



SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

SWEDEN

I. Description of education system

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 1997, approximately 66% of the population aged 29 and under were in education and there were 980 000 young people of compulsory education age. The main language of instruction is Swedish. However, there are state schools for the Samic population where the basic curriculum and the native language and culture are taught in both Swedish and the minority language.

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

In 1995, all students attended publicly funded schools, 7% of which were private institutions. Independent compulsory and upper secondary schools should be open to everyone and receive grants from the local authorities (if the school has been approved) according to the same criteria as the municipality's own schools.

There are a few private institutions within higher education, of which some receive state subsidies to assist with operational costs.

The Ministry of Education and Science has overall responsibility for education but some responsibilities, especially regarding monitoring and evaluation of the system, have been delegated to government agencies. Local authorities are responsible for providing and operating schools within a national framework of curricula, objectives and guidelines.

The National Agency for Education is responsible for monitoring development in Swedish schools. A system with state education inspectors, appointed one year at a time, has recently been introduced in order to supervise the quality of education and promote the development of local quality work.

The National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for evaluation, follow-up and supervision and, among other things, the provision of information as well as international contacts in the field of higher 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. The municipalities are required to provide pre-school classes for 6-year-olds, normally lasting three hours a day, in a school or a pre-school. The pre-school class is part of the state 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 classes.

| 1998 | Age 3 | Age 4 | Age 5 | Age 6 |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pre-compulsory education | 64% | 69% | 73% | 92% |

4. Compulsory full-time education

(a) Phases

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| <i>Grundskola</i> (primary and lower secondary school) | 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 1998, 6% of six-year-olds attended school.

(b) Admissions criteria

Admission is governed by parental choice, but over-subscribed schools give priority to students 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 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 hours per week. National regulations specify the minimum number of taught hours over the nine years of compulsory schooling as 6 665, which schools divide over the nine years.

(d) Class size/student grouping

There are no national regulations for class size, which is determined by the local authority and the school. In the first six years, students are mostly taught by the same teacher for all subjects except physical education, art, music and crafts. Thereafter there are separate teachers for each subject area.

(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 local authority 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. New curricula, introduced in 1995, and updated in 1998 to include also the pre-school class and the after-school 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, sciences and another foreign language.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Continuous assessment is practised throughout this phase of education. Diagnostic tests in reading, writing and arithmetic may take place at the end of the second and the seventh year (in the seventh year also in English). A system of national assessment has been introduced, which involves tests in Swedish, English and mathematics at the end of the fifth and ninth years (those in the ninth year are compulsory). 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

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

(b) Admissions criteria

A compulsory school-leaving certificate qualifies students to apply for *Gymnasieskola*. However, in order to follow one of the 16 national programmes or a specially designed programme (for students with special interests), students are required to have at least pass grades in Swedish, English and

mathematics. Students who have not achieved this goal may follow an individual programme. Students may apply to follow a course outside their municipality. *Gymnasieskola* is free of charge.

(c) **Curricular control and content**

Teachers and schools work within the nationally determined curricular framework. Following recent curricular reform, students choose from 16 study programs, 14 of which are vocationally oriented. All 16 study programmes, as well as a specially designed programme, provide a broad-based general education and general eligibility for entrance to higher education. The common core subjects are Swedish, English, mathematics, religious studies, civics, natural sciences, sport and health studies and aesthetic activities. The individual programme should both support and follow student needs and its content can thus vary.

(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 *Gymnasieskola*.

6. Higher education

(a) **Types of institution**

Higher education is provided in universities and university colleges.

(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 a 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.

(c) **Qualifications**

There are two kinds of undergraduate degrees covering three general and around 50 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). 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, while those with hearing disabilities also may attend special schools. In 1998, approximately 0.01 per cent of all primary and secondary school students were in separate schools. For mentally retarded students there are special schools or integrated classes within the compulsory school system. There are also some upper secondary schools for mentally retarded students. Such students may also follow classroom education in compulsory school with special support.

8. Teachers

All teachers have completed a study programme at a university or a university college. Pre-school teachers complete a University Diploma in Child and Youth training. There is one single *Grundskola* teaching diploma, the Bachelor of Education for the Compulsory School, with specialization for different levels and in different subject areas. There is also one single teaching diploma for *Gymnasieskola*, the Master of Education for the Upper Secondary School, which is awarded after a

minimum of four years of study, with two years for the main subject and training in teaching. It is also possible to obtain the 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, compulsory school and upper secondary school are mainly municipal employees. Teaching staff at universities and university colleges are 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 recent years. The compulsory school and upper secondary school have received new curricula and syllabi and the curriculum for compulsory school has been amended to cover also the pre-school class and the after school centre. The pre-school has received its first curriculum. The whole structure of upper secondary school has been reformed. There has been an expansion in the higher education area and the governing of the universities and university colleges by objectives has been applied. Finally, there has been a great enforcement in the field of adult education through the adult education initiative.

Pre-primary Education

The co-operation between pre-school, compulsory school and child care for school aged children has increased. The responsibilities for all these areas now come under the Ministry of Education and Science.

The first curriculum for the pre-school is applied as from the 1st August 1998. Since 1998, the school system incorporates the pre-school class, "*förskoleklass*", as a new school form. The pre-school class replaced the special activities run for six-year-olds within the framework of the pre-school. From the start of school year 1998/99, the curriculum for the compulsory school, "*grundskola*", has been amended to cover not only compulsory schooling, but also the pre-school class and the after school centre, "*fritidshem*".

The Government has recently proposed a maximum child care charge to be introduced in stages from 2001. A reform which would entitle all children 4 and 5 years of age to free pre-school activities for a certain number of hours per day is proposed to be carried out at the same time.

Basic Democratic Values in School

The area of basic democratic values in school is of the utmost importance for the development of the schools. A special project has started in order to take action within this field; to accumulate knowledge, to raise awareness in school and municipalities, to support the work at local level through different actions and to propose changes. Within the project, a special "youth council" has been created, consisting of pupils aged 16. The council will be able to put forward its opinions and suggestions within this field to the project.

Upper Secondary Education

The reform of the upper secondary school which started in 1992-93 is continuing. The main priorities are to strengthen the quality in general in order to enable more pupils to complete upper secondary education as well as to strengthen the co-operation between school and working life.

The structure of upper secondary education is also changed to facilitate the overview of different pathways in the system, increase the freedom of choice and strengthen the pupils overall competencies and widened scope of knowledge.

Higher Education

Undergraduate higher education is expanding significantly in Sweden. The increase started in the beginning of the 1990's and will continue at least until 2002. In this time, the number of study places

will be doubled. Following the increase in the number of places there is also an increase in the allocation of resources. There are two reasons for this expansion: a will to meet the increased demand for higher 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, there has been an increase in the state grants for research at higher education institutions. Close co-operation between education and research is an important condition for high quality education.

Adult Education

The Adult Education Initiative "*Kunskapslyftet*" is a five year programme for adult education established in 1997. It is part of the Government's strategy to fight unemployment. An overall boost in national knowledge is going on which aims at providing those with lower levels of education the opportunity to get a job and continue their learning. The aim is to stimulate economic growth by increasing access to a skilled labour force. Another objective is to reform the adult education system in terms of both content and forms of instruction.

Since autumn 1996 pilot projects have been carried out in advanced post secondary vocational education - qualified vocational education, KY. Through the KY-training new forms of co-operation between working places and the education area are developed. A third of the education is located at workplaces. The aim is to develop new forms for post secondary vocational training. The pilot project will continue until 2001.

Study Support

In 1996, a commission submitted a report on a reform of the whole study support system. The commission suggested that the loan part should be repaid in 25 years of time with a modified fixed annual instalment. The Government will make a proposal based on the commission's suggestions combined with a change of the grant amount. The new study support system will be implemented in 2001.

ICT in Schools

The Government is investing in a national three year programme, "Tools for learning", by means of ICT. The programme covers pre-school, compulsory school, special school, Sami school and upper secondary school.

The major part of the programme is the training of 60 000 teachers, which equals 40% of all teachers, in using ICT as a pedagogical tool. These teachers will be supplied with a multimedia computer for home use. Investments in infrastructure in order to improve the schools access to the Internet will also be made and all teachers and pupils will be offered personal e-mail addresses.

Unrevised English

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| For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (www.eurydice.org) |
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