

# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

**National report of Sweden**

**by**

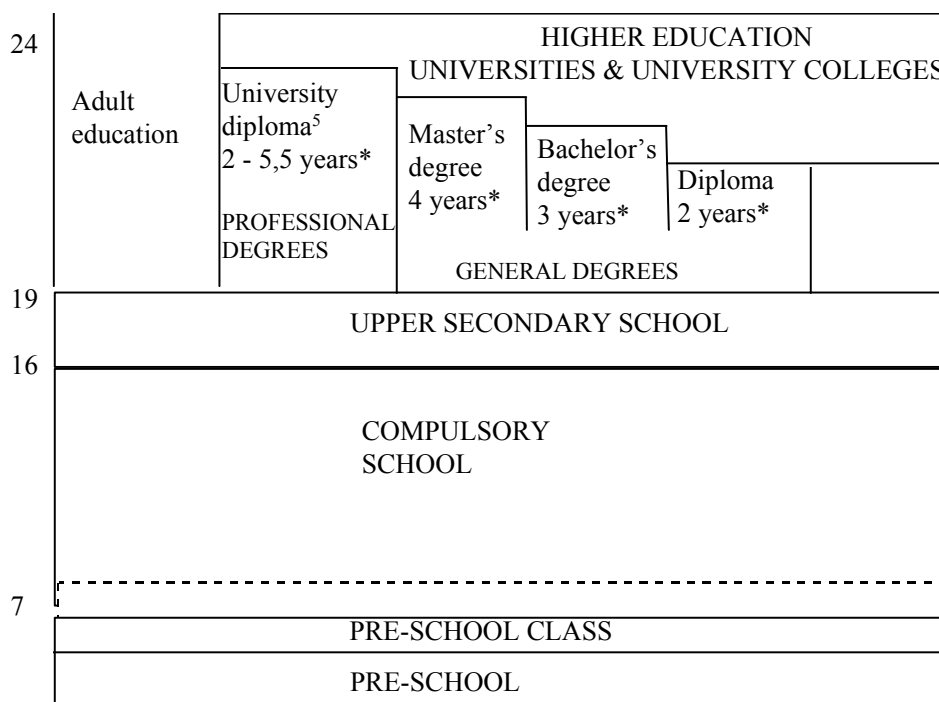
***Swedish Ministry of Education & Science***

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## Introduction

This report is organised according to the instruction given by International Bureau of Education (IBE) and with reference to information in the Country Dossier of the IBE Databanks regarding organization and functioning of the education system.

However, following picture show the structure of the Swedish Education system



\* Minimum requirements

### 1. The education system at the beginning of the 21st century: an overview

During the 20th century, the school system in Sweden was changed from a fairly traditional European system – with early selection, parallel school forms, several selection points, and small, exclusive secondary and tertiary levels – to a system reminiscent of the American one, with mass education at secondary level. The age for the earliest transition has been postponed from 10 to 16, and most educational “dead ends” have been eliminated. Fees and other costs for education up to upper secondary school (age 18/19) have been abolished, and fairly generous loans are available to those who study at university.

#### Organisation:

- The Ministry, the central agencies and the municipalities with great autonomy in administrating the education system within the framework set by the government.

- The municipalities are obliged to provide pre-school activities. A recent OECD-study points to the high quality of Swedish childcare, among other things due to the universal right to attend.
- Compulsory nine-year basic school (age 7-16).
- All upper secondary school programmes (academic or vocational) provide basic qualifications for higher education.
- Higher education was decentralised under the 1993 Higher Education Ordinance.
- Advanced Vocational Education.
- Adult education in Sweden is extensive and based on a long tradition.
- Schooling and education is free (with the exception of pre-school activities and after-school centres) and at university and college level, the government also offers generous study grants and loans.
- “Education Act 2: Education in each school form shall be uniform throughout Sweden. All children and young people, regardless of gender, where they live, or social or economic factors, shall have equal access to education in the public school system.”
- The teacher-pupil ratio in Sweden is, in contrast to most other OECD-countries, higher in compulsory school than in upper secondary school.
- Sweden ranks third among the OECD-countries when it comes to the number of students entering higher education prior to their 25th birthday.

### **1.1 Major reforms and innovations introduced in the education system at the beginning of the 21st century.**

The overarching aim is an education system that provides knowledge and development opportunity for all - a system in which all pupils have the right and opportunity to make progress. Everyone shall have the opportunity to gain an equitable, high-quality education. The follow-up of school results performed by the National Agency for Education indicates, however, that goal-achievement varies and that there is considerable variation among the municipalities and even more among individual schools.

During the 1990's, the vocational programmes were changed so that all upper secondary school programmes now provide eligibility for higher education. Some programmes have been extended so that all programmes now are three years. The transfer rate to upper secondary school programmes is very high. Every year, 98 per cent of compulsory school pupils successfully apply to upper secondary school. Unfortunately the number of pupils who do not meet the set goals and who leave school without a leaving certificate is also high. It has been argued that this may partly be due to the stronger emphasis on theoretical subjects in the vocational programmes. The high numbers of pupils who don't reach the set educational goals and the lack of apprenticeship training may be making it more difficult for young people to access the labour market [Official

Govt. Report 2003:92]. But on the other hand, drop-out rates and the numbers of pupils without leaving certificates may be less problematic in Sweden since there is widespread opportunity to participate in supplementary adult education programmes, an opportunity grasped by many.

There has been a strong trend towards decentralisation and freedom of choice in the Swedish educational system over the last fifteen years. Firstly, the principal responsibility for organising primary and secondary school education shifted from the state to the municipalities during the early 1990's. Secondly, the regulations have become less detailed and the trend has been towards management by objectives and results.

Development in the decentralised school system is influenced by many different actors. The government establishes national objectives and follows up results, school governors create the prerequisites and school staff are responsible for the actual teaching, which in turn depends on the commitment of pupils, parents and the local community.

Over the last 20 or 30 years, the government has made intensive efforts to stimulate and support equity in and development of municipal and independent schools.

#### *Teacher education*

Teacher education is a tool by which the government can set the qualifications that equip the teacher for the task ahead. The degree description given in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) formulates the objectives for the educational programme and the qualitative requirements for trainee teachers.

The school system has undergone major changes in the past decade. Pre-schools have been given augmented pedagogical responsibilities, new school curricula have been brought in, and the very fundamentals of the upper secondary school system have been transformed. In the light of these changes, teachers must take on a new role, which in turn must be the product of a new type of teacher education. New, cohesive teacher education and dramatically increased resources for research and post-graduate studies in education were introduced as from 1 July 2001. The scientific underpinnings of teacher education were radically reinforced. Appropriations for research and post-graduate education in teacher education programmes are to increase year by year for three years. An important component will be the establishment of research schools in the field of educational science.

A new general teaching qualification worth between 120 and 220 university credits was introduced replacing eight of the previous diplomas. The new teaching degree is made up of three educational areas: a general field of education, one or more areas of emphasis on a particular subject or subject area, and one area of specialisation. A special body, the members of which include teachers and students, is to be established at each Higher Education Institution. This body will have responsibility for teacher education, related research and post-graduate studies.

#### *The Committee for Upper Secondary Schools*

In 1999, the government appointed a cross-party parliamentary committee called the Committee for Upper Secondary Schools and instructed it to examine and submit proposals regarding how the choice of courses at upper secondary school should be designed in the future in accordance with Swedish Government

Directive 2000:35. The Committee's assignment basically involved proposing a new study path structure and also considering how all study paths can be made accessible for pupils all over the country. The assignment also included analysing the effects of the size of schools on quality and choice, and developing cooperation between school and working life. Other assignments given to the Committee were to look at subject grades, examine the possibilities for an upper secondary diploma and review the design of certain core subject courses. The Committee for Upper Secondary Schools submitted its proposals and the government drafted a bill that has been presented to parliament in the spring of 2004.

### *The Education Act Committee*

The Swedish Education Act came into force on 1 July 1986. Since then, several paragraphs in the Act have been amended. Furthermore, child-care provisions have been transferred from the Social Services Act to the Education Act. In total, the Education Act has been amended about 50 times. Extensive changes have also been made in the various school ordinances.

A parliamentary committee (the Education Act Committee) was given the task of reviewing education legislation and submitting proposals on how the Education Act could be modernised through simplification and greater clarification and how it could be better adapted to a target-oriented education system and to the way responsibility is currently distributed between the government and the municipalities.

The Education Act Committee has submitted its report containing a proposal for a new education act. Some of the fundamental principles in the proposal are as follows:

- Uniform provisions regardless of who runs the schools (under public, private management, etc.)
- Extensive deregulation of municipal schools.
- Clearer allocation of responsibility for school principals, teachers and school governors.
- Improved statutory rights and greater influence for pupils
- Provisions that promote a good working environment and security in schools.
- Pre-school will become its own school form.

The National Agency for Education will be able to order school governing bodies to fulfil their obligations or face a fine.

The proposals are currently being discussed within the Swedish Government Offices and the intention is to present a bill to parliament during the 2004-2005 parliamentary session.

## **1.2 Major achievements**

15-year olds in Sweden perform on average relatively well in, especially, reading literacy, but also in mathematical literacy and scientific literacy. This is mostly explained by the relatively few poor performances. This is in turn probably due to the comprehensive school system and the equal opportunities of pupils in different schools. The ambition in the Swedish educational system is to avoid dead ends and to ensure that every child leaves compulsory school with at least basic skills, in other words a 'no child left behind'-ambition.

#### *a) access to education*

All children between the ages of 7-16 must attend school. If the parents wish, a child can start school one year earlier, at the age of six. Municipalities have an obligation to provide a place for all 6-year-olds in a pre-school class. Education is compulsory and free of charge. Normally, pupils or their parents are not charged for teaching materials, school meals, health services and transport.

Thus, compulsory attendance at school and the right to attend nine-year compulsory school basically apply to all children in Sweden. There is special education for children with learning disabilities. Special education for children with learning disabilities is spread over the entire country and is often located within mainstream compulsory and upper secondary schools, whereas special schools for pupils with impaired hearing can only be found at a few locations and are often residential at the government's expense. These special schools consist of ten years of schooling at the compulsory level. Sami children may pursue their compulsory schooling in Sami-schools up to grade 6.

All those who have completed compulsory or special school with acceptable grades in Swedish or Swedish as a second language, English and mathematics are entitled to attend a national programme at upper secondary school. The pupil's home municipality is obliged to offer such education. Those not accepted on a national programme because they do not fulfil the specified requirements are entitled to an individual or preparatory educational programme. A person who has completed compulsory education for pupil's with learning disabilities is entitled to continue such upper secondary education, or, if the pupil is deemed capable, to attend an individual programme at a mainstream upper secondary school.

Sweden has an open education system with broad participation – but every seventh pupil leaves compulsory school with sub-standard reading literacy.

By international standards, accessibility and participation in both formal and non-formal education are high in Sweden. The increase in the proportion of 16-24 year-olds who are neither in education/training nor employment is, however, more problematic.

#### *Specially designed programmes*

By combining programme-specific subjects from different programmes, a municipality can establish separate specially designed programmes. These will meet local and regional needs. A specially designed programme will also include the eight core subjects and project work and will be equivalent to a national programme regarding its educational level and time scale. The specially designed programmes are locally designed programmes with programme goals that correspond to those of national programmes but with the added dimension of 'untraditional' course and subject combinations. Specially designed programmes can also be individually designed for a single pupil to meet his/her knowledge needs. The idea behind these programmes is therefore to provide an education, the need for which is not satisfied on the national level but which is of equal value.

## *b) Equity in education*

Previous research has confirmed that there is a connection between class background and education, and current research shows that this is still the case [National Agency for Education, 2002]. The fact that children and adolescents with different class backgrounds have always achieved different results at school has often been the focus of interest both in Sweden and the rest of Europe, especially in the 1970s. Today the class concept seems to have reclaimed some of its central position in research on school and education. Creating a school for everyone in Sweden was the mainstay of Social Democratic education policy, the intention being to locate and utilise the educational potential and eliminate class distinctions by giving everyone access to the same type of education. It was soon obvious, however, that education does not possess the expected equalising effects, and consequently many researchers began to take an interest in the relation between class and education. Research showed that, on the contrary, education tends to reproduce the current social order, that class distinctions are reproduced within and by means of the school system and that consequently educational patterns are also reproduced. Thus, class background is still a crucial factor. High-achievers at school today often have well educated parents and tend to come from homes with a long study tradition and where education is valued highly. This applies to Swedish children as well as to children with a foreign background, and to both boys and girls.

### *Mainstreaming*

Equity has been one of the cornerstones of the Swedish education system, and mainstreaming has been the major strategy for achieving this. The basic systems are in themselves seen as a way of achieving equity; an important feature of the Swedish education system being its homogeneity. The basic idea is to provide all children and young people with access to the same education, regardless of sex, place of residence, social and financial circumstances. Each type of school must offer equivalent education irrespective of where it is provided. The curricula and syllabi are valid nation-wide and the education shall take account of pupils with special needs. A school for all is the underlying principle - all pupils shall be able to reach the goals set in the curricula for compulsory education and also follow a three-year upper secondary school programme making them eligible for higher education studies. The same basic ideas are found throughout the whole of the education system i.e. accessibility, openness, equivalence and quality.

Overall participation in all kinds of school education is about the same for boys as it is for girls in pre-schools, pre-school classes, after-school centres, compulsory schools and upper-secondary national programmes. On the other hand, boys constitute nearly 60 per cent of those attending education for pupils with learning difficulties and upper-secondary school individual programmes.

Regarding:

- compulsory school grades,
- test results,
- eligibility for upper secondary school and higher education,
- upper-secondary school grades,
- graduation from upper secondary school/interruption and
- transition to higher education,

the statistics point to better results and throughput for girls (apart from test results in mathematics, where no gender discrepancies are evident). Girls had better grades in all subjects bar three in the spring of 1988, but were better in all subjects bar just one five years later. Test grades indicate the same trend as final grades but girls gain better grades than boys in relation to their test results.

### *Integration*

Traditionally, Sweden has been a very homogenous society, both socially and ethnically. However, during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sweden evolved into a ethnically diverse society. One important question is whether the Swedish model is equipped to deal with the problems of a less homogenous society.

More than one in ten of the country's inhabitants were born abroad. A further 800,000 people born in Sweden have at least one foreign-born parent. Sweden has inhabitants from 203 countries. The majority of immigrants have been here at least ten years. More than 60 per cent of those who have migrated to Sweden have Swedish citizenship. Integration policy shall permeate all areas of society. Despite Sweden having taken some initiatives to facilitate the integration of immigrants into society, more needs to be done.

### *A gender-equitable pre-school*

All children shall be able to develop as individuals based on their own interests. Research indicates that children are treated very much according to their gender from an early age, causing them to be both aware of and affected by gender roles. The task of pre-schools is to counteract traditional gender patterns and roles from an early stage. It is therefore essential for all pre-schools to have activities that are safe, fun, developmental and instructive for all children, irrespective of sex and background. Bearing in mind the importance of setting good examples, it is vital that more men become pre-school teachers. Ninety per cent of all pre-school staff are currently women. Far too few long-term measures have been implemented to increase gender equality in pre-schools and these efforts need to be intensified. To this end, a gender equality delegation for pre-schools has been appointed. The task of the delegation is to highlight, strengthen and develop the educational efforts of pre-schools in the area of gender equality. This task shall also encompass the need to recruit more men as pre-school staff. The delegation will carry out its task from December 2003 until the end of June 2006.

As many as 100 different first languages are spoken in Swedish childcare and schools today (including officially recognised Swedish minority languages). All children in Sweden have the same right to education regardless of their background. Pupils in compulsory schools who belong to one of the countries official minorities or have a first language other than Swedish, however, have a number of additional rights associated with their language and origin.

\* Multilingualism in pre-school - providing children whose first language is not Swedish with the opportunity to develop both that language and Swedish

\* First language instruction - children and youth whose first language is not Swedish are entitled to first language instruction in compulsory and upper secondary school.

\* Swedish as a Second Language - pupils who attend Swedish schools and whose first language is not Swedish may study Swedish as a Second Language (SSL) as a subject. The goal of SSL is to help pupils develop daily communication skills and give them the proficiency required to study their school subjects in Swedish.

#### *Child and youth asylum-seekers*

Children and youths seeking asylum in Sweden have the same right to pre-school and childcare for schoolchildren, and to compulsory and upper secondary education as children already settled in the country.

Despite extensive initiatives to give everyone the same opportunities in society, the disparities between immigrants and Swedish-born citizens remain large.

#### *Clarification of Swedish integration policy goals*

The task of reducing immigrant exclusion is one of the government's highest priorities. Two education policy goals have been established; one for compulsory school and one for upper secondary. Both are connected to the general national objectives. The goal for compulsory school is a gradual increase in the percentage of pupils with foreign backgrounds leaving school with a complete set of grades. The upper secondary school objective is a gradual increase in the percentage of pupils with foreign backgrounds completing a national or specially designed programme after four years. Having a foreign background refers to pupils born overseas and Swedish-born pupils whose parents were both born abroad. These goals are to be continually monitored.

The National Agency for Education's further analysis of the PISA study indicates a number of explanations for the relatively large differences in school results between pupils with Swedish backgrounds and those with foreign backgrounds. The aim must be to intensify measures aimed at pupils with foreign backgrounds to iron out the inequalities. One such measure is to increase the percentage of school staff with foreign backgrounds. This is one of the most strategic areas for greater goal achievement.

#### *A discrimination commission*

Pre-schools, after-school care and compulsory school shall be permeated by a democratic approach and respect for the equal value of all people. The rights of children and young people must not be violated with respect to culture, tradition, religion and background, nor on the basis of their gender or sexual orientation. A legislative review is of central importance to combat these conditions. Furthermore, measures will be necessary in order to implement the EC education directive on equal treatment regardless of race or ethnic origin and equal treatment in working life. A special commissioner has therefore been appointed to submit legislative proposals for simple and clear regulations that promote equal rights and combat discrimination and other abusive treatment in the school system as a whole. The so-called Committee for Accountability in Schools submitted its proposals to the government in April 2004. The proposals are currently being circulated for comments.

### *c) Quality*

#### *Knowledge and security shall be the key elements of the education system*

Swedish schools shall be safe schools of knowledge for all, the focal point being pupils' development towards knowledge and democracy goals. The teaching shall stimulate creativity and inquisitiveness and provide the necessary support for all those who are to achieve the goals. In order to cope with the inherent diversity of schoolchildren, the school's working method must be adapted to suit each individual pupil and resources must be allocated accordingly. School shall represent a challenge to all and offer individualised teaching within the framework of the common school system, where people from different backgrounds can meet and learn from each other.

The two main tasks of school curricula - to promote knowledge and democratic values - are heavily dependent on one another. Peace and quiet, a safe atmosphere and respect are the key prerequisites of knowledge assimilation and knowledge is the best weapon against undemocratic values. To be able to gain knowledge, everyone must feel safe at school. There must also be peace and quiet based on clear, commonly supported values and rules.

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

The quality programme involves supporting individual pupils, greater individualisation, clearer and prompter information to pupils, better interaction between the home and school and improving the quality audits of both schools and municipalities. It also includes streamlining the tasks of the National Agency for Education and the establishment of an agency for school improvement.

The state's extensive financial investment in the school system in recent years must be accompanied by a clarity as regards measures to achieve equitable and high-quality education across the nation. Improving schools is not just about increased resources. A decentralised school system requires resolute quality assurance to ensure all schools are good schools. The responsibility for this lies with the individual school, the municipality/school governing body and the state.

#### *Better information between school and home*

Provisions in the 1994 Compulsory School Ordinance (1994:1194) and other Swedish school legislation on the rights of pupils and parents to receive information have been strengthened. As a result, pupils and parents are to be informed of the pupil's educational development twice a year throughout his/her schooling in 'development discussions'. These should be based on an evaluation of the pupil's development in relation to the goals laid down in the curriculum and syllabi for grades 5 and 9. The measures needed to achieve the goals must also be clarified. The development discussions shall as a rule lead to progressive, individual development plans, which spell out the measures needed in order for the pupil to be able to reach the expressed goals. Schools are also obliged to issue written assessments of each pupil who does not reach the compulsory school grade 9 goals in one or more subjects or groups of subjects.

#### *Quality audits*

It is not only pupil development that needs to be monitored. The objective is to establish a quality assurance system with more open and uniform quality

auditing that encompasses all schools and all municipalities as from the 2004 autumn term.

The quality audit shall be the central document for evaluating and reporting a school's results. It is important for many actors - administrations, schools, teachers, pupils, etc. - to all be involved in this process. The government intends to continue to develop quality audits and formulate clearer regulations. The quality audits shall in an easily accessible and comparable way show how far schools have succeeded in improving teaching quality and achieving the national goals. They shall also indicate the measures needed to rectify any shortcomings.

#### *Administrative reform*

By reforming the central agencies in the field of education, the government has separated its central supervisory responsibility from its efforts to improve schools.

On 1 March 2003, the responsibilities of the National Agency for Education were narrowed down to follow-up, evaluation and supervision (inspection and enforcement). The aim is to double the amount of inspections so that every municipality and in principle every school is inspected at least once every six years.

The first of March 2003 also saw the establishment of the new National Agency for School Improvement. Its task is to support municipalities, schools and pre-schools in their improvement efforts, acting as a source of inspiration and a driving-force. The agency shall promote knowledge building and experience exchange, by e.g. illustrating success factors and examples of best practice. The agency also has the national responsibility for the further development of information technology in schools. The common objective for both the agencies is to promote high-quality education and increase goal achievement in all schools throughout the country.

Comprehensive reform has been implemented in recent years to improve the conditions for pupils with disabilities. This large-scale reform has included the gathering-together of all special needs education issues within a single agency - the Swedish Institute for Special Needs Education; teacher education reform to equip future teachers with knowledge in special needs education; the establishment of the National Agency for Special Schools with the collective responsibility for special schools for deaf or hearing impaired children; measures to increase teacher-pupil ratios in schools; various skills development measures and the government's quality programme for schools.

Furthermore, the National Agency for Education has been given a sector responsibility within the area of disability policy, the central premise of which is for people with disabilities to be afforded the same rights and obligations as other citizens in society.

#### *d) Content of education (major trends and challenges for curriculum development processes)*

As far as compulsory school is concerned, the goals in the curriculum and syllabi are of two types: goals to strive towards and goals to achieve. Goals to strive towards specify the direction teaching should take, whereas goals to achieve express the minimum pupils are to have achieved when they leave school. Goals

in the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system are divided up in the same way.

The debate on compulsory school goals and goal achievement has at times only focused in the percentage of pupils gaining pass grades in grade 9. These results are without doubt important indicators of how well a school is succeeding. For individual pupils, it may also be a question of the difference between being accepted on a national upper-secondary school programme or not. Goals to strive towards have a general focus specifying the desired degree of quality improvement in schools. Every pupil shall be given the chance of going as far as s/he can when it comes to her/his development in knowledge and social skills.

To achieve its task and give every pupil the chance of achieving the goals and developing to their fullest possible potential, the school needs to plan and utilise its resources in a flexible and goal-oriented way. The role of the national timetable has been to specify the possible level of ambition within the framework of the curriculum. The goals must however remain the most important policy instrument, not the time it takes to achieve them.

A pilot project has been underway since 1 July 2000, in which a number of municipalities have been allowed to organise their compulsory school activities without a centrally established timetable. The total number of teaching hours a pupil receives in compulsory school is to be the same everywhere but how this time is used to teach different subjects is a matter for the individual school. Playing down the role of the national timetable in this way will in the long term reinforce and refine management-by-objectives and thus help pupils to achieve the educational goals. Municipalities and schools must however continue to develop their goals and evaluation methods in order to guarantee quality and equity.

#### *The National School Timetable Delegation*

The on-going pilot project for compulsory schools with no set timetable (flexible lessons system) gives them complete freedom from the constraints of the national timetable as regards time allocation per subject/group of subjects. The task of the National School Timetable Delegation in accordance with Swedish Government Directive 1999:90 is to guide, support and evaluate the pilot scheme.

Schools participating in the pilot scheme must, however, abide by all other compulsory school provisions. In other words, the total number of guaranteed teaching hours in the nine years of compulsory schooling (6,665 hours) provided for in the national timetable still applies to the pilot schools and they shall also work to the subject/subject group curriculum and syllabi specified in the timetable. Pupils shall also receive both a well-balanced education in total and well-balanced academic years and schooldays. The pilot scheme comprising 79 municipalities and nearly 900 municipal compulsory schools will run for five years and will end at the end of June 2005. The delegation submitted an interim report on 15 March 2004. The national timetable both can and should be abolished though not before the pilot scheme has come to an end, according to the delegation.

#### *Individual programmes*

All those who have completed compulsory or special school with acceptable grades in Swedish or Swedish as a Second Language, English and mathematics

are eligible to attend a national programme at upper secondary school. The pupil's home municipality is obliged to offer such education. Those not accepted on a national programme because they do not fulfil the specified requirements are entitled to an individual preparatory educational programme.

Individual programmes shall be designed based on the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil. Municipalities have full freedom to choose how the programmes are to be organised and how local resources are to be utilised. There is far too much variation in the quality of education on upper secondary school individual programmes. Programme quality varies considerably from one municipality to the next and pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to impose demands on the content and scope of the education they receive. Originally intended as an option for only a small number of pupils, individual programmes are now followed by about nine per cent of all those coming from compulsory school. Less than half of these go on to study a national programme. Increasing the quality of the individual programmes is the key to increase the number of young people completing an upper secondary education.

*e) Policy and dialogue, partnerships and participation by civil society in the process of educational change*

In addition to providing high-quality education, schools shall also provide the basis for pupils to go on to lead active and rich social and working lives. This presupposes good cooperation between the home, working life and the local community in general.

Democracy is highlighted in the curricula as an overarching value, a benchmark against which other values in the curricula are to be understood and interpreted. The school has a three-pronged role in the promotion of democratic values. Firstly, it is a question of developing the pupils' knowledge of the democratic system. Key elements in this respect include the election system, the political party system, the various elected assemblies and other societal institutions. Secondly, the school shall prepare pupils to take an active part in a democratic society. Schools are themselves to adhere to democratic principles so that pupils can acquire experience and the necessary skills to enable them to participate in various democratic processes. Thirdly, it is a question of focusing on society's fundamental values. Schools shall help pupils embrace values such as the sanctity of human life, the freedom and integrity of the individual, the equal worth of all people, gender equality, solidarity with the weak and vulnerable and respect for our common environment.

Democracy requires people to come together and meet. Schools shall help pupils to develop into responsible human beings and citizens of society by being open to different opinions and encouraging their expression. It is therefore important for schools to be physical meeting-places where pupils can meet different opinions and values.

The National Agency for School Improvement has developed support material, the aim of which is to allay the uncertainty of school governors, principals and teachers as to how schools are supposed to handle their political contacts with the world at large.

### *Everyday influence*

The right of children, pupils and parents to influence and the obligation of pre-schools, schools and adult education to provide the necessary conditions to increase real influence need to be more clearly regulated. A working group has examined how and to what extent the real influence of children, pupils and parents can be increased in pre-schools, after-school centres, schools and adult education. It has also submitted proposals on e.g. how and in what form local committees with pupil and parent majorities respectively can be included in a future permanent regulation of pupil and parent influence. The group proposes that a provision be inserted into the Swedish Education Act making it compulsory for all pre-schools and schools to have an 'pupil/parent council' to provide for the collective influence of pupils and parents. This council shall be an arena where pupils and parents have the opportunity to put forward proposals and express opinions in issues that concern them. Municipalities and individual schools shall themselves in consultation with pupils and parents decide how to cater for pupil and parent influence.

### **1.3 The main problems and challenges facing the education system at the beginning of the twenty-first century.**

Improving schools so that all pupils gain good knowledge is by far the greatest challenge facing the education system and one of the most important measures to promote greater justice and equity and reduce social and ethnic segregation.

Swedish pupils compare well in international school result studies, but in relation to the established high levels of ambition, there are shortcomings in the results and widening discrepancies regarding the results achieved in municipalities and even in schools within the same municipality.

#### *Who are the 'young outsiders'?*

During 2001, approximately 70,000 young people aged 16–24 were for some reason outside education and employment. Among 16–19 year-olds, by far the most common development was to start studying again after spending a year as an 'outsider'. Three-quarters of the 16–19 year-olds who were outside in 2000 were studying in 2001. Half of the 20–24 year-olds who were outside in 2000 remained outside for a second year. Only one in five studied during this second year, and one in ten worked with a salary income of over three base amounts.

In 2001, approximately 7,000 young people aged 16–19 and 20,000 aged 20–24 had been outside for two years. Those individuals who are outside for two years find it considerably more difficult to establish themselves in society. This group contains a large number of young people who were born abroad, and those who have been in the country for less than five years are particularly over-represented. The most important difference compared with other youngsters of the same age is that the group who have been outside for two years show below-average completion of compulsory school. Analyses of the differences between those who are outside for a year and those who are outside for two years show that it is possible in this way to identify a group of 16–24 year-olds per year approximately 25,000–30,000 in number who clearly have considerable problems in establishing themselves. Statistical analyses show significantly

higher risks of falling outside the system among those who failed to complete their compulsory education, and that the disadvantage of this in the case of the older youths is greater than for the younger ones.

#### *Young outsiders – a social problem*

Without making any real calculations, it can be deduced that these young people themselves have to suffer the most serious consequences of being outsiders but that society also has much to gain by finding a place for them. Society has probably already invested considerable resources in both time and money in trying to establish them in society, but has not succeeded.

A number of measures are being taken to strengthen quality in the education system. Such measures include a government grant for increasing staff levels in schools - a strategic measure to help more pupils attain the goals of compulsory school as well as of upper secondary school.

## **2. *Quality education for all young people: challenges, trends and priorities***

Adequate resources are a pre-condition for achieving the goals, but they must be combined with systematic quality enhancement both in all schools and at all school governing bodies in order to ensure the resources are utilised in the best way. A decentralised and management-by-objectives system requires clear goals monitored and systematically evaluated to ensure equitable, high-quality education for all. For the sake of the pupils, all schools must be good schools. No one should need to de-select the pre-school or school that is closest to their home because it is of a poor quality. The Quality programme (see Section 1c) contains a number of measures to help enhance quality on all levels, from the monitoring of individual pupil development, of individual schools and municipalities right up to central government level. The results of every pupil, school and municipality shall be continuously monitored. An accurate, overall picture of the extent to which goals are being achieved and the measures required to rectify any shortcomings is needed both on the local and on the national level.

#### *Central government grants to increase staff levels in schools*

School finances were cut at the beginning of the 1990s leading to a reduction in school staff levels. In turn, this led to an increased workload for remaining staff members and difficulties in achieving the goals laid down in curricula and other policy documents. A special government grant was introduced in 2001 to help increase school and after-school centre staff levels.

An estimated 15,000 new teachers and other specialists could be employed to increase goal achievement. Municipalities can voluntarily apply for the grant and it is they and the schools themselves that decide where extra staff is needed to maximise goal achievement. The grants play an important role in creating a better work environment both for teachers and pupils. Schools will also become more attractive workplaces. The support along with other measures to improve local authority finances has helped to once again increase school teaching staff.

## **2.1 Education and gender equality**

The overall aim of Sweden's gender equality policy is for women and men, girls and boys to have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities in all areas of life. This implies things like:

- an equal distribution of power and influence between women and men
- the same opportunities for women and men to achieve economic independence
- equal conditions and opportunities in respect of entrepreneurship, jobs, terms of employment and advancement prospects at work
- equal access to education and training and equal opportunities for developing personal ambitions, interests and talents
- freedom from sexual (gender-related) violence.

In the field of education, promoting gender equality and democracy is an important part of the work done by pre-schools, schools and adult education.

The knowledge and skills of the staff are key aspects when it comes to improving gender equality in preschools and schools. In order to strengthen and support the knowledge and skills of municipalities and schools in the area of gender equality, the government has set aside funding to train educational resource staff in gender equality issues. It is the government's aim for there to be at least one such resource staff member in each municipality from 2004 onwards.

## **2.2 Education and social inclusion**

### *Better conditions for education in segregated areas*

There are many municipal districts throughout the country that are characterised by a high level of social and ethnic segregation. Pupils who find it difficult to attain the educational goals are over-represented in these areas. It is a well-known fact that a pupil's success potential is not only affected by factors inside the school. Factors such as how long the child has been in Sweden, his/her parents' educational backgrounds and relation to the labour market also have a substantial bearing on a pupil's school potential. Schools do play a key role in this context, however. It is therefore important to focus the spotlight especially on the educational conditions for pupils in areas characterised by social and ethnic segregation.

The National Agency for School Improvement has been charged with the task of promoting improvement in pre-schools, after-school care activities and schools in segregated areas. The Agency shall promote improvement in such areas with the aim of increasing the number of pupils who attain the established educational goals. The role of pre-schools, pre-school classes and after-school centres shall receive particular attention.

### *Urban development policy*

Within the framework of urban development policy, a large number of measures are being employed in compulsory schools aimed at improving pupils' school results and strengthening their linguistic development. As in the area of pre-

school education, funding is being used to develop staff skills and develop new teaching methodologies. Several schools have extended their opening hours and offer e.g. help with homework after school as well as cultural and leisure activities. Other examples of measures include projects to strengthen cooperation between parents and the school, especially language development groups, responsible for coordinating language development and the regular analysis of how pupils' language is developing. Inter-school experience and knowledge exchange networks are being built up in some municipalities.

### **2.3 Education and competencies for life**

Swedish pupils compare well in international result studies, but measured against the government's high level of ambition, shortcomings are evident in the results and there are widening discrepancies between the results of different schools and housing areas. Despite the evidence of a reversal of a previously negative trend over the last two years, far too many pupils are still leaving compulsory school without pass grades in one or more of the subjects they need to go on to a national programme in upper secondary school.

#### *Upper secondary schooling in tune with future needs*

As is true at other levels of the education system, upper secondary school must develop in line with an ever-changing labour market and society at large. An ever-growing number of industries now require post-secondary education, but there is still (and will continue to be) a considerable need for a workforce with upper secondary vocational training qualifications. Modified requirements for skills in various industries lead to a need to adapt upper secondary vocational programmes. Not least the technological development in working life demands new knowledge and skills.

More measures are needed to improve the conditions for all pupils to reach the goals and obtain final grades from upper secondary school. A completed upper secondary education is a pre-condition for a smooth transition into both higher education and the labour market. More pupils need to achieve the standards needed to make them eligible for higher education. The measures implemented at upper secondary level as part of the government's quality programme are aimed at promoting this.

Government Bill 2003/04:140, *Knowledge and quality - eleven steps to improve upper secondary education*, proposes no change to the structure, but establishes the need of upper secondary schools to improve so that more pupils achieve the common goals and hence obtain the knowledge and skills needed for a good life - both at work and in their leisure time. The upper secondary schools of the future must be better suited to the requirements of a modern society both regarding broad knowledge and a high level of specialisation. The changes will be implemented prior to the 2007 autumn term. Quality strengthening measures on the individual programme will be implemented as from 1 July 2006. Upper secondary school reform can be summarised in eleven points, the new aspects of which are as follows:

\* Subject grades will replace today's course grades, history will be a new core subject and an upper secondary diploma will be introduced.

\* A better quality individual programme will help increase goal achievement and combat interruption/drop-out.

\* Unrestricted application will give pupils greater freedom of choice and stimulate regional cooperation. It is important to give young people the opportunity to choose both their education and school. Pursuing one's preferred education at the school of one's choice increases motivation and may well produce better study results. Pupils can currently select any independent school they like irrespective of in which municipality it is located but they are not afforded that right when it comes to municipal schools. To improve their freedom of choice, pupils will be able to apply to programmes or areas of specialisation in other municipalities even if these are available in their home municipality upper secondary school. This will make the rules between municipal and independent schools basically the same.

\* Improved quality of upper secondary vocational programmes and a modern apprenticeship-training programme will revitalise vocational education. High-quality basic vocational education is needed to meet the needs of both the individual and the society. Pupils on vocationally oriented programmes are over-represented among those who do not complete their upper secondary school education. The quality of basic vocational education therefore needs to improve as part of the upper secondary school reform, including being more closely linked to working life. All upper secondary school pupils should obtain an insight into the prevailing conditions in working life through their own experience and be given the opportunity to do high-quality work-placed training, closely related to their chosen educational programme/area of specialisation. Under the new bill, pupils who choose vocationally oriented programmes will, as now, receive at least 15 weeks of work-placed training. For pupils on higher education preparatory programmes, work-placed training can take many forms, including being the result of collaboration between universities/university colleges, the business sector and working life. Working methods and teaching methodology need to be developed in order to make vocationally oriented programmes more attractive and enhance their quality. A new upper secondary apprenticeship training programme has been proposed as an alternative within national vocational programmes at upper secondary school. This training programme will be designed as an interesting option for all pupils, with the same knowledge goals as school-based programmes.

## **2.4 Quality education and the key role of teachers**

### *Teachers and school principals*

The changes undergone by schools in recent years have basically created new working conditions for both teachers and school principals. As the teachers' employer, school governing bodies have a clear responsibility for the development of the teaching profession and for offering a stimulating working environment with development opportunities. Teacher organisations also shoulder great responsibility for the development of the teaching profession. The school reforms of recent years, school contracts and systematic quality assurance, which is becoming more and more a part of school, together with the ever-closer association between schools and higher education are providing teachers with good professional development opportunities. The new teacher

education also provides them with greater opportunities to do research and to develop within the education system, partly within the framework of work-placement.

The number of teacher education graduates has increased dramatically in recent years. This is due to an increase in the number of teacher students as a result of an increase of the governments goals to reach for the Higher Education Institutions offering teacher education and in a general expansion of the Higher Education Institutions. This increase however, compared to the National Agency for Education's estimated teacher demand in the future, will not be sufficient in some fields of teaching especially science and maths. Additional measures are needed such as skills development of existing staff and measures to attract teachers working in other fields back into teaching. Measures are also needed in order to make the teaching profession more attractive, so that more people choose it and fewer leave it prematurely.

About 25 municipalities are working together in the on-going "Attraktiv Skola (Attractive School)" project, aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. The experiences gained by these municipalities can act as best practice examples of how to successfully recruit, retain and develop teachers. The project is expected to run until 2006 and will then be incorporated into the municipalities' mainstream efforts with these issues.

Sweden is currently participating in an OECD study entitled "Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers". The Ministry of Education and Science presented a background report into Sweden in April 2003. About 20 countries are taking part in the study. The aim is for the countries to present how they try to recruit and retain effective teachers, illustrating best practice. The overarching objective is to provide politicians and decision-makers in the field of education with information, analysis and other background information on a global scale. A final report from the project is expected in October 2004.

Follow-up by the National Agency for Education indicates that clear leadership from school principals is of crucial significance when it comes to government improvement measures making an impact. The government announced its intention to initiate an evaluation of school management structure. There is no overall picture of the school management improvement measures currently being implemented in many municipalities. This is particularly true regarding the development of school management organisation and support measures to school principals as well as how these may be connected to goal achievement.

## **2.5 Education for sustainable development**

As our work with education for sustainable development has not been presented in our previous reports we would now like to give a comprehensive presentation.

### *Vision and premises*

#### *2.5.1 Vision*

Sustainable development is an overarching aim of government policy. In other words, all political decisions are to be formulated taking into account the long-term economic, social and ecological consequences. The sustainable development strategy emphasises the importance of economic progress, social

justice and environmental protection. Our capacity to work, knowledge and creativity form the backbone of sustainable development.

The Governments vision of a sustainable society incorporates solidarity and justice in all countries, between countries and between generations. In a sustainable society, economic development, social welfare and cohesion go hand in hand with a healthy environment. A sustainable society satisfies its current needs without jeopardising the chances of forthcoming generations to satisfy theirs. It is a society permeated by democratic values. Its citizens have a sense of participation, feel they can exert influence on social development and have the will and ability to shoulder the ensuing responsibility. How human resources are utilised and developed is therefore vital to sustainable development. Education and research in general are therefore of crucial significance for sustainable development.

Education plays an important part in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

### *2.5.2 Education for sustainable development*

#### **a) To what extent is the issue of sustainable development being considered in current curricula and syllabi?**

The consequences of the 1972 Stockholm environment conference for the Swedish school curricula regarding the ecological dimension of sustainable development were already apparent even at such an early stage. This was brought even more to the fore in the most recent curricula established in 1994 after education was placed high on the agenda at the 1992 world summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The Swedish Education Act of 1998 stipulates that all school activities shall be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values and that each and everyone working in schools shall encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share.

The Swedish curricula also include components relevant to ecologically sustainable development (ESD). Democracy forms the basis of the national school system. A holistic approach is supported by stressing the importance of some general perspectives: covering environmental as well as international, ethical and historical perspectives. The social dimension is incorporated in the fundamental values that the school is to impart: the sanctity of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, gender equality and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable. The school shall also inspire critical thinking. Pupils shall train themselves to think critically, examine facts and their relationships and see the consequences of different alternatives. Action competence is another main component in ESD which is supported in the curricula. Acquiring and using knowledge and skills are seen as important.

One of the fundamental values in *the pre-school curriculum* (Lpfö 98) concerns environment and nature conservation. The children's own role is stressed since one task of the school is to ensure that children acquire a caring attitude to nature and the environment. Also, one goal of the school is to give children the opportunity of understanding how their own behaviour can have an effect on the environment and to try to ensure that children develop the ability to accept responsibility.

The *curriculum for compulsory school from 1994* (Lpo 94) states that: "An environmental perspective provides them (pupils) with opportunities not only to take responsibility for the environment in areas where they themselves can have a direct influence, but also to formulate a personal standpoint with respect to global environmental issues. Teaching should illuminate how the functions of society and how our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create conditions for sustainable development".

The *syllabi* were revised and new ones adopted in 1999. The environment was brought more to the fore in the new syllabi and is now incorporated into a broader perspective related to economic, social and cultural issues. Education in environmental issues is seen as crucial to sustainable development and to improving the capacity of people to solve environmental and development problems.

The *national curriculum for non-compulsory education* (Lpf 94) applies to upper secondary schools, special upper secondary schools, municipal adult education and state adult education centres. The curriculum states that the environmental dimension is to provide pupils with insights enabling them to act to prevent harmful environmental impact and also to acquire a personal view of general and global environmental issues.

According to Lpf 94, teaching shall illustrate ways in which functions within society and our way of living and working can be adapted to achieve sustainable development. An international perspective in teaching is important in order for pupils to see their own reality in a global context, to create international solidarity and to prepare them for a society in which contact is increasingly being made across national and cultural boundaries.

*Programme objectives* and *syllabi* complement the curriculum. The programme objectives stipulate the skills and knowledge schools should endeavour to impart to pupils and thus govern teaching of the curricula. The curricula define the purpose and objectives of the courses as well as the minimum skills and knowledge pupils should possess on completion of the respective courses. Various pressing aspects of the environmental problem have been identified in many compulsory school and upper secondary school curricula.

The environment is one of the general perspectives for all schools. Environmental education (EE) and ESD are clearly defined for nine subjects out of eighteen in the curriculum Lpo 94 as amended in 2000 for the *compulsory level*: home and consumer studies, physical education and health, biology, physics, chemistry, geography, social studies, crafts and technology. Thus it is not taught as a special subject. At the *upper secondary level*, three out of eight core subject courses have stated aims concerning EE/ESD: science studies, social studies and physical education and training. In addition, more than half of other subjects have stated aims concerning EE/ESD. Obviously it is not taught as a special subject. There are a few special and optional environmental courses such as Environmental Management and Environmentally Compatible Architecture for the reason of further studies..

The pupils/students shall be given the opportunity to discuss issues of common interest with their teachers. At upper secondary level, each class must have a class council and pupils must be represented in the school council. To develop their knowledge and social awareness, pupils must take greater responsibility for their own work as well as for the school environment and be able to exercise real influence over their education.

Practical and specific examples of environmentally friendly behaviour are used in pre-school classes and early school years. A significant proportion of EE takes place outdoors. At upper secondary level, EE/ESD is mostly integrated into natural science subjects, social science subjects and vocational subjects. In some schools, it is also included in language studies, and practical/aesthetic subjects. Most schools have some contact with the municipality, local organisations and local business.

The knowledge and skills possessed by *teachers* are a key factor in influencing and encouraging pupils' interest. Their skill level is very much dependent on when they were educated. The need for further in-service training varies. Some teachers of older children emphasised the need for specialised training on the environment in relation to their subject, whereas others highlighted the need to develop a problem-oriented approach and a deeper didactic approach to the whole subject of environment and sustainable development.

Support at the local level is another important issue for encouraging the teachers to partake in EE/ESD-teaching. Environment and democracy issues play a prominent role in the Municipalities' School Plan. The importance of school and education is also mentioned in the Municipalities' Environmental Plan.

**b) what measures are being envisaged in order to ensure that the content of education reflects and supports sustainable development as one of its central theme?**

#### *Education for sustainable development - further steps*

The action plan from the Johannesburg summit in 2002 strongly underlines the need for education for sustainable development. The decision by the UN General Assembly in December of the following year to declare 2005-2014 the decade of education for sustainable development expresses the international community's expectations of the member states to take the issue extremely seriously. The need for cooperation on the regional and sub-regional level in order to achieve the established goals was emphasised at the meeting. The interpretation of all three dimensions of the sustainable development concept - economic, social and ecological - was also clarified. This includes endeavouring to integrate education and research for democracy, human rights and health with environmental education and research to a greater extent. It also makes it easier to make education for sustainable development more interdisciplinary in a natural way.

At the meeting, Sweden declared its intention to host an international seminar on education for sustainable development. This meeting was held in Göteborg in May 2004 and helped to substantially increase interest in the UN decade of education for sustainable development 2005-2014. A document is being put together summarising the experiences gained and conclusions drawn from the conference. The Committee for Education for Sustainable Development, specially appointed by the government (U 2003:06), was given the responsibility for planning the conference. The Committee also has the task of surveying and analysing the endeavours of education systems on all levels to promote economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development and to stimulate further efforts in this field. The Committee is due to submit its report no later than 31 October 2004. The report will contain the Committee's proposals to the government for further measures to reinforce the idea of education for sustainable development from pre-school all the way up to higher education.

### *Research*

Much of the implementation plan adopted at the Johannesburg world summit is strongly linked to research. Scientific research must form the basis of sustainable development work. The Johannesburg plan of implementation places special emphasis on capacity building in and in cooperation with developing countries, working across disciplinary boundaries and cooperation between scientists and the rest of the society.

Successful sustainable development research requires a new way of thinking and acting in order to create new sustainable structures in society. It is therefore essential to underline the importance of cooperation across the disciplinary boundaries of science and of cooperation between scientists and the rest of the society. Advanced knowledge is needed both as a basis for key strategic choices that must be made in society and in order to assess the impact associated with various courses of action.

### *Measures already implemented*

#### *- nationally*

Education for sustainable development is well supported in our curricula for pre-school, compulsory school, upper secondary school and municipal adult education as well as in the goals established for liberal adult education. In addition to adhering to the provisions laid down in the Swedish Higher Education Act promoting understanding of other countries and of international circumstances, many of our universities and university colleges have also formulated goals to promote sustainable development.

- Education for sustainable development can however only be successful if teachers, pupils/students at individual schools or institutes work together and with creativity and commitment to try to realise the aim integrating sustainable development into the teaching. Work prior to the adoption of Baltic 21 Education highlighted the need for skills development of both active teachers and other education professionals.

- The National Agency for Education drew up a framework course plan for the skills development of teachers in the field of education for sustainable development and initiated a pilot project, Sustainable development in education, in partnership with the universities of Uppsala and Örebro aimed at improving in-service training for teachers. The pilot project is now being finalised by the National Agency for School Improvement, which is considering how best to disseminate the experiences to a broader circle of schools and teachers.

- The perspective of sustainable development is particularly important when it comes to undergraduate teacher education. There is good potential for developing the perspective within the current general teacher education degree (60 credits). How this may be achieved is naturally a matter for each individual university/university college in question.

- The National Agency for Higher Education has appointed a working group to develop thinking on how the sustainable development perspective could also be reinforced within higher education.

#### *- internationally*

In partnership with the Nordic Council of Ministers, Sweden hosted a Nordic seminar called "Education for sustainable development". By exchanging

experiences and disseminating knowledge on best practice, the aim was to enthuse and stimulate efforts in the field, prepare for the Göteborg seminar and the UN decade of education for sustainable development and thereby constitute a step towards the implementation of Baltic 21E (Education).

The education ministers of the countries in the Baltic Sea region adopted an agenda for education for sustainable development in January 2002 and agreed on an action programme for the implementation of Baltic 21E. Sweden has the task of coordinating and driving forward this process.

At one of the UN Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) organised environment ministers conferences in Kiev in 2003, a "Statement on Education for Sustainable Development" was adopted, giving clear indication of the importance of education in addition to the key points emphasised in the UNECE Århus Convention of 1998. Through this statement, the environment ministers called for a reorientation of environmental education towards education for sustainable development. The statement also encouraged further work on a UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. Sweden and Russia were called on to coordinate and supervise this work. The strategy is expected to be adopted in February 2005.

At a meeting of environment ministers from the Nordic region and other countries involved in the Baltic Sea cooperation project in Luleå in August 2003, support for education for sustainable development was expressed in order to achieve sustainable consumption and production.