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Ministry of Education and Research**The Swedish strategy for lifelong learning. A summary of principles and orientations**

Lifelong learning may be regarded as an overall description of a number of approaches, system characteristics and basic values which over a number of years has been one of the guiding principles in the development of educational and learning policy in a broad sense. This Memorandum intends to provide an up-to-date, overall description of the principles and policy orientations that the strategy for lifelong learning today is currently based on.

The right of everyone to a good education

Education like few other areas impacts many people in society. High quality in education and research is vital in determining how Sweden develops as a knowledge nation and knowledge economy.

Compulsory schooling should provide all citizens with opportunities to play an active role in a democratic society. It should also provide all children and young people with an education that prepares them for adult life.

In Sweden there is a well-established tradition of broad public education consisting of voluntary and societal initiatives. It has long been self-evident that a person's education should not be dependent on social background, gender or financial resources. Everyone has the same right to a good education. The school is a unique opportunity for each child to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills, which she or he needs. It is here that the foundations for lifelong learning are laid.

A strategy for such learning must be based on the individual rather than systems and institutions, and they in their turn should be organised to support individual learning at different stages of life. The individual's opportunities, needs, motivation and potential should be the starting point for the support to be provided and the structures that are needed. A strategy must cover all forms of learning, formal, as well as informal, and non-formal. It must cover all levels and parts of the education system, from preschool to adult education and higher education. It must take into account and give meaning to learning in both working life and in societal life, as well as in other life contexts.

Quality is the key word

The policy for lifelong learning focuses largely on quality and goal attainment. This applies not least to the early parts of the education system. The Government's intention is to clearly direct policy so that all young persons obtain basic knowledge and skills. The individual in an upper secondary school should not need to learn what he or she should have already learned in compulsory school. Adult education should be directed not only to compensating for shortcomings in knowledge, but also to broadening opportunities for adults to raise their competence. In higher education quality enhancing measures must be given priority in the future over quantitative expansion.

The education system should be organised so that transitions between different levels and parts are facilitated, as well as the transition between education and working life. Dead-ends in the educational system should be avoided as far as possible. Good opportunities should also exist for those who wish and need to supplement in different ways their earlier studies in order to progress to a higher level or change orientation. Study and vocational guidance of high quality in different forms of education are important in satisfying the needs of individuals, society and the labour market.

Accessibility - equivalence - coordination

All education in the public education system should be free of charge for citizens. In addition, a generous and equitable study support system should provide everyone with the opportunity to study, irrespective of background and financial resources. Both these investments from the public side provide many people with financial conditions for studies and encourage education and lifelong learning.

Education should be geographically accessible and adapted to the different living conditions of individuals. One aim is the attainment of a high level of equivalence in education as regards admission, design

and content. Education should have the same value irrespective of where it is provided, but this does not mean it has to be identical. Opportunities for learning should exist and be promoted throughout the whole of a person's life cycle. Different groups with different preconditions should have equal opportunities for studying and learning. Functional disabilities must not be permitted to constitute an obstacle to learning. Knowledge and experience must be recognized, for example, through validation. All employees have long enjoyed a legal right to leave of absence from employment in order to study.

Since learning in a broad sense is not just related to the education system, but is also very closely linked to working life, societal life, and not least the individual, co-ordination is a foundation stone for lifelong learning. The public sector can in some cases support the individual with labour market training, but the most important support which can be given is to stimulate by different ways participation in working life. This is a prerequisite for learning at work. Working life thus plays an important role in learning and development.

The preschool and preschool class

A preschool of high-quality provides the foundations for future learning. The preschool has had its own curriculum since 1998. The preschool should provide at an early stage pedagogical stimulation and the pedagogical task of the preschool should be strengthened as the child develops. The preschool class plays an important role in assisting the transition between preschool and school.

Activities in both the preschool and the preschool class must be continuously developed so that children receive competent support in their language development, amongst other things. The development of language is the means of acquiring an understanding the surrounding world. Linking language development and concept formation is needed to develop both good reading skills and e.g. develop understanding in mathematics. Different studies over many years have shown that an early starting point in the preschool (or equivalent) have a favourable effect on the child's development and that children who have gone to preschool subsequently achieve better outcomes in school.

Municipalities are obliged to supply preschooling for children aged 1-5 years. They are heavily subsidized and highly accessible. A universal preschool free of charge for children from the age of 4 has been introduced, and the Government also intends to introduce this for 3 year-olds. Preschooling has been continuously expanded since the end of the 1960s, and has continued to expand over the last decade. 83

percent of all children aged 1-5 years in 2005 were registered in preschooling, and among children aged 4-5 years, the corresponding figure was 96 percent.

Compulsory school

The fact that the school can provide the young with the skills and desire to learn is in many ways vital for the development of Swedish society and prosperity. All children have the right to learn basic skills, such as reading, writing and counting, and obtain the basic tools they need to function in societal and professional life. The school should strive to create the best overall conditions for the pupils' general education, thinking and knowledge development.

The core task of the compulsory school is its knowledge mission. The Government is thus initiating a number of different measures to strengthen quality in education. In order to equip schools with better conditions for providing individualized support to pupils at an early stage, compulsory national tests will be introduced for year 3 and tests in year 5 will be made compulsory. The intention is also that compulsory grading should be introduced earlier than is currently the case. Opportunities for local follow-up of knowledge development should be reinforced.

Since the main task of the school is that all pupils should achieve the knowledge goals, teaching needs to be continuously developed and improved, so that the school can more effectively meet the challenge of teaching pupils with different backgrounds and preconditions. It is essential that teachers be given good opportunities to develop professionally. A comprehensive initiative will be launched during 2007/08 to increase the opportunities for teachers to participate in advanced in-service training and in-depth studies. The initiative also involves increasing teachers' opportunities to carry out research and postgraduate studies parallel with teaching and other pedagogical activities. Lifelong learning is also important for those staff who have the task of supporting pupils in their development.

Negative experiences from schooling may lead to a loss of interest in learning in adult life as well. For this reason, the lifelong perspective is vital if the school is truly to be a school for all. Compulsory schooling as a whole should create the conditions for basic knowledge on the part of all pupils. Division into fixed groups on the basis of knowledge and level of ambition has been replaced by a more individual view based on pupils' needs, which also has the purpose of eliminating

dead-ends. Resources and support for pupils should be employed at an early stage to prevent later difficulties during schooling.

The learning of children and young persons presupposes security, a stable learning environment and freedom from discrimination and abusive treatment. The Government attaches the highest priority to creating a school where the rights of all pupils are respected.

Upper secondary school

The upper secondary school is a voluntary school form building on the compulsory school. Municipalities have an obligation to provide young persons residing in the home municipality with a well-balanced, all-round selection of programs, either locally or through co-operation with other municipalities. The upper secondary school should provide educational pathways of high quality. It should provide preparation for vocational studies, as an employee or for running one's own business, for further studies and active participation in the life of society.

The Government has a clear ambition that more young people should achieve the goals set up for the different programmes on completion of upper secondary schooling. There are far too many young people who have not obtained a basic foundations, and who thus run the risk of not being able to establish an entry point to the labour market and in adult life. A new upper secondary education would better satisfy the needs, not only of pupils who intend to study in higher education, but also those who wish to begin working in a profession or vocational area immediately after upper secondary school, or after further vocational studies. The upper secondary school should be designed such that more young people than hitherto have the opportunity of completing their education. At present only around three quarters of those who start an upper secondary education obtain a final certificate within four years. Current policy is that students in the future will be offered programs in three different educational pathways through the upper secondary school. Not only will the theoretically oriented programs lead to an upper secondary school certificate that provides basic eligibility for higher education. But vocationally oriented programs will also lead to a vocational leaving certificate. The third pathway is apprenticeship training that leads to an apprenticeship qualification. By this means the upper second school will become a school for all young people, where each and every one can participate in an education programme that corresponds to their interests and preconditions.

One of the aims of the future reform is that all upper secondary education should more than hitherto focus on the goals which the study pathways are directed towards. As vocationally oriented programs are increasingly directed to those subjects which are specific to their study pathway, student motivation and completion rates will increase. At the same time, it should be possible in a vocational program to study courses or subjects that provide basic eligibility to higher education.

Working life imposes demands on both broad and specialist competences. Labour market demands for mobility are increasing. Vocationally oriented study pathways need to be continuously adapted to changes in different industrial and vocational areas. The vocational programs of the upper secondary school function as a source of recruitment for broad sectors of working life. In order to ensure high quality in education and good adaptation of the education to vocational life, greater coordination is needed between school and working life.

The dimensioning of the different study pathways of the upper secondary school should be based on the principle of student's freedom of choice, which would also in all probability promote learning motivation. In order to ensure that the choice of educational pathway rests on a solid foundation, pupils in the compulsory school and their parents should have access to appropriate guidance and good information on different occupations, educational pathways and what the future expectations of the labour market are.

3. Higher education

Sweden needs a well-educated labour force in order to compete internationally and create economic growth and greater prosperity. Higher education of internationally comparable quality is a precondition for achieving this. It should also contribute to the student's personal development, involvement in society, critical thinking and general all-round education.

The curiosity of students and their acquisition of knowledge should be a starting point for the direction of higher education and its dimensioning. By this means motivation will increase and this is a precondition for good study outcomes and a good throughput.

Quality in higher education has the highest priority. Resources for increasing teacher-student ratios and the proportion of teachers with postgraduate qualifications in undergraduate programmes should be built up so that the future expansion of undergraduate programmes can

take place without any negative effects on the quality of the education. The Government is now investing in reinforcing quality in the humanistic and social science areas. Increased resources must also be allocated to postgraduate programs in order to achieve high quality and secure conditions.

Quality in higher education should be continuously evaluated. Apart from providing knowledge and skills, a central purpose of higher education is that it can lead to work related to the education. The current task of the National Agency for Higher Education is to examine institutions of higher education in terms of their quality and that individual programmes should be expanded.

Higher education should be easily accessible through direct education or via distance technologies and should be free of charge for all citizens of the EEA, as well as for students from foreign universities that have co-operation agreements with Sweden.

Social, gender and ethnic distortions in higher education must be counteracted. Work on this must take a long-term view and build on an overall approach covering all levels of education. Compulsory and upper secondary school fulfil a crucial mission in providing pupils with the basic knowledge needed for higher education.

Structures which impede development in the direction of gender equality in higher education must be removed. Institutions of higher education should work actively both to recruit students from under-represented genders, and educational environments so that both female and male students have equivalent opportunities to educate themselves in areas in which they are interested. Measures must also be taken to increase integration of immigrant academics by means of special supplementary measures for different professional groups.

Sweden's universities and university colleges have for some time – for instance by encouraging older persons to study in higher education – a well-established tradition in providing courses that can be studied at different tempos, during evenings and weekends. The Swedish system where higher education is made up of courses that can be studied independently and which the student can build further on, strengthen the opportunities for adults to return to higher education after a degree, or to study short courses which they may need in their working life.

Higher education should coordinate with the surrounding society. Institutions of higher education should increasingly play a role in

regional development. Students and institutions of higher education should be given good preconditions for international cooperation and exchange.

Adult education

Studying is one means by which an individual through their own efforts can strengthen their position in society and in working life. Adult education is one of the opportunities for learning which society provides the individual and which has well-established traditions in Sweden. It provides individuals with the opportunity of developing and strengthening their knowledge and skills, for example, in working life or for further studies for those who are not eligible for such an education. Upper secondary education and post upper secondary education parallel with higher education are also important in providing many with a vocational education at a basic or more advanced level. Those who have the least education should be given priority in selection.

Apart from participation in the public education system – formal learning – learning takes place in both working life, as well as in private life. This learning often makes up an essential part of an individual's competence development. Policy should be directed to both supporting adult learning, and promoting the development of structures for greater coordination between different players supporting learning. Responsibility for adult education in a broad sense thus becomes the responsibility of the individual, the state and the employer.

Similar to other forms of education, publicly supported adult education has the aim of satisfying both the needs of the individual and society. This may involve measures for satisfying the specific requirements of the labour market, or changes in society which necessitate educational initiatives for adults, or individual needs for competence development, in order to achieve a better position in working life, and make possible higher studies, or a more general ambition to learn more in a specific area. Often or perhaps most often these aims coincide to varying degrees. An individual's development is, of course, of interest not only for the individual, but also society. The individual's preconditions should be the starting point for accessibility and organisation of adult education, and it should be possible to combine learning with other commitments in life. A well-developed infrastructure with guidance, validation, accessibility and study support are thus of great importance, as is the flexibility and appropriateness of the education to different life situations. It should be possible to study irrespective of whether one is employed or wishes to combine work and studies, or study by distance or in more traditional forms.

Popular adult education through activities carried out by popular adult education institutes and folk high schools also plays an important role in providing adults with learning opportunities, not least for those with a weak educational background. Popular adult education fulfils a number of different purposes; it should, amongst others, enable people to influence their life situation, strengthen and develop democracy, and broaden cultural interests in society. Popular adult education also provides people with the opportunity to more freely and on the basis of their own desires and interests create together with others "their own education" without being forced to follow a given program or priorities dictated by society.

Today adults have the right to obtain an education corresponding to that of the compulsory school. The Government intends to examine how a similar right could be introduced at the upper secondary school level. In addition, there will be an investigation as to how independent adult education could be organised so that adults will have the same opportunity as children and young people to choose an education based on their desires and needs.

Post upper secondary education outside higher education must be strengthened and transformed into a more powerful alternative. Crucial for the quality of vocational education is that it corresponds to the real needs of society and working life. Currently the issue of the introduction of a common framework for post upper secondary vocational education is being investigated.

Labour market policy

The essence of the Government's labour market policy is to create preconditions for more people to enter the labour market at an earlier stage, and that more people of working age work and fewer leave before normal retirement age. This means, amongst other things, a clear focus on jobs and effective measures for those who are furthest from the labour market. Labour market policy can and should function as a lubricant in the labour market. It should enable people to move from one job to another, or from unemployment to work in the regular labour market as rapidly as possible. Labour market training – currently under review – should increasingly be directed to strengthening the competence of the unemployed and focus on areas where there is a shortage of labour.

In addition, initiatives are being taken to improve the supply of labour and competence development within the framework of the EU structural

funds and Swedish regional growth policy programmes. This involves initiatives in learning centres, competence development of employees to develop their competence and strengthen opportunities for successfully managing ongoing structural change, coordination between different authorities and organisations, e.g. labour market boards, county administrative boards, universities and university colleges, over the supply of competence as well as initiatives to bring about a change in work organisations.

A working organisation with good opportunities for employees to participate and develop on the basis of their individual preconditions is important. Sweden is at a comparatively high level as regards competence development at work. Of the total labour force aged between 25–64 years, 33.5 percent participated in some form of in-service training during 2005.¹ Development in this area is very largely an issue for the labour market partners, and the Government is considering investigating new pathways to stimulate individuals and employers to put resources into lifelong learning.

¹ EU's *Labour Force Survey*.