# Swedish Education, Culture, Youth and Civil Society policies

**Education policy**

The Swedish school system is working to give the students deeper and wider skills in their foreign language learning. Top researchers in the area of language translation point out several advantages having a solid native language foundation while learning a second language. Being able to see a grammatical pattern in the native language gives a much better and faster understanding in the meeting with a new one. A student who is aware of grammatical structures, pronunciation patterns and who has experience of processing different kinds of texts in both reading and writing and who is able to vary the language interacting with different receivers and of different purposes, shows a significantly faster progression in second language learning. This knowledge tells us that we have a great deal to win by giving the students proper fundamental language education and that this will also enable him or her to integrate faster into the Swedish society.

A report from The Swedish National Agency for Education that analysed the PISA 2000 results, reveals that Swedish 15-year-old students performed above the OECD-average in all three surveyed domains; Reading literacy, Mathematical literacy and Scientific literacy. It was also found that the Swedish school system achieves a high level of equity compared to many other OECD-countries. Nevertheless the PISA results show that there is a considerable performance gap in Sweden between native students and foreign background students as well as in many other OECD-countries. It is not significantly larger than the OECD-average,but taking into account the other "equity indicators" and the fact that Sweden traditionally has belonged to one of the countries with the highest ambitions with respect to an equitable distribution of learning outcomes, the result is far from satisfactory. (Edited extracts from Report 227 - Further analyses from the PISA 2000 results **)** As part of the solution of this problem, the students therefore get the opportunity to study their primary language with an educated tutor in the subject. To motivate the student even more they get grades in the language just as in the other school subjects. The grades also fill an important purpose as a mean to identify obstacles in the students’ learning of the second language. For example: If a student has high grades in his or her native language, the second language teacher can conclude that difficulties in the second language-learning is not the consequence of for example dyslexia. The students also get to reflect over the similarities between their own language and the Swedish language.

The teacher has to be well educated with a good knowledge of the Swedish language. This is important in order to be able to make the student understand the process of learning a new language and to become acquainted with the Swedish school system. To develop this part of the educational system the Swedish Board of Education urges the school leaders and the teachers to work consciously towards this goal. Munkebäcksgymnasiet can offer additional tuition with a native language teacher who works with one or more pupils in or outside the classroom. At our school we have pupils from about 16 different groups of languages. Currently we offer native language tuition in six of them. This is done in for example history and mathematics since these particular school subjects often cause problems for our second language learners.

Your child can attend preschool from the time he or she is 1 year old. Play is an important element of preschool. When your child turns 6, he/she can attend preschool class. Both preschool and preschool class are voluntary. All children attend comprehensive school from about the age of 7. Comprehensive school is compulsory, and compulsory schooling applies for years 1-9.

Most young people then attend upper secondary school for three years. New arrivals who have received a permanent residence permit are entitled to begin their upper secondary education before the end of the spring term in the year they turn 20; for asylum seekers this limit is the year they turn 18. However, there are also certain requirements for recognised grades from earlier education. Upper secondary school prepares pupils for university or university college, or for going on to employment without further education.

Skolverket (The Swedish National Agency for Education) is the central administrative authority for the Swedish public school system for children, young people and adults, as well as for preschool activities and childcare for school children. The role of the National Agency for Education in the Swedish education system is to define goals in order to administrate, to inform in order to influence and to review in order to improve. The National Agency for Education audits preschool activities, care for school children, schools and adult education in many different ways. Regardless of the method, however, the focus is always on asserting the right of each individual to knowledge and personal development.

**Culture policy**

The goal of Swedish cultural policy is to increase access for all who live in Sweden to culture, both via contact with culture of high quality and through creative activity of their own. Financial support for artists and cultural institutions is a key element of this policy, for which the Swedish state, regions and municipalities share responsibility. Yet it is individuals themselves who account for the majority of spending, when they purchase books, CDs, tickets for various cultural events, musical instruments, CD players, TV sets, computers, IPads and smart phones. There are certain national cultural institutions that receive funding direct from the Swedish government, such as the Royal Opera, the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Riksutställningar (Swedish Travelling Exhibitions) and Statens Musikverk (Music Development and Heritage Sweden). In every county there are theatres, music institutions, county libraries and county museums. These often function as regional centres in their respective cultural spheres, working together with schools, the business community and others. Regional and municipal heads of these organisations have financial responsibility for their own institutions and thereby decisive influence over the scope and nature of their activities. However, for some considerable time the state has been promoting the establishment of the regional network of institutions, providing substantial funding each year. The state and regions also jointly fund specialist county consultants for dance, the pictorial arts and design with the aim of promoting activities in these areas.

The collaborative cultural model is a model for allocating State allowances to regional cultural activities. The purpose of the collaborative cultural model is to contribute to achieving national cultural policy goals, as well as providing opportunities to regional priorities and variations. In Sweden's 290 municipalities there are also cultural institutions funded wholly or for the most part from local income taxes, e.g. public libraries, art museums and, in some instances, municipal schools for children and young people specialising in music and the arts. In certain cases, the state provides funding for projects and special commissions. The cultural infrastructure is both a pre-condition and a consequence of Swedish cultural policy. Sweden's parliament laid down the objectives and basic principles of Swedish cultural policy in 1974. They were revised in 2009. The Swedish Arts Council was founded in 1974.

*The vision of Alice Bah Kuhnke: Culture and Democracy Minister: "More culture to more people in the country and an active democracy policies that contribute to a Sweden where people live, learn and evolve. This is the basis for the policy that will be a priority during this term. The free culture depends on a stable and strong democracy. Sweden must be a country where many different voices get an opportunity to be heard and considered. Racism and similar forms of hostility will not be given space. It is therefore more important than ever to defend the freedom of the media, independence of art and civil society conditions. Culture and Democracy policy is part of the work of a Sweden that holds together."*

**Youth policy**

The goal of the youth policy in Sweden is that all young people between the ages of 13 and 25 are to have good living conditions, the power to form their own lives and influence over developments in society.

**Why we need youth policy**

The opportunities for young people to enter into the world of adults are highly dependent on the way society is structured. Given the right conditions, young people can both form their own lives and contribute to positive societal developments. The goal of the youth policy is to ensure that all young people aged between 13 and 25 have good living conditions, the power to form their own lives and influence over developments in society.

**Youth policy is multisectoral**

Youth policy is multisectoral and includes areas such as education, work, influence, health, leisure time and culture. The fact that youth policy is multisectoral means that all affected areas of activity have a joint responsibility for achieving the stated youth policy goal.

**Three prioritised areas**

Teenagers and young adults face a range of challenges in the transition from childhood to adulthood that society needs to take into consideration. Three areas have therefore been given special priority in Sweden’s youth policy for the period up to 2017 – young people’s influence, young people’s ability to support themselves and the mental health of young people.

**Proceeding from the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a human rights perspective**

Youth policy is binding on state agencies and is to serve as a guidance for municipalities and county councils. National Youth policy proceeds on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and human rights and is thus also mandatory for the municipalities. At the same time, the National Youth policy can only serve as a guidance in relation to how the municipalities choose to implement this policy. The Swedish youth policy is also linked to the ongoing EU youth policy cooperation.

**A youth perspective in all public sector decisions**

All public sector decisions and initiatives are to include a youth perspective. This means that young people should be viewed as a diverse group of individuals, should be given support to become independent, and should have the opportunity to participate in the decisions made in society. The youth perspective is to proceed on the basis of young people having a voice of their own (participation and influence) and knowledge about young people.

**Municipal responsibility for activating young people**

Chapter 2 of the Swedish Education Act assigns the municipalities an activation responsibility in relation to young people who are under 20 years of age, who have completed compulsory schooling but who are not attending upper secondary school. This means that the municipality is required to provide appropriate individual measures that are first and foremost intended to motivate the young person to enter education. The municipalities are also required to maintain a register of the young people covered by this responsibility and to document their measures in an appropriate way. This is what we do: We work to produce and disseminate knowledge on conditions affecting young people and on youth policy and its goals. We emphasise the importance of the fact that all public sector activity should proceed on the basis of a youth perspective. We work together with other agencies, among other things by participating in a public sector agency network focused on issues affecting children and young people. We support the municipalities’ work with their local youth policy by means of the LUPP youth questionnaire survey, education and training measures and by supporting municipalities in learning from one another’s experiences. We also work to ensure that municipal activities are based on a youth perspective. This means municipalities conducting regular follow-ups of young people’s living conditions and making use of information about young people as a basis for decisions and prioritisations. In addition, the municipalities should also make use of young people’s knowledge and experiences.

**Civil society**

The government wants to strengthen civil society voices and has therefore introduced a new method, a special council (sakråd), to systematically take advantage of the civil society expertise on various issues. It complements other forms of consultation and increases the quality of the government's support.

Thanks to the method government offices benefit from the knowledge of civil society in a more effective and transparent way. The purpose of the council is to help raise the quality of the government's work by deepening and broadening the government's knowledge and perspectives on issues where civil society organizations have important contributions to make. The method is flexible and can be used in different extents and in all kinds of issues in government offices, such as for early dialogue, or when there is a need for rapid acquisition of knowledge. If necessary, other actors than civil society be invited to participate.

The method is based on the six principles that are the basis of government policy for civil society: autonomy and independence, dialogue, quality, sustainability, transparency and diversity. Civil society has played an important role in the development of the council. More than 100 organizations have participated in the work. The method is now starting to be widely used in government offices.

The council gives a good structure and setting for dialogue that we have with civil society and other stakeholders. They will be an important part of the Government's efforts to strengthen consultation arrangements and increase participation in EU work, says Oscar Stenström, Secretary of State of the EU and Minister of trade Ann Linde.

**Resources:**

* Göteborgs stad - The City of Gothenburg website Lagboken <https://www.lagboken.se/dokument/lagkommentarer/768416/11-kap.-10--skollagen---modersmalsundervisning?pageid=24593>
* Skolverket - The Swedish National Agency for Education
* [https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publikationer/visa-enskild-publikation?\_xurl\_=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpub ext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D1480](https://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publikationer/visa-enskild-publikation?_)
* <http://www.omsvenskaskolan.se/engelska/det-haer-aer-den-svenska-skolan/>
* <http://www.utbildningsinfo.se/in-english-1.3131>
* <http://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2015/12/det-har-ar-kulturdepartementet/>
* <http://www.kulturradet.se/en/In-English/Cultural-policy/>
* <https://eng.mucf.se/swedens-youth-policy>
* <http://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2017/02/sakrad-ny-metod-for-att-inhamta-kunskaper-fran-civilsamhallet/>