



**National summary sheets on
education systems in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2007 Edition



SWEDEN

DECEMBER 2007

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 2005, 36 % of the population was between 0 and 29 years old and slightly more than 995 000 young people were in compulsory education and around 350 000 in upper secondary schools. The main language of instruction is Swedish. There are state schools for the Sami population in the north of Sweden, where basic curriculum is taught in Swedish and Sami.

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

In Sweden, practically all pupils attend publicly funded schools. An increasing number of pupils attend grant aided independent schools (8 % in compulsory school and 13 % in upper secondary school in 2005). Grant aided 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 meet operational costs.

Education is steered by a system of management by goals/learning outcomes. The Government has the overall responsibility for education and sets the framework for education at the national level, but the municipalities are responsible for providing and operating schools at basic, secondary and adult education level. Universities and university colleges are responsible for providing and operating tertiary education. The legal framework consists of laws and ordinances and, for the schools, curricula, goals and syllabi. In higher education there are no national curricula, but an appendix to the ordinance stipulates degrees in undergraduate tertiary education and their requirements. Some responsibilities, typically regarding monitoring and evaluation of the system, are delegated to central authorities.

The Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and supervision of pre-primary/early childhood education, schools and adult education. The Swedish National Agency for School Improvement (*Myndigheten för skolutveckling*) supports local development of work quality and improvement of learning environments, stimulates the development of professional competence among educators, supports the widened use of ICT in education and is responsible for the national programme for education for school leaders.

The National Agency for Higher Education (*Högskoleverket*) is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and supervision of tertiary education as well as provision of information to students and international contacts.

3. Pre-primary education

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| Pre-primary/early childhood education (<i>Förskola</i>) | Age 1/5 |
| Pre-primary class in <i>Grundskolan</i> | 6 |

The municipalities are required to provide pre-primary/early childhood education (*förskola*) for all children aged 1 to 5 whose parents work or study. Universal pre-school (*allmän förskola*) gives all four- and five-year olds, including those with parents that are unemployed or on parental leave, the right to pre-primary/early childhood education for at least three hours a day or 15 hours a week free of charge. This is generally provided in pre-schools, but also by childminders in the minders' own home or in so called open pre-schools where children and their parents can spend 3 hours a day five days a week. The municipal budget and parental fees finance municipal pre-school activities. The maximum fee regulates families' maximum cost for childcare by taking into account the number of children from one family that attend pre-school activities or school-age childcare.

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

The following table shows the percentage of children attending pre-primary education in 2005.

| | Age 1-3 | Age 4-5 | Age 6 (pre-school class) |
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| Number of children in pre-primary/early childhood education | 75.3 % | 96.4 % | 94.7 % |

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

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| <i>Grundskola</i> (primary and lower secondary education) | Age 6/7-15/16 |
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All children ages 7-16 must attend school for a compulsory period of nine years. If the parents so wish a child can start school at the age of six, some three per cent of all six-year-olds attended school in 2005.

(ii) Admissions criteria

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

(iii) Length of 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 number of hours per week and the length of the school day (which must not exceed six hours in the first two years and eight hours in the later years). National regulations specify the minimum number of hours taught over the nine years of compulsory schooling as 6 665.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Class size is not centrally regulated: it is determined locally by the municipality and the school. Children are usually grouped by age; integrated classes are common where there are few children and are sometimes used as a pedagogical tool. In the first three years the class teacher normally teaches all subjects except in some cases music and physical education and health. In classes 4-5 specialised teachers teach languages, mathematics, craft and art. From class 6-7 all teachers are specialised to teach two or three subjects. There are leisure-time centres that cater for pupils in the morning and in the afternoon, and their staff often participates in school activities during school hours.

(v) Curriculum control and content

The curriculum is determined at national level and is the basis for the municipalities' school plan setting out the general objectives for school activities. In addition, each school has a work plan based on the curriculum and local priorities. Within this framework, teachers and institutions are free to determine teaching methods and select teaching material. The curriculum includes the compulsory school, the pre-primary class and the leisure-time centres and prescribes compulsory subjects, subject syllabi and educational goals. Swedish, English and Mathematics have a prominent role in compulsory school. All pupils also study practical arts subjects, social sciences, natural sciences and another foreign language. There is a nationally valid timetable stating the number of hours per subject over the nine years of compulsory education, but each municipality/school decide themselves on the distribution of hours and in what year a subject is introduced, as long as pupils meet the goals set in the curriculum for year five and nine.

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Pupils are continuously assessed throughout compulsory education. Grades are introduced in 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 grade is awarded for each subject and the teacher determines the final grade awarded. In this grading process the teacher should take into consideration all performance information available for that particular pupil, and not only test results. Pupils automatically move to a higher class each year. In cases where a pupil fails to achieve a passing grade in a subject, no grade is given.

At the end of year 9, teachers shall use nationally approved tests in Swedish, Swedish as a Second Language, English and Mathematics, to aid the assessment of student progress and assist in determining which grade to be given. National tests can be used to assess the student's progress in these subjects at the end of year 5. These tests are optional for the schools. National tests are a support tool for teachers. Only the final grades set by the teachers and based on the teachers' overall judgements of the pupil's results are recorded in the grade certificate.

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level**(i) Types of education**

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| <i>Gymnasieskola</i> (upper secondary education) | Age 16-19 |
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The public school system for adults includes municipal adult education including post-secondary training programmes, supplementary education programmes (a complementary education at upper secondary level within certain subjects and vocational fields), advanced vocational education and training, municipal education for adults with learning disabilities and Swedish tuition for immigrants. Folk high schools and adult education associations offer other forms of adult education.

(ii) Admissions criteria

A compulsory school-leaving certificate qualifies students to apply for upper secondary education. For the 17 national programmes and the specially designed programmes (for students with special interests)

pupils must have passing grades in Swedish (mother tongue) or Swedish as a second language, English and Mathematics. Pupils who do not meet the requirements may follow an individual programme. Pupils may attend schools outside their home municipality. Municipal upper secondary schools are grant aided and free of charge. Independent schools at upper secondary level are generally grant aided. Grant aided schools as a general rule are not allowed to charge fees.

Law stipulates the right to basic education for adults without a compulsory school-leaving certificate. Upper secondary education for adults is primarily aimed for people with short previous education or less than two years of upper secondary education.

(iii) Curriculum 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 programmes and the specially designed programme provide a broad-based general education and general eligibility for entrance to tertiary education. The common core subjects are Swedish (mother tongue) or Swedish as a second language, English, Mathematics, religion, civics, science studies, physical education and health and artistic activities. The core subjects take up about one third of the tuition. The remaining time pupils study programme specific subjects and individual choices. The individual programme aims to qualify students for the national programmes.

Municipal adult education includes basic and upper secondary education. Basic education for adults corresponds to the 9-year compulsory school and leads to a leaving certificate requiring passing grades in Swedish (mother tongue) or Swedish as a second language, English, Mathematics and Social Studies. Upper secondary education for adults and the regular upper secondary school for youths share the same syllabi, the same curriculum and the same grading. The students themselves determine the rate of study and number of subjects.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment is continuous with marks awarded at completion of each course. The assessment involves national tests in certain subjects. The grades are Pass, Pass with Distinction and Pass with Special Distinction and Not Passed. There is no final examination, but a leaving certificate is awarded on completion of the education. This consists of a summary of the courses in the pupil's study plan and the grades received for each course. After completing their upper secondary education, pupils are entitled to resit tests to improve their grades. These tests are organised by the local municipality.

6. Higher education

(i) Structure

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

(ii) Access

The basic eligibility requirement for all courses and programmes is either a school-leaving certificate from an upper secondary national programme (with passing grades in at least 90 % of the credit points constituting a complete programme) or four years of work experience. For eligibility through work experience applicants must be 25 years old and possess knowledge of Swedish and English corresponding to a completed upper secondary programme. Most courses and programmes also have specific 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 is made on 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 designed to cover student's living costs during the study period, as well as study-related expenses, such as course literature. The support is a combination of non-repayable grant and a larger repayable loan and may be awarded for full-time or part-time studies.

(iii) Qualifications

As a result of the Bologna process a new structure for higher education was implemented in July 2007. There are four general undergraduate degrees and about 40 professional degrees set out in the Degree Ordinance. The general degrees are the higher education diploma (two years of study), the Bachelor degree (three years of study), the Master's degree (*magisterexamen*) (four years of study alternatively one year of study for students with a previous degree of at least 180 credits) and the new Master's degree (*masterexamen*) (five years of studies). The programmes leading to professional degrees vary in length from two to five-and-a-half years.

7. Special needs

Pupils with a physical disability normally attend mainstream schools, except those with hearing disabilities, which usually attend special state schools. Pupils with severe learning disabilities receive separate education at compulsory and upper secondary level; sometimes they are integrated into classes in the compulsory school system. In 2005 less than 0.02 % of all pupils in compulsory and upper secondary school were separately educated.

According to the Act of Equal Treatment of Students in Higher Education (Law 2001:1286), and a paragraph in the Higher Education Act (Law 1992:1434) 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 orientation and functional disability.

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. The municipality employs teachers in municipal schools and the school employs teachers in independent schools. Teachers in pre-school, pre-primary classes, compulsory school and upper secondary school are mainly municipal employees. Decisions on employing teachers are taken at school level. Regulations on working time, salaries and other working conditions are set in collective agreements by the employers and teachers unions. Teachers have individual salaries negotiated by the employer and the teacher (generally represented by the teacher union) at school level.

There is one integrated teaching degree, which means all teachers have a common basic competence combined with a specialisation for particular subjects/subject areas and/or age groups. The length of studies varies from three to five and a half years depending on the chosen subject area and age level. It is also possible to obtain a teaching degree through combining education and experience in subjects relevant to school with a special one and a half-year teacher-training course.

Teaching staff at universities and university colleges is grouped into the main categories of professors, lecturers, junior lecturers and research assistants. Employees at public universities and university colleges are national civil servants. In order to promote pedagogical renewal applicants seeking permanent senior or junior lecturer posts must have teacher training for tertiary education or have acquired equivalent skills. Training in tertiary education teaching methods is required for post-graduate students in teaching posts.

9. Current reforms and priorities

(a) Recent changes

An active reform policy has characterised the area of education during the last decade. Mainly as a result of the Bologna process, legislation for a three-cycle structure of higher education was adopted in January 2007 and applied as from 1 July 2007. The new structure replaces the former system and is the only structure for all higher education institutions (HEIs). This will improve international comparability of Swedish education in accordance with the Bologna process. A new credit point system in line with ECTS is introduced. The former degree system has been reformed and structured to fit the new three-cycle system.

Quality is enhanced at all levels of education, from pre-school, through compulsory and upper secondary education to tertiary education. The Government's quality work aims at strengthening the systematic quality work throughout the educational system and standardized measures for assessing results to be used in quality reporting are developed by the Swedish National Agency for Education.

The *Riksdag* has decided a law against discrimination and offensive treatment of children and pupils. The Governmental bill '*Trygghet, respekt och ansvar – om förbud mot diskriminering och annan kränkande behandling av barn och elever*' (2005/06:38) entered into force on 1 April 2006. It regulates the right of children and pupils to equivalent treatment in pre-school, compulsory school, upper secondary school and adult education. The aim of the Act is to counteract discrimination on the grounds of sex, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief systems, sexual orientation or disabilities.

(b) Planned reforms

Review of the Education Act

The Government plans to submit a proposal for a new Education Act during spring 2008. The proposal will be drawn up by the Ministry of Education. Planned changes cover i.a. an increase and clarification of teachers' disciplinary powers. The legal position of independent schools will be strengthened, the qualification rules for the teaching profession will be tightened up, teachers' authorisation will be introduced and adult education will be regulated under the Education Act.

Upper secondary education

A Commission has been appointed to review the future structure of the upper secondary school. According to the directives of the Commission, students in the upper secondary school should be offered three new different education pathways: programs preparatory for further studies, vocationally oriented programs, and apprenticeship training. The Commission will present its work on 31 March 2008.

The National Agency for School Improvement will provide support during school year 2006/07 for developing educational forms similar to apprenticeship training (*lärlingsutbildning*) in upper secondary vocational education at six pilot schools. The goal being to elaborate structures for less 'academic' upper secondary programmes and give students a wider choice.

Unrevised English

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