipalities are required to provide pre-school activity for all children aged 1 to 5 whose parents work or study. This is generally provided in pre-schools, but also by childminders in the minders' own home or in open pre-schools. Municipal pre-school activity is jointly financed by the municipal budget and parental fees, usually income-related.

As from 1 January 2002, a maximum childcare charge was introduced in those municipalities who wish to do so (almost all have chosen to do so). As from 1 January 2003, all children should be offered a place in the pre-school as of the autumn term in the year they become four years old. Pre-school will then be free of charge for 4-5 year olds for three hours a day during the school term. According to newly implemented regulations, children between 1-5 years, whose parents are

unemployed or on parental leave for care of another child, shall have the right to pre-school for at least three hours a day or 15 hours a week.

The municipalities are required to provide pre-school classes for 6-year-olds, normally lasting three hours a day. This is usually organised within a school. The pre-school class is part of the public school system, but the attendance of children is voluntary. Education is free of charge. The regulations for the pre-school class are the same as for compulsory education; the same curriculum applies, but there are no syllabi or timetable for these classes.

2001/02	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5	Age 6 (pre-school class)
Pre-compulsory education	around 2/3	around 3/4	around 3/4	93%

#### 4. Compulsory full-time education

##### (a) Phases

<i>Grundskola</i> (primary and lower secondary education)	Age 6/7-15/16
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Children may begin their schooling at 6 or 7 years of age and must attend for a compulsory period of nine years. In 2001, 4% of six-year-olds attended school.

##### (b) Admission criteria

Admission is governed by parental choice, but over-subscribed schools give priority to pupils living closest. All schools are free of charge.

##### (c) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises at least 178 days between the end of August and early June. Schools are open five days a week. The school decides the length of the school day (which must not exceed eight hours, or six hours in the first two years and is usually less) and the number of hours per week. National regulations specify the minimum number of taught hours over the nine years of compulsory schooling as 6,665 distributed by schools over the nine years.

##### (d) Class size/student grouping

There are no national regulations for class size, which is determined by the municipality and the school. In the first six years, students are mostly taught by the same teacher for all subjects except physical education and health, art, music and crafts. Thereafter there are separate teachers for each subject area, although teachers often work in teams. In the first three years of the *Grundskola*, it is common that staff working in the leisure-time centres also participate in school activities.

##### (e) Curricular control and content

A curricular framework, setting out goals and general principles, is determined at national level. On the basis of the curriculum, each municipality is required to set out the general objectives for its school in a school plan. In addition, every school has to devise a work plan, based on the curriculum and local priorities. Within this framework, teachers and institutions have freedom to determine teaching methods and select teaching materials. The current curricula, introduced in 1995, and updated in 1998 to include also the pre-school class and the leisure-time centres, prescribe compulsory subjects, subject syllabuses and curricular aims. Swedish, English and mathematics occupy a prominent position in compulsory school. Students also study among other things practical arts subjects, social sciences, natural sciences and another foreign language. There is a national valid timetable stating the number of hours per subject over the nine years of the *Grundskola*, but each municipality/school decide themselves on the distribution of hours and in what year a subject is to be introduced, as long as pupils meet the goals set in the curriculum for year five and nine.

##### (f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Continuous assessment is practised throughout compulsory education. National assessment involves tests in Swedish, English and mathematics at the end of the fifth and ninth years (those in the ninth year are compulsory). Grades are awarded as from the eighth school year, and are awarded on a three-point scale: Pass (G), Pass with Distinction (VG) and Pass with Special Distinction (MVG). A *Grundskola* leaving certificate is awarded to students who successfully complete the final year.

Students who do not achieve the goals of a certain subject do not receive a grade in that subject but a written assessment. After leaving school, they can complete their compulsory school certificate by examination or further studies in an individual programme in upper secondary school.

## 5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

### (a) Types of education

<i>Gymnasieskola</i> (upper secondary education)	Age 16-19
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All upper secondary education programmes take place in the *Gymnasieskola*.

### (b) Admission criteria

A compulsory school-leaving certificate qualifies students to apply for the *Gymnasieskola*. However, in order to follow one of the 17 national programmes or specially designed programmes (for students with special interests), students are required to have at least pass grades in Swedish (as a mother tongue or as a second language), English and mathematics. Students who have not achieved this goal may follow an individual programme. Students may in some cases apply to follow a course outside their municipality. The *Gymnasieskola* is free of charge.

### (c) Curricular control and content

Teachers and schools work within the nationally determined curricular framework. There are 17 study programs, 14 of which are vocationally oriented. All national study programmes, as well as the so called 'specially designed programme', provide a broad-based general education and general eligibility for entrance to tertiary education. The common core subjects, which are the same for all national programmes and the specially designed programme, are Swedish/ Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics, religion, civics, science studies, physical education and health and artistic activities. The core subjects take up about a third of the tuition. The remaining time, pupils study programme specific subjects and individual choices. There are also individual programmes for students who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the national and specially designed programmes. The main aim of the individual programme is to qualify students for those programmes.

### (d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Student work is assessed on a continuous basis, with marks awarded for the completion of each course. National tests have been developed in certain subjects. No final examination is taken, but a leaving certificate is awarded on completion of the *Gymnasieskola*. This consists of a summary of the courses in the pupil's study plan and the grades received in the course. After completing their upper secondary education, pupils are entitled to resit examinations to improve their grades.

## 6. Tertiary education

### (a) Types of institution

Tertiary education is provided in universities (*universitet*) and university colleges (*högskola*).

### (b) Access

To be admitted to undergraduate education, applicants must meet the basic eligibility requirements; these are the same for all courses and programmes. They may either have a school-leaving certificate from an upper secondary national programme (at least a pass for 90% of the credits) or work experience. The criteria for work experience are that applicants should be at least 25 years old, have worked for at least four years and have knowledge of Swedish and English corresponding to a completed upper secondary programme. Most courses and programmes also have special requirements that vary depending on the subject or type of course.

If the number of eligible applicants exceeds the number of places available, a selection must be made on the basis of one or more of the following criteria: upper secondary school grades, university standard aptitude test and work experience. Within this generally formulated framework, responsibility for the admission of students rests with the institutions.

Virtually all state or state-subsidised education is free of charge. The student aid system is thus designed to cover student's living costs during the study period, as well as study-related expenses, such as course literature. A fundamental principle is that all students who want help to finance their studies can receive assistance from the central government. The support is a combination of non-repayable grant and a larger repayable loan and may be awarded for full-time and part-time studies.

### (c) Qualifications

There are two kinds of undergraduate degrees; three general and 42 professional degrees. The general degrees are the diploma (two years of study), Bachelor's degree (three years of study), and Master's degree (four years of study alternatively one year of study for students who already have a degree of at least 120 credits). The professional degrees are awarded upon completion of programmes of varying length (from two to five-and-a-half years) leading to specific professions. The requirements and aims for the general and professional degrees are set out in the Degree Ordinance and thus stipulated by the Government.

## 7. Special needs

Students with a physical disability normally attend mainstream schools, except those with hearing disabilities, who usually attend special schools. Pupils with learning disabilities attend special education in the *särskola*, which covers both primary and secondary education. Education takes place in special schools or integrated classes within the compulsory school system. Pupils may also follow classroom education in mainstream schools with special support. In 2002, approximately 0.01 per cent of all primary and secondary school students attended the *särskola* or the special schools for pupils with hearing disabilities.

For tertiary education there is an act in force from March 2002, Act (Law 2001:1286) of Equal Treatment of Students in Higher Education, and a paragraph in the Higher Education Act (Law 1992:1434) stating that the tertiary education institutions have to work in a goal-oriented way to actively support equal rights for students and applicants regardless of sex, ethnic background, sexual affiliation and functional disorders.

## 8. Teachers

To be permanently employed, a teacher must have completed a teacher education programme at a university or a university college. An applicant not fulfilling this requirement can be appointed for a maximum of 12 months at a time. Teachers in municipal schools are employed by the municipality and teachers in independent schools are employed by the school. Decisions on employing teachers are taken at school level. Regulations on working time, salaries and other working conditions are set in the collective agreements, made by the employers and teachers unions. Teachers have individual salaries, which are negotiated by the employer and the teacher (mostly represented by the teacher union) at school level.

In 2001 an integrated teaching degree was established. With the new structure, all future teachers (from pre-primary to upper secondary level) will have a common basic competence, combined with a chosen specialisation in particular subjects/subject areas and/or age groups. The teaching degree comprises a program consisting of a minimum of 140 credits (equals three and a half years of full time studies) and a maximum of 220 credits, depending on the chosen area and education level. It is also possible to obtain a teaching degree by having education and experience in subjects relevant to school and combining them with a special one-year teacher-training course. Teachers in pre-school, pre-school classes, compulsory school and upper secondary school are mainly municipal employees.

Teaching staff at universities and university colleges is grouped into the main categories of professors, lecturers, junior lecturers and research assistants. The employees at public universities and university colleges are national civil servants.

## **II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debate in Education**

An active reform policy has characterised the area of education in the last decade. New curricula and syllabi have been developed for the compulsory school and upper secondary school and the curriculum for compulsory school has been amended to cover also the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre. The pre-school has received its first curriculum. The whole structure of upper secondary school has been reformed. A new teacher education programme has been established. There has been an expansion in the tertiary education area and initiatives have been taken to widen access, especially for non-traditional learners. There has also been a great enforcement in the field of adult education.

### **Quality in Education**

The issue of quality in education is of high priority for the Swedish government. Quality is being enhanced at all levels of the education system, from pre-school, through compulsory and upper secondary education to tertiary education. In spring 2003 the National Agency for Education split into two separate agencies, where one now works with the development of the education system and the other one focuses on monitoring and evaluation. The latter agency shall monitor all schools, municipal as well as independent schools, during a cycle of six years (as in the tertiary education area). Furthermore, municipalities as well as schools will be obliged to present quality reports each year.

### **Review of the Education Act**

Swedish education is steered with a goal and result oriented system. Thus, one of the most important means of governing is the Education Act. Since 1999 a parliamentary commission has had the task of carrying out a review of the Education Act and submitting proposals on i.a. the need to adapt the Act to the changes that have taken place in the education system since the Act was adopted in 1985. The Commission presented its report on 16 December 2002 and its proposals are currently being prepared within the Ministry of Education and Science. The report has been circulated for official comment and proposals on a new Education Act is expected to be submitted to the Riksdag in 2004.

The Commission on the Education Act proposes a new Education Act with some common provisions for all education, from pre-school to adult education, independently of whether the principal organiser is public or private. This involves comprehensive deregulation of municipal schools. The responsibility of the school head for pedagogical work is given prominence, whilst a number of administrative provisions will disappear. The Commission proposes that only qualified teachers should be permitted to award grades, and that the grade may also be re-assessed by another teacher. Pupils' need for support should be examined and certain decisions on such matters may be appealed. It is proposed that the National Agency for Education should have greater powers to impose sanctions on municipal schools as well.

### **Compulsory Education**

In the autumn of 2000 a pilot project with local timetables started. A selection of municipalities, including about 900 schools, has been allowed to design their own timetables in order to create a more flexible organisation and to meet the needs of every pupil. A mid-time review of the project was in 2003, and a final evaluation is due in 2005. The government has initiated a pilot project which makes it possible for municipalities to arrange education in English in compulsory school. The project runs from August 2003 to June 2007.

### **Upper Secondary Education**

A Parliamentary Commission, the Commission on Upper Secondary School 2000, presented their report in January 2003. The proposal is currently being prepared within the Ministry of Education and Science.

The Commission on the Upper Secondary School proposed a new structure for upper secondary education, where there would be eight sectors, each individually representing a broad field of the labour market, intended to replace existing programmes. Each of these sectors would have a broad focus, and thereafter be followed by increasing specialisation. Each of the sectors would be organised into at least five parts, a block sector, an orientation block, an in-depth block, pupils' individual options, and also project work. The blocks consist of courses. As today all pupils would study the core subjects. The proposal is that these should be the same as today, with the addition of a course in

history. Project work would be carried out independently and planning would start in the second study year and be carried out in connection with the area which pupils choose for their in-depth studies. The Commission also proposed that municipalities should be obliged to ensure that pupils get a place in their chosen sector, and also that the home municipality should be obliged to pay for upper secondary education which the pupil may choose to study in a different municipality.

### **Tertiary Education**

Undergraduate tertiary education is expanding significantly in Sweden. From the early 1990s the number of study places has doubled. There are two reasons for this expansion: a will to meet the increased demand for tertiary education and a will to meet the needs of industry and society. Industry especially has underlined the need for more graduate students in the areas of technology and science. Therefore, the main emphasis of the expansion has been put on these areas.

Alongside the expansion of undergraduate student places, efforts are made to broaden recruitment and to encourage new groups to obtain a tertiary education. In September 2001 the Government Bill *Reforms in Higher Education – a more open system* was presented, proposing new instruments and new funding to stimulate universities to work more actively to broaden their recruitment. A Network University has been established, which offers academic courses and degrees by means of distance education. A new master's degree has also been introduced, aimed at students who wish to widen their competence, possibly into a new field, rather than to specialise further within one area of study. The new master's course covers 40 credit points, and is open to people who already have a degree comprising at least 120 credit points. The degree will be an important element of lifelong learning by making it attractive for those in employment to return to tertiary educational studies.

In the light of developments at both national and international level, particularly the Bologna process, the Government has appointed a project group to review certain issues relating to university degrees. Issues to be addressed are: the level to which the master's degree belongs; the need to establish principles for introducing and eliminating professional degrees and the adaptation of the Swedish credit system and grading scale to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). An interim report was submitted in March 2003, and the final report will be submitted by 29 February 2004.

The Government has commissioned a review of the admission requirements to undergraduate education. The purpose of the revision is to increase the number of students who choose to study at higher education level and broaden the recruitment to universities and university colleges. The report will be presented during the spring 2004.

### **Adult Education**

Beginning in 2003 a new system of adult study support – Adult Education Recruitment Grants – was brought in to replace the special education allowance (abolished in 2002). People over the age of 25 who have relatively little previous education, who either are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed or who have functional disabilities may be awarded support. The recruitment grant is a grant and contains no loan element. The grant is either SEK 1 694 or 2 076 per week.

The Government has appointed a delegation for validation. The delegation will promote and support new methods and systems for validation during the period 2004-2007.

### **Teacher education**

In the tertiary education field, a new initiative has been taken to promote pedagogical renewal. In universities and university colleges it is now obligatory for applicants seeking permanent senior or junior lecturer posts to have undergone teacher training for tertiary education or to have acquired the equivalent skills in another way. Training in tertiary education teaching methods is required of post-graduate student in teaching posts.

*Unrevised English*

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