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Coordination of Lifelong Learning Policies

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## IMPLEMENTING THE 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010'

### WORK PROGRAMME

# 2005 Progress Report

# SWEDEN

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**REGERINGSKANSLIET**

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28 April 2005

Ministry of Education, Research and  
Culture**Swedish report: Educational Cooperation under the Lisbon  
strategy - Towards the 2010 Common Goals**

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In reply to the European Commission's communication, *Modernisation of the Education and Training Systems: Towards the 2010 Common Goals*, we hereby submit the Swedish report.

The European Union has set an ambitious target for 2010. In our opinion the pursuit of vigorous and progressive education policies is one of the best means of ensuring that the EU becomes "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". People – with their ability, their initiative and their skills – represent our foremost asset in the task of developing Europe in social, human and economic terms. As the government ministers responsible for the Swedish education and training systems, we are convinced that the joint processes launched in the European education sphere must be maintained and intensified. We therefore welcome the follow-up to the common goals of which this report is a part. Sweden has much to contribute and much to learn from the other member states. The differences between our countries and our education and training systems represent an asset. Although much remains to be done, we can rejoice in the fact that a process involving practical cooperation, comparisons and exchanges of experience is now under way.

Widespread endorsement of European cooperation presupposes transparency, good information and an ability to combine the goals with regional and local efforts. A broad commitment to the European goals – both in the education and training system and in working life – is essential if lasting results are to be achieved at our national level. Work is in progress to this end. In dealing with issues relating to lifelong learning in the present report, we have also consulted with those of our colleagues who are responsible for employment and industrial policy.

We look forward to continuing our close cooperation!

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## **Swedish report: Educational Cooperation under the Lisbon Strategy – Towards the 2010 Common Goals**

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### **1. Introduction**

In an official communication, *Modernisation of the Education and Training Systems: Towards the 2010 Common Goals*, finally dated 14 February 2005, the European Commission asked the member states to contribute national documentation for the report due to be presented to the European Council in the spring of 2006. The following is Sweden's contribution.

#### ***People – our principal asset***

From a global viewpoint, Europe is a region – a region able to compete in the world market due to its high standards of education and research, its expertise in the high-technology field and its skilled workforce. People – with their ability, their initiative and their competence – represent our foremost asset in the task of developing Europe both socially and economically. In the knowledge-based economy currently evolving, education, training and learning are crucial to the maintenance and enhancement both of our own and of Europe's competitiveness, growth and welfare. In addition, education is an important aspect of personal and democratic development.

#### ***Goals incorporated into Swedish education policy***

Internationalisation and international cooperation have long been important aspects of Swedish education policy, and this has been accentuated further by the Lisbon process, the increasingly intensive cooperation efforts under way in the higher education field (the Bologna process), and the deeper cooperation evident in vocational education and training (the Copenhagen process). In principle, common European goals and priorities are not managed in isolation but are integrated with national policy as far as possible. These goals and priorities are effective in that they are a specific part of the policies pursued. This could also mean that the European dimension is not always particularly visible. Hitherto, European cooperation in the education and training sphere has progressed furthest and been most visible in higher education.

The common goals are expressed in general terms and therefore have a limited direct impact. They should, however, be seen in the light of joint processes currently under way. The impact of the goals is most evident in connection with joint action enabling mobility, comparability and transparency, exchanges of experience, peer reviews and instructive examples. While mindful of our national responsibility for education, viewing our education and training systems and our learning infrastructure from external and comparative perspectives is a useful exercise that can provide us with an alternative outlook.

#### ***Follow-up required at different levels***

Following up the established goals is essential to the task both of highlighting trends and of keeping education policy on the agenda and ensuring a vigorous policy discourse. Sweden believes that indicator work and benchmarking are important parts of this endeavour, both on a European basis and at national level. Not just the goals but also the outcomes must be brought to the fore so that they may become a broad topic of discussion. Data from both Eurostat and the OECD must be utilised in the follow-up.

A country like Sweden with a high level of public investment in education and a long tradition of access to lifelong learning performs well in relation to many of the common indicators and benchmarks. From a national perspective, however, the results achieved so far can scarcely be considered a cause for satisfaction; the Swedish aim is a higher level of target fulfilment. A long-term discussion needs to be launched at both European and national level on education and training goals and objectives after 2010.

The follow-up to the Lisbon process consists of a number of different parts and processes, which may lead to fragmentation. Achieving a cohesive approach to 2010 may present certain difficulties, which means it would also be difficult to reach a broad audience with effective

information. Widespread endorsement presupposes transparency, good information and an ability to combine the goals with regional and local efforts. A broad commitment to the European goals – both in the education and training system and in Swedish working life – is essential if lasting results are to be achieved at national level. Much still remains to be done in this respect.

### ***Special measures to improve coordination and information***

Active participation in the joint processes currently under way and an active follow-up of the other common goals are at the heart of Swedish work with the Lisbon process. Sweden's efforts are being coordinated in working groups in the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture, and the groups are also collaborating on strategies for lifelong learning with the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications and with other relevant ministries. A special working group has been set up to prepare and seek endorsement for issues dealt with by the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training (ACVT) within the framework of the Copenhagen process.

In addition, information is being provided to important actors, partners and organisations. In the autumn of 2002, a major conference was organised for national actors that marked the launching of the next stage in the work. A status report on the Swedish situation in relation to the European goals was produced in 2003 (*Education and Training in Europe: A report on education and training in Sweden and shared European goals*) and a Swedish version of it was distributed in the spring of 2004. In September and October 2005, five conferences will be held at different locations around the country to make the Lisbon strategy and European cooperation on education visible at regional level.

### ***The present report***

The report is largely structured in accordance with the guidelines provided by the European Commission. It primarily sets out to present an overall picture of current developments in the Swedish education system and in policies on education and learning. Besides describing significant reforms and investments, it discusses the basis for lifelong learning and international cooperation in education and training. The report format does not allow for a specific account of how the education and training systems work in practice or of the current state of target fulfilment in various respects. An annex to the report provides a certain amount of statistical data on trends in Sweden. It is also worth noting that several of the subgoals included in the detailed Work Programme are scarcely touched upon in the report.

## **2. Reforms: Investments, efficiency and quality**

This chapter provides an overview of current reforms and investments in education and of current measures and programmes aimed at enhancing efficiency and quality, in the light of investments already made or currently being made. We begin, however, by briefly outlining some of the basic features of Swedish education policy. Further details will be provided in Chapter 3 on lifelong learning.

### **Some basic features**

The Swedish education system exhibits a high level of investment and ambitious goals, and by international standards achieves a high degree of target fulfilment. In many respects, the goals set at Community level have already been achieved, which means Swedish education policy often sets its sights higher.

The policy objective is that Sweden should be a leading knowledge-based nation characterised by high-quality education and lifelong learning for growth, sustainable development and justice.

The Swedish education system is characterised to a great extent by public financing, management by objectives, and a high level of decentralisation. In the early 1990s, the entire responsibility for

providing compulsory schooling, upper secondary schooling and public adult education was delegated to the municipalities. It is now easier for pupils and parents to choose between schools, both between different municipal schools and independent schools<sup>1</sup>. During the second half of the 1990s, the pre-school was incorporated into the Swedish education system and was explicitly defined as the first step in lifelong learning. Pre-schools also acquired their own national curriculum. Under the reform programme introduced in Sweden in 1993, universities and university colleges were given greater responsibility for their own activities and development.

As decentralisation has progressed, the Swedish state has developed methods for improving and monitoring standards at all levels and in all forms of education. Developing methods for quality assurance is one way of making sure that the substantial public resources invested in education are used in an efficient manner.

## **Public and private funding**

Public, equitable financing is one of the cornerstones of Swedish education policy. In relative terms, private investment accounts for only a very small part of the budget, even for instance in post-secondary education. The emergence of a system of independent schools at compulsory and upper-secondary level in recent years has meant that new actors have come onto the scene, but the system is still wholly based on public funding.

Viewed in terms of lifelong learning and adult skills development, however, private investments are far from small. By international standards, Sweden has a high proportion of adults in education, training and skills development programmes; formal, informal and non-formal. Much of this learning is financed by enterprises. Calculating the sum total of these investments is virtually impossible. One measure, however, is that employer costs for staff training in 2003 were an estimated SEK 64 billion, which corresponds to about 90 per cent of the total cost at compulsory level. Under Objective 3 of the Social Fund, the EU and the Swedish state contribute just over SEK 1 billion per annum to skills development for employees.

It is society's responsibility to ensure that the conditions for learning are created in such a way as to benefit both individual and social development. In Sweden, the public sector contributes in a number of ways: by ensuring that instruction throughout the education system is free of charge to the individual, by means of a generous student aid system and through the provision of various kinds of tax relief for employers who invest in skills development programmes for their staff.

## **Greater public investment in education**

Investment in education and learning is a major priority in Sweden. In 2003, total costs for the education system (including student aid) exceeded SEK 200 billion, corresponding in the same year to 8.2 per cent of GDP.

In recent years, the Government and the Riksdag have introduced a series of reforms involving significant public investment in the education system. The focus has been on reforms that enhance accessibility and quality both in pre-schools and schools and in adult education and higher education.

### *Pre-school and school programmes*

In keeping with the decentralised model applied in Sweden, it is the municipalities who are responsible for financing childcare, school education and municipal adult education<sup>2</sup>. The financial crisis that Sweden underwent during the first half of the 1990s led to resource cuts in municipal activities. Since 1997, however, resource input has once again gradually increased.

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<sup>1</sup> Pupils have increasingly come to choose a school other than the nearest one, but - in the case of compulsory education - the dominant choice is the nearest school.

<sup>2</sup> Targeted state grants are also provided, e.g. to adult education. See later in this chapter.

With a view to improving both staffing ratios and target fulfilment in education, a special state grant was introduced in 2001 to fund measures that would bring more staff into schools and leisure-time centres. Up to and including 2003/04, the country's municipalities recruited additional staff corresponding to 12,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs), which meant that staffing ratios in compulsory education increased by just over 8 per cent.

In addition, the children of unemployed persons and of employees on parental leave are now entitled to pre-school places, and a national reform imposing a charge ceiling for public childcare has been introduced. Accessibility for 4-5-year-olds has also been improved by the introduction of universal pre-school for this age group, which guarantees them three hours of pre-school activity a day for free during the school term. The next step has been to focus attention on the actual content of pre-school education. The Riksdag recently adopted a government bill on quality in Sweden's pre-schools ( 2004/05:11). This provides for a three-year targeted government grant to the municipalities aimed at improving pre-school staffing ratios and helping to reduce the size of pre-school groups in municipal childcare. As a result of this investment, the number of pre-school teachers, child minders and other pre-school staff will increase by an estimated 6,000 FTEs.

In 2004, the Government announced a range of quality enhancement measures targeting *upper secondary* education, and under a parliamentary decision these will be introduced by stages from 2005. They include the provision of an additional SEK 450 million per annum to the municipalities for the development of instruction in upper-secondary individual programmes, i.e. the educational path for young people who do not qualify for admission to a national or specially designed programme. In the case of vocational education and training at upper-secondary level, a number of measures and investments have been introduced in recent years (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In 1999-2002, the Government implemented a special ICT initiative for the schools sector (ITiS) that involved offering a skills development programme to teachers working in a team, and together with pupils. Altogether, the programme cost almost SEK 1.7 billion and embraced some 70,000 teachers, all of whom were provided with a computer and other aids as personal tools. The programme included a state grant for infrastructural improvements, including Internet connections and e-mail access for all pupils and teachers.

#### *Greater access to learning for adults*

The Adult Education Initiative (AEI) of 1997-2002 was the most ambitious undertaking in this field ever seen in Sweden. It involved an investment in adult learning of over SEK 42 billion, of which half went to the financing of the participants' studies. The programme reached some 800,000 people, corresponding to about 20 per cent of the workforce. The AEI was directed primarily at unemployed adults partially or wholly lacking a three-year upper-secondary education. The idea was to give those in greatest need of education the opportunity to acquire better qualifications and thus to strengthen their position in the labour market. Further measures in this area include the provision of a targeted state grant for municipal adult education in 2003-2005 totalling approx. SEK 1.8 billion per annum. The Government recently submitted a proposal to the Riksdag calling for an extension of this targeted funding up to and including 2008. For details of participatory trends in upper-secondary adult education, see Annex, Figure 6.

In the spring of 2001, the Riksdag passed a government bill, Adult Learning and the Future Development of Adult Education (2000/01:72), setting out proposals for goals and strategies for the development of adult learning. This shifted the focus from teaching in school-like forms to more flexible forms of support for individual learning. Outreach activities, guidance, validation and student aid may be said to constitute the basic infrastructure. To promote flexible learning, a new public authority, the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (CFL), was founded in 2002. The municipalities were allocated government funding of SEK 350 million for the further development of an appropriate infrastructure for adult learning. This money was to be used, particularly in 2003, to further enhance cooperation between local and regional authorities, organisations, enterprises and other actors in adult education. They were also allowed to use the

funds for investment in technology, teaching aids and environments that encouraged flexible, lifelong learning.

A recruitment grant for adult studies totalling approx. SEK 2 billion per annum was introduced in 2003. This was to be used by the municipalities in their outreach activities as an instrument for encouraging studies at compulsory and upper-secondary school level. The grant is available to people with little previous education who are or risk becoming unemployed, or who need extra time to achieve the study objectives due to a disability .

In 2002, a new regular training programme closely linked to working life was introduced: advanced vocational education (see also Chapter 3). The Government recently proposed allocating resources for 1,000 new openings in this programme, as well as for 500 openings at folk high school, earmarked for chronically unemployed young people.

#### *Fifty per cent goal for young university students*

Higher education in Sweden has expanded dramatically since 1997. Funding for almost an additional 100,000 openings was introduced between 1997 and 2003. In 2003, the number of FTEs in basic training was 300,000. The Government's long-term aim is for 50 per cent of each cohort in the population to have entered higher education by the age of 25. The proportion of 25-year-olds continuing to higher education in Sweden has steadily increased, reaching 42 per cent in 2003. As the expansion process has involved the provision of maximum government funding for all additional openings, the high standards in university-level education have been maintained. To enhance accessibility, institutes of higher education throughout the country have been included in the expansion programme. Also, the institutions themselves have taken a number of steps to promote recruitment and encourage young people to enter higher education, and many have altered their range of programmes to attract new groups (see also Chapter 3).

#### *Student aid*

By international standards, students in Sweden receive generous student aid. Of the above-mentioned education policy costs of SEK 200 billion, some 20 billion goes to the provision of student aid. Study financing is an important instrument in the task of ensuring that everyone has access to education on relatively equal terms. Study funding comprising grants and loans is a general form of support available to students in higher education and other post-secondary education and to adults studying at compulsory and upper-secondary level. In 2001, a reformed study funding system was introduced at an annual cost of SEK 4 billion. The Government intends to raise the funding level further from 2006 by introducing a supplementary grant for students with children. From the same year, opportunities for studying later in life will also be improved by various means, including raising the upper age limit for study support entitlement to 54.

#### *Better quality assurance*

Although the Swedish education system has realised its goals and objectives to a great extent, certain difficulties and challenges remain. National equity remains a problem in the case of children with foreign backgrounds and of boys in general. Levels of proficiency in certain subjects (such as mathematics) and throughput in the education system are two issues requiring attention and action. The Government's stated ambition to boost the educational skills of young people and adults and thus help them become active in the labour market, and also to bring more young people into higher education, means that further efforts will be required.

In order to make proper use of public resources and create an appropriate basis for the decisions of responsible bodies concerning goals and priorities, systematic efforts in pursuit of quality must inform all levels of Sweden's decentralised education system. A clear picture is needed of the work processes in education, of how national goals are being tackled and achieved, of what is lacking in this respect and of what measures are needed to bring about improvements. The aim is to raise educational standards in general and also to promote equity between schools. Quality work must be a natural component in the development and regulation of learning activities.

The Swedish state establishes the goals for education by means of laws, ordinances and appropriation directions to the relevant agencies. The work itself and the forms for achieving these goals is a local responsibility, chiefly for teachers and management functions, both in collaboration with pupils and students, and, in school education, with parents as well. Allowing the professionals at local level to decide the content of education provision is designed to promote efficiency. The state, however, needs to keep a check on target fulfilment by supervising, inspecting and scrutinising schools and institutes of higher education. State follow-ups and evaluations – e.g. through national tests – ensure a better understanding of the various systems' efficiency and relevance, and provide a basis for assessments and decisions at both national and local level. The state also has a duty to support and promote local development efforts, by such means as establishing frameworks for quality work, monitoring quality and disseminating good practice and research findings. The fact that the results of quality work are publicly available and easily accessible enhances credibility and enables various stakeholders to evaluate education system outcomes and efficiency.

#### *The Government's quality programme for schools*

Under the Government's quality programme for school education, All Schools Must Be Good Schools (2002), a number of initiatives have been taken to enhance target fulfilment at all levels in the school system. The basic premise is that the greater investment levels of recent years must be followed by clearly defined measures for achieving national equity in education and high educational standards.

Communication between home and school is a vital aspect of quality work. To make the school's responsibility clearer, stricter requirements have been introduced concerning the provision of school information to the home. The Government has also introduced a provision, due to take effect from 2006, whereby schools must draw up a forward-looking individual development plan showing what action is needed for a pupil to achieve the national objectives.

#### *Quality reporting and national tests*

Since 1997, all municipalities and schools in Sweden – including units in municipal adult education – have been required to provide annual quality reports, evaluating and assessing their activities and comparing them with the national objectives. The same requirement will shortly be introduced in the case of municipal pre-school and school-age childcare as well.

A national testing system helps the education authorities acquire a better understanding of outcomes in schools, in municipalities and at national level. The National Agency for Education was recently assigned to further elaborate the system of national tests and to produce diagnostic material for the purpose.

Another feature of the quality programme was the change in government supervision of the sector introduced on 1 March 2003 when the National Agency for Education as it was then structured was divided into two parts: a new National Agency for Education and a National Agency for School Improvement. The move stemmed from the realisation that in a decentralised system managed by objectives, a clearly defined and vigorous inspection, supervision and evaluation structure was essential. This needs to be augmented, however, by regular input aimed at carrying forward local quality work and promoting the development of local activities. Measures have focused on such aspects as basic skills and schools in socially deprived areas.

#### *Quality system input in higher education*

All institutes of higher education are required to assure the quality of their activities, and the National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for external evaluations in this respect. The agency evaluates both subjects and programmes. Over a six-year period, the quality of all education leading to a degree comes under scrutiny. If on the basis of the assessment group's report the agency decides that a university programme is insufficient in quality, it can revoke the institution's right to issue degrees in that particular discipline. In just under 10 per cent of cases

in recent years, the quality of programmes has been deemed inadequate and appropriate action has been taken by the institute to make the necessary improvements.

Applications from universities and university colleges to issue a degree in a certain subject or to establish a research area, i.e. provide post-graduate training, are also scrutinised. A publicly financed institution of higher education seeking authorisation to issue a degree must apply to the National Agency for Higher Education. Private education providers apply to the Government for the right to issue degrees. Usually, such applications are referred to the National Agency for Higher Education for assessment. For the purpose of determining the applicant's qualitative capacity for issuing the degree in question, the agency appoints a group of assessors. Their task is to consider the quality of the education provided, or its qualitative potential, and report back to the agency with an overall assessment.

### **3. A policy for lifelong learning**

Lifelong learning – learning throughout a person's life cycle – is a task for both the public and the private sector as well as for the individual. The public sector supports the learning process and has principal responsibility for the first, formative stage of the life cycle. A key instrument in the performance of this task is education policy, although other policy areas also contribute input. Learning in an employment policy framework is supported chiefly by labour market training provision. Skills development in working life is also supported to some extent via industrial policy input. Social policy plays a part by providing rehabilitation training programmes. The EU Social Fund contributes financial assistance for such purposes as education and training and for skills development in working life. Employers and employees, too, finance much of the learning process through the provision of staff training. Closer collaboration between different sectors – with different tasks but the same goal – is essential to the task of developing a public support system for lifelong learning.

A policy for lifelong learning in Sweden is based on a number of guiding principles. It must apply to all stages of life. Blind alleys in the education system must be eliminated as far as possible. Schools must give all citizens access to a comprehensive basic education. They must provide knowledge and a level of proficiency that together equip pupils and students with the necessary means for further studies and for the development of skills in a labour market currently undergoing rapid transition.

A basic principle is that all education in the public education system shall be free of charge to the individual. A generous study support system is another cornerstone of Swedish education – good funding is an important precondition if all are to have access to study opportunities, irrespective of background or family finances. People with relatively little previous education may be granted more generous funding terms. These are two crucially important public investments that provide many people with the financial means to engage in studies and which act as an incentive to education and lifelong learning. In addition, all employees in Sweden have a statutory right to leave of absence from their employment for study purposes.

#### ***Accessibility and equity***

Education must be readily available, in terms both of geographical spread and of how it adapts to different individuals' circumstances in life. A high degree of equity in terms of access, structure and content must also be present.

There are two imperatives with regard to equity in education and learning. One is that all individuals, regardless of their background (sex, ethnicity, social class), must have access to learning on equal terms as far as possible. The other is that learning must be available to all throughout their life cycle. It may be a question of compensating for a lack of education in early life or of acquiring further qualifications, or it may involve facilitating skills development for the unemployed. Alternatively, it may be about eliminating obstacles that prevent young people from entering the labour market.

Access to education for all individuals is a fundamental right enshrined in Swedish law. As far as possible, different groups with differing capabilities are to have the same real opportunities to study and learn.

#### *Pre-school – the first step*

A good pre-school paves the way for the individual's learning in life and pre-school education has therefore had its own curriculum since 1998. Today, most children have a place at a pre-school. In principle, all children aged 1-5 are entitled to pre-school activities, which are extensively subsidised and widely available. As mentioned earlier, a free universal pre-school system has been introduced for children from the age of four. Childcare in Sweden has been steadily expanding since the late 1960s, and this process has continued over the past decade. In 1994, some 63 per cent of children aged 1-5 were registered at a childcare facility. By 2003, this figure had risen to 83 per cent. See Annex, Figure 3.

#### *Child and youth education*

The ability of school education to provide all the basic tools that people will need in their public and professional lives, and at the same time to preserve children's desire to learn, is crucial to Sweden's development as a knowledge-based economy.

Some adults have a negative attitude to studies, often due to their own unfavourable experience of school education. During their time at school, they may have lost their desire to learn. From a long-term viewpoint, therefore, it is essential for Swedish schooling to be accessible to all and of interest to all.

Compulsory education as a whole must provide all pupils with the means to acquire basic knowledge and skills. The practice of dividing pupils into permanent groups in accordance with their levels of knowledge and ambition has been replaced by a more individualised approach emphasising each pupil's specific needs, the aim being to eliminate blind alleys.

Upper-secondary school is to build on the knowledge and skills acquired in compulsory education and be a school for all young people. Education at this level is to emphasise personal development, prepare students for active participation in public life and working life, and pave the way for further studies. At present, there are 17 national programmes in Swedish upper-secondary education, all of three years' duration. Three of these programmes are primarily meant to lead to further studies, while the others are more vocationally oriented. All, however, offer basic eligibility for university entrance. The various educational paths must all provide a solid foundation of general knowledge and prepare students for specialist studies in the profession of their choice. One of the aims is for upper-secondary education and training to serve as a recruitment base for broad areas of working life. It must not lead students into blind alleys or focus too narrowly on the skill requirements of the day. Students are also allowed a certain amount of scope in choosing their own programme content. In dimensioning the various upper-secondary programmes, the basic principle has been to respect students' first choices as far as possible.

#### *Adult learning*

No less important than the need to prepare the ground for learning in early life is the need to provide adults with opportunities for further learning later on. Municipal adult education is a time-honoured tradition in Sweden. Historically, its primary task has been to provide elementary or secondary education to those who lack such qualifications. In the selection process, those with the least amount of previous education are given precedence. With the gradual transformation of the employment market, municipal adult education has acquired a broader remit. It is now additionally required to meet the needs of people who as a result of changes in working life – or for their own personal development – seek further knowledge and skills.

The adult education system is charged with supporting adult learning in a flexible manner, based on the wishes, needs and capabilities of the individual participant. The Government's aim is to give all adults the opportunity to extend their knowledge and develop their skills in order to promote personal development, democracy, gender equality, economic growth and employment, and a fair distribution of resources. The emphasis is to be on the individual, and people should be able to combine learning with other commitments in life. A highly developed infrastructure is essential, incorporating outreach activities, guidance, validation, accessibility and study support, as is cooperation between activities in different policy areas. Flexibility involves giving as many people as possible the best possible learning opportunities, whatever their circumstances in life. People must be able to study regardless of whether they are in employment, or wish to combine work and studies, or whether they prefer distance learning or traditional study methods. This shifts the focus from a more rigid organisational approach to a more flexible one in terms of time, space and content.

The establishment of the Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning (CFL) in 2002 was a step towards an even more flexible and accessible adult education system. The task of the new agency is to raise educational and methodological levels in flexible learning at folk high schools, in study associations and in municipal adult education. A further task is to increase accessibility to upper-secondary adult education by providing the types of courses that the municipalities themselves are unable to offer at distance. The CFL also seeks to develop the skills of education providers in both liberal and municipal adult education by offering further training in methods and approaches relating to distance education and flexible learning.

To meet the need for advanced skills in various sectors, advanced vocational education was introduced as a new regular form of education in 2002. See also Chapter 5.

Swedish tuition for immigrants (SFI) aims to equip adults who have come to Sweden as immigrants with a basic understanding of the Swedish language and Swedish society. The

Government established a new SFI curriculum in 2002, tailored to the needs of this highly heterogeneous group. In January 2004, the National Agency for School Improvement was charged with launching a targeted skills development programme for SFI teachers. SFI remains a priority area, and the Government intends to present a bill in the spring of 2006 containing proposals for reforming the programme. The aim is to provide high-quality Swedish language tuition that can be more easily adapted to the needs and capabilities of each individual than at present. Under these proposals, SFI students will be able to combine language tuition with other activities such as work training and other types of education or training.

Liberal adult education (folk high schools and study circle activities) offers a wide range of courses and programmes. One of its aims is to make it easier for women and men to influence their situations, and it also seeks to strengthen and promote democracy and broaden interest in culture in the community. Priority is given to activities aimed at closing educational gaps and raising educational standards. Other important target groups are people with disabilities, people from foreign backgrounds and the unemployed. In 2003, the country's study associations registered more than 2.5 million participants in some 312,000 study circles. For longer courses, folk high schools attracted some 20,000 participants in the spring of 2003.

Sweden has an abundance of voluntary organisations. The great majority of citizens belong to an association of some kind or other. Both non-formal and informal learning provided under association auspices are important features of Swedish community life. Many associations, not least youth organisations, provide extensive non-formal training as part of their regular activities. Participation in activities run by associations helps to enhance such important social skills as cooperation, communication and respect and tolerance.

### *Higher education*

Over the past decade, the proportion of young people entering higher education has increased significantly, as noted in Chapter 2. Expansion of the university system has opened up study opportunities for growing numbers of people. The establishment of new institutes of higher

education together with the development of ICT-supported distance learning has led to an increase both in the number of university openings and in geographical accessibility. As a result, recruitment to higher education is approaching the Government's goal whereby 50 per cent of each cohort in the population is to have begun university-level studies by the age of 25. There is still a social imbalance in recruitment, but this has been significantly reduced since the early 1990s.

As the students become more heterogeneous in terms both of social and ethnic affiliation and of experience, the supply of courses will have to be more varied according to individual needs.

#### *Greater access to higher education studies*

In the late 1990s, the Government focused in particular on improving geographical accessibility to higher education. Now that the university system has been expanded, the majority of Swedish institutions are able to offer distance courses in a wide range of subjects, thus enabling students to adapt their studies to professional life and family life. Since 2000, universities and university colleges have been collaborating on the provision of ICT-supported distance learning via the Swedish Net University. Under this scheme, the institutions' ICT-supported courses and programmes are coordinated and presented in a joint web portal. The Net University has helped to enhance accessibility and broaden recruitment to higher education through its collaborative approach.

Besides their full-time training, Sweden's colleges and universities have traditionally offered courses on a part-time basis, as well as evening and weekend courses. The Swedish system – in which training comprises courses that can be studied separately and that students can supplement – makes it easier for adults to return to studies at higher education level after taking a degree, or for instance to enrol in short courses to enhance their professional skills.

As from 2003, Swedish institutes of higher education are authorised to arrange special university introductory programmes in cooperation with municipal adult education. These programmes consist of an upper-secondary school component of at most 20 weeks and a higher education component of at most 20 academic points (equivalent to 20 weeks of full-time study). The aim is to strengthen participants' basic knowledge and eligibility, and provide an introduction to studies at higher education level. The one-year foundation course introduced in 1992 in preparation for studies in science and technology, and providing the necessary qualifications for higher education entrance, also played its part in broadening recruitment, in both gender and social terms. As from 1 January 2003, the foundation course has been broadened and is now available in connection with other programmes at higher education level where there is a shortage of qualified applicants and where there is a need for skilled labour in the employment market.

To further support institutes of higher education in their efforts to promote and broaden intake, the Government appointed a National Commission on Recruitment that had over SEK 120 million at its disposal during the years 2002-2004. The aim was to bring about greater diversity in Swedish higher education in the long term and to correct the skewed pattern of recruitment.

#### ***Guidance and validation***

Information and guidance are vital at all levels of education if the individual is to be in a position to make informed choices. All municipalities in Sweden, therefore, offer a study and vocational guidance service of one kind or another. Under a government mandate, the National Agency for Education is currently evaluating how this guidance and information is working. The agency has also been assigned by the Government to open an Internet-based portal in 2005 to provide broad access to information on study and vocational choices.

For those who have acquired knowledge and skills by other means than via a formal education, these need to be officially recognised, or validated, irrespective of how they were acquired. In Sweden, validation is regarded as a key issue in lifelong learning. Besides acknowledging qualifications that have not been documented, validation can help the individual to find the right

level of education at which to start, and can also turn to account skills already acquired. This improves the use of resources and makes for economic efficiency. Validation and assessment of actual skills are not anything new in themselves, but are becoming an increasingly natural component. The task of ensuring equity, respect for legal rights and quality standards, however, remains.

Swedish institutes of higher education are required to assess the actual skills invoked by applicants seeking university entrance. The law states that any individual who through a Swedish or foreign education, practical experience or any other circumstance is able to benefit from studies at university level should be regarded as eligible. For the purposes of validation outside the higher education sector, the Government has appointed a special body, the Swedish

National Commission on Validation. Its mandate for the years 2004-2007 is to promote the development of legitimacy, quality and methodology in this field. In collaboration with the business and education sectors, the Commission is to strengthen and promote regional cooperation, disseminate information and recommend action.

### **Employment and cooperation with the business sector**

Sound employment policies aim to create an efficient labour market. This in turn is an important precondition for growth and employment. Swedish employment policies, therefore, are based on the 'work first' principle, which in recent years has developed into an approach emphasising both work and skills. Specifically, this means that unemployed persons are primarily to be matched with job vacancies, and, failing that, are to strengthen their position in the employment market by joining a labour market policy programme. The variety of undertakings involved necessitates extensive cooperation between for instance employment offices and the regular education system.

As from 1997, universities and university colleges in Sweden are required by law to cooperate with the surrounding community (see Chapter 4). They cooperate with other actors via such channels as the regional growth programmes introduced by the Government in 1998. The aim is for agencies and organisations working with growth issues in the region to join in creating favourable conditions for business development. Both upper-secondary schools and adult education are important partners in this respect, as are universities and university colleges.

The Government has previously reviewed the prospects for further strengthening access to lifelong learning via a national individual learning account (ILA) scheme, to which both individuals and their employers would contribute. Despite considerable efforts, it has not been possible to construct a satisfactory savings model widely acceptable to the social partners. Also, since the Government presented its proposals, there has been a change in case-law. Savings for skills development purposes as foreseen in the ILA scheme are already possible to a certain extent, although in other forms. Some of the resources earmarked for the ILA have been reallocated to other parts of the lifelong learning programme in the form of funding for skills development among old-age care staff and a higher age ceiling for the student aid system.

The social partners<sup>3</sup> are strongly in favour of skills development initiatives. The emphasis in those initiatives undertaken as part of working life and financed within that framework is on short courses. As in other countries, there is an imbalance in Sweden in this respect in that the best educated and trained receive more of the skills development input. It should be emphasised that the way work is organised is of paramount importance for learning opportunities in working life. The collective agreements on skills development allow scope for extensive local coordination, and the financing of programmes is based on the needs and capabilities of the industry

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<sup>3</sup> The Confederation of Swedish Enterprises, Sweden's municipalities and county councils, the Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) and the Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO).

concerned.<sup>4</sup> Some information on staff training volume and trends is available in Annex, Figures 4 and 5.

Funding for skills development schemes is also available under Objective 3 of the EU Social Fund. In addition, skills development is an important component in regional growth programmes, where the supply of labour and skills is one of three principal areas of focus.

#### **4. Swedish higher education and the impact of European cooperation**

This chapter looks partly at developments in Sweden in light of the joint European processes under way in higher education, and partly at Swedish policies and measures relating to cooperation between higher education and research, the business sector and the community at large. The vocational education and training (VET) provided at Swedish universities and university colleges is also discussed. Quality assurance issues in higher education are dealt with in Chapter 2.

##### **European cooperation – the situation in Sweden**

###### *The Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Convention*

The initiatives in higher education taken at European level in recent years have had a significant impact on developments in Sweden. The most influential of these initiatives has been the Bologna Declaration (and the follow-up in the subsequent communiqués), which is an intergovernmental process outside the established international organisations. In Sweden, a number of actors at different levels are involved in following up the Declaration.

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and commonly referred to as the Lisbon Convention, deals with the mutual recognition both of qualifications for university entrance and of study periods and diplomas leading to higher education. Sweden ratified the Convention in August 2001.

###### *Recognition of diplomas for professional work in other countries*

Besides targeting higher education, the European initiatives also seek to promote the free movement of workers in the EU.

Diplomas may be of considerable value to people planning to work in another country. Many member states have a much greater number of regulated professions than Sweden. To facilitate the free movement of people practising a regulated profession, or where that profession is regulated in another country, the EU has adopted a number of directives on the mutual recognition of diplomas and vocational qualifications.

In Sweden, freedom of trade has long been enshrined in the constitution. Under Chapter 2, Article 20 of the Instrument of Government (SFS 1974:152), restrictions affecting the right to trade or to practise a profession may be introduced only in order to protect pressing public interests, and never solely in order to further the economic interests of a particular person or enterprise. Consequently, there are only a limited number of regulated professions in Sweden and these are largely to be found in healthcare, transport, the rescue services and the fire protection services, and in the teaching, law and accountancy fields.

As Sweden has relatively few regulated professions, the rules tend to affect Swedish citizens wishing to work abroad rather than the other way round. A professional examination with a structured description of aims, supplemented by a local training plan showing the vocational orientation of the education provided, could be defined as ‘regulated education and training’ as

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<sup>4</sup> Data from the 2004 Swedish Action Plan on Employment.

laid down in Council Directive 89/48/EEC. Accordingly, the issuing of professional degrees facilitates the free movement of their holders more than is the case for those who have only general qualifications not linked a specific professional field.

#### *Free education in the EEA*

The Government believes it is important to increase the number of foreign students coming to Sweden to study. Their presence fosters development and quality enhancement at teaching and research environments in Swedish higher education. Foreign students make a significant contribution to the international environment and to diversity, and thereby help promote an understanding of other cultures and traditions.

Demand from students in other countries, particularly in Asia, is extensive. The Government's position is that there is no reason to provide publicly financed education to foreign students free of charge and without restrictions. If foreign students were not given the opportunity to finance their own education, their numbers could not increase as they would then be displacing Swedish students. With this in mind, the Government has appointed a special investigator whose task will be to propose an arrangement whereby state universities and university colleges would charge fees for undergraduate education in the case of students from countries outside the EEA zone. In addition, the special investigator is to formulate legislation reflecting the guiding principle that higher education in Sweden is to be free for students from EEA countries.

#### *Cooperation, commercialisation and dynamic research environments*

Under the Higher Education Act, Swedish universities and university colleges are required to cooperate with the surrounding community. The forms for this are to be determined by the conditions prevailing at each respective institution. Today, all institutes of higher education in Sweden cooperate actively with the outside world, via three main processes:

- Work on profiling, recruitment and broad research communication.
- Participation in skills and innovation systems aimed at supporting company start-ups and knowledge transfers.
- Tailoring education to meet labour market demand and to enable students to come into contact with the surrounding community during their education.

In 2002, the Government established the Commission for Regional Cooperation on Higher Education to promote cooperation at university level and thereby create sustainable growth in the regions while at the same time encouraging recruitment to higher education. The Commission has distributed approx. SEK 130 million to 70-odd projects.

Industrial research institutes and holding companies at universities and university colleges have an important role to play in the transfer of knowledge between academia and the business world. In a research policy bill, Research for a Better Life (2004/05:80), the Government proposed allocating extra capital totalling SEK 60 million to the holding companies and appointing a negotiator to propose improvements in their structure that enhance efficiency. It also proposed allocating a further SEK 110 million to the industrial research institutes.

An example of efficient cooperation between higher education, the research institutes and business is the joint financing by the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems and the state-owned technology transfer foundations (Teknikbrostiftelserna) of a number of strong Swedish company incubators, to the tune of SEK 50 million per annum over three years.

#### *Dynamic research environments*

The Government takes various measures to promote dynamic research environments and to make the commercialisation of innovations more effective at the country's institutes of higher education. If Sweden is to remain a leading nation in terms of know-how and research, a broad base is essential as well as the ability to specialise and to make concerted efforts in strategic

areas. In its research policy bill, the Government provided for extensive investments in dynamic research environments, including extra appropriations totalling SEK 300 million to four research financing agencies for the years 2006-2008. In addition, institutes of higher education, research institutes, enterprises and other stakeholders were expected to contribute substantial resources of their own to these research environments. A principal aim is to establish and maintain research and innovation environments that are dynamic enough to attract researchers of excellence and knowledge-intensive enterprises. In addition, the Government has called on institutes of higher education to draw up plans of action for the commercialisation of their research findings.

## **5. Enhancing the quality and attraction of vocational education and training**

For the past few decades, Sweden has had an integrated upper-secondary education system offering both vocationally oriented study paths and paths leading to further studies. In all essentials, basic vocational education and training (VET) is provided within the upper-secondary framework. Following the introduction of the latest upper-secondary reform in the early 1990s, all programmes are of three years' duration, both those preparing pupils for further studies and those preparing them for employment. All share a core of general subject tuition that takes up about a third of the training period, and all qualify pupils for further studies. Initial VET of a similar kind is also provided in the form of upper-secondary adult education. Post-secondary VET is available under the relatively new advanced vocational education programme and in higher education. VET at university level was discussed in the previous chapter.

The upper-secondary school reform and the expansion of adult education has meant that a growing share of the population now has a more extensive (three-year) education at upper-secondary level. In the late 1980s, about a third of all 25-year-olds had completed upper-secondary studies. The corresponding figure in 2003 was just over 80 per cent (see Annex, Figure 3). Ever since the upper-secondary reform of the early 1990s, the proportion of a cohort commencing studies at upper-secondary level has been approx. 98 per cent.

By tradition, Swedish VET has primarily been located at schools. In recent years, however, a number of steps have been taken to enhance the quality and status of VET, not least through closer cooperation between education and working life at all levels in the system. In May 2004, the Government set up a Vocational Education Commission to develop cooperation in this area.

Its members include business representatives, trade unions, trade organisations, vocational training providers and government agencies.

The Government's latest proposals for developing both upper-secondary education and basic VET are contained in its 2004 bill, *Eleven Steps for Improving Upper Secondary Education*<sup>5</sup>. The proposals have received parliamentary approval. The development areas targeted in the bill coincide to a great extent with the action areas identified at European level, including the need to improve the quality of VET, measures to reduce drop-out among pupils, and greater mobility.

### **Swedish vocational education and training in relation to the Copenhagen process and the Maastricht Communiqué**

#### *Improvements in transparency, recognition and mobility*

Work within the framework of the Copenhagen process has emphasised issues relating to clarity and transparency in the Swedish education and training system. Greater priority has been given to the need for information and tools that facilitate the recognition of Swedish vocational

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/02/34/68/91517a51.pdf>

qualifications abroad. The purpose of the Government's decision to introduce upper-secondary school certificate for all national and specially designed programmes, for instance, is to show more clearly and in an internationally more viable way what Swedish upper-secondary education and training involves. These diplomas are also intended to enhance quality assurance. At the same time, a compulsory upper-secondary certificate project is being introduced that gives pupils the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired, for instance in cooperation with working life.

The instruments for greater transparency and for improving the recognition of foreign vocational qualifications that have been developed under the Copenhagen process are considered important in Sweden. The International Programme Office for Education and Training has been designated the National Europass Centre with responsibility both for the new Europass portfolio and for coordination with the agencies responsible for the various Europass documents. Sweden's National Reference Point for Vocational Qualifications has developed a certificate supplement for all upper-secondary VET programmes and specialisations and posted them on its website. The Government encourages use of the Europass and is currently considering ways of emphasizing its possibilities in national legislation.

#### *Closer cooperation with working life*

To enhance the quality and relevance of vocational education and training at upper-secondary level, municipalities will be required to engage in local consultations on VET programmes with the social partners. As before, representatives of the social partners also take part in the development of new syllabuses for vocationally oriented programmes. Workplace training programmes of at least 15 weeks' duration are already a VET feature in Swedish upper-secondary education. The Government also aims to take steps to ensure that a greater number of pupils are given the chance to undertake part of their education abroad. In addition, a modern system of apprenticeship training is to be introduced as an alternative to the vocationally oriented programmes but with the same requirements in terms of proficiency and quality. Workplace vocational training as part of the upper-secondary adult education system is growing in importance. These efforts to encourage cooperation between the education and work communities are well in line with the Maastricht Communiqué's emphasis on greater relevance and quality in VET through closer cooperation with key actors.

#### *Better training for young people who risk becoming early school leavers*

Sweden's individual programme (IP) is an individualised study path intended primarily for pupils who do not qualify for admission to a national or specially designed programme. In the

IP framework, studies at both compulsory and upper-secondary level can be combined with workplace learning or work placements. From 1 July 2006, IP courses will be provided on a full-time basis and the programme structure will be similar to that of the national programmes. Municipalities will thereafter be allocated an additional SEK 450 million per annum for the development of their individual programmes. Pupils' right to support in their upper-secondary studies will also be clarified as a consequence of the bill.

#### *VET linked to employment needs*

Advanced vocational education (AVE), introduced as a regular post-secondary school form in its own right in 2002, is one example of an initiative designed to meet the needs of working life. This programme is distinguished by its close cooperation with business, which take an active part in devising the courses and which finances the workplace training scheme – Learning in Working Life – that absorbs a third of the training period. AVE programmes are normally two years in duration and lead to an advanced vocational qualification. They are designed to provide pupils with the advanced theoretical and practical knowledge they need to perform sophisticated tasks both independently and in teams at modern workplaces. The training is provided for a limited period only and each course is based on a documented need. The active participation of the industry or sector concerned in the planning and implementation of the training is required before a provider will agree to launch an AVE programme.

AVE is an example of an educational form adapted to the actual knowledge and skill requirements of professional life. The fact that it is only available for a limited period means that new programmes develop in response to fresh needs in the labour market and replace the old ones. The Government recently decided to transform a number of continuing education programmes – an educational form in municipal adult education – into AVE courses. It also proposed making additional openings available for training in professional areas where there is a pronounced shortage of skilled labour. If the proposals are approved, this form of education will command some 16,500 annual study openings in the 2005/06 academic year.

A large and growing proportion of young people aged 19-25 have chosen to begin studies at university level. For those who choose not to study at this level, the education provided at upper-secondary level is not always sufficient – employers often require advanced skills. Accordingly, analysis efforts are under way to develop a more efficient system of post-secondary vocational education.

#### *Skills development for vocational teachers*

With the development of a more individualised and pupil-centred approach to learning, both in education and training, teachers are no longer simply knowledge communicators but are increasingly assuming the role of tutors supervisors or mentors. Rapid advances in many professions and the attendant demand for closer cooperation between education and the labour market also mean that teachers are required to act as a link to the surrounding work community. Good contact with workplaces makes it easier for schools to organise and follow up pupils' workplace learning, and enables teachers to keep up with developments in the various professions and sectors in the labour market.

### **Challenges and problems in the development of VET**

Implementing educational reforms takes time. The aims that shaped the previous upper-secondary school reform in the early 1990s have still not been fully realised, and the changes recently introduced could be largely viewed as a continuation of the previous reform programme. To a great extent, enhancing the quality and attraction of VET is about changing attitudes, which is a long-term endeavour. There is still some way to go as regards fulfilment of the objectives in the upper-secondary VET programme. More pupils must be given the means and support they need in order to achieve the programme objectives. Cooperation between school and working life is another area in which there is scope for further development, in addition to the sometimes extensive efforts already being made in this area. Closer cooperation can reasonably be expected to facilitate the transition to working life and reduce youth unemployment.

An issue requiring particular attention is the shortage of vocational teachers. The National Agency for Education considers an adequate supply of trained teachers to be the single most important factor for maintaining and raising standards in upper-secondary education. In the agency's assessment, however, the graduation rate for vocational teachers will have to be tripled in the run-up to 2010 to meet needs, and measures will be required at several different levels. Special Teacher Education Programmes, a major scheme that has been under way in Sweden for the past few years, gives practising unqualified teachers the opportunity to combine part-time employment at a school with part-time studies in teacher education in order to acquire a teacher qualification. Including the autumn intake in 2004, some 4,800 students have been granted admission to the scheme, and of these about 400 have chosen to specialise in vocational education. The Government recently proposed investing additional resources in the scheme in 2005/06, in an initiative targeting vocational teachers in cooperation with the municipal sector. This initiative – involving an additional 1,000 openings – specifically targets employed teachers in VET but is also seen as a means of recruiting greater numbers of vocational teachers to the education sector.

## **6. The European dimension in Swedish education**

Internationalisation is important, not only for enhancing quality in Swedish education but also for promoting a better understanding of other cultures and strengthening Sweden's competitive position in the world. Comparisons with the outside world help us develop new perspectives, higher standards and greater efficiency. EU cooperation in education and training – not least the greater exchange of experts that has resulted from work with the common goals – is a key aspect of international cooperation.

### **Strengthening the European dimension in education and training**

The promotion of a European dimension has been a part of the internationalisation process in Swedish education. The curricula governing the level under university make clear that pupils are to familiarise themselves with the principles of international, European and Nordic cooperation. The Higher Education Act specifies that Sweden's universities and university colleges are to promote an understanding of other countries and of international relations.

Due to a number of different factors, European cooperation on education and training as it affects Sweden is undergoing a change of character. Swedish providers, for instance, have been taking part in the EU's education programmes for some time, and this has strengthened the European dimension in Swedish education. But education in Sweden has also been indirectly affected by EU legislation in various fields and by the closer cooperation that has developed between the European ministers of education as a result of the common goals. This applies in particular to the recognition of education and training at all levels, which is crucial to the achievement of the free movement of people. The Swedish education system has been influenced by the processes now under way, and which have accelerated in recent years, the most prominent among them being the Bologna process (intergovernmental cooperation outside the EU) and the Copenhagen process.

Sweden has a long tradition of international cooperation in the education field. Besides regional cooperation with the other Nordic countries, Swedish universities and university colleges and other education providers have cooperated with their counterparts in other countries, either on their own initiative or via scholarships. From an early stage, Sweden became interested in cooperating with developing countries in particular, but with the emergence of the EU programmes and widening cooperation in European education, the European dimension has had an increasing impact on Swedish education. This dimension has also been strengthened since Sweden joined the EU as schools now provide teaching about the Union.

### **Numerous initiatives for enhancing European cooperation**

Swedish participation in the EU education and training programmes have primarily influenced those who have taken a direct part in them at local level. With the adoption of the common goals, the discussion has been broadened and is now more concerned with issues relating to the governance and content of the Swedish education and training systems.

Internationalisation in Swedish higher education has attracted growing attention. The Government has ordered the country's institutes of higher education to take active measures in this area, both to increase international mobility and to strengthen the international component in domestic courses and programmes.

In January 2005, the National Agency for Higher Education presented a report on the internationalisation of undergraduate and graduate programmes in Sweden.<sup>6</sup> An English

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<sup>6</sup> A brief English summary of the report is available at

version of the whole report will be published on the agency's website in May. As noted in Chapter 4, the Government plans to present a bill to the Riksdag later in the spring in which internationalisation is a key theme. The Government also takes a very favourable view of the efforts currently under way at Sweden's universities and university colleges to develop joint programmes of studies with institutes of higher education abroad. This naturally includes studies in a number of European countries. Sweden has also taken an active part in efforts to make the discussion on joint degrees more specific. This type of cooperation actively contributes to the strengthening of the international dimension in education.

## **Mobility**

Mobility in school education is encouraged partly by the Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes and partly by Nordplus Junior, the upper-secondary programme run by the Nordic Council of Ministers. In addition, some pupils finance their own year of foreign studies during the upper-secondary period, primarily in the US but also in other countries. Bilateral programmes are available for upper-secondary studies in France, Germany, Spain and Austria. The Government considers that pupils in all types of upper-secondary programmes should have access to international exchange, and that schools should make a point of turning the pupils' experiences to account on their return to the Swedish education system. Therefore, opportunities for extending recognition to education and training undertaken abroad need to be reviewed. In this context, the Europass has an important role to play in relation to studies and work placements abroad, both at upper-secondary level and in higher education (see Chapter 4).

To supplement the practical training available to young people under Leonardo da Vinci, the Government has allocated funds to enable upper-secondary pupils to undertake their workplace training abroad, either in European VET programmes or elsewhere in the world. Development work is under way to find appropriate forms for cooperation with certain developing countries' vocationally oriented upper-secondary education systems. Proposals for regular activities in this area are to be presented on 1 February 2006.

The EU's YOUTH Programme supports youth exchange via project funding to organisations outside the education system. The programme also funds youth volunteers working abroad. In addition, a number of initiatives promoting mobility among young people are financed out of national funds via Sida<sup>7</sup> and the Swedish Inheritance Fund. These include exchanges with developing countries, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.

Mobility in adult education has attracted growing attention in recent years. In this area, besides Socrates and Grundtvig, network exchanges are provided for under the Nordic Council of Ministers' programme Nordplus Vuxen.

In the university sector, a high mobility rate has long been a Swedish priority, and the availability of Swedish funding for studies abroad has facilitated matters in this respect. The participation rate in the various programmes is also high. The three most popular are Erasmus, Nordplus (the Nordic Council of Ministers' programme for higher education) and Linnaeus-Palme (a Sida-sponsored national programme for exchanges in higher education between Sweden and the developing countries).

Until 1989, student aid was only granted in exceptional cases for studies in the Nordic area and for education or training that was not as readily available in Sweden. The new, more liberal rules governing studies outside Sweden have contributed significantly to the rise in the number of Swedish students travelling abroad to study. Sweden's entry into the Erasmus programme in

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[http://www.eng.hsv.se/en/CollectionServlet?view=0&page\\_id=592](http://www.eng.hsv.se/en/CollectionServlet?view=0&page_id=592).

<sup>7</sup> The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

1992 had a powerful catalytic effect on mobility. As Figure 10 in the Annex shows, the number of Swedish students travelling abroad in 1987/88 was about 2,000. This figure rose steadily over the next ten years, following the rule changes. In the 1998/99 academic year, approx. 26,200 students studying abroad, and this figure has remained constant since. The majority travel abroad on their own, 5,800 study languages at non-academic level and 5,700 travel as part of an exchange programme. Sweden is a popular destination for Erasmus students. Today, the number of incoming students under the Erasmus programme is 6,100, compared to 2,700 outgoing students.

Recognition of other countries' degrees, diplomas and certificates is based on a complicated system of quality assurance and validation, and here, too, joint efforts at European level are needed, both under the Bologna process and via networks of various kinds, such as Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Nordic network for quality assurance.

#### *Follow-up of the recommendation on mobility*

Since Sweden last reported to the Commission in August 2003 on the follow-up to the Recommendation on mobility, the Government has addressed a number of issues in the areas covered by it. It has stressed, for instance, the vital importance of non-English language skills for mobility in Europe, as regards both work and study as well as travel and trade. The question of how greater weight might be attached to language studies, e.g. when people apply to higher education, is currently being studied at the ministry, and the National Agency for Education has been charged with overhauling the different curricula and in doing so considering how best to promote greater interest in language studies among pupils at upper-secondary level.

Teacher participation in international exchange is essential to the task of enhancing mobility in education and strengthening the European dimension. To emphasise this, the Government has set targets for the number of university-level teachers participating in Erasmus (700 in 2005, as against 500 previously) and for the number of scholarships for further training under Comenius (500 in 2004).

As mentioned earlier, Sweden has a student aid system that gives students plenty of opportunity to finance studies abroad. In recent years, however, the numbers studying abroad on Swedish student aid has not increased. This is probably due in large part to the unsettled situation in the world and to the size of course fees in places such as the US, where they are very high. These and other extra costs may cause some students to refrain from studying abroad, particularly if they are not sure that such studies entitle them to credit in the Swedish education system. The Government is following developments closely to ensure that the rules do not lead to a drop in the number of students opting to pursue part of their education abroad. Recently, the Government presented a bill containing proposals for bringing the Swedish regulations into line with Community law (2004/05:111). One of the proposals is for the rules to make clear that entitlement to student aid for studies abroad only applies to persons with ties to Sweden. Also, the applicant must have been living in Sweden for two consecutive years during the five-year period immediately preceding the application.

### **Obstacles and areas for development**

In the Government's view, there is reason to continue tackling formal obstacles to mobility, of which the difficulty of obtaining recognition for study periods abroad is one of the more important. Certain moves to enhance recognition are being made in the Bologna and Copenhagen processes. Within the framework of Nordic cooperation, too, efforts have been focused on eliminating the formal obstacles to mutual recognition of upper-secondary education and training. However, it is not only the formal obstacles that need to be addressed but also deficiencies in language skills, and attitudes and traditions that prevent people from taking advantage of the opportunities that exist. This applies, for instance, to the Upper Secondary School Ordinance's scope for recognising courses undertaken abroad, which is not being properly exploited. It also applies to the insufficient importance being attached to mobility and internationalisation at Sweden's universities and university colleges. It is clear that a strong level of commitment is

required on the part of education providers in the form of school head teachers, municipal leaders and managers in higher education, if results are to be achieved on the ground.

Many Swedish actors in education and training are interested in international cooperation and cooperation within Europe. A degree of EU scepticism remains, however, which is not directly apparent in exchanges and partnerships between individual schools and institutions but which is sometimes reflected in the broader picture of educational cooperation. As noted in the introduction to this report, more people at different levels must be brought into the practical work of enhancing European cooperation.

### **Statistical Appendix: Some data on the development of education and learning in Sweden**

(Source: Statistic Sweden, unless other source is specified.)

Figure 1.

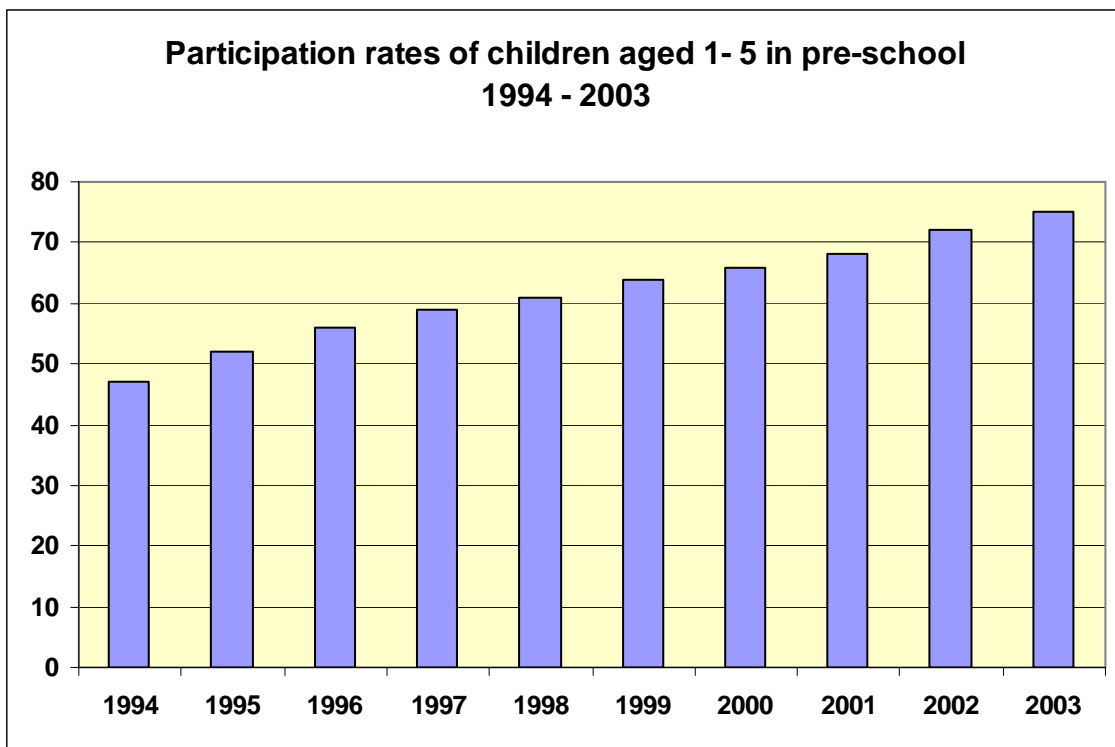


Figure 2.

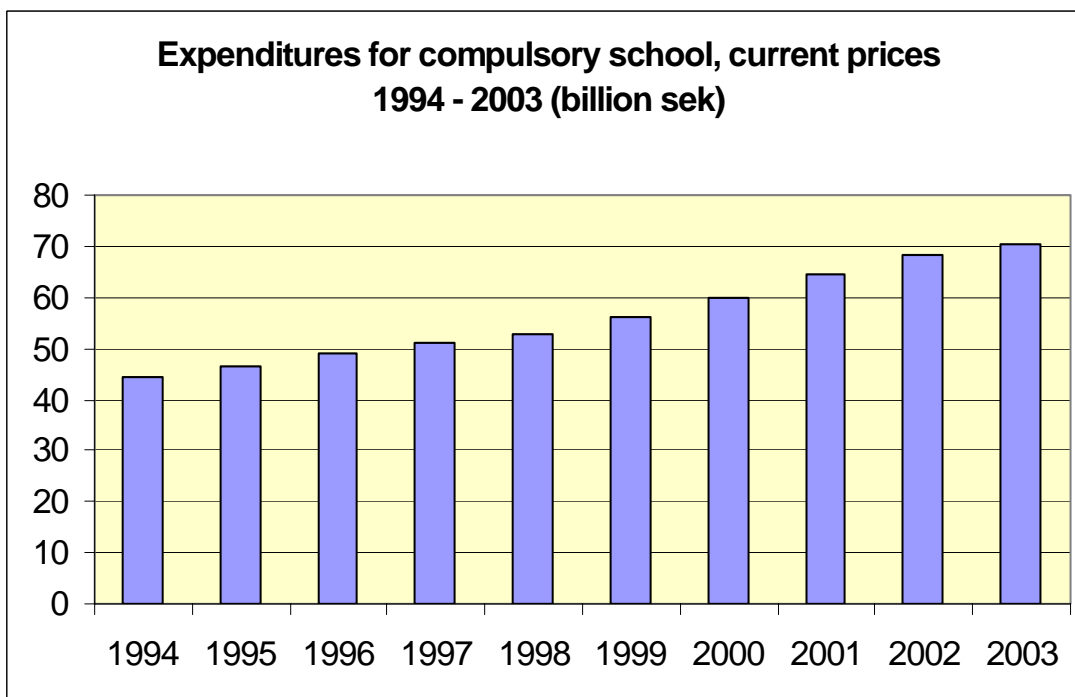


Figure 3.

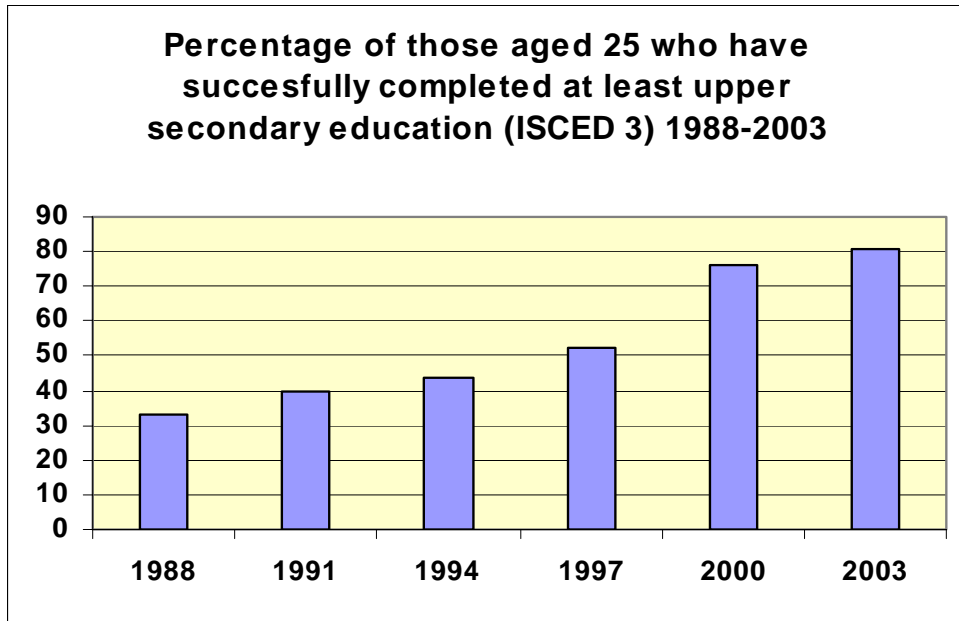


Figure 4.

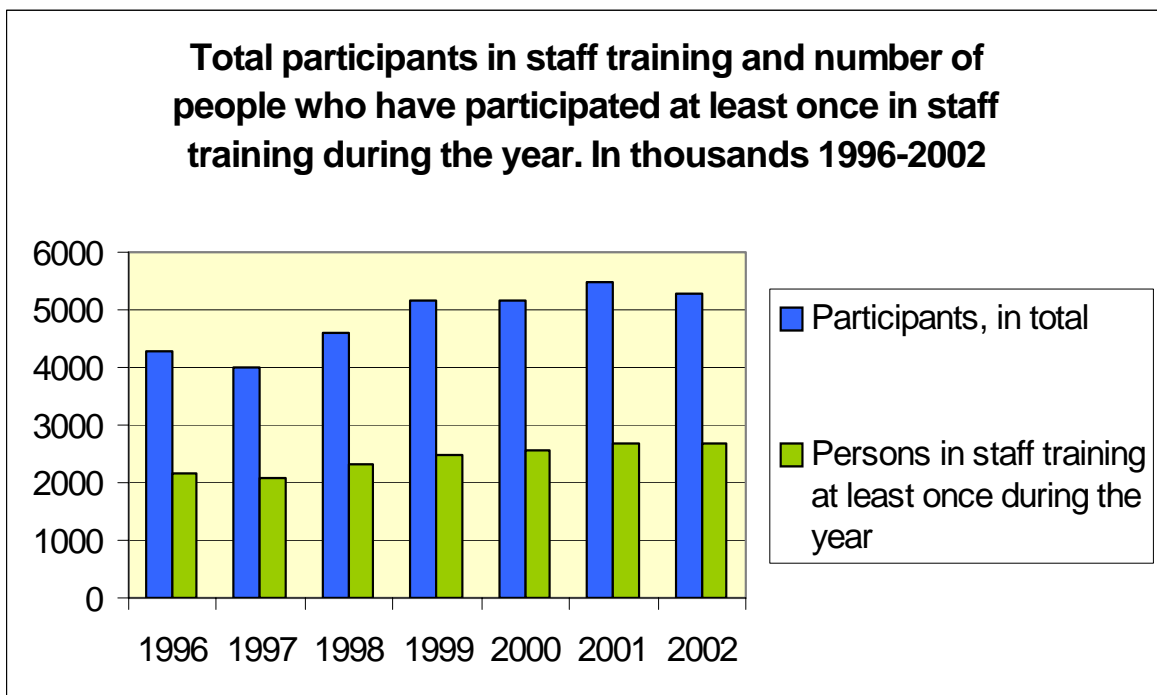


Figure 5

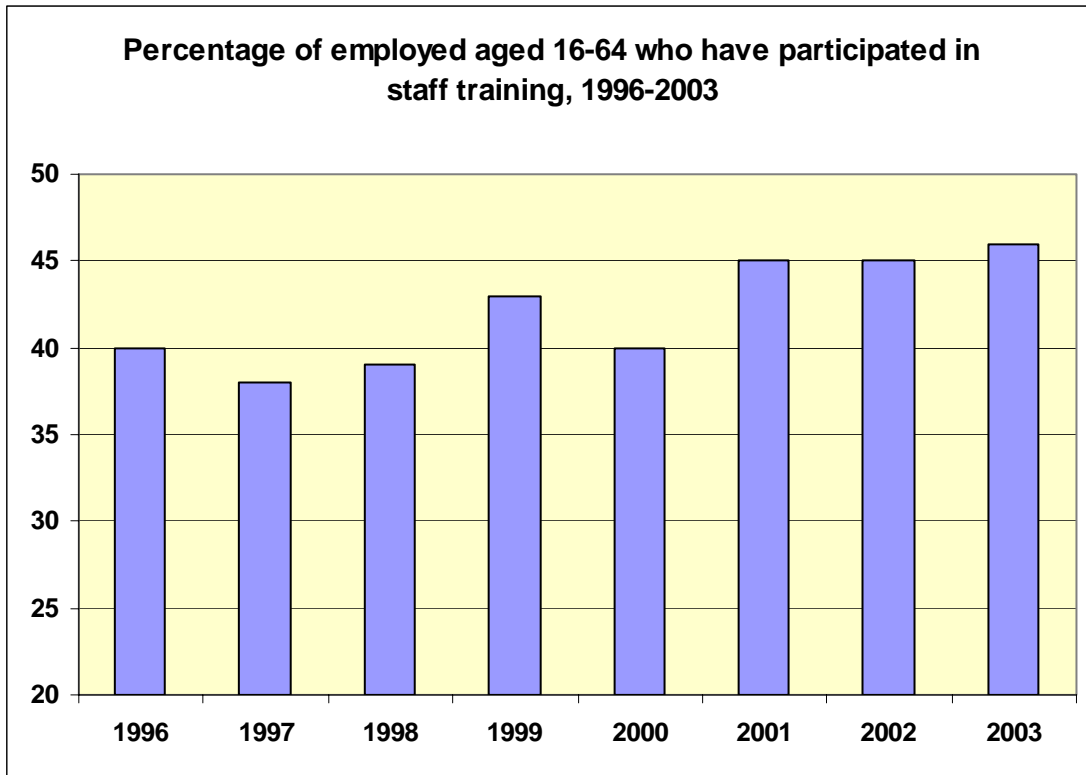


Figure 6.

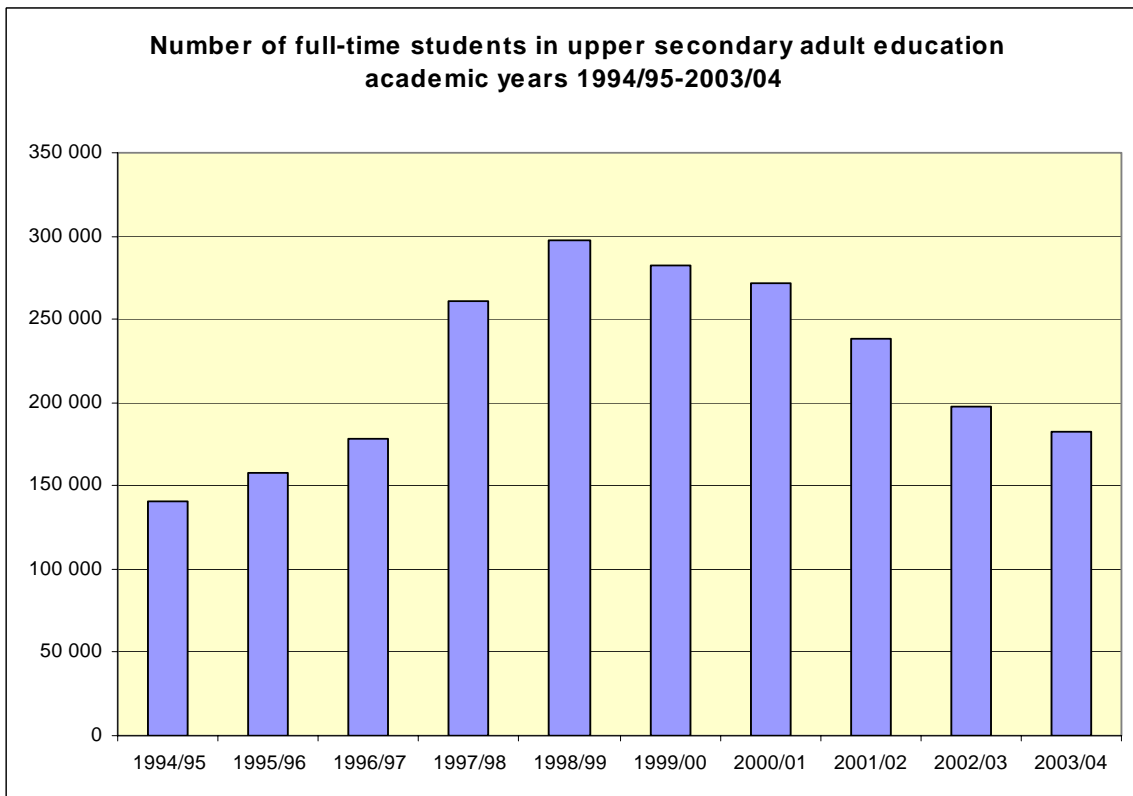


Figure 7.

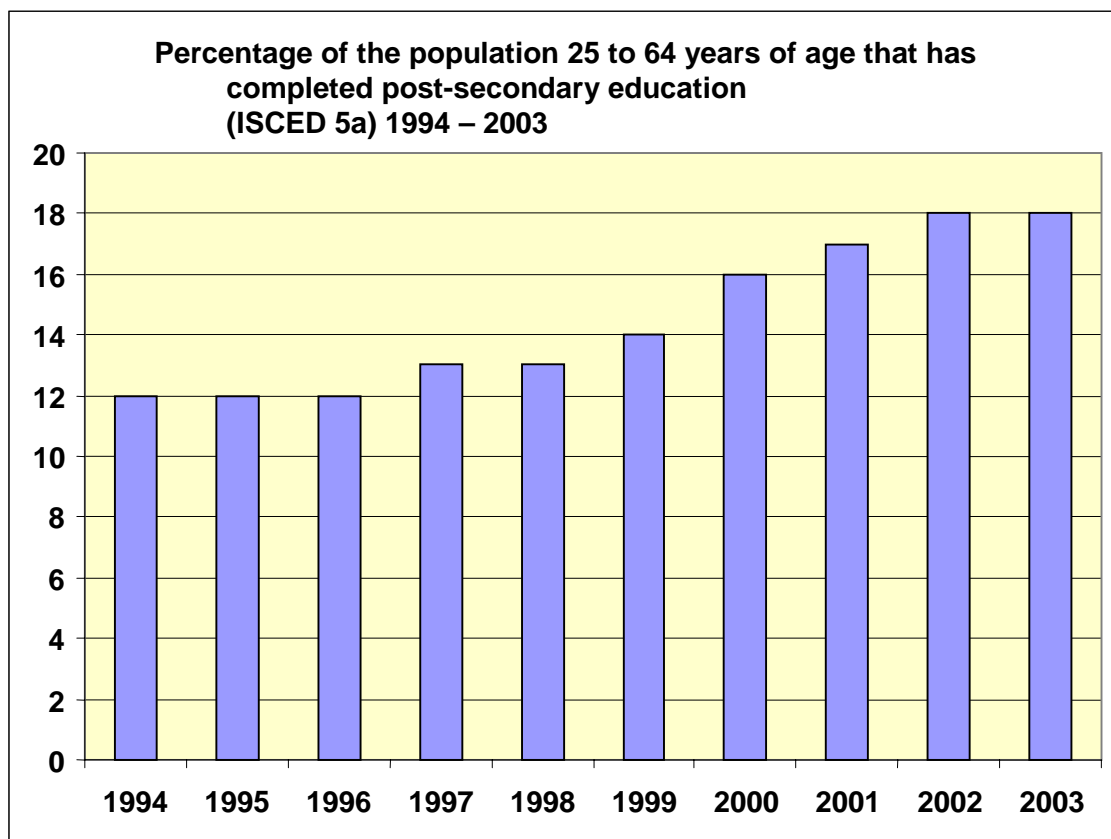


Figure 8.

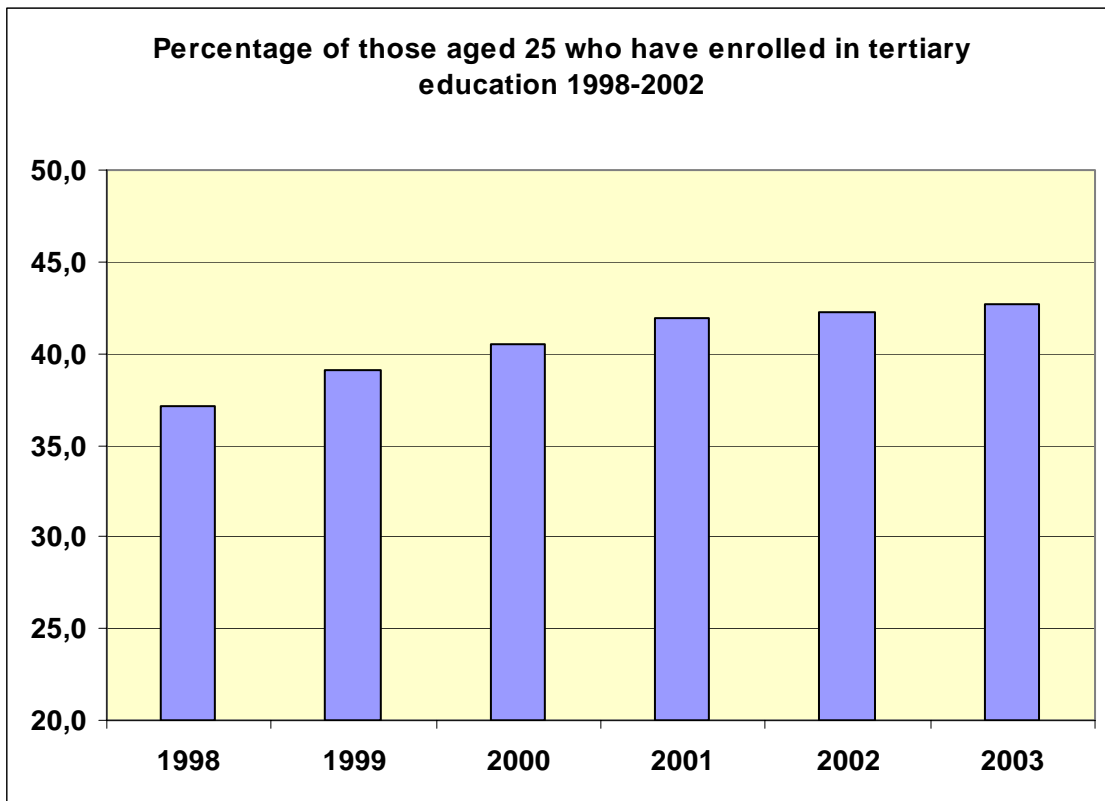


Figure 9.

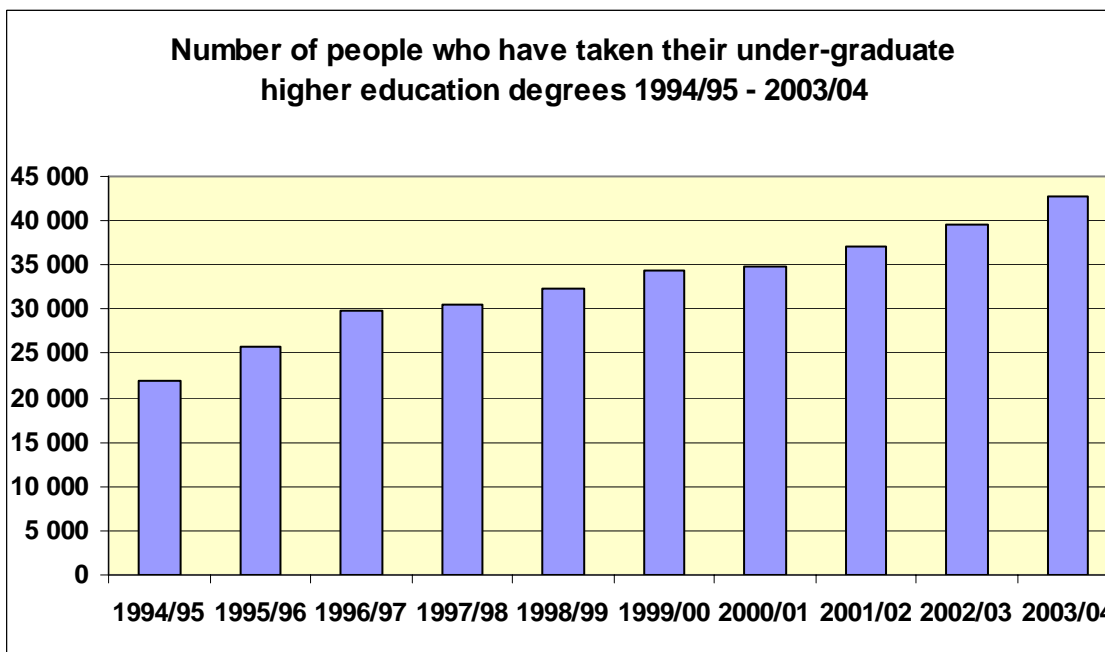
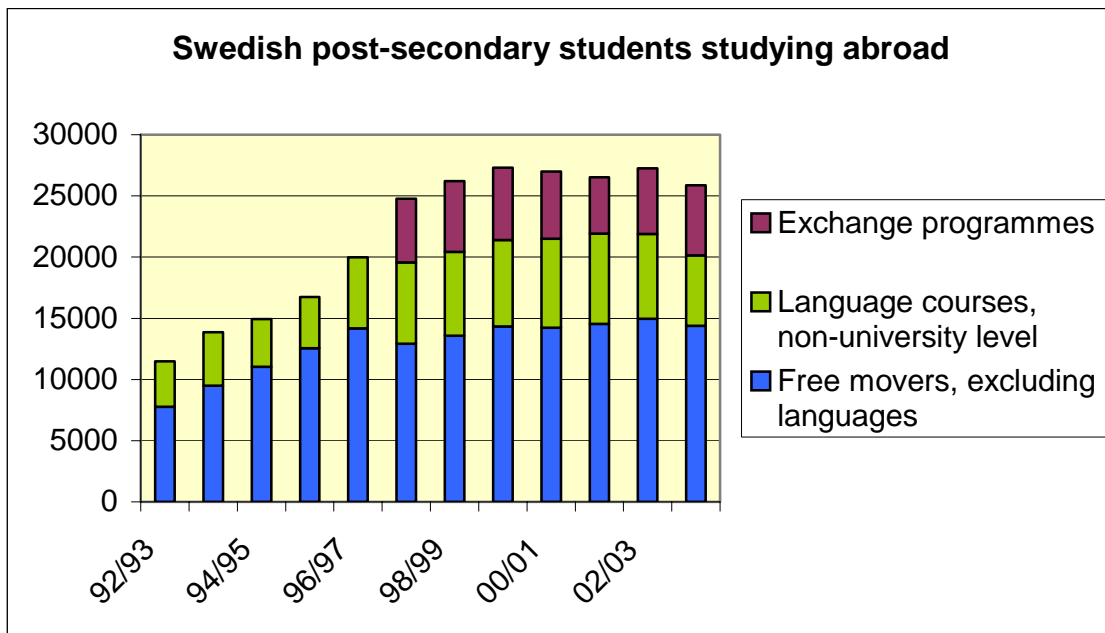


Figure 10.



Students in exchange programmes are included in the statistics as from academic year 1997/98. Earlier, they were categorised as students studying in Sweden. There were around 4 000 students in exchanges programmes per year 1992/93 - 1996/97.