



Skolverket – a presentation

The Swedish National Agency for Education

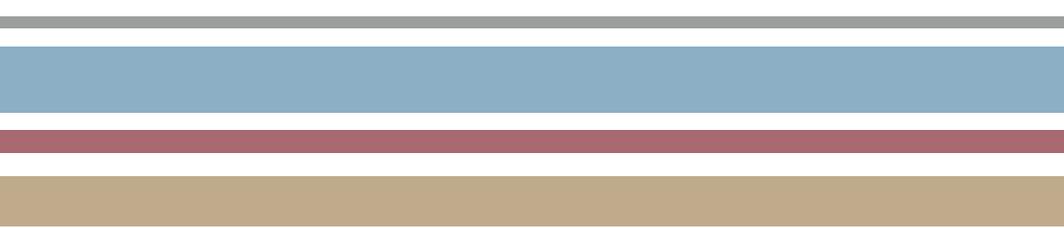
With involvement, expertise and integrity
– the National Agency for Education is
asserting the right of every individual to
knowledge, education and development.

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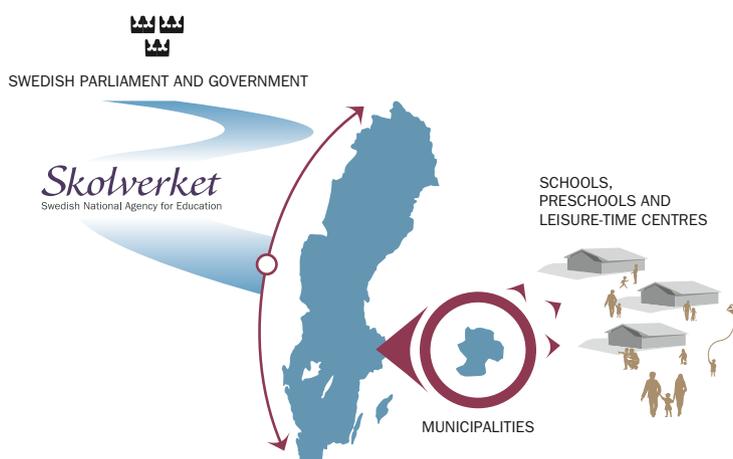


The Swedish National Agency for Education

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 child care 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
- to review in order to improve.



The Swedish school system is a goal-based system with a high degree of local responsibility. The main responsibility for education activities lies with the municipalities and authorities responsible for independent schools. Various steering documents are used to steer activities, that is, school curriculum, course syllabi, etc. that are drawn up at different levels within the school system.

The overall national goals are set out by **Swedish Parliament and Government** in...

- The Education Act
- Curriculum for the Pre-school (Lpfö 98), Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure-time Centre (Lpo 94), and Curriculum for the Non-compulsory School System (Lpf 94)
- Course syllabi for compulsory school etc.
- Program goals for upper secondary school

The National Agency for Education draws up and takes decisions on...

- Course syllabi for upper secondary school etc.
- Grading criteria for all types of Swedish school
- General recommendations

The main responsibility for preschool activities, child care for school children, schools and adult education lies with **the municipalities**, whose responsibilities include distributing resources and organizing education such that students are able to achieve the national goals. On the basis of this municipal input and the goals and guidelines set out in the steering documents, **individual schools, preschools and leisure-time centres** can then choose work methods suited to their activities and local conditions. This work is followed up in annual...

- Quality reports.

Defining goals in order to administrate

The Education Act, school curriculum, program objectives, course syllabi and grading criteria, are some of the national steering documents that steer education activities. Part of the philosophy of the Swedish education system is that the state should define the national goals and guidelines for education, while detailed sub-regulation should be avoided to give municipalities and schools as much freedom as possible to formulate their own work. Defining the goals for administration can involve:

- ongoing revision of course syllabi, grading criteria and other steering documents to ensure that they reflect the needs motivated by developments in society and the workplace, as well as the needs of individuals, and contribute thereby, over time, to greater equality of education.
- setting criteria to be met when opening new independent schools, and assessing whether applications received for new schools meet these criteria. This can apply, for example, to the ability and desire of the authorities concerned to operate an independent school that corresponds to the basic values of education that apply in the public school system.
- providing monetary steering instruments for municipalities and schools to better achieve the goals, and guarantee quality and equivalence. The allocation of monetary steering instruments is evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine whether school authorities are meeting the goals for which the funding was provided.

Informing in order to influence

The National Agency for Education communicates and maintains a dialogue with Swedish Parliament and Government, responsible authorities in education and child care, school staff, and to a certain extent also with parents and students. Providing information to influence can involve:

- clarifying course syllabi and grading criteria, in the form of national examinations, to support teachers in grade-setting and thereby ensure fairness and consistency in grading students.
- making qualified prognoses regarding the availability of staff, from a two-year perspective, to facilitate municipalities' recruitment planning or to enable Government to identify the number of spaces needed in teacher training programs.
- making the results of National Agency for Education reviews and evaluations readily accessible and comprehensible for parents so that they have a good idea of how their chil-

dren's school works. With this knowledge to support them, parents can engage in a constructive dialogue with teachers and school administrators concerning how their individual school can be developed.

Reviewing 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. Reviewing to effect improvements can involve:

- establishing, by way of education inspections, whether- and how well an educational activity is functioning in relation to the regulations set out in the Education Act and school curriculum, and drawing attention to areas where a municipality or board of an independent school need to invest more efforts in their own development work.
- focusing on, by way of national evaluations, areas where development is needed at the national level, as well as providing the underlying basis for this development, e.g., to help school principals and supervisors in their efforts to lead and rejuvenate activities at the local level.
- participating in international evaluations in order to gain more indepth knowledge on comparable education systems and on how other countries have dealt with areas similar to those needing improvement in the Swedish education system.

The National Agency for Education is led by a director-general. To ensure a broad basis in society, the director-general is assisted by a board of people from other areas.

This brochure provides a brief description of how the National Agency for Education works and its area of responsibility. To find out more, visit the National Agency for Education website at: www.skolverket.se. Agency reports and other information can also be ordered from the website.



Current steering documents that meet the needs

The National Agency for Education is responsible for a number of the national steering documents, above all course syllabi and the criteria for grading.

The National Agency for Education is continually developing and revising syllabi, grading criteria and other steering documents to ensure that they help to improve equivalence and achievement of goals, as well as reflect the needs motivated by developments in society and the workplace and the needs of individuals.

The National Agency for Education also follows up how the steering documents are helping, in practice, to increase equivalence and meet the goals. The agency also evaluates the knowledge of responsible authorities or institutions regarding the content and purpose of steering documents.



Follow-up through statistics and analysis

The National Agency for Education collects data regularly from the municipalities on preschool activities, child care for school children, schools and adult education, and thus also fundamental knowledge on these institutions. Facts on how these activities are organized, how much they cost, and the results achieved are gathered annually. This follow-up data constitutes the official statistics for the sector, for which the National Agency for Education is responsible. The statistics are then used by municipalities in their planning and as a basis for governmental and parliamentary planning and decisions. To gain a more nuanced picture, indepth analyses of the statistics are also performed. Regular polling of public, parental, student and teacher attitudes toward education is also carried out as a part of the national follow-up.

One of the purposes of the statistics and indepth studies is to provide a basis for comparison and to encourage debate, locally and nationally, on how we can better achieve the intended goals of school and child care activities. The statistics and analyses are available on the National Agency for Education website, including via the SIRIS system, which presents much of the data on the individual school level so that students, teachers and parents can also follow local developments.



National and international evaluations lead to more indepth knowledge

Evaluations are indepth studies and comprehensive analyses, the purpose of which is to describe, explain and evaluate different factors in education and child care. The evaluation results provide a basis for conscious improvement on all levels throughout the system for everyone involved, as they endeavour to develop and breathe new life into activities. They also provide a broad factual base for anyone wishing to take part in the debate on education policy.

Evaluation is most often conducted in a selected number of municipalities, in various forms of preschool activities, care for school children, schools and/or adult education. The areas evaluated are chosen on the basis of problems or needs detected in the statistics or through educational inspection. The National Agency for Education also takes the initiative to evaluations in other areas where more knowledge may be needed. Evaluations are also conducted on direct assignment from Government.

The National Agency for Education is also responsible for seeing that Sweden takes part in international knowledge assessments. The purpose here is to examine how Swedish students fare in comparison with students from other countries, and how the national goals for education in Sweden compare to education in other countries. The results from international comparative studies help to form a basis for analysing variations in different education systems.



Testing and diagnostic materials to support teachers and students

The National Agency for Education is responsible for the national examination system. This involves producing and developing subject testing and diagnostic materials in cooperation with universities and university colleges for compulsory school and other corresponding school forms, and national examinations for upper secondary and adult education courses, above all for the subjects of Swedish, Swedish as a Second Language, English and Mathematics.

The diagnostic materials shall serve as an aid to teachers and students in identifying a student's strengths and areas where the student may require further development.

Subject testing and national examinations are important tools to support teachers in assessing a student's achievement in relation to the national goals for a course, and thus enable fairness and consistency in grading. Testing is also important for clarifying that which is stated in national course goals and grading criteria.

The results of the national examinations also enable the National Agency for Education to describe, analyse and assess the results of different student groups in order to concentrate on areas of knowledge where support measures are needed.



Educational inspection to assert the rights of individuals

The task of the educational inspectorate is to determine whether- and how well an activity is functioning in relation to the regulations set out in the Education Act, school ordinances and national curriculum. This involves auditing and assessment at the municipal- and individual school level, focusing on both the quality and legal aspects of the activities under inspection. Educational inspection, a prioritized activity of the National Agency for Education, also provides an underlying basis for quality development in preschool activities, child care for school children, and the school system as a whole.

One of the most important tasks of the educational inspectorate is to note whether everyone actually does have access to the child care, schools and adult education to which they are entitled.

Before the inspection itself, a mapping of the authority responsible, which can be a municipality or the board of an independent school, and the separate school(s) is carried out. This is done with the aid of existing materials such as follow-up statistics, national examination results, quality reports, and any previous supervisory decisions, in addition to carrying out special surveys, such as questionnaires. The purpose of this is in

part to gain an overall picture of the activities of the authority concerned, and in part to identify possible shortcomings. For example, has enough been done to ensure fair grading practices in the schools, or are there indications that some students are not receiving the necessary support?

Once this initial mapping has been done, inspections are planned and carried out in the form of visits to municipalities and schools. National Agency for Education inspectors conduct interviews with staff from different professional categories: school administrators, educators, school nurses, etc., as well as students, parents and the politicians in charge. They also look at whether school premises, teaching materials and other equipment are properly adapted to their purpose.

The inspectors' observations are documented and compiled, and form the basis for what will gradually be made into a report.

When an inspection is complete, the municipality or other school authorities and their schools are given a report based on the compiled data, which is also published on the National Agency for Education website. Inspection reports serve as a basis to be used as a starting point for improving the quality of municipal schooling. Examples can include the inspection's focus on efforts to counteract offensive treatment or how the school's own quality work is structured.

Inspection of independent schools is carried out in the same way as for municipal schools, though in some cases can occur more frequently.

Often, the National Agency for Education receives reports from parents or others wishing to draw attention to apparent inconsistencies in a school or activity. If the National Agency for Education judges there to be grounds for a review, an investigation is conducted into what happened and the accountability of the relevant authority or school in the matter.

The National Agency for Education educational inspectorate is made up of five regional offices, based in: Göteborg, Linköping, Lund, Stockholm and Umeå. The offices are responsible for carrying out inspections within their respective regions.



Careful review of independent school activities prior to approval

The National Agency for Education decides on approval of new independent schools to operate as well as their right to subsidized funding. The point of departure taken in National Agency for Education assessments is the right of all students to freedom of choice and to an education of high standards.

In conjunction with the approval process, careful review of an application is carried out. This includes assessment of the ability and desire of the responsible authority to operate an independent school that corresponds to the general goals and basic values that apply in education provided by the public school system.

The National Agency for Education also contacts the municipality in which the school is to operate to allow municipal authorities to express their views regarding the possible financial, organizational and educational consequences that establishing the new independent school might have. Consideration is given to the municipality's report in the National Agency for Education's final assessment.

The National Agency for Education is also responsible for decisions concerning federal funding for supplementary courses. In this process, particular weight is placed on assessment of a course's value from a national perspective. The National Agency for Education is also responsible for inspecting these supplementary programs.



The use of funding as a steering instrument

The National Agency for Education administrates, follows up and evaluates monetary steering instruments within the National Agency for Education's area of responsibility. This includes the allocation of federal funding to municipalities and other authorities, and grants to Swedish schools abroad. The National Agency for Education reviews and assesses the ability of the state to use funding as a steering instrument to encourage municipalities and schools to increase goal achievement, and to ensure quality and equivalence. In total, this involves funding of nearly 10 billion SEK to be administrated, followed up and evaluated.

An example of funding used by the National Agency for Education as a steering instrument are grants for additional staffing in schools and child care for school children. The primary task is to follow up and evaluate the effects of these grants on preschool classes, compulsory school, education for students with learning disabilities, upper secondary schools and leisure-time centres.

Information is made available in part via the National Agency for Education website, where parents, students, staff and other interested parties can keep themselves informed on the commitments undertaken by the authorities concerned and what they have implemented.

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