



Sweden

Education for All 2015 National Review

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National Education for All Review 2015 - Sweden

The conference, World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, held in April 2000, confirmed that the right to education is a human right.

The final document from Dakar contains an agreement that member states shall work to attain the six goals set for EFA (Education for All) by 2005 and 2015 respectively and to develop a National Action Plan for achieving the goals by 2002.

In autumn 2002 an action plan was accordingly drawn up by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with representatives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Representatives of government agencies, teachers' and head teachers' organisations and voluntary organisations submitted their opinions on the plan. The plan was adopted by the Swedish Government on 19 December 2002 (U2002/2817/IS).

The plan found that the level of ambition for goals 1 to 5 had already been achieved in Sweden. Regarding goal 6, it was judged that there was scope for additional initiatives to attain a nationally equivalent and qualitatively high level of education throughout the country and in all schools. The action plan set out several measures for achieving goal 6.

A follow-up and a concluding assessment of the six EFA goals as requested by UNESCO on 5 July 2013 (ED/THE/TEP/13/31/ NNT/MDD) are provided below.

Follow-up of the six goals of Education for All

Goal 1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

Since the late 1990s, preschool has been the first step in Sweden's coherent education system. The introduction of a preschool curriculum has clarified the educational task of preschool education, giving it more specific nationwide goals. Preschool education is integrated in the Education Act (2010:800) and is a form of education in its own right as part of the education system with the same overall goals as other forms of schooling. In addition to the preschool curriculum, there is also general advice and support material produced by the national education authority, the Swedish National Agency for Education, to support and provide guidance in working to improve goal fulfilment in pre-school education.

The Education Act states that preschool is to stimulate children's development and learning in a secure and caring environment. Activities are to be based on a holistic view of the child and the child's needs and designed such that care, development and learning form a coherent whole. Preschool is also intended to promote a broad spectrum of contacts and a sense of community, and to prepare children for continued education.

Under the Education Act, municipalities are obliged to offer children preschool education from the age of one to the extent it is required in terms of the paid employment or studies of the parents, or if the child has a need in their own right due to the family's situation in general.

In autumn 2012, the number of children registered in preschool reached an unprecedented level. In 2012, 84 percent of all children aged 1 to 4 were attending preschool, compared with 72 percent 10 years earlier. There is an equal distribution between boys and girls. The highest attendance is seen in children aged 4 to 5, with almost 95 percent of all children attending preschool.

On 1 July 2010 public preschool was introduced from the age of three. The underlying idea is that more children than before should gain access to educational activities. No family should be denied the opportunity for their child to attend preschool for financial reasons.

Despite the fact that more children are attending preschool, the average class size has not changed since the start of the 2000s, remaining relatively constant at around 17 children. Under the

Education Act, classes must be of an appropriate composition and size.

In autumn 2012, 94 percent of FTE preschool staff were trained to work with children. The proportion of FTE staff with a higher education qualification in education was 54 percent. The staffing ratio was 5.3 children per FTE member of staff and 10.1 children per preschool teacher. Data on training and staffing ratios has varied very little over the past decade. The gender distribution of preschool staff has not changed either. The gender distribution is not equal. 3.5 percent of FTE staff were men in autumn 2012. The Swedish National Agency for Education has currently been commissioned to run a national campaign to encourage more men to train as preschool teachers. It is important that both men and women work in the preschool sector.

According to the Education Act and the preschool curriculum, preschool is to contribute towards giving children whose mother tongue is not Swedish an opportunity to develop the Swedish language and their mother tongue. The number of children attending preschool with a mother tongue other than Swedish has more than doubled in the past decade from 43 000 children in 2002 to 99 800 children in 2012. This means that two out of ten children attending preschool have a mother tongue other than Swedish.

A survey of parents shows that parents in Sweden are satisfied with preschool education. Almost 90 percent think that staff are doing a good job, that children feel secure and that the teaching is good. However, many parents are dissatisfied with preschool class sizes.

The Education Act and the preschool curriculum have given preschool teachers clearer responsibility for teaching as part of preschool education. A number of measures have been put in place to empower this professional group. New preschool teacher training began in autumn 2011. In the same year preschool teacher certification was introduced to raise the status of the profession of preschool teacher and guarantee quality. Only holders of such a certificate may be employed as preschool teachers on permanent contracts.

From 2009 to 2011 Förskolelyftet (“Preschool Initiative”) offered an opportunity for continuing professional development for preschool teachers, childminders, etc. in the preschool sector. The aim was to improve the expertise of preschool staff as the educational mandate of preschools was clarified in the preschool curriculum. From 2012 to 2014 an additional training initiative was carried out for preschool teachers and preschool heads, partly with a focus on continuing

professional development regarding children in need of special support, as well as monitoring and evaluation. From autumn 2013, courses were also offered focusing on multilingualism and intercultural competence.

Before reaching compulsory school age, all six-year-olds must be offered a place in a preschool class. The preschool class is a voluntary form of education within the public education system. The preschool class is to stimulate the development and learning of every child and form the basis for continued schooling. In 2012 95 percent of Sweden's six-year-olds were attending a preschool class, a gradual increase from 94 percent in 2002.

Goal 2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.

Education is compulsory for almost all children resident in Sweden. Compulsory education goes hand in hand with a right to education, which can be met in a school run by the public sector or a school run by the private sector. Because education is compulsory, compulsory school attendance mirrors demographic trends. Compulsory schooling may be provided in one of the following types of school: compulsory school, compulsory school for children with learning disabilities, special school or Sami school. Children of Sami people can complete their compulsory education at Sami school instead of years 1 to 6 of compulsory school. Other children may also complete their compulsory education at Sami school if there are special reasons to do so. Compulsory school for children with learning disabilities aims to give students with learning disabilities education tailored to their needs which provides skills and teaches values and develops students' ability to acquire these. The education must be adapted to the abilities of each individual student and covers nine school years. Within compulsory school for students with learning disabilities there is a special orientation called the training school. Special school is for children who due to their disability or other special reasons are unable to attend compulsory school or compulsory school for students with learning disabilities. Special schools cover ten school years.

There are also other ways of completing compulsory education, for example during a stay in hospital or if there are grounds for attending an international school.

Education in schools is partly guided by curricula with course syllabuses. The Swedish National Agency for Education has also set

out general guidelines to support the work of education providers in complying with the provisions.

Education is compulsory from the autumn term in which the child reaches the age of seven. The main rule is that compulsory school attendance ceases at the end of the spring term in the ninth year after the student began compulsory education. For students attending special schools, compulsory education ends at the end of the tenth year.

The basic education to which all children have a right within compulsory education must be free of charge. Pupils must be offered meals free of charge and the municipality in which they are resident is obliged to arrange school transport free of charge if required. Only occasional elements forming part of school activities may give rise to a minimal cost for students.

With a few exceptions, the same provisions apply to students who lack a permanent residence permit as for all other students in school. Children seeking asylum have a right to education but are not obliged to attend school. Since 1 July 2013, children without a residence permit, known as paperless children, are entitled to education, but without being obliged to attend school. Previously municipalities offered schooling for these children on a voluntary basis but all children living in Sweden have now been granted the formal right to participate in education.

Over time, student-teacher ratios, i.e. the number of students per teacher, have increased from 12.7 in 2002 to 12.1 in 2012. The gender distribution of teachers in compulsory school is unequal, an imbalance which has increased over time.

Under the Education Act, education must take into account the different needs of children and students. Schools must give all children and students the guidance and stimulation that they need in their learning and their personal growth to enable them to develop as far as possible on the basis of their own capacity in line with the goals of education. One aim must be to even out differences in the underlying factors affecting the capacity of children and students to benefit from education. One intention of this rule is to highlight the responsibility that providers and the profession have, in allocating resources, organisation and choosing methods and approaches, for adapting activities to the differing abilities and needs of children and students.

Teaching in the student's mother tongue is offered in compulsory schools. This teaching aims to give students an opportunity to develop

their spoken and written language such that they gain confidence in their language skills and are able to express themselves in different contexts and for different purposes. Teaching is to contribute towards students acquiring knowledge of the structure of their mother tongue and becoming aware of the importance of their mother tongue for their own learning in different school subjects. Just over 20 percent of all students in compulsory schools are entitled to mother tongue education. In the past ten years, this proportion has increased by almost eight percentage points. 54 percent of those entitled to mother tongue education took part in such education in 2012. Mother tongue education must also be offered in a minority language even if it is not the student's daily language of communication in the home.

Sweden has five national minority languages: Finnish, Sami, Meänkieli, Romani chib and Yiddish. Swedish sign language enjoys the same status as the national minority languages. All students must be aware of the language, culture and religion and history of the national minorities. Children and students who belong to a national minority group are able to develop their language and their multicultural identity in preschools and in schools.

Girls as a group have better final grades than boys in year nine of compulsory education. The differences have remained roughly the same for the past ten years. Across Sweden as a whole, girls' grades are better than those of boys on average, but this pattern is particularly marked in sparsely populated municipalities. Boys attain approximately 90 percent of the grades of girls in compulsory education, but the average grade gap between girls and boys varies between different subjects. In compulsory schools, girls as a group score higher average points than boys in all subjects apart from sports and health.

Of the background factors gender, socio-economic background and Swedish/foreign background, it is the student's socio-economic background, measured statistically as the level of education of their parents, that has proved to have the single largest significance for the students' results. Irrespective of the result parameters compared, the picture when it comes to parental education is clear. Pupils with highly educated parents have better results than students whose parents attained a lower level of education.

The international knowledge survey PISA 2012 shows a continued deterioration in the skills of Swedish 15-year-olds in mathematics, reading comprehension and science. Sweden has the worst trend in results of all OECD countries. Swedish students now perform below

the OECD average in all three areas. The deterioration is greatest among low-performing students. Girls generally perform better than boys in the survey. The greatest difference is seen in reading comprehension.

However, the actual picture of Swedish students' skills in compulsory school based on international studies is not unambiguous. Sweden displays a negative trend in the subjects that have long been included in international measurements: reading comprehension, mathematics and science in the latter years of compulsory education. In other areas, such as digital reading, citizenship, English and science in year four, international studies give a more positive picture.

It has also been noted that the results of compulsory schools are becoming increasingly differentiated. The differences between schools' results have doubled since the late 1990s and there is now a gap of more than 18 percent, looking at grades. In an international context, Sweden previously had minimal differences in results between schools but we are now starting to approach the level seen in many other countries.

Goal 3. Ensuring that the learning needs for all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.

All children and young people, irrespective of their gender, place of residence, ethnic affiliation, and social and economic circumstances, must have equal access to education in compulsory and upper secondary school. The education should be equivalent in each school form, irrespective of where in the country it is provided.

Upper secondary school education is voluntary, but 98.7 percent of the students who left compulsory schooling in the spring term of 2012 continued at upper secondary school in autumn 2012. The corresponding figure in autumn 2002 was 97.6%.

Upper secondary school seeks to provide fundamental life skills for preparation for vocational life, life as citizens of society and for further studies. All students who have completed compulsory schooling must be offered upper secondary education by their home municipality. An equivalent obligation also applies for young people with learning difficulties who have completed compulsory school for students with learning disabilities to be given the opportunity to receive education at an upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities. A home municipality must constantly keep itself informed of the occupation of young people under 20 years of age who have completed

compulsory education with the aim of offering them appropriate individual provision.

Swedish upper secondary education has undergone a reform and as of autumn 2011, 18 national programmes have been offered. The programme a student follows is to be based on their own choice and interests. Pupils compete for places at schools and on programmes on the basis of their grades from compulsory school. The new upper secondary school system makes a distinction between programmes that prepare students for higher education and vocational programmes. These are associated with different admission requirements, qualification goals and programme structures. There are twelve vocational programmes and six programmes leading to higher education. In addition, there are five introductory programmes intended for students who do not meet the admission requirements or who need to acquire a specific qualification, which seek to give students a foundation for further study or for the job market. Within upper secondary education apprenticeships are also offered, which means that it is possible for students on vocational programmes to carry out at least half of their education in the workplace. Upper secondary education also offers further variants such as sports programmes, with a clear focus on elite sporting prowess; aesthetic options on programmes leading to higher education; cutting edge education with a clearer profile more concentrated on certain specialist areas than other upper secondary school programmes; and a professional dancer programme, which is a vocational programme in classical ballet and modern contemporary dance.

Upper secondary schooling for students with learning disabilities in Sweden covers four years and is voluntary. There are nine vocationally oriented national programmes and individual programmes for students who need education adapted to their own situation and needs.

In autumn 2011 just over half of first year students in upper secondary school were on programmes leading to higher education, a third were on vocational programmes and just under a fifth on one of the five introductory programmes. The most common of these was language introduction, which was attended by one in three students on the introductory programme.

The Swedish government is currently carrying out major initiatives in vocational education. A student attending a vocational programme in upper secondary school will be able to learn a trade. A person who has successfully completed a vocational programme is able to start work

immediately, start their own company or continue their studies in higher vocational education or at university. Continued study in higher vocational education requires that the student either during upper secondary education or later has completed the courses required in order to meet the criteria for admission to higher education. Everyone on a vocational programme carries out at least 15 weeks of the programme in a workplace (workplace-based learning). Apprenticeships involve the student completing more than half of their education in the workplace. Employers are involved in designing vocational courses to ensure that they are as good as possible. All the students on the vocational programmes now also have the right and the opportunity to obtain fundamental qualifications for admission to higher education, within the remit of their programme.

Of the students who completed upper secondary school in spring 2009, 44 percent had started higher education within three years. This is the highest proportion since 2000/01, when the corresponding percentage was 46 percent.

As of 1 July 2012 the new Education Act has also applied to adult education. Municipal adult education comprises education at basic level and at upper secondary level. Municipal adult education at basic level is education for adults at compulsory school level and seeks to give adults the knowledge and skills they need to participate in society and the world of work. It must also seek to enable further study. Every resident of the municipality has the right to participate in basic adult education from the second half of the calendar year in which they reach the age of 20 if the person lacks the skills normally attained in compulsory school and has the capacity to benefit from the education. Municipal adult education at upper secondary school level seeks to give adults knowledge and skills equivalent to those young people gain in upper secondary school. The students are also given an opportunity to validate the knowledge, competencies and skills that they have when they begin their studies as adults. The municipalities must seek to arrange adult education at upper secondary level to match demand.

Adults with learning difficulties or acquired brain damage must be supported and stimulated in their learning within special education for adults. They must be given the opportunity to develop their skills and their competence with the aim of strengthening their position in society and in the world of work and promoting their personal growth.

An increasing number of people are studying in municipal adult education and the number reached almost 190 000 students in 2012. The number fell dramatically from the late 1990s until the end of the

first decade of the 21st century with the phasing out of the government grant introduced with Kunskapslyftet (a government initiative to promote adult education). In recent years the number of students has once more started to rise, partly due to the investment in government grants for vocational adult education courses termed Yrkesvux. The purpose of the initiative is to combat a lack of labour by providing vocational education and to reach the groups that lack upper secondary education or have vocational education but need supplementary training. From autumn 2011 municipalities can apply for government grants for apprenticeships for adults. In the academic year 1998/99 the number of students studying in municipal adult education was at its peak with 350 000 students.

In 2012 the majority of students in municipal adult education, 82 percent, are attending upper secondary education for adults. The remaining 18 percent are attending basic adult education. Every student at Komvux (municipal adult education) participates in an average of four courses, which means that there are 750 000 course participants.

In total 34 000 students attended municipal adult education at basic level in 2012. The student group has changed a great deal in the past 20 years. In 2012 35 percent of the students had a higher education qualification. In 2001, that proportion was 17 percent. The proportion of people in adult education who were born outside Sweden has increased since the 1990s and in 2011 nine out of ten participants were born abroad. See Goal 4 below.

Swedish for immigrants is advanced language education which seeks to give adult immigrants basic knowledge of the Swedish language. Every municipality is obliged to ensure that education in Swedish for immigrants is offered to the people who lack the basic skills in the Swedish language that the course is intended to provide. This applies from the second half of the year in which the students reach the age of 16. The number of students studying Swedish for immigrants has increased hugely in recent years. In 2012 just over 107 800 students attended courses, which is an increase of 5 percent on the previous year and more than double the figure in 2005.

Goal 4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

For several decades adult education has been an important part of the Swedish education system with the aim of giving everyone an opportunity for lifelong learning. The goal laid down by the Swedish

Riksdag (Parliament) for adult learning means that all adults should have the opportunity of expanding their knowledge and developing their competence in order to promote personal development, democracy, equality of opportunity, economic growth and employment, and an equitable distribution of wealth.

Autumn 2013 saw the presentation of the results of PIAAC, the OECD survey of adult skills carried out to obtain information on the extent to which the adult population, aged 16–65, has the skills needed in society. In total Sweden comes in above average for the participating countries when it comes to literacy and numeracy and highest when it comes to problem solving with the help of computers. The differences between the sexes are small in terms of literacy and also in their ability to solve problems. However, there are differences in numeracy.

While Sweden performs well in the international comparison, there is a quite large proportion of the Swedish population at a low level in the different knowledge areas. This group includes many people with limited education and many people born outside Sweden. There is a risk that groups with a low level of knowledge have poorer opportunities to participate actively in society and the world of work.

Every resident of a municipality has the right to attend basic adult education from the second half of the calendar year in which they reach the age of 20 if the person lacks the skills normally attained in compulsory school. The municipalities must also work actively to reach the adults in the municipality that have the right to participate in such education and motivate them to take part. The municipalities must seek to arrange adult education at upper secondary level to match demand. The objectives for municipal adult education are that adults must be supported and stimulated in their learning. They must be given the opportunity to develop their skills and their competence with the aim of strengthening their position in society and in the world of work and promoting their personal growth.

Every municipality is obliged to ensure that education in Swedish for immigrants is offered to the people who lack the basic skills in the Swedish language that the course is intended to provide. Swedish for immigrants is advanced language education which seeks to give adults whose mother tongue is a language other than Swedish basic skills in the Swedish language. The course enables adults to learn and develop a functional second language.

Since the end of the 1990s the number of students attending courses in Swedish for immigrants has increased, amounting to 107 800 people in 2012. More women than men attend these courses. 57 percent of the

total number of students in 2012 were women. The proportion of women has increased since the mid-1990s. In the academic year 1993/94, that proportion was 50 percent.

The state offers providers of adult education the opportunity to apply for government grants to develop activities and train staff. Providers of education in Swedish for immigrants or the equivalent can apply for grants to develop their activities.

A study of students in municipal adult education at basic level in 2010 showed that 34 percent of students had a university degree. The majority were born outside Sweden and their goal was often to learn Swedish in order to enter society and the world of work. Adult education has a challenge in better adapting to the needs and capacities of students. As of 1 July 2012 the new Education Act has also applied to adult education. One of the results of this is a greater focus on the individual. The point of departure for education must be the needs and prerequisites of the individual. One important change is that there must be an individual study plan for each student in adult education. The plan must contain information on the individual's educational goals and the planned extent of their studies.

Adult literacy only accounts for a minor proportion of basic adult education in Sweden. Illiterate people in Sweden are immigrants with a low level of education or no education at all from their respective home countries. In basic adult education, people with limited education and people who are illiterate are offered an opportunity to improve their ability to read and write at the same time as studying SFI (Swedish for immigrants).

Goal 5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

The Education Act and all curricula clearly express the fact that preschools and schools have a mandate to combat traditional gender patterns and that everyone working in preschools and schools must provide an opportunity for all children and students to try out and develop abilities and interests without being limited by their gender. Gender equality as a fundamental democratic value must both be created and conveyed.

The compulsory school curriculum states that gender equality is one of the overall objectives of education: "The school should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for women and men. The way in which girls and boys are treated and assessed in

school, and 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 patterns. It should thus provide scope for pupils to explore and develop their ability and their interests independently of gender affiliation.”

The upper secondary school curriculum states that “The school should actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Students should be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice concerning gender differences.”

According to the Education Act, everyone, irrespective of their geographical location and social and economic conditions, must have equal access to schooling within the education system. The Discrimination Act contains provisions intended to combat discrimination and otherwise promote equal rights and opportunities within the education sector irrespective of gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

In terms of grades girls and young women score higher grades than boys and young men both in compulsory and upper secondary school. This has been the situation for a long time and is due to several reasons, inter alia differences in expectations and treatment of boys and girls, but also diverse efforts, experiences and preferences among girls and boys in school work. In the academic year 2012/13 young women on average scored higher grades in all national programmes in upper secondary school (with the exception of the Vehicle and Transport programme). In order to promote gender equality and equal opportunities for boys and girls to achieve the learning objectives, the Swedish National Agency for Education has been commissioned to offer training programs to principals, preschool directors, teachers, student counsellors among others.

Education is compulsory for almost all children resident in Sweden. The obligation to attend school is matched by a right to education. Compulsory schooling may be provided in one of the compulsory types of school: compulsory school, compulsory school for children with learning disabilities, special school or Sami school. Upper secondary school, on the other hand, is voluntary. In autumn 2012, 98.7 percent of the students leaving compulsory school in the spring term of 2012 continued at upper secondary school. There is no general gender difference in terms of applications to upper secondary school and transfer frequency. On the other hand, major differences remain in the gender distribution on the majority of programmes. In the first

year of upper secondary school the proportion of men was over 90 percent in the HVAC and Property Maintenance, Electricity and Energy, and Building and Construction programmes. The proportion of women was highest in the Handicraft, Health and Social Care, and Humanities programmes. The Economics programme was the programme with the most even gender distribution.

More than half of applicants to higher education are women. Of the students who completed upper secondary school in spring 2009, 44 percent had started higher education within three years. Women commence higher education to a greater extent than men. Of the students who completed their upper secondary school studies in spring 2009, 50 percent of the women and 38 percent of the men had completed higher education within three years.

The gender distribution of teachers in compulsory school is unequal, an imbalance which has increased over time. In the academic year 2011/12 the proportion of women teachers was 76 percent, while the corresponding proportion in the academic year 2002/03 was 73 percent. A higher proportion of female teachers have a university degree in education than male teachers.

In upper secondary school in total there is an almost even gender distribution among teachers with 52 percent women in the academic year 2012/13, compared with 48 percent women in the academic year 2001/02.

Goal 6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Since the early 1990s, responsibility for preschool, schools and adult education has lain with the providers, municipal or private (free schools are publically funded). The intended objectives of decentralisation to citizens and teaching staff in schools were to attain greater efficiency and improved quality in schools.

Decentralisation means that the state sets goals, provides development support, follows up, evaluates and inspects, while the provider, municipalities or private providers, is responsible for carrying out and developing the work of the school. The state has set out in curricula and course/subject syllabuses the standards, values and skills that children, young people and adults must be given an opportunity to acquire. The municipalities and other providers of preschool, school and adult education have responsibility for ensuring that the goals are met. Children and young people have the right to

education that equips them to meet the goals in every respect, in terms of both knowledge goals and overall goals relating to fundamental values.

Since 2008 Sweden has had a government agency, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, which scrutinises schools and assesses applications to run free schools. Swedish schools are currently undergoing extensive reform with new steering documents. Since 1 July 2011 Sweden has had a new Education Act, new curricula and syllabuses, a new grading scale with a more complex grading scale and earlier assessment, changes to upper secondary education, more national tests, etc. The knowledge criteria have been expressed more clearly, with the aim of making it easier for teachers to carry out assessment and grading. To ensure equity and indirectly contribute towards improving the quality of teaching, a large number of measures are being carried out to support equal and fair assessment and grading. Furthermore, general advice and support material has been produced for how providers, head teachers and teachers are to plan, carry out and follow up teaching, and for work on programmes of measures for students in need of special support. Initiatives in the field of study and careers guidance are being put in place.

Professional teaching staff are required to ensure that good quality teaching is maintained. The teachers' responsibility for the professional content of teaching has been reinforced in that the Education Act sets out that education must be based on academic principles and tried and tested experience. National initiatives to strengthen the teaching profession include a new teacher training programme, the introduction of teacher certification, career paths for teachers and greater investments in continuing professional development for teachers. To improve teaching in strategically important subjects, a "boost" is being launched in mathematics and reading, as well as initiatives in natural sciences and technology. These initiatives are based on peer learning, an umbrella term for different forms of professional development in which colleagues work together in a structured manner (under a mentor) to develop skills in day-to-day practice. The same structure is also being applied in an initiative at ten selected schools with low knowledge results. The teachers in these schools are supported by mentors in developing their teaching. These initiatives also include study guidance in the students' mother tongue, support for schools working with their students' parents and guardians, and opportunities for help with homework. Furthermore, a trial has been launched of larger amounts of teaching time in Swedish

and Swedish as a second language for students who have recently arrived in Sweden.

When trends in results in Swedish education are described at national level, the main means of comparison are the international studies including PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS. Since 1995 Sweden has participated in almost 40 international measurements of knowledge, in everything from literacy and mathematics to English. Unlike national tests, the tests in international studies are not designed on the basis of the Swedish curricula and syllabuses but are instead produced on the basis of internationally produced frameworks and are specially designed to measure development over time.

It is important to note that the international studies only shed light on certain subject areas – mainly mathematics, natural sciences and reading comprehension – and mainly concern compulsory education. The Swedish education system has other aims that are not highlighted by the international studies, both subject goals and overall curriculum goals such as, for example, desire to learn, responsibility and influence. The international studies are thus insufficient for drawing conclusions on trends in the results of the Swedish education system as a whole.

The picture of the performance of Swedish compulsory school students in different areas of knowledge based on the results of international studies is not unambiguous but demonstrates poorer results for some areas and year groups, and unchanged and improved results for others; see Goal 2 above. The well-known patterns of how well different student groups succeed at school remains, and the difference between the average results of schools has doubled in 20 years. Schools seem to be becoming increasingly segregated by student characteristics. Students who are more motivated to study are gathered in schools where there are many other highly motivated students.

Regarding local follow-up of the skills of Swedish students, there is a strong focus on individual students. A link is made to a lesser extent between the knowledge results and organisation and teaching methods. Systematic and active work to develop the quality of teaching in schools is of strategic importance for greater goal fulfilment. Scrutiny by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate has repeatedly cited deficiencies in the responsibility of head teachers for evaluating the results of schools on a regular basis with the aim of improving the work of schools.

The new Education Act contains criteria on systematic work on quality. In this area, too, the scrutiny of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate has highlighted major deficiencies. Systematic work on quality involves planning, following up and analysing the results in relation to national goals, requirements and guidelines. This must form the starting point for choosing initiatives that lead to improvements and attaining the targets and results set. The work must be carried out on an ongoing basis and at all levels: national level, provider level and establishment level. The Swedish National Agency for Education has also decided on general advice for the quality work of the providers and the establishments, as well as a range of supporting material to help them examine their own operations, e.g. self assessment tools.

Education is also a central area in broader national initiatives such as *the strategy for disability policy 2011 to 2016 and a coordinated long-term strategy for Roma inclusion 2012 to 2032*.

Conclusions

From the above report it is clear that the level of ambition for goals 1 to 5 can still be considered to be met in Sweden. The national action plan adopted by the Swedish government in 2002 highlighted several measures judged to lead to attaining a nationally equal education of high quality throughout the country and in all schools. Despite this, several of the problems identified then still remain and improvements are still required where Goal 6 is concerned.

The Swedish education system faces major challenges. There are three overall development areas that are important to meeting the challenges faced by education in Sweden: developing all schools into good schools to increase equality, safeguarding access to competent teachers and ensuring a long-term approach on the part of schools and education providers. These conclusions are further reinforced by the PISA survey, in which the results show that Swedish 15 year-olds are currently performing below the OECD average in mathematics, literacy and natural sciences. There are major differences between girls and boys (to the advantage of girls) and low performers have lost further ground to high performers.

Schools must become more **equal**. The Swedish education system is not succeeding in compensating for the different backgrounds and conditions of students. The gap between schools with high and low results has grown. It is highly likely that the school choice reform has contributed towards increasing the differences between schools. What

the national regulatory framework looks like plays a role but the local decision-makers can also contribute to a more equitable education system through deliberate allocation of resources. This is not only about how money is allocated but also about attracting the best teachers and head teachers to the schools facing the greatest challenges. All schools must be developed into good schools.

Safeguard access to competent **teachers**. Nothing is as important for students' development as expert and committed teachers. At the same time, future access to teachers and preschool teachers is threatened. A large number of teachers are about to retire and Swedish teachers are also less satisfied with their career choice than average in other EU and OECD countries. Education providers, municipalities and the boards of free schools should do more to recruit and retain teachers with the right competence. Teachers must be equipped to take responsibility for the professional content of their educational work and for increasing the quality of teaching.

Schools need a **long-term approach**. In recent years major reforms have been carried out – a new Education Act, new curricula, course and subject syllabuses, a new grading scale, assessment in year 6 and more national tests. The *Lärarlyftet* teacher training initiative, career services for teachers and teaching certificates have been introduced. The reforms seek to improve, but also present schools with a challenge. This is why education now needs a long-term approach. Further initiatives should be linked to the initiatives already in place. The way in which the state handles regulations and support plays a role but with an intelligent local school policy, local decision-makers can contribute towards a long-term approach and stability for their schools. Providers must do more to take their combined responsibility for schools, and work systematically to improve quality.

Vocational education is an additional area on which to focus attention. The proportion of students commencing a vocational programme has gradually fallen since 2007. In combination with small year groups, a lower proportion of students choosing vocational programmes involves a risk of insufficient skills supply for particular career areas. Currently a large number of state initiatives are being introduced in this area, such as support to providers and schools, campaigns to increase interest in vocational courses and to encourage more people to train as teachers in vocational education, investments in study and careers guidance and following up how students gain a footing in the job market.

Areas where improvement is needed cannot be tackled through one-off initiatives. Instead such areas form part of systematic work to improve quality to ensure that the Swedish education system is of high quality, attains excellent results and is equitable.