



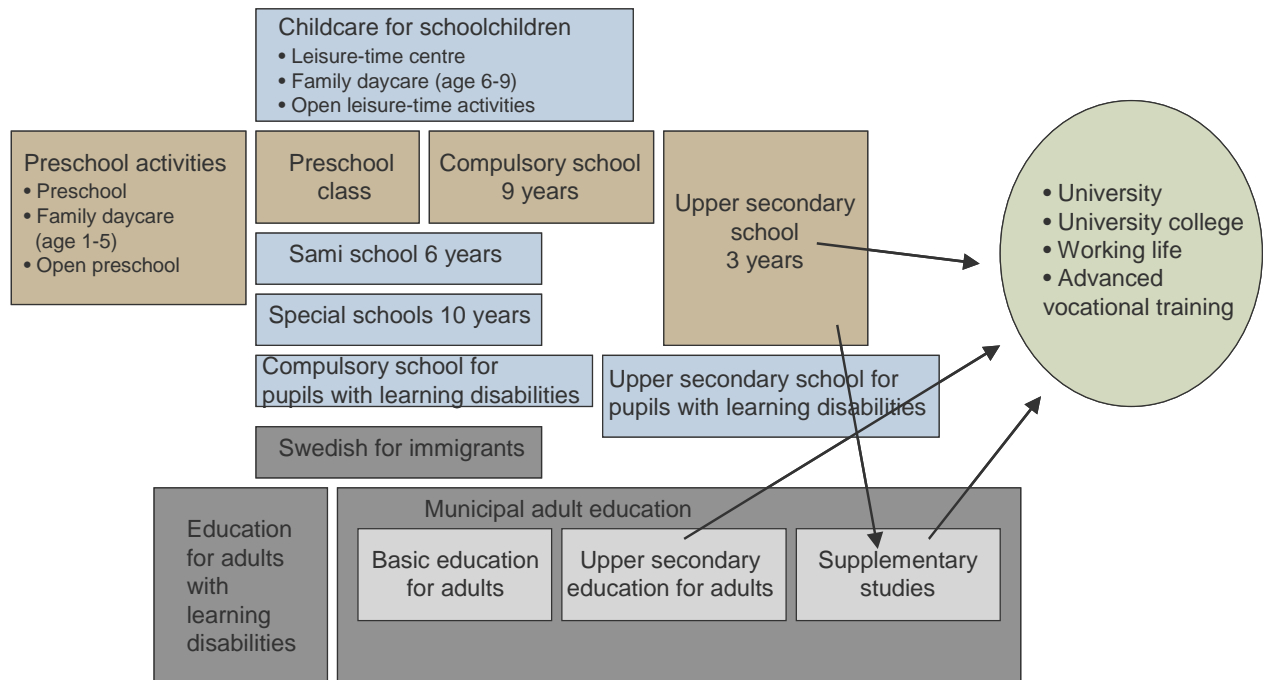
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Ministry of Education and Research

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

**National report of Sweden**



## 1. The education system facing the challenges of the twenty-first century: an overview

### The Swedish education system

Sweden is, as a UN Member State, obliged to fulfil its commitments to assure that all Swedish children know about their rights and receive education on the United Nations Charter. Provisions for the promotion of the human rights education are found in many international human rights declarations, for example the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Swedish education system includes compulsory and non-compulsory education. A majority of Swedish schools are public, run by municipalities, but an increasing number of schools are independent. Independent schools on compulsory level need to be certified by National Agency for Education and are financed by municipality subsidies. Correspondingly independent upper-secondary schools, in order to be entitled to municipal grants, must have a certification.

Compulsory education includes regular compulsory school, Sami school, special school, and compulsory school or special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities. Non-compulsory education includes the pre-school, pre-school class, leisure time centre, upper-secondary school, upper-secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities, municipal adult education, adult education for adults with intellectual disabilities and Swedish for Immigrants.

There is a division of responsibility between the Parliament, the Government and the municipalities or independent school owners. The Parliament sets the Education Act (see below) and general curricula and decides upon major school reforms. The Government has the overall responsibility for education in the sense that it gives the comprehensive framework in terms of national goals, regulations and national improvement initiatives for education. The municipalities are responsible for providing and operating pre-primary, compulsory, upper-secondary and adult education in accordance with the national framework. The municipalities have the major financial responsibility for education. A national tax transfer system, which is used to give municipalities equal possibilities to fulfil their responsibilities, and national improvement ventures often mean additional financial support to municipalities.

Currently, there are sixty-one institutions offering higher education in various forms in Sweden. The majority of universities and university colleges are public authorities. Universities and university colleges are self-governing and independent.

#### **- Pre-primary education**

##### *Pre-school*

Pre-schools for younger children (1-5 years) and family day-care aims to stimulate every child's development as well as to provide safe care, an objective often called "educare". Even if pre-schools are not a part of compulsory education, over 85 per cent of all children aged 1-5 attended some type of pre-school during 2007/08. Pre-school is offered children whose parents work, study, are unemployed or on parental leave or if the child itself is in need of pre-school. Municipalities are obliged to offer pre-school activities within reasonable time. Pre-school for at least 525 hours per year is free of charge to children 4 years and older (see below maximum fees).

### *Pre-school class*

The pre-school class is non-compulsory education designed to stimulate each child's development and learning and to provide a platform for their future schooling. Municipalities are obligated to provide a place in a pre-school class for all 6 year-olds. The pre-school class programme shall comprise a minimum of 525 hours per year. How the pre-school class is arranged may differ between municipalities. Most often, it is organized and located in connection to a compulsory school and most pre-school teachers co-operate closely with teachers on primary level.

#### **- Compulsory education**

The 9-year compulsory school addresses all children between the ages of 7-16 years. Upon the request of the parents, a child may begin school at the age of 6 or at the age of 8, but a vast majority starts at 7. Sami children can receive education in Sami School that covers years 1-6. This schooling corresponds to the first 6 years of compulsory school. Special schools offer a 10-year programme for pupils who have intellectual disabilities and whose first language is sign language. Pupils with intellectual disabilities can attend compulsory school or special programmes. Compulsory education including teaching materials, school meals, health care and school transports is free of charge.

#### **- Upper-secondary education**

Almost all pupils continue directly to an upper-secondary education after their 9<sup>th</sup> year of compulsory education. Young people can begin upper-secondary school up until 20 years of age. Upper-secondary education is divided into 17 national 3-year programmes. Alongside the national programmes, are also a number of specially designed and individual programmes. Many pupils succeed to finish their education within 3 years, but some have to use another year to complete successfully. All programmes shall offer a broad general education and basic eligibility to continue studies at tertiary level.

Upper-secondary education for pupils with intellectual disabilities offers vocational training in the form of national-, specially designed- or individual 4-year programmes, similar to those of regular upper-secondary.

#### **- Adult education**

There are different types of municipally run adult education for those older than 20. Among these are municipal adult education and education for adults with severe learning disabilities including basic education, corresponding to compulsory education and upper-secondary education. Municipalities are obliged to provide basic adult education to adults who do not have the skills that compulsory school is designed to provide. Municipalities are also obliged to provide upper-secondary adult education to the extent that it is needed.

Adult municipal education also offers supplementary education that gives specialized skills in different occupational fields. State granted post-secondary vocational education and training is provided as independent supplementary education and advanced vocational education.

Municipalities have an obligation to offer Swedish for Immigrants to newly arrived immigrants. It is designed to provide newcomers with knowledge of the Swedish language.

#### **- National minorities**

Sweden is a signatory to the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and to the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages. Sweden's national minorities are the Jews, the Roma, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers. The minority languages are Yiddish, Romany Chib, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli.

Specific minority language legislation applies to certain geographical areas, where Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli have a long tradition. In certain municipalities in the north of Sweden individuals are entitled among other things the right to pre-school in their minority language.

Children of the national minorities have the right to study their minority languages in school. Mother-tongue instruction and bilingual instruction have an important role to play in supporting and strengthening the minority languages.

The Sami people are acknowledged as an indigenous people. Sami children have the right to fulfil their compulsory school in a Sami school instead of in the elementary school. Sami children can also obtain an integrated Sami education in their elementary school if they wish.

#### **The Education Act – the foundation for education of children, youth and adults**

The Swedish Education Act, decided by the Parliament, lays the basis for all education from pre-school to upper-secondary level. The Education Act also extends the right to education for adults. It states that all children and youth shall have equal access to education regardless of gender, ethnicity, place of residence, or of social or economic factors. It states that education shall “provide the pupils with knowledge and, in co-operation with the homes, promote their harmonious development into responsible human beings and members of the community.” Special support shall be given to pupils who have difficulties in completing their education successfully<sup>1</sup>. Pupils with another mother tongue than Swedish have the right to learn and have support in their mother tongue in pre-primary, compulsory

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<sup>1</sup> If a pupil needs special support an Action Plan shall be drawn up. The regulations regarding plans for pupils in need of special support have been further clarified. The pupil's need is to be

have support in their mother tongue in pre-primary, compulsory and upper-secondary education.

With the Education Act as the basis, the Parliament, the Government or the National Agency for Education gives the more detailed framework in curricula, ordinances, recommendations and national development initiatives. Other parts in the governance of the educational system are national tests, evaluation and inspection.

### **- Higher Education**

The public higher education sector is governed by the Higher Education Act and Ordinance. The Government policy gives the framework in order to guarantee high quality through out the country. The higher education institutions ensure that activities are carried out in the best possible manner.

## **1.1 Major recent reforms and innovations introduced and discussed in the education system**

### **1.1.1 Reforms introduced**

#### *The Discrimination Act<sup>2</sup>*

In order to promote equal rights for children and pupils in all facilities that are subject to the present Education Act a new act entered into force on 1 April 2006. It emphasizes that no child and no pupil shall be left without secure, clear and active protection against any kind of discrimination. The municipalities and educational institutions must, according to the act, conduct active targeted efforts to prevent and combat all forms of degrading treatment. It is intended to promote equal rights for children and pupils in all institutions that are subject to the Education Act. The Act is also intended to combat discrimination and harassment on grounds of gender, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability. Further, it is designed to hinder and prevent other degrading treatment that is not directly attributable to these grounds of discrimination. This means that it covers all forms of degrading treatment, including bullying. Every organizer is required to have an equal treatment plan describing planned measures. The Act gives children and pupils increased rights to damages if personnel in positions of responsibility in the institutions do not fulfil the obligations in the Act.

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assessed and the following Action Plan shall contain information regarding the pupil's needs, what measures will be taken and how these measures will be followed up and evaluated. Not only pupils in difficulties are focussed in compulsory education. The need for special action plans has been complemented with the obligation for schools to have regular personal developmental dialogues between pupils, parents and teacher and that this shall end in an individual developmental plan, showing what the school must do to help the pupil to finish her/his schooling with success.

<sup>2</sup> The Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment of Children and School Pupils, SFS 2006:67

*The Equal Treatment Representative for Children and Pupils*

The specially appointed Equal Treatment Representative for Children and Pupils is to monitor compliance with the Act. The Representative has the right to bring actions for damages on behalf of a child or a pupil and is also responsible for providing information about the Act and giving advice on the application of the Act.

*Gender equality in schools*

According to the curriculum<sup>3</sup> the school should actively and conscientiously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women. The way in which girls and boys are treated and assessed in school as well as the demands and expectations that are placed on them, contributes to their perception of gender differences. The school has a responsibility to counteract traditional gender roles and should therefore provide pupils with the opportunity of developing their own abilities and interests irrespective of their gender and sexual identity. Studies have shown, however, that traditional gender roles are consolidated in schools, that girls perform considerably better than boys, that few men become teachers etc. The Government has therefore initiated an extensive venture to support gender equality in schools. A total of about € 10 000 000 is to be invested to enable the establishment of a gender equality delegation, continued professional development for teachers, better health in schools and recruitment of more male teachers.

A commission will be appointed for highlighting and developing knowledge about gender equality in both municipal and independent schools, as well as Sami schools, special schools and special programmes for students with intellectual disabilities. Swedish national agencies will also support the venture.

*Reform of governance structure on national level*

The State's responsibility for the national evaluation is carried out by the national agencies in their respective field of responsibility. Agencies in the field of education support the process of raising standards and achieving the goals of all parts of the educational system. A new structure for education authorities has been established in 2008 in order to clarify responsibility and tasks on national as well as on local levels, to strengthen inspection and to separate supervision from development work. The new organisation comprises three authorities:

- The National Agency for Education,
- The Educational Inspectorate and
- The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time center.

### *Teacher and school leader reforms*

In order to raise the level of skills among teachers, pre-school teachers and school leaders and to improve the quality of educational services the Government has launched major reforms and taken further actions to ensure continuing professional development (see 1.2 Main policies, achievements and lessons learned).

#### *Written assessments from year 1*

Written assessments from year 1 that clearly indicate whether the pupils have reached the goals or not have been introduced in 2008 (see below 1.1.2).

### *Bologna reform*

Changes in the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance have been decided and issued in accordance with the Bologna reform process. The Swedish reform covers the whole system for higher education and came into effect from 1 July 2007.

## **1.1.2 Reforms discussed or under progress**

### *Review of the Education Act*

Since the Swedish Education Act came into force in 1986 several paragraphs in the Act have been amended and extensive changes have been made in the various school ordinances. A parliamentary committee has reviewed the present legislation and submitted a proposal to the Government on a new Education Act. The Government is at present working on a Government bill to the Parliament. A decision will be made no later than 2010 according to present planning.

### *The financial system for independent schools*

Independent schools are an important part of the Swedish education system and all children and parents shall have the possibility to choose which school the child shall attend. The independent schools are to receive funding on the same grounds as the municipal schools<sup>4</sup>. The increase of the number of independent schools has given cause for the Government to take an initiative to new legal provisions to secure a fair and reasonable financing system.

## **Pre-primary education**

### *Reforms for increased availability and choice*

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<sup>4</sup> The grant to the independent compulsory schools shall be determined with regard to the school's provision of education and the pupil's needs on the same basis as applied by the municipality in the allocation of resources to its own schools (Education Act, Chapter 9, section 6).



Several reforms have been introduced to increase the availability of pre-school activities. According to the Education Act municipalities are required to provide pre-school activities for children between the ages of 1 and 5 to the extent necessary to allow parents to be able to work or study, or if the child itself is in need of this provision. Children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave are now entitled to pre-school activities for a minimum of 3 hours per day or 15 hours per week.

A system featuring a maximum fee has been introduced and is financially supported by the Government. The maximum fee is set at between one and three percent of parents' income (depending on the number of children) up to a cap. Even if this fee is voluntary the municipalities have introduced it.

The Government has announced a family policy reform in five parts:

- a childcare voucher system,
- strengthened pedagogical task in pre-school,
- universal pre-school for all children 525 hours per year free of charge from the age of three,
- a gender equality bonus and
- a voluntary municipal child-raising allowance.

The proposals are expected to increase diversity and freedom of choice in childcare and the reforms will be carried out successively.

### ***Compulsory education***

The Government's position is that Swedish schools as well as national initiatives and ventures must emphasise on improving performances among pupils as well as securing peaceful and challenging learning environments. From the national level objectives need to be more distinctly formulated to promote high quality and equality in education.

### ***Revision of goal documents and national tests***

All pupils shall be given the possibility to acquire and develop the knowledge needed to provide a basis for further education or working life. The Government is of the opinion that it is of outmost importance to clarify the demands on goals and knowledge together with the reinforcement of reviewing compulsory school. As a first step to strengthen the steering power of national goal documents, The National Agency for Education has been given a mandate to establish more distinct

goals and content in the curriculum for Swedish/ Swedish as a Second Language and Mathematics in school year 3. The second step is to develop national tests for these subjects. In the beginning of 2009 all compulsory schools will take part in a try-out and in 2009/2010 the new tests will be in regular use.

The Government has decided that national tests in Swedish/Swedish as a Second Language, Mathematics and English in year 5, now optional, shall be compulsory in 2009. In year 9, in addition to these three subjects, national tests shall be developed for Physics, Chemistry and Biology and will be implemented in 2009. In compulsory education for pupils with intellectual disabilities corresponding national tests shall be introduced in years 4, 6 and 10.

#### *A new grading scale*

A grading system is one of several instruments that enable a correct assessment of pupils' learning. It is important that grades are used earlier in school and in a way that guarantees quality. The Government is therefore of the opinion that the present grading system does not include enough steps to give an accurate picture of the pupils' knowledge and that the amount of steps should increase.

At present, grades are given to pupils in year 8 for the first time during their schooling. The grades possible to get are one of three grades from "passed" to "passed with special distinction"<sup>5</sup>. In cases where a pupil fails to achieve a passing grade in a subject, no grade is given. However, a written assessment showing the pupils' progress and support measures taken is then provided.

The Government's position is that there should be a more refined grading scale and that pupils should have formal feedback in terms of earlier grades the first time in year 8 is to late.

#### *Written assessments from year 1*

The Government states that parents have a right to explicit information on their children's school results from the very start. Written assessments from grade one on the pupil's knowledge development related to the national goals for each subject have been introduced in 2008. The written assessment shall clearly indicate whether the goals have been reached or not and may have the character of grades, even if there are no national criteria for grading. They are meant to be included parts of the pupil's "Individual Development Plan" and communicated during the "personal development dialogues" between the pupil, hers/his parents and the teacher held at least once per school term.

#### *National, supporting initiatives to increase performance - reading-writing and arithmetic venture*

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<sup>5</sup> In upper-secondary education a fourth grade –"not passed" – is added.

The Government has decided on an extensive reading-writing-arithmetic venture to strengthen performance at compulsory school level. By establishing early reading, writing and arithmetic skills in years 1- 3 the Government aims at cutting down the number of pupils leaving compulsory school without sufficient skills. A grant of € 90 000 000 will financially support the municipalities to focus on pupils who are at risk of failing to attain the goals set out in education. The purpose is to encourage municipalities and schools to strengthen work on pupils' basic skills. The initiative will reinforce an earlier national mandate of the National Centre for Developing Reading, Writing and Language Skills to enhance teacher competence, promote contact between research society and schools and to improve interest and motivation for reading and writing as well as dissemination of knowledge on best practice in schools.

#### *Mathematics, natural sciences and technology*

In its 2009 Budget Bill the Government presents further measures for mathematics, natural sciences and technology. Most of the money will be used to finance an incentive grant to develop teaching in these areas. The Government has taken several long-term initiatives to improve pupils' knowledge of mathematics, natural sciences and technology, e.g. by introducing national tests in mathematics in year 3 and through the "Boost for Teachers".

#### **Upper-Secondary Education**

Upper-secondary attainment levels are high in Sweden. As mentioned above almost all pupils in year 9 continue in upper-secondary education. However, the Government is concerned about the current dropout rate of pupils. From the governmental point of view it's urgent to take initiatives for improvements not only to decrease the proportion of pupils not succeeding but also to more efficiently prepare pupils either for future occupations or for further studies. In the near future Parliament is expected to decide upon a reformed upper secondary school.

Present upper-secondary education is a result of reforms in the 70s and in the beginning of the 90s. As mentioned above, all upper-secondary programmes have the same general format; they are three years long, part of time is devoted to the same core subjects and they provide basic eligibility for higher education studies. Vocational training, including workplace-based training and more academically oriented programmes are integrated in the same schools. Even if there has been strong consensus about an integrated upper-secondary school the present Government as well as representatives from teachers' union, employers' organisations and others have been concerned about the weaknesses and problems with the present ambitions; the vocationally programmes are considered to be too theoretically focused.

Initiated by the Government, a commission has proposed a new structure for the upper-secondary education. The commission has proposed 19 national programmes with national specialisations, of which 5 are higher education preparatory

programmes and 14 are vocational leading to employability. All upper-secondary programmes are proposed to be three years in length but the different aims of vocational and academic programmes are more distinct compared to present upper-secondary education. Other ingredients in the proposal are local programme councils, a new design of individual solutions for pupils not eligible for upper-secondary school and an introduction of two types of diploma, one for vocational and one for higher education preparatory education.

The commission report is now referred for consideration and comment to stakeholders on the proposals and a bill is to be presented in 2009.

The Minister for Education has announced that the new grading scale, described under heading "Compulsory education" will be introduced in upper-secondary school, upper-secondary school for pupils with intellectual impairment and upper-secondary adult education in 2010 or 2011.

#### *New application rules*

Pupils are allowed to apply for an independent upper-secondary school irrespective of where the school is located while application rules to public schools have been more restrictive. By the introduction of unrestricted application rules in 2008 pupils have enlarged freedom to choose schools. To stimulate pupils in upper-secondary education to take more advanced courses in foreign languages and mathematics the rules for application to tertiary education have been modified. Advanced courses now give the pupil extra points.

#### *Apprenticeship*

A 3-year pilot project in upper-secondary apprenticeship education has started in 2008 withholding the possibility to combine upper-secondary education with employment. Experiences gained from this project are expected to increase the understanding regarding the potential of employment with respect to apprenticeship programmes. Pupils' interest has so far been significant. In the academic year of 2008/09 a total of around 5000 places have been granted.

#### *Special gifted pupils*

The Government has decided that special education in theoretical subjects for high achieving pupils should be introduced at upper-secondary school. A 5-year pilot project in Mathematics, Natural and Social Science and Liberal Art will start in a number of schools in 2009. The pace of the studies will be higher compared to regular studies and the pupils will furthermore be permitted to study university courses parallel to their upper-secondary studies.

### ***Adult education***

The Swedish Government actively promotes opportunities for adults to participate in learning in a variety of ways. Flexibility and lifelong learning are key issues in adult educational development policy.

#### ***Upper-secondary adult education***

To a large extent the proposals mentioned above on upper-secondary education also apply to upper-secondary adult education. An example is proposals for diplomas that shall include the same requirements for both upper-secondary school and upper-secondary adult education. The path to the diploma can, however, vary since studies in upper-secondary adult education system are not designed as programmes. If the proposals will be accepted by the Parliament, validation will be an important instrument in upper-secondary adult education.

#### ***Improving Swedish for Immigrants***

Immigrants with a non-European background and low level of education run a particularly high risk of lasting exclusion from the labour market. The Government has found it crucial to implement changes that give more people the encouragement and opportunity to support themselves. Good language proficiency significantly increases immigrants' chances of obtaining work. Statistics show however that a large number of first generation immigrants do not achieve the goals set out for education. The Government is therefore presenting an initiative to improve Swedish for Immigrants. Focus is on skills enhancement for teachers, national tests, clearer goals and time limits for the education.

#### ***Education for adults with intellectual disabilities***

Education for adults with intellectual disabilities is part of the public adult education system. 2007 marked the introduction of the right to basic education for adults who do not have the skills that compulsory school with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities is designed to provide, if they are capable of benefiting from such an education.

#### ***Validation***

A national commission has been responsible for a pilot project, aiming at a more effective and enhanced structure and methods for validation of adults' merits primarily obtained in work in different occupations and in-service training. The Swedish Agency for Education has the Government's assignment to continue working with and disseminating results from the commission. The agency is initiating, organizing and carrying out developmental efforts in order to improve quality, strengthen legitimacy and increase equality concerning validation of adults' competences and knowledge.

### *A Vocational University College*

The Government is preparing a proposal to the Parliament on the establishment of a vocational university college. The initiative is a component in the Government's ambition to improve vocational education and training by co-ordinating, streamlining and strengthening all post-secondary education and training within an umbrella organization, a Vocational University College.

### **Higher education**

#### *Greater freedom for universities and other higher education institutions*

An inquiry is to present proposals for one or more organisational forms for state universities and other higher education institutions covered by the Higher Education Act. Based on the proposals on organisational forms that are presented, the inquiry is to propose how state control of universities and higher education institutions is to be structured.

#### *Tuition fees*

The Government is considering the introduction of full cost based tuition fees for students who are not citizens of the EU, EEA or Switzerland. Scholarships targeted towards very qualified students and towards certain DAC-countries would accompany this reform.

## **1.2 Main policies, achievements and lessons learned**

Reforms described above are components in the Government's strategy. However, even if reforms concerning the education system are necessary, the implementation of the reforms might be jeopardized without the support of a competent and professional school staff.

According to the Education Act municipalities are obliged to employ teachers who have completed teacher education appropriate to the subjects and levels they will teach. Exceptions may be made only if persons with such training are not available or if there are other special reasons with regard to the pupils. In addition each municipality shall ensure that in-service training is arranged. Municipalities shall further strive towards appointing teachers with postgraduate training to teach in upper secondary schools, upper secondary adult education and supplementary education.

The proportion of teachers with higher education teaching qualification varies between municipalities. In 2007/08 an average of 20 per cent of the annual teaching work force lacked prescribed qualifications. For teachers in vocational education on upper-secondary level the percentage was even higher. The shortage of supply of vocational teachers is regarded a critical factor, especially since more than 50 per cent of the teachers are older than 50 years of age.

A challenge, to implement the ambitions of an improved Swedish education, is to take the necessary steps to meet the needs for highly qualified school staff at all levels of the system. As a consequence, several of the major initiatives from the Government have teachers, school-leaders and teacher training in focus.

### **1.2.1 Professionalization of teachers**

- With an initiative called “*A boost for teachers?*” the Government encourages teachers to take part in an extensive in-service training. Within four years, 2007-2011, the Government offers 30 000 qualified teachers, i.e. about 25 per cent of all primary, secondary and upper-secondary school teachers in Sweden, an in-service training. The education focuses on the qualifications in the teaching subjects and the enhancement of the pedagogical competence.
- About € 45 000 000 will be provided for research studies for those already working as teachers.
- The Government has taken an initiative to raise the quality of Swedish for Immigrant education in order to improve the students’ achievements. Skills enhancement for teachers in Swedish for Immigrants is part of the measures taken.
- Special needs education is also in focus of the Government. National inspections have shown that schools in general are better at diagnosing pupils’ difficulties than to actually give competent support. Although the number of teachers for special needs education has increased, school-leaders and teachers still express lack of support for special needs education. To meet the needs, the Government has decided to re-establish a post-secondary training programme for teachers of special needs education.
- To ensure quality in teaching, experienced but unqualified teachers will have the opportunity to supplement their education to obtain a degree of Bachelor/Master of Education. Programmes will be organised by the universities and higher education institutions approved by the Government.
- The Government has appointed an inquiry to propose a reform of the present teacher education programmes. The proposals will be presented in November 2008 and on the basis of this and the comments from stakeholders the Government will prepare a governmental bill to the Parliament.
- An inquiry on teachers’ qualifications and authorisation has been appointed to review the regulation in the Education Act on pre-school teachers’ and teachers’ competence. The inquiry chair has submitted proposals on qualification rules for pre-school teachers and teachers, and proposals for developing a national authorisation system.

- An inquiry, appointed in 2008, is expected to make proposals on vocational pre-school teacher and teacher training, education of teachers in national minority languages and teacher development in ICT.

### **1.2.2 Professionalization of school leaders**

Competent leadership has appeared in many studies as a key factor for the success of pre-schools' and schools' work on improvement, not least because the major responsibility for development within the pre-schools and schools rests with its management. According to the Education Act school heads shall keep themselves informed about daily work and support development within their schools. Even if the municipalities and independent school owners are responsible for the major leadership training, a revised national programme for school head training is expected to enhance the pre-school and school leaders' insights on the national demands. The Government has recently decided to strengthen the education by doubling its subsidy and to make the education more focused on issues that are important for the fulfilment of the national objectives. The new headmaster training on university level consists of three parts – educational legislation, management by objectives and results and, finally, pre-school and school leadership and management.

### **1.3 The role of the education system in combating poverty and other forms of exclusion and cultural marginalisation**

Education per se is probably one of the most powerful instruments to combat poverty and other forms of exclusion. For many years there has been political consensus on the importance of education for all and that the major strategy should be integration and inclusion. The national strategy rests on the following pillars, also mentioned earlier in this report:

the Education Act, stressing the right to education for all irrespective of gender, ethnicity, geographic residence and social and economic conditions,

an education free of charge,

a system of study grants for upper-secondary pupils and a system of study allowances for students in tertiary education and adult education,

as few excluding institutional solutions as possible

To support this general strategy, the reforms mentioned earlier in this report aim at securing a high quality education for all, giving every child, youth and adult the possibility to develop their abilities. Action plans for those who risk failing, mother tongue education and Swedish for Immigrants are only a few examples of supportive instruments. To secure that the system fulfils its obligations national evaluations and inspections are carried through, giving feedback to the Government and



the schools and comprising an empirical basis for new national initiatives for improvement. The initiatives for establishing an inclusive education will be elaborated in the next section of this report.

## **2. Inclusive education: The way of the future**

### **2.1. Approaches, scope and content**

#### ***The current vision of inclusive education***

The term inclusive education in this report hence first and foremost refers to inclusive education in school and not in the whole fabric of society.

The Swedish school system is characterised by very high ambitions and aims to include the absolute majority of children and youth in the regular school system. This development started during the 1960s with the compulsory school reform and has reached its present form during the end of the last century. Upper-secondary education was broadened and the pre-school, as well as the school for pupils with intellectual disabilities, was given greater opportunities to work towards the principles of inclusion. The municipal adult education is obliged to ensure a right for all to a basic education and an aim to raise the general level of education to an upper-secondary level. The higher education institutions shall actively promote and broaden recruitment to higher education. It offers a second opportunity for those who have not completed their education during their youth. There is also an opportunity for those with a mother tongue other than Swedish to study Swedish as a second language. The Swedish school system is in large constructed to promote integration and participation as well as meeting the needs of the individual child, pupil and adult and to counteract exclusion.

The including ambition is distinct when it comes to children and youth in difficulties or with disabilities in school. The national handicap policy emphasises the opportunity for pupils with disabilities, in the same way as other pupils, to live with or close to their parents and attend a school close to home.<sup>6</sup> The focus lies on the learning environment rather than on the failings of individual pupils<sup>7</sup> and the fundamental feature of education in Sweden today is that almost all are included in regular schooling. Participation and equal opportunity that is emphasised in international agreements as well as in national documents, has its base in an inclusive view on education. In higher education in Sweden, the policy of inclusion has mainly revolved around the issue of widening participation. The inclusion of underrepresented student groups in terms of social and ethnic background are some-

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<sup>6</sup> Prop. 1999/2000:79 Från patient till medborgare (Government bill 1999/2000:79 From patient to citizen)

<sup>7</sup> Analys av faktorer inom skelsektorn som påverkar möjligheterna att uppnå de handikappolitiska målen. (Analysis of factors that facilitate the possibilities to achieve the goals set out in the handicap policy) (Skolverket, september 2005)

thing that the higher education institutions (HEI) are commissioned by the government to deal with. The measures and actions taken by the HEI are highly dependent on the situation of applications and enrolment.

Questions about the inclusion of students with impairments have increasingly become in focus in higher education. There is for i.e. a law concerning equal treatment of students aiming to promote equal rights for students and applicants and to work in counter to discrimination on account of sex, ethnical and religious affiliation, sexual disposition or impaired function.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) supports inclusive education initiatives on the global level as well as bilaterally.

### ***How inclusive education is conceptualised***

Since the Swedish school system is based upon the principles of inclusion the vast majority of pupils are enrolled in regular compulsory schools. 98.5 per cent of all pupils in years 1 to 9 attended regular compulsory school during the academic year of 2007/08. The majority of those who didn't attend compulsory school attended compulsory school or special programmes for pupils with learning disabilities. Only 514 pupils attended a special school for the deaf and hard of hearing in 2007/08. Most pupils with hearing impairment and almost all with vision impairment or pupils with physical disabilities receive their education in regular compulsory schools.

In Sweden school becomes compulsory during the year of the child's seventh birthday. The compulsory attendance in school corresponds to a right to education within the state financed education system. Thus all children shall participate in primary school.

Both the special school and schools with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities correspond as far as possible to the education children receive in regular compulsory schools. The special school consists of 10 years and includes specific subjects like sign language. The schools with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities makes special adjustments regarding the different prerequisites of the individual pupil.

Schools with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities are seen as natural parts of the public school system and not as secluded entities. Schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities – compulsory schools, upper secondary schools and schools for adult education - are generally located in the same buildings as the regular schools, belonging to the same administrative unit and led by the same school head. A major difference between a regular class and a class for pupils with intellectual disabilities is the teacher ratio. This is much higher in schools for pupils with learning disabilities, in order to offer education adapted to each pupil individually. Pupils that make use of their right to attend schools with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities, which is voluntary, can under cer-

tain circumstances receive their education with pupils in their own age in a regular compulsory school. The aim is to challenge the pupil intellectually and to increase social contacts in order to better support the potential development of the pupil. There are thus several ways the school system can bring the different schools closer in order to avoid the effects of exclusion and to take the pupil's whole potential of development into account.

Pupils in pre-school class, compulsory and upper-secondary school that for some reason have difficulties reaching the goals set out for education shall receive special support. The school leaders are responsible for assessing the need of support and establishing an Action Plan in consultation with the pupil and its guardians. The pupil can receive support in several ways and the support shall as far as possible be given within the class or group the pupil is a member of. In certain cases the pupil can receive the best help in a smaller special group.

#### *Reducing the impact of financial background*

In pre-school the maximum fee system (see above 1.1.2) guarantees that high fees do not prevent parents from having their children attend pre-school.

The Government intends to expand the present universal pre-school for children 4 years and older, that is free of charge up to 525 hours per year, to include 3 year olds as well.

All education throughout the public school system is free. There is usually no charge, especially in compulsory school, to pupils or their parents for teaching materials, school meals, health services or transport.

The Swedish system of study financing is designed to promote high participation in education. It is intended to help realize the objectives of education policy by reducing the impact of social, financial and geographical background and by making it easier for people with disabilities and older people to study. The forms of support that reach the greatest number of people are aid for young students at upper secondary school (grants only) and post-secondary students (student grants and student loans). Within the post-secondary student aid system lays a possibility to receive supplementary loans and loans for additional costs. An extra child allowance is payable to students with children and certain grants target special groups in the community.

#### *Challenges for ensuring educational and social inclusion*

Inclusion is a complex issue consisting of different aspects - spatial, social and didactic. Despite of highly set ambitions in municipalities and schools in order to realize inclusive education, examples of tendencies of exclusion can be found. Municipalities can e.g. in exceptional cases decide that the support is best attended to by education in a special remedial group or in the form of a reduced course of

studies. Research reports and information from school inspection indicate that these exceptions are increasing. Deficiencies such as unclear management due to the fact that pupils from different municipalities can attend a certain special group, lack of information on the contents of the education offered as well as on the pupils' legal rights and education given in locations separated from other school activities are challenges paid attention to.

From an international perspective, the Swedish school system achieves a high level of equity, i.e. a relatively equitable distribution of learning outcomes. The difference between schools in terms of socioeconomic composition is relatively low in Sweden, and the effect on performance of this segregation is also very low compared to most other OECD countries. Moreover, the difference in performance between schools (the between school variation) is also very low compared to the OECD average. However, it is higher than in most other Nordic countries and it seems to be increasing.

To provide good education for pupils with disabilities is a challenge. In 2008 two national special schools for pupils with visual impairment and additional disabilities or severe speech and language disorder have been re-established. Active co-operation between these schools and the pupils' home municipalities is stated.

To ensure pupils with a foreign background both educational and social inclusion is yet another challenge (see below 2.2).

### ***Specific legal and regulatory frameworks referring to inclusive education issues***

According to the Education Act, children and young people in Sweden shall have equal access to education regardless of gender, place of residence, ethnic affiliation and social and financial circumstances. Pupils in need of support shall receive it primarily in regular school and within the class and group they belong to.

The Swedish curricula stress the importance of norms and values that are closely connected with inclusion. The importance of diversity is stated in the curricula. The pre-school should establish the children's solidarity and tolerance at an early stage and their sympathy and empathy for the situations of others. The curricula for compulsory and non-compulsory school state that school should promote an understanding for others and the ability to empathise. They also state that the teacher should take each individual's needs, circumstances, experience and thinking as the starting point for education.

The Act on Equal Treatment of Students in Higher Education addresses discrimination on grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief, sexual orientation or disability and stipulates that the higher education institutions are to implement purposeful measures to actively promote equal rights for students and applicants. The prohibition against discrimination also applies when the university, by making premises accessible and usable, can create a situation for a person with

disability that is comparable to that for persons without such disability, provided it is reasonable to require that the university takes such measures.

Higher education institutions are, according to public service agreements, obliged to consider the need of special learning support for students with functional disabilities or other impairments. They can apply for extra public funding to cover some of the costs for special learning support.

Sweden has agreed on several international agreements considering inclusive education that further strengthen these issues on a national level. The United Nations Standard Rules (1993), The Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) to mention some.

The Government decided in 2000 to give certain national agencies the responsibility for establishing national handicap policies in different sectors of society. Three national goals have been established by the Government: a community with diversity as its foundation, full participation in social life and equality in living conditions. The National Agency for Education has the overall responsibility for the school sector and has compiled a plan of action with handicap policy goals for a period of eight years, 2002-2010.

The National Agency for Education draws up and takes decisions on General guidelines that are recommendations for assisting with the application of different statutes, i.e. laws, ordinances and directives. Several of these have been issued in recent years and are partly guidelines for inclusion:

- General guidelines for the work on equal treatment and preventing discrimination and other diminishing treatment,
- General guidelines for the individual development plan,
- General guidelines for work with Action plans and
- General guidelines for routines for assessment of reception in compulsory school for students with learning disabilities.

Guidelines are also planned for study and vocational guidance and for asylum seeking children.

#### ***Groups categorized and considered as excluded in these frameworks***

No groups are excluded in the Swedish education system and Sweden has chosen not to categorize pupils according to different disabilities. Neither the steering documents nor the official statistics on pre-school activities, leisure-time centres, schools and adult education categorize children or pupils according to different disabilities. The Swedish official statistics cover only the amount of pupils in special

schools and in schools with special programmes for pupils with intellectual disabilities. A reason for not using a more detailed categorization is that those classification systems always seem to contain difficult reliability problems and risks for arbitrary interpretations from those using the classification in practice.

## **2.2. Public policies**

### ***Groups considered to be most vulnerable to various forms of exclusion from and within education***

Even though the Swedish education system is inclusive and does not exclude children, youth and adults from education recent studies have shown areas in need of improvement.

#### *Absence*

In a national survey from 2008 long-term absence in compulsory school has been studied.<sup>8</sup> The absence of pupils occurs mainly in school years 7-9 and no difference is noted when it comes to gender. Long-term absence often starts as random absence. The reasons can e.g. be social or psychosocial problems, lack of support from home as well as the school's problem dealing with acting-out pupils. Upper secondary school surveys of absence also indicate that the number of switchers, drop-outs, deferrers and those with high absence tend to have increased in recent years. It is of utmost importance for children and youth that school provides them with a basis for every day life as well as for future labour. Even in the most complicated situations pupils have the right to education.

#### *Pupils with foreign background*

From an international perspective, the Swedish school system achieves a high level of equity, i.e. a relatively equitable distribution of learning outcomes. The difference in performance between pupils with a Swedish background and pupils with a foreign background is still less than in many other European countries, but it is still considerable. The proportion of pupils with a foreign background is particularly large among pupils showing very poor results. Pupils with foreign background leave compulsory school with incomplete grades to a larger extent than native-born pupils and are over represented among those not eligible for a national or specially adapted programme in upper secondary school. It is first and foremost pupils born abroad that have entered the Swedish education system in a later stage that show difficulties reaching the goals set in compulsory and upper-secondary education.

#### *Working possibilities*

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<sup>8</sup> Rätten till utbildning, Skolverket 2008, Rapport 309 (The Right to Education, The National Agency for Education 2008, Report 309)

Persons with disabilities and reduced working capacity have according to national statistics a lower degree of employment. The Swedish National Agency for Education is preparing General guidelines for study and vocational guidance in order to improve the support for long-term planning when it comes to educational choices in upper secondary school and the transition to labour market or tertiary education.

### **2.3. Systems, links and transitions**

#### ***Main barriers to inclusive education?***

Inclusion and cooperation lay demands on well-thought out and carefully prepared strategies for organisation, teaching and the allocation of resources as well as on the competence of the teaching staff. Above all a pedagogical leadership is needed that consciously and with insight works towards promotion of inclusion.

Competence in special needs education, enabling the teacher to identify frequently recurring problematic situations in school and to assist pupils, is of great importance. The number of qualified teachers with special needs education in compulsory school for pupils with intellectual disabilities has decreased in the last ten years. The Government has therefore taken several strong measures. A new training for teachers in special needs education has been established as well as an extensive in-service training (see above 1.2).

There is a lack of knowledge among school leaders and teachers about the different school forms respectively in integrated entities detains a developed cooperation. The national agencies have therefore carried out in-service activities and produced information material.

#### ***Specific approaches and measures adopted to make the education system more inclusive***

##### ***Immigrants***

Over the past few decades, Sweden has become a culturally diverse and multilingual country. Today, nearly 15 per cent of pupils in Swedish compulsory and upper secondary schools have a mother tongue other than Swedish. This group is not homogeneous and the variation among these pupils is both linguistically and culturally greater than among pupils with Swedish as their mother tongue.

Pupils from abroad have in general poorer results than native-born pupils the same age. The Government has therefore taken several measures to help students develop proficiency required to reach the goals set for education as well as to promote their development as bilingual individuals with dual cultural identity and competence.

All pupils whose mother tongue is a language other than Swedish can study Swedish as a Second Language throughout their education in compulsory, upper-secondary school and adult education. The subject has its own syllabus and is equivalent to the subject Swedish.

Many measures have been made for children and pupils with a foreign background and pupils from ethnic and linguistic minorities to develop and maintain their mother tongue. The mother tongue is of importance for the personal identity and development of the individual pupil. One of the aims of mother tongue tuition is that good knowledge in the mother tongue shall facilitate the learning of Swedish. Grades awarded in this subject are equivalent to grades in other subjects.

A student, in compulsory or upper-secondary school, that has a native language other than Swedish can receive mother tongue tuition if there is a minimum of five pupils in the municipality. The language must be a language of daily, ordinary intercourse in the home and the student shall have a fundamental knowledge of the language. The demands above do not apply to the students of the five historical minority languages: Yiddish, Romani Chib, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli.

A pupil in compulsory school can, if needed, receive student guidance in his or her mother tongue. The purpose of this is to increase the pupil's chances to profit by education and the possibility to reach the goals for education.

Children seeking asylum and children granted a time-limited residence permit have the same rights to pre-school, leisure-time centre and school as other children in Sweden. Young people seeking asylum have the same right to education in the upper-secondary school.

#### *Adjusted Assessment*

Compensations to pupil's disabilities can be taken into consideration in relation to grading. If there are specific reasons the teacher may, when awarding grades, disregard single goals that the pupil should have attained by the end of the 9th school year (the 10th year in the special school). Specific reasons include a disability or other similar personal conditions that are not temporary and constitute an immediate obstacle for the pupil to attain a certain goal.

#### *Hospital education*

It is of great importance that pupils who have been ill for a long time have access to education. Pupils in compulsory school who frequently miss school due to illness or are ill for an extended period of time are entitled to education at a hospital or equivalent, in their home or another convenient location. This education shall correspond as far as possible to regular classroom education and is only given with the consent of a physician.



***Specific approaches and measures adopted to make the education system more flexible in order to offer additional educational opportunities to those who have dropped out or have not attained an appropriate level of qualifications***

The individual programme receives pupils lacking the requirements needed to apply for a national upper secondary programme. The aim of the programme is, through individual adjustments and specific resources, to support the pupil's transition to a national programme. The individual programme could be regarded as an instrument to give special support to students. However support is as well given to students in national programmes in order to help them complete their studies in the programme. Action plans for pupils in need of special support shall also be established in upper-secondary school.

The national adult education system gives adults an opportunity to supplement their education. Primarily those who have received the least education are given an opportunity to strengthen their position in working, cultural and political life through education. Adult education is carried out as municipal adult education – basic adult education, upper-secondary adult education and supplementary education- and adult education for persons with severe learning disabilities. In addition, Government supports liberal adult education that is supposed to give priority to activities that aim at bridging educational gaps and is geared towards educationally, socially and culturally disadvantaged people. Particularly important target groups are people of foreign descent, people with physical or mental disabilities and those unemployed.

#### **2.4. Learners and teachers**

***New approaches to teaching and learning being implemented to increase educational opportunities for all, improve student learning outcomes and reduce disparities***

Teachers are responsible for organising work in class in such way as to meet with pupils' different needs and a variety of methods can be used. Individual Development Plans for all pupils that are evaluated continually were introduced in 2005. Each pupil can thus follow his/her own knowledge progress in relation to national goals.

A systematic set of checkpoints helps the teacher to see what is missing and how to go further. The Government has in 2008 decided upon national objectives to be achieved in Swedish and Mathematics for year 3 (up until then only for year 5 and 9) and national tests in these years will now be compulsory in order to early on discover contingent need for special support. Diagnosis material has also been developed.

The Government has launched several major initiatives on teacher education and teacher in-service training as a means of improving student outcomes and reducing disparities. (see above 1.2)

***Ways the curricula are being designed and organized to respond to the diversity of learners***

One of the fundamental tasks of pre-school, stated in the curriculum, is to be enjoyable, secure, developmental and rich in learning opportunities for all children on the basis of each child's individual conditions and needs. Children who occasionally or on a more permanent basis need more support than others should receive this in relation to their needs and circumstances. The pre-school should, according to the curriculum, help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receive an opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue. The pre-school can help to ensure that children from national minorities and children with a foreign background receive support in developing a multicultural belonging.

The curricula for compulsory and non-compulsory school state that equivalent education does not have to mean that the education should be the same everywhere or that school resources shall be allocated equally. Account should be taken of the varying circumstances and needs of pupils as well as the fact that there are a variety of ways of attaining these goals. In both curricula, the schools are furthermore given a special responsibility for pupils with different disabilities and pupils who for different reasons experience difficulties in attaining the goals that have been set for the education.

***Instructional hours, in terms of curricular time, per year dedicated to learning reading in the early primary grades***

The minimum of 1490 instructional hours is dedicated to the subjects Swedish or Swedish as a Second Language during nine years of compulsory school. It is not further regulated how many of these 1490 hours should be dedicated to learning reading nor how many hours should be dedicated to the early primary grades. Municipalities and schools decide themselves on the distribution of hours and in what year a subject is to be introduced.

Results from PIRLS 2006 show that about half of the Swedish pupils in the fourth school year (or aged around 10) receive more than three hours of teaching of reading and/or other reading activities per week. In an international comparison Swedish teachers devote 1.6 hours per week to developing and improving pupils' reading literacy compared to an average of 2.5 hours.

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