Linnaeus University students on teaching practice placements abroad

Instructions and assessment guide for supervisors in secondary school

Linnaeus University
Sweden
BILDERNA ÄR TAGNA FRÅN VÅR BILDBANK OCH KAN GIVETVIS BYTAS UT DÅ DE ÄR FÖRSLAG FRÅN OSS. GULMARKERARÖVERSKRIFTEN/AVDELNINGAR I MATERIALET SOM ÖCKSÅ BÖR BLI INNEHÅLLSFÖRTECKNINGSUPPLIST. SKICKAR ÖCKSÅ MED FIL MED YTTERLIGARE BILDER SOM KAN VARA BRA ATT FYLLA I MED OM DET FINNS PLATS.
Linnaeus University and our teacher education

**General facts**
Linnaeus University – a creative and international knowledge environment promoting curiosity, creativity, companionship and utility.

Linnaeus University is one of Sweden’s newest higher education institutions. The university was formed when the University of Kalmar and Växjö University merged in 2010.

Linnaeus University is located in Kalmar and Växjö. We have approximately 31,000 students in 150 degree programmes and 2,500 single-subject courses. Our high-quality research has had an impact, both nationally and internationally. It covers the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and engineering, and represents a number of well-established research domains. Examples are labour market policy, welfare issues and entrepreneurship, but also life sciences, aquatic ecology, and timber and energy technology.

Carl Linnaeus is the Swedish scientist who has had the greatest impact globally. Bold and curious, he made the entire world his arena. Linnaeus University is inspired by the spirit of Carl Linnaeus. Curiosity, creativity, companionship and utility – this is how we interpret the actions of Linnaeus, and this is how we wish to carry out our activities. Linnaeus University should have attractive degree programmes, prominent research, and a strong position in society. Internationalization, sustainable development, and equal conditions should characterize the work we do.

Working at Linnaeus University means being part of a dynamic environment where knowledge and new ideas flow freely. We believe in personal meetings here at Linnaeus University – the more we meet and discuss, the more we develop ourselves and our ideas. Students will be able to find new skills and knowledge, while at the same time learning more about themselves, and researchers will discover new approaches.

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**Our teacher education**
Linnaeus University educates teachers for all types of schools; pre-school, primary school and secondary school. There are seven different teacher training programmes, with a total of around 3,000 students.

*The programmes offered at Linnaeus University are:*

- Early Years Education Programme (pre-school)
- Primary Teacher Programme with a Specialisation in Pre-school Class and Years 1–3
- Primary Teacher Programme with a Specialisation in Extended School Teaching
- Primary Teacher Programme with a Specialisation in Years 4–6
- Secondary Teacher Education Programme
- Vocational Teacher Programme
- Supplementary educational programme

The programmes run over two to five years and include subject studies, courses in educational science, and teaching practice placement. All trainee teachers conduct three or four teaching practice placements of five or ten weeks, and have the opportunity to conduct one of them abroad.
Practical information for teaching practice placement abroad at Linnaeus University

The students are informed and apply for teaching practice placement abroad
At an early stage in their studies, our students are informed of their possibilities to conduct teaching practice placement abroad. However, normally only students in their fourth or fifth year of studies can conduct teaching practice placement abroad. Therefore we also give the students more specific and detailed information in December or January. The deadline for applying for teaching practice placement abroad for the coming year is in February.

High-quality partner schools
Teaching practice placement abroad must be conducted at high-quality schools, in terms of both the teaching at the school and our students' chances of receiving satisfactory supervision. Extending the range of partner schools for the students to choose between is a long-term project. We use partner schools recommended by and included in the networks of our university partners around the world, and we also have our own network of partner schools that we use continuously. To a certain extent, our students also have the opportunity to conduct teaching practice placement at a school of their own choice. However, it is important for us to guarantee that these schools are of high quality, and we therefore ask new schools in our network to describe their competence in supervising trainee teachers. We ask prospective partner schools the following questions, and their answers give us a solid foundation for assessing whether we find them an appropriate new member of our network:

- Which authority is accountable for the school?
- What type of schooling is carried out?
- How many pupils participate in the schooling?
- How many teaching languages are there at the school?
- Is English a teaching language, and if so, in which subjects/years?
- What knowledge of English do teachers and other staff have?
- What other collaborations with national and international schools and universities does the school have?
- What experiences or programmes are there for welcoming, supervising and assessing national/international students?
- Are there IT resources to be used as tools for communication and examination?
- How are the semesters structured and what holidays are there?

The coordinator for teaching practice placement and the teacher of the relevant course assess whether the school meets the requirements of the Teacher Education for teaching practice placement schools. We also follow this up by asking students to evaluate their teaching practice placement at a new partner school.

Administrative routines for teaching practice placement abroad
After the above-mentioned application period in February each year, a coordinator for teaching practice placement at Linnaeus University contacts proposed partner schools abroad to ascertain that they can accept one or several students in the coming year. The contact person is often someone in the school board. When the school has accepted the number of students and the time periods, each student is informed of the decision. A contract is signed between Linnaeus University and the partner school.

The teacher responsible for each teaching practice placement course then takes over the contact with the partner school in general, and the correspondence with the supervisor(s) for each student in particular. The teacher responsible for the course informs the
supervisor at the partner school of the content and examination of the course, and makes sure that they have access to assessment material and the like. In most cases, the assessment work includes a written report being sent from the supervisor to the teacher responsible for the course, and/or a meeting via for example Skype. The teacher responsible for the course may also require the student to participate in such a meeting.

Teaching practice placement abroad in the structure at Linnaeus University

When conducting teaching practice placement abroad, the student must have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and experience of teaching, as well as of global issues and contexts. As when conducted in Sweden, teaching practice placement abroad must be comprehensive and include all or most of the tasks included in the teaching profession. Teaching practice placement is conducted at a pre-school, primary school, secondary school or the equivalent, and the student normally follows the working hours of the school.

The Teacher Education Programmes at Linnaeus University include a total of 20 weeks of teaching practice placement, spread over a number of courses/periods of 5 or 10 weeks depending on the level. The content and objectives are developed between the different periods, as well as the requirements and expectations on the student. What makes the content and objectives of teaching practice placement abroad special is that the student has the opportunity to specialise in areas covering one or more global issues within the scope of their stay abroad.

The teacher education includes a mixture of subject studies, educational science and teaching practice placement, depending on the age group, subject choice and subject combinations. The supervisor must be informed of what parts the student has studied before starting the teaching practice placement in question.

The main content of the teaching practice placement can be summarised in three areas:

A The student’s own teaching
This can be divided into three phases

• The planning of teaching
• Teaching
• Follow-up and evaluation

The student will find support on how to plan their teaching in the objectives and content of the syllabi, in general instructions and assessment areas described in this manual, and in subject-specific instructions and templates enclosed with this material.

The amount of teaching is adjusted according to the student’s previous experience and need to develop. There must always be enough time for both planning and evaluation.

B Classroom observation
It is particularly important for the students to observe other teachers in teaching practice placements occurring at an early stage in their studies, but this should also be included in later stages, when teaching practice placement abroad occurs. The student may visit several teachers at the school, and the visits should be spread over the entire period.

C Other tasks
The student should participate in other relevant activities at the school, for example subject meetings and other staff meetings, staff conferences, pupil welfare conferences and other tasks included in the teaching profession.

The teaching practice placement is planned by the student, the supervisor and the teacher responsible for the course well in advance of or in connection to the start of the period.

Teachers from LNU do not visit schools abroad

In teaching practice placements in Sweden, a teacher from LNU visits the trainee teacher at the school on one or more occasions. The purpose of the visit is to observe the student in authentic teaching situations, as well as to have a didactic discussion with the student and the supervisor. For teaching practice placements abroad, it is normally impossible for a teacher from LNU to visit the school, and the communication between the teacher at LNU and the supervisor at the school is therefore extra important. We may therefore want to contact the supervisor via telephone or an online meeting to discuss the student’s development.

In some cases, we may ask the student to record a number of teaching situations as a basis for formative and summative assessment of the teaching practice placement. In such cases, the student asks their supervisor or pupils in the classroom to film a number of situations using a mobile phone or a tablet computer. The films are then made available for the teacher at LNU. Note that the films will only be used for the purpose of teaching and assessing, and will not be spread.
An experience Beyond ‘It was great!’

It is of great importance for us at Linnaeus University that our students go abroad during their studies, for example in the form of exchange studies or teaching practice placement abroad, as this gives the students knowledge and experience that may be useful in their future studies and careers, as well as at a personal level. Therefore, we have a programme called *Outcomes of teaching practice placement abroad – Beyond ‘It was great’*. All students conducting parts of their studies abroad are invited to participate in the programme, which focuses on formulating objectives for the stay abroad, in addition to those found in the syllabus, and then following these during and after the stay abroad. This helps the students reflect on their new knowledge and skills, and communicate this to other students, friends and future employers. We encourage our partner schools to help the students experience more of the local culture and meet other interesting people and environments than those they come in contact with at the school.

Trainee teachers conducting their teaching practice placement abroad also have the opportunity to participate in a preparatory workshop, in which they can prepare for any cultural clashes that may occur in the new teaching situations abroad. We want our students to develop their abilities to open up for the unknown and make the most of impressions, experiences and knowledge they come across and share with other people with different nationalities and cultures. It should be easy for them to give and take, in more and increasingly complex situations.

We hope that the schools that welcome our students also take the opportunity to make use of the trainee teachers from Linnaeus University when they conduct their teaching practice placement. The student can be an extra resource for the supervisor. For example, support from the trainee teacher can allow for the supervisor to work with smaller pupil groups, or the trainee teacher could provide individual supervision. We have also seen that teaching practice placement abroad may lead to long-term contacts and possibly future collaborations between individual teachers as well as between schools and/or universities. Our students will soon be working as independent teachers, and experiences and contacts from their teaching practice placement should form the basis for both small and major collaborations. The contacts made result in a more international classroom for everyone involved – a more open classroom where children and adults get to know each other.
Responsibilities and roles

There are three main roles included in a teaching practice placement: the trainee teacher, the supervisor at the school, and the teacher responsible for the course at Linnaeus University.

The trainee teacher
The student must be active and take responsibility for the planning and completion of the teaching practice placement. For example, after consultation with the supervisor, it is the student who should contact other teachers to plan classroom observations, and the student is responsible for necessary communication with the teacher from LNU.

During the teaching practice placement, the student must participate actively in the work on a full-time basis. If the student misses any days for valid reasons they have informed the supervisor of, they can compensate for the missed days in connection to the teaching practice placement period. Longer periods of absence are dealt with in consultation with the teacher responsible for the course. The student is responsible for contacting the teacher responsible for the course if there are any problems.

With an insurance issued by the Swedish government, the student is insured with an all-covering insurance during their stay abroad. We are grateful for any help by the local school in helping the student find accommodation and/or picking them up by the airport or train station and showing them around upon arrival.

The supervisor
The supervisor’s main responsibility is to supervise the student as they develop their knowledge and experience of teaching. This includes supporting the student in their lesson planning and discussing teaching in connection to completed lessons (see pages 12–13). The supervisor is also responsible for giving the student the opportunity to teach in different classes to a reasonable extent. Since teaching practice placement abroad is only conducted during the final stages in the trainee teachers’ studies, the supervisor should give the student increasing responsibility for planning, conducting and evaluating their teaching. Previous experiences of teaching practice placements should be included in discussions and analyses of the teaching.

Several teachers at the school could be involved in the supervision of the student. However, the supervisor is always responsible for making sure that such arrangements work.

It is not included in the supervisor’s responsibility to examine or grade the student. However, they should give their view and assessments and the like to the teacher responsible for the course.

The supervisor is responsible for providing the student with a working space, keys, textbooks, teaching aids and other relevant material.

If there are any problems, the supervisor must contact the university teacher immediately. Students who show up late, do not show up at all, or do not show any interest, must be reported on immediately.

The university teacher responsible for the course
The teacher responsible for the course is responsible for providing the student and the supervisor with information about the teaching practice placement course. They also provide them with documents such as a syllabus in English, bases for assessment, and possible writing assignments. The teacher responsible for the course collects the bases for assessment.

All material should be available at Linnaeus University’s website: Lnu.se/en/teachingpractice
Examination

The student's performance is examined and graded on the basis of the following:

- The supervisor's written report (according to template provided by the university teacher responsible for the course) and any other oral communication.
- The student's written assignment(s) (for example pedagogical plans, evaluations of individual lessons, observation assignment, logbook and any other assignments agreed upon).

Grading and grading criteria
After completing the teaching practice placement, the student receives a grade in the course. The grade is decided by an examiner at Linnaeus University, but reports by the supervisor and the teacher responsible for the course on the student's performance constitute a very important part of the basis for grading. The student's performance is assessed with the grades Fail (U), Pass (G) or Pass with Distinction (VG). There are specific grading criteria for each course, and the requirements for the grade of Pass are described as objectives in the syllabus.

How to pass a teaching practice placement
Teachers are different and develop a style of teaching that suits their personality. The same goes for trainee teachers. What is important for the trainee teacher in their teaching practice placement is that they have the opportunity to develop (and to be assessed) in an appropriate and functional way in relation to the course objectives.

Areas of learning

In order for the student to receive good supervision in their development, and in order for the supervisor to provide appropriate support, the course objectives must be made concrete. Below (on pages 10–11) are some concrete areas of learning, which can be used as a support in the supervision and the assessment of the course objectives. Note that these areas of learning are formulated on the basis of a Swedish context and may be interpreted differently depending on the cultural and social contexts of a non-Swedish school. Hopefully, the examples can form the basis for many interesting discussions between students and supervisors at the local school.

- A Planning – Organising the content for pupils' learning
- B Relations – Creating an environment for pupils' learning
- C Didactic/methodological work – Teaching for pupils' learning
- D Evaluation/development work – Demonstrating a professional attitude

Area A is mostly concerned with the planning of lessons. Additional support for this is to be found in a template for lesson planning (see page 12).

Areas B and C are mostly concerned with the actual classroom teaching.

Area D describes the teaching profession outside of the classroom and the student's ability to reflect on their own performance.

The areas of learning, including concrete criteria and templates, should be used by the student as a support in understanding and identifying various aspects of teaching and the teaching profession.

They should also be used by the supervisor, in their supervision of students, but also as a basis for their written report to the examiner. The areas of learning should help them identify various aspects and abilities the student has developed or needs to develop further.
**Areas of learning, cont**

A **Planning – Organising the content for pupils’ learning**
The area of planning is concerned with the student’s ability to plan teaching for learning and understand the context of the lesson. Planning is divided into five objectives, A1–A5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>To account for relevant aspects of pupils’ previous knowledge, experiences and special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>To formulate clear learning objectives for the lesson with clear purposes for the pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>To account for the content of the lesson in relation to what has been discussed before and what is going to be discussed later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>To develop and choose teaching methods, learning activities and teaching material or other resources with clear purposes for the pupils, in accordance with the learning objectives for the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>To develop and choose assessment methods with clear purposes for the pupils, in accordance with the learning objectives for the lesson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

*The student:*
- demonstrates a reasonable approach to ethical and democratic issues and values,
- treats all pupils respectfully without any traces of stereotypical conceptions,
- pays attention to all students equally.

B **Relations – Creating an environment for pupils’ learning**
This area is about the student’s ability to create a safe and good working environment for the pupils. The classroom must also be a place for learning in which the teacher and the pupils can communicate. This is divided into five objectives, B1–B5. Each objective includes examples of how the student can achieve it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>To create a climate promoting equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>To build and maintain good relationships with the pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>To communicate challenging learning expectations for each pupil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>To create and maintain clear rules for behaviour in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>To guarantee a safe physical environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

*The student:*
- demonstrates an academic and positive approach to knowledge,
- can motivate, engage and raise interest for the subject and the lesson,
- can vary and adjust objectives to find the right challenge for each pupil.

**Example:**

*The student:*
- is sensitive to situations that may be perceived as insulting or offensive (to pupils or teachers),
- can guide their pupils towards good behaviour in the classroom and/or handle situations that occur.

C **Didactic/methodological work – Teaching for pupils’ learning**
Didactic and methodological work is concerned with the student’s ability to convey knowledge and develop the pupils’ knowledge. This is divided into five objectives, C1–C5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>To present learning objectives and make the instructions/procedures for the lesson clear to the pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>[Content not provided]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>[Content not provided]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>[Content not provided]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5</td>
<td>[Content not provided]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

*The student:*
- can introduce and/or present a structure and/or give instructions which are clear and adequate,
• can adapt objectives and instructions to different pupils,
• tries to place their lessons in a wider context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C2</th>
<th>To present content in a comprehensible way to the pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Example:
The student:
• can communicate subject content in a clear and structured way,
• can communicate subject content at the right level and to the right extent,
• can vary their teaching and use various perspectives and representations,
• can base their teaching on pupils' levels, positions, thoughts and interests,
• demonstrates confidence in their subject,
• can structure a lesson in a coherent way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C3</th>
<th>To encourage pupils to widen their thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Example:
The student:
• can guide their pupils into “thinking on their own”, and be critical and creative, when possible and relevant,
• tries to place the subject area in a wider context to stimulate curiosity and/or give “hints” on what it can lead to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C4</th>
<th>To be observant of the pupils' understanding of the subject content through a variation of methods, provide the pupils with feedback to promote learning, and change learning activities depending on the situation or the needs of the pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Example:
The student:
• can listen to or pick up on the pupils' understanding,
• can handle response and questions from the pupils and provide adequate feedback,
• can adapt their activities, structures and levels when needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C5</th>
<th>To use the teaching time efficiently</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Example:
The student:
• can plan and conduct a lesson (including the various phases of a lesson) at an appropriate speed which can keep the pupils inspired throughout the entire lesson,
• makes sure to minimise the time spent on work not related to learning,
• makes sure that all pupils are working with something relevant throughout the entire lesson.

D Evaluation and development work—Demonstrating a professional attitude
Evaluation and development work is about the student’s understanding of their own work and their ability to cooperate with colleagues. Criteria D1–D6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D1</th>
<th>To have a realistic view on how their lesson went</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D2</td>
<td>To have a realistic view on their own performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>To be open to criticism, comments, advice and ideas on changes in their teaching methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td>To account for and discuss the extent to which the pupils achieved the learning objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5</td>
<td>To be efficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D6</td>
<td>To build professional relations to colleagues in order to share teaching ideas and coordinate learning activities for the pupils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Template for lesson plan

Note that the following template is a general example and could be replaced by a more subject-specific lesson plan provided by the subject or the teacher responsible for the course.

Time: the length of the lesson(s) or part of a lesson.

The pupil group: age/year, number of pupils (whole class/half class or smaller group), gender distribution, strong/weak pupils, pupils with disabilities/in need of extra support, etc.

Subject content: how is the lesson related to the central content, knowledge requirements and/or learning objectives in the curriculum?

Learning objectives: what are the pupils expected to learn in this lesson? how does this relate to the content of previous and future lessons?

Teaching/learning activity: what methods/activities are used? Teacher activity time, Pupil activity time.

Material/resources: what material and resources (digital/analogue) are available for teachers and pupils, which are used, and why?

Possible group division: if group activities are used, how are the groups divided and why (girls/boys, strong/weak pupils)?

Assessment: how are the learning activities assessed (feedback from the teacher, peer feedback, self-assessment)?

Evaluation: what strategies are used in the evaluation of the lesson (collection of pupils’ comments and material/results in assignments)?

In their planning of a learning activity, the student should include detailed descriptions of the following aspects:
Post-teaching supervision

The supervisor’s analysis and assessment should form the basis for various discussions with the trainee teacher and be guiding and supporting in character. In other words, assessments and discussions should be characterised by assessment for learning. This means that the supervisor (and the student) must make both summative and formative assessments. A summative assessment is an assessment of what the student knows right now. A formative assessment (which requires that a summative assessment has already been made) is assessment meant to promote further learning. Assessment for learning is different from the examiner’s final assessment, which is usually a summative assessment for grading.

Development discussions between the student and the supervisor should take place on a daily basis during the teaching practice placement. In particular, there should be a planned discussion in direct connection to each lesson the student has conducted, or after a series of lessons in which the student has had a considerable amount of responsibility.

The post-teaching discussions can be structured in different ways, and be more or less formal. The form, content and extent of these can vary during the teaching practice placement. It is not meaningful to formulate exact instructions for these discussions. The following structures should therefore be seen as suggestions and inspiration for approaches to be used to give structure to the discussions.

1. One way to structure a post-teaching supervision discussion is that the supervisor uses the notes made in relation to the areas of learning (pages 10–11) B and C and any other notes as a point of departure.

2. Another way is to discuss the lesson in relation to the student’s lesson plan.

3. A third way could be for the student and the supervisor to look at the different parts of the lesson and analyse what went well, what did not go well, and what can be improved.

4. A fourth approach could be to focus on the student’s own conception of their own performance and/or of the pupils’ roles and status. The following questions could form the basis for discussion:
   - How do you think that the objectives of the lesson were achieved (for example in relation to the plan)?
   - How can any deviations from the plan be explained?
   - What would you change if you could give the lesson again?
   - What specific measures should be planned or implemented in the next lesson, considering the outcomes of the lesson carried out?
   - What is your conception of the pupils’ learning/understanding/commitment during the lesson?
   - Are there any pupil(s) you think may need extra support?
   - Are there any pupil(s) you think may need more challenges?
Education in Sweden

From the age of six, every child in Sweden has equal access to free education. The school system is regulated through the Swedish Education Act, which specifies the minimum amount of time to be spent on each subject and ensures a safe and friendly environment for students. The act also mandates nine years of school attendance for all children from the year they turn seven.

Preschool
In Sweden, förskola (pre-school) is provided by municipalities for children ages one to five. The amount of municipal subsidy for pre-school depends on the child’s age and whether the parents work, study, are unemployed or on parental leave for other children.

Swedish pre-school emphasises the importance of play in a child’s development, with a curriculum aiming to ensure children’s individual needs and interests. Gender-aware education is increasingly common, striving to provide children with the same opportunities in life regardless of gender.

A year before the first year
All children are guaranteed a place in a one-year förskoleklass (‘pre-school year’) starting in the fall term of the year they turn six until they start compulsory schooling.

This year is designed to stimulate each child’s development and learning, and provide a platform for their future schooling. Although förskoleklass is non-compulsory, almost all children in Sweden attend it.

Compulsory schooling
Swedish compulsory schooling consists of three stages: lägstadiet (years 1–3), followed by mellanstadiet (years 4–6) and then högstadiet (years 7–9). Children between ages 6 and 13 are also offered out-of-school care before and after school hours.

Compulsory education also includes sameskolor (Sami schools) for children of the indigenous Sami people.

Upper secondary school
Gymnasium (upper secondary school or high school, years 10–12) is optional. There are 18 regular national programmes of 3 years to choose from, 6 of which are preparatory for higher education such as university, and 12 of which are vocational.

While entrance requirements vary between programmes, all of them demand students to have passing grades in Swedish, English and mathematics from their final year of compulsory schooling.

In 2014, 13 per cent of Swedish 9-year students did not have the grades to qualify for a national programme; however, instead of national programmes, these students have five so-called introductory programmes to choose from. From these introductory programmes, students can then move on to a national programme.

There are also upper secondary schools for people with intellectual disabilities as well as programme variations targeting for example athletes.

In 2014, roughly 88 per cent of upper secondary students received a leaving qualification (diploma).

Benchmarking internationally
The quality of Swedish education has been keenly debated over the past decade, following declining results among Swedish students in international comparisons. Sweden has moved to improve performances and to raise the status of the teaching profession for long-term benefits.

International studies such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have indicated a deteriorating performance among Swedish children in recent years.

Most recently, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which is behind the PISA assessment, followed up on the trends in May 2015 with a detailed review of Sweden’s educational quality.

The study, carried out on the request of the Swedish Government, confirms that Sweden needs to improve the quality of education and in particular raise the performance level of students in reading, math and science. This can be seen in light of Sweden investing a larger share of its GDP on education (6.8 per cent) compared with the OECD average (5.6 per cent) in 2014.

Recent reforms
The relevance of the PISA studies has been questioned by educators and policy makers both in Sweden and abroad. Critics of the standardised tests argue that the studies are too focused on math and science, and altogether exclude areas of education that stimulate personal growth, morality and creativity.

Nevertheless, while the discussion between critics and defenders of PISA continues, the Swedish Government is looking for ways to improve the education system. It has looked particularly at neighbours Finland but also at South Korea, where teachers’ salaries are higher, and at the Netherlands, where class sizes are typically smaller.

Several reforms have been implemented over the last few years, aimed at improving student results and raising the status of the teaching profession:

New education act
The new Swedish Education Act of 2011 contains basic principles and provisions for compulsory and further education, pre-school, pre-school year, out-of-school care and adult education. It promotes greater review, freedom of choice, and student safety and security.

New curricula
New consolidated curricula for compulsory schools for all
students, Sami schools, special schools and upper secondary schools came into force 1 July 2011. The curricula contain new general goals, guidelines and syllabuses. The pre-school curriculum includes clearer goals for children's linguistic and communicative development and for science and technology. Mandatory national subject tests are held in years 3, 6 and 9 of compulsory school to assess student progress. There are also new qualification requirements for areas including upper secondary school studies.

**New grading system**
The old Swedish system with four grades from Pass with Special Distinction (MVG) down to Did Not Pass (IG) was replaced by a new grading scale with six grades from A to F in 2011. A to E are passing grades, with F as a failing grade. Grades are assigned starting in year 6. The new grading system is very similar to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the standard grading system for higher education in Europe.

**Teacher certification**
As of 1 December 2013, professional certification is required for school and pre-school teachers on permanent contracts. The decision, a milestone in Swedish education policy, aims to raise the status of the teaching profession, support professional development and thus increase quality in education.

**Charter schools**
The number of independent schools with public funding, so-called charter schools, is growing in Sweden. Following a law change in the 1990s, parents and their children can choose among tuition-free schools, whether municipal or private.

Although private schools have been in existence for as long as there has been compulsory education in Sweden, they were not a wide-spread competitive alternative to municipal schools until the 1992 law provided them with public funding.

These publicly funded non-municipal schools are called friskola (charter school) to differentiate them from tuition-based private schools (of which there are only a handful left in Sweden).

**Same rules apply**
In Sweden, charter schools must be approved by the Schools Inspectorate and follow the national curricula and syllabuses, just like regular municipal schools.

In 2014, around 17 per cent of compulsory schools and 30 per cent of upper secondary schools were charter schools and they attracted close to 14 per cent of all compulsory school students and 26 per cent of all upper secondary school students.

Sweden has its share of scepticism about running schools for profit. Fears include that profits will take precedence over quality. Advocates of independent schools, on the other hand, note the many positive results found in statistical surveys. One is that parents with children who attend independent schools are more satisfied than those with children in municipal schools.

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