



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Research Paper

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# Sweden: Support for People with Learning Disabilities

**NIAR 542-2014**

The following paper provides a detailed discussion of the provision Sweden provides for people with learning disabilities.

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## Key Points

- Sweden has an integrated system whereby pupils may stay in the same school from the age of 7 until 16;
- Municipalities are responsible for Education including providing preschool education, setting goals and decision making for education and allocating resources;
- Education in Sweden occurs in pre-schools, pre-school class, compulsory school and upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education;
- People with learning disabilities are by and large taught within the standard education system;
- A National Curriculum is set by the Government with each school bound to implement it. However, schools are free to organise how they do this themselves, creating flexibility to meet the needs of the parents, pupils and the local economy;
- Each pupil has an Individual Development Plan (IDP). If there is evidence that a pupil is having difficulty in achieving a learning goal an Action Plan is developed;
- Support for pupils with special needs is available through each strand of the education system;
- In addition there are special programmes for pupils with severe learning disabilities called Sarskola which are closely linked to or included in general school activities;
- This is divided into compulsory school for pupils with severe intellectual impairments (Grundsarskolan) and Training School (Traingskolan);
- The Training Schools are designed for students who are unable to absorb all or part of the training in the subjects. Instead they receive a tailored programme of courses that include the arts, motor skills and communication;
- Schools can receive additional support through local Resource Centres operated by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM);
- Upper-secondary schools (Gymnasia) are roughly equivalent to further education colleges in the UK;
- For pupils with learning disabilities Gymnasia have a four year educational programme for those aged 16-20;
- Gymnasia can receive additional support through the SPSM;
- Sarvux is an adult education programme for people with learning disabilities. It is provided at both basic and upper secondary level and has the same curriculum as municipal adult education;
- Participants must be aged 20 years or older and have a learning disability or an acquired brain injury;
- Courses are free and cover a wide variety of subjects including history, natural sciences and vocational courses;
- In 2010/11 215 municipalities provided Sarvux courses;

- Under the Swedish Education Act all children and young people have equal access to education regardless of gender, ethnicity, place of residence or social/economic factors;
- It sets out the basis for the curriculum, grading systems and professionalisation of pedagogy;
- The National Curriculum is designed so that:

*All compulsory education will be organised in such a way that individual solutions are possible for all pupils. This is a way of strengthening the pupils' influence and personal responsibility, but also a way of taking into account all pupils' needs and individuality.*

- **Example of Support – Nossebro School**

- In 2007, Nossebro School had only 76% of learners eligible to enter upper secondary school. In addition 20% of learners from Grades 6 – 9 had been placed in segregated support units;
- The low results forced a rethink of school strategy regarding support for pupils with learning disabilities;
- Amongst a number of changes, the segregated units were closed and pupils with special needs were returned to the general classes. Shared values were also embedded in all policy and practice with a focus on learning across the whole school community;
- As a result of these changes Nossebro moved from among the bottom of the 290 municipalities in Sweden to among the top three in Grade 9 exam results.

- **Gothenburg's Strad Centrum Day Activities:**

- An EU Commission report identified the work of Strad Centrum (the central urban district in Gothenburg) with people who have complex needs as an example of good practice;
- The city provides daily activities for a small group of people who do not fit into the traditional day care centres;
- The target group of the programme is young people aged 16 – 35 who have neuropsychiatric diagnoses (including autism and learning disabilities);
- Individuals take part in daily activities based around an action plan developed between them and programme staff;
- Activities include learning skills such as preparing food and learning about health and visiting different workplaces with the overall objective of finding employment for attendees;

- **Gothenburg: A city for everyone:**

- Gothenburg has recently won the Access City Award from the EU. This is given to cities which is given to cities which have made themselves more accessible for disabled and older people;

- In Gothenburg, the Property Management Committee has introduced a number of projects to promote accessibility within the city, including an inventory of the city's public buildings and spaces in order to measure accessibility and using procurement to promote Universal Design;
- The use of Universal Design has resulted in the development of a Travel Planner to allow people to research trips based on their individual accessibility requirements, Travel instructors who are available to help people with accessibility issues use public transport including providing support and security and a special form of transport for those whose disabilities make it impossible for them to travel alone;
- **Special Introduction and Follow-up Support (SIUS):**
  - SIUS is the Swedish Supported Employment Programme;
  - To access SIUS, an individual must register with their local Labour Office which then assesses their ability to work. If they are deemed to need additional support as a result of a disability or learning disability they are referred to the SIUS;
  - Individuals meet with an SIUS consultant and a job coach who supports them in developing skills in finding and maintaining a job. The SIUS consultant then works to find the individual an appropriate job;
  - Employers who take on a SIUS client can receive a portion of their wage costs, and funds to provide adaptations to the workplace for the SIUS client;
- **Samhall:**
  - Samhall is a government sponsored agency that is tasked with the creation of stimulating jobs for people with disabilities;
  - Samhall provides supported employment with contracted work and manned solutions;
  - It employs approximately 22,000 people in 250 locations. Of these 19,000 have disabilities;
  - Samhall offers employment in industries such as manufacturing, warehousing and property services;
- **The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM):**
  - SPSM works to ensure that children, young people and adults have adequate conditions to fulfil their educational goals;
  - SPSM acts as a partner with schools and adult education bodies, offering skills support through its regional offices;
  - There are twenty offices in five regions;
  - Support offered includes on teaching strategies, in-service training for teachers and producing teaching materials;
  - SPSM also operates five national and five regional special schools that provide places for pupils with special needs in need of additional support;

▪ **Agency for Participation:**

- The Agency for Participation works to ensure that disability policy will have an impact on Swedish society;
- This is done through a variety of means, including monitoring and analysing developments, disseminating knowledge and initiating research work; and
- The Agency is also responsible for monitoring Sweden's implementation and adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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# 1 Introduction

This paper discusses the support provided to people with learning disabilities in Sweden.

It should be noted that the support provided to people with learning disabilities and special education needs in Sweden is based within a different socio-economic context to that of the UK.

For example, the Swedish Welfare State is very extensive providing support in areas such as child care allowance, housing allowance (if a household's salary is below certain limits it may be possible to apply for support) and comprehensive sick leave payments that are at a rate of 80% of normal salary.

The extensive social benefits (which in some ways are reflected in the support available to people with learning disabilities) is funded via higher taxes than those in the UK.

## **A Brief Description of Sweden's Governance Structure:**

Sweden is a unitary state with three levels of domestic Government.

At a **national** level the Riksdag is the supreme legislative authority which appoints a Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then forms a Government comprising selected Cabinet Ministers.

At a **regional** level Sweden is divided into 20 Counties. County councils appoint Administrative Boards which act as the government bodies for the counties. A County is responsible for tasks that need coordination across a large region. As such they are responsible for health care and can levy income taxes to cover their costs.

At a **local** level, Sweden is divided into 290 Municipalities, each of which has an elective assembly. Municipalities are responsible for a broad range of facilities and services including housing, roads, water supply and waste-water processing, schools, public welfare, elderly care and childcare. The municipalities are entitled to levy income taxes on individuals. They also charge for various services. As a result, municipalities have significant latitude in deciding what services they should offer. They are however legally obliged to provide certain basic services.

## 2 Support for People With Disabilities in the Education System

This section of the paper will discuss the support available to people with learning disabilities within Sweden's education system.

Whilst the Committee for Employment and Learning's Inquiry focuses on SEN provision for those aged 19 and over, this section of the paper will discuss the entirety of

Sweden’s education system. This is necessary in order to set the context for post 19 support and also to highlight that support for SEN for adults cannot be considered in isolation from what has gone before.

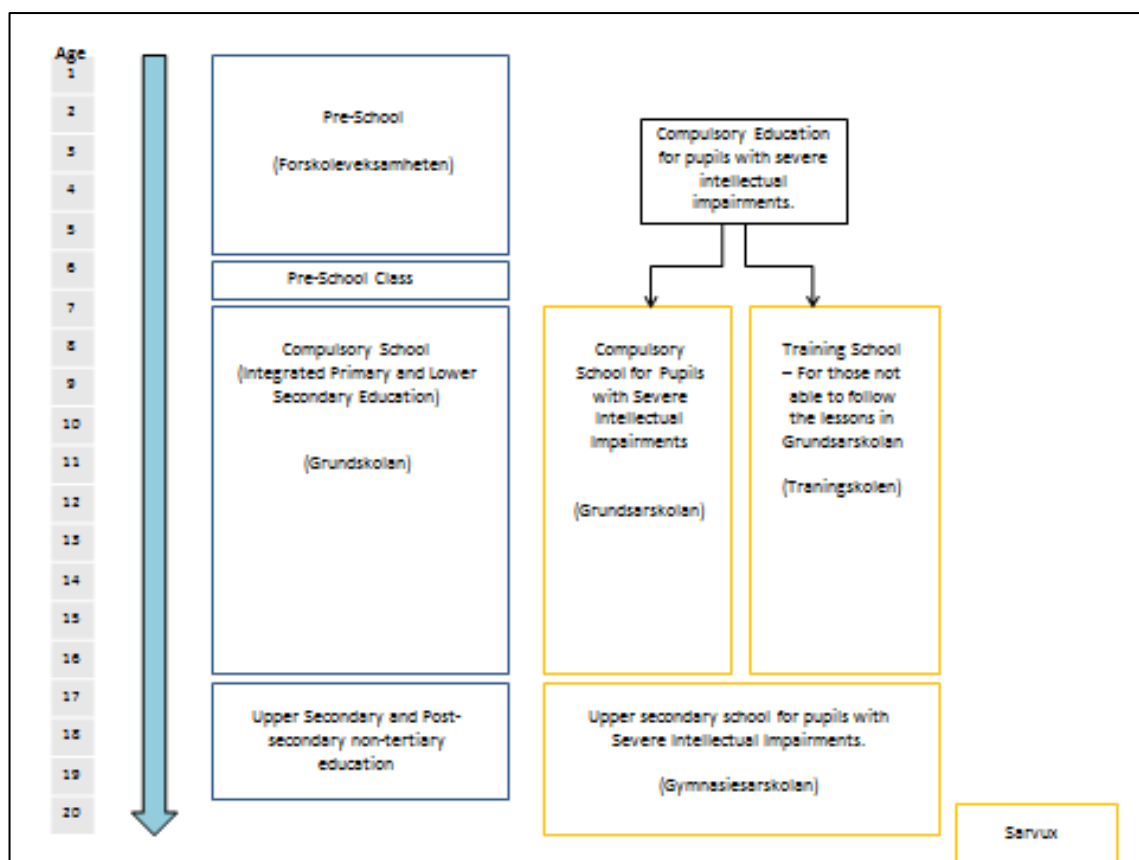
## 2.1 Sweden’s Education System

Sweden’s Education system is significantly different from that in Northern Ireland – for example, rather than a separate primary and secondary school Sweden has an integrated system whereby pupils may stay in the same school from the age of 7 until 16.

Municipalities are responsible for carrying out education as per the Education Act. Amongst the duties a Municipality must carry out are:<sup>1</sup>

- Providing preschool activities and education for their residents;
- Set goals and make decisions about preschools and other education; and
- Set priorities and allocate resources.

The figure below shows the structure of the Swedish Education system and the supports in place for people with a learning disability.



**Figure 1:** Sweden’s Education System

<sup>1</sup> OECD, *Sickness, Disability and work: Breaking the barriers - A synthesis of findings across OECD Countries*

Education in Sweden is as follows:

- **Pre-School (Forskoleveksamheten):** Accessible when a child reaches the age of one, Pre-schools are operated by Municipalities to provide activities and childcare for at least three hours per day for each child. The provision is voluntary for parents to access although municipalities must offer Pre-school provision under the Education Act. 83% of children attend Pre-school. It has its own curriculum and children can access the pre-school that best meets their needs. For example, if a child has special needs that cannot be met by a Pre-school in the municipality of residence they can travel (free of charge) to one that does;
- **Pre-school class (Forskoleklass):** Municipalities must provide Pre-school classes and all six year olds must be offered a place for a minimum of 525 hours (as with Pre-school participation is voluntary). 95.8% of six year olds were enrolled in Pre-school classes in 2010/11;
- **Compulsory School:** Compulsory school corresponds to primary and lower secondary school (from age 7 to 16) in the UK. Unlike the UK, however, in Sweden it is a single, integrated system with most schools comprising years one to five or years five to nine. Compulsory schooling is broken down into Elementary School (years 1-3), Middle school (years 4 – 6) and junior high school (years 7-9).<sup>2</sup> An increasing number of municipalities are, however, organising the whole of compulsory school on the same premises to increase integration and promote an overall approach. Compulsory schools are run, generally, by municipalities. Overall goals for education are set by central government via the curriculum. However how the curriculum is implemented is not set giving municipalities and schools the power to decide how best to meet these goals. Unlike the UK system there is no final set of exams (such as GCSE's) although there are obligatory national tests in Swedish, English and Mathematics in years six and nine;
- **Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education (Gymnasieutbildning):** For pupils aged 16 -19, Gymnasieutbildning provides 18 national programmes (or courses) of which six are for Higher Education preparation and twelve are vocational. There are also five introductory programmes for pupils who do not meet the entry criteria for the national programmes. Gymnasieutbildning is not compulsory for pupils although they are attended by almost all pupils. Municipalities have a duty placed on them to offer upper secondary education for all pupils, including those with severe learning disabilities. This is mostly done in a programme offering non-theoretical studies and practical training.

It should be noted that municipal childcare, Pre-primary activities, compulsory schooling, after-school centres and youth centres are often part of the same organisation with a common school-board.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Sweden, Education in Sweden, <https://sweden.se/society/education-in-sweden/>

<sup>3</sup> Eurydice , Sweden Overview, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Redirect>

## 2.2 Special Education Needs

Within the Swedish Education system, people with learning disabilities are taught within the standard system. As stated by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education:

*The majority of pupils in need of special educational support are educated in general basic compulsory classes. If this is not possible, then the school must indicate very clearly why other educational options for pupils should be considered. This is an important philosophical standpoint for childcare organisation and operation. Earlier debates focused upon prerequisites for mainstreaming. Now the focus has shifted to the need for justification for segregated options to be considered for pupils.*

This is facilitated through the overall structure of the education system. A National Curriculum is set by the Government, stating values, educational goals and the responsibilities of different aspects of school activities.

Each school is bound by the curriculum but is free to organise its means to reach these as it chooses. As a result schools are flexible in meeting both the needs of pupils and of local employers.

During the school year pupils, their guardians and teachers meet to discuss progress. Through these meetings an Individual Development Plan (IDP) is set.

Every pupil will have one of these. If there is evidence that a pupil is having difficulty in achieving a learning goal, an Action Plan will be developed. These must include:

- Information on the specific needs of the child;
- Information on the needed measurements; and
- Information on evaluations during the intervention process.

Resources to support the pupil are allocated by the Head Teacher of the School.

Within each strand of the education system, support is available for pupils with special education needs. These include:<sup>4</sup>

- **Pre-school:** As municipalities have a large amount of independence Special Educational Needs can be organised in different ways, including:
  - The teachers of the child are supported by a resource centre at the local level;
  - Specialist teachers work with the child concerned within the format of the activities of the larger group. This can be a permanent arrangement or temporary;
  - The child leaves the larger group for limited periods to work with a specialist teacher; and

<sup>4</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Complete National Overview – Sweden, <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/sweden/national-overview/complete-national-overview>

- Resource centres may be supported by an adviser at the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (the managing body for the Resource Centres).
- **Compulsory Education:**
  - The majority of pupils in need of special education support are educated in general basic compulsory classes;
  - The focus is on the need to justify segregation options rather than prerequisites for mainstreaming;
  - All pupils in need of special support have written action plans of provision set up in co-operation with the pupils themselves, parents and professionals involved;
  - The teachers of the pupil are consulted by a specialist teacher;
  - The pupil receives teaching materials adapted for his or her needs; and
  - Teachers are supported by a Resource Centre at a local level.

In the Swedish compulsory school system there are special programmes for pupils with severe learning disabilities called “Särskola”. They are closely linked to or included into general school activities.

For pupils who are unable to take part in the compulsory school system it is possible to take part in Sarskolan – compulsory education for pupils with severe intellectual impairments. It should be noted that:<sup>5</sup>

*In most cases the compulsory education for pupils with severe intellectual impairments (särskolan) is organisationally integrated in mainstream compulsory education and share premises with a municipal school. A pupil may attend mainstream compulsory school (grundskolan) but follow the syllabi for education for pupils with intellectual impairments if the parents so wish.*

Sarskolan is divided into compulsory school for pupils with severe intellectual impairments (grundsärskolan) and training school (träningsskolan). The training schools are intended for those who are not able to follow the lessons in the compulsory school for pupils with severe intellectual impairments.

Training school is designed for students who are unable to absorb all or part of the training in the subjects. Training schools teach across five subject areas:

- Arts;
- Communications;
- Motor skills;
- Everyday activities; and
- Perception of reality.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

At compulsory level education for pupils with severe intellectual impairments have their own curriculum (Lärplan för grundskolan).<sup>6</sup>

There are also three national special schools which pupils with learning disabilities can attend. These are:<sup>7</sup>

- Åsbackaskolan in Gnesta is for pupils with congenital deaf-blindness and pupils with impaired hearing in combination with severe learning disorders;
- Hällsboskolan in Sigtuna and Umeå is for pupils with severe speech and language disorders; and
- Ekeskolan in Örebro is for pupils with impaired vision in combination with other disabilities.

### 2.3 Upper-Secondary Schools (Gymnasia)

Upper-secondary schools are roughly equivalent to further education colleges in the UK, with students aged 15/16 sitting exams for entry. Those who fail to meet the entry requirements (at least passes in Swedish, English and Mathematics) study educational programmes tailored to their needs.<sup>8</sup>

Upper secondary schools are not compulsory but are attended by nearly all pupils. For pupils with severe learning disabilities municipalities provide support via programmes (known as sarskola) operated through the Gymnasia that offer theoretical studies and practical training.<sup>9</sup>

A reform of upper secondary school education for young people with learning disabilities is currently under way. The review intends to:<sup>10</sup>

*...better prepare the pupils for working life and to give them a solid foundation for their personal development and active participation in society.*

These reforms involve national and individual programmes. There are nine national programmes with their own goals, all agreed at a national level. As part of the national programme, pupils spend at least 22 weeks in the workplace, with the tasks undertaken on site intended to bolster classroom based learning.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, Eurypedia, Sweden: Special education needs provision within mainstream education, [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Special\\_Education\\_Needs\\_Provision\\_within\\_Mainstream\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Special_Education_Needs_Provision_within_Mainstream_Education)

<sup>7</sup> National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, Special needs schools <http://www.spsm.se/sv/Om-webbplatsen/English/Special-needs-schools/>

<sup>8</sup> Sweden, Free Education from age 6 to 19, <http://sweden.se/collection/from-preschool-to-university-in-sweden/article/free-education-from-age-6-to-19/>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Euronews Issue 22, <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Euronews22-ENword.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

For pupils with learning disabilities, Upper Secondary School has a four-year educational programme for young people aged 16-20 who have learning disabilities or an acquired brain injury. In 2012 approximately 9,000 pupils attended upper secondary for individuals with learning disabilities.

Gymnasia can receive additional support through the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools, which provides special pedagogical support services to authorities, services and schools. The overall aim of this service is to develop local resource centres in order to provide support at a local level.

## 2.4 Särvox

Särvox is the adult education programme for people with learning disabilities. It is provided at both basic and upper secondary level and has the same curriculum as municipal adult education.

It is intended to:<sup>12</sup>

*Provide skills in individual subjects and skills equivalent to those acquired at compulsory and upper secondary education schools for pupils with learning disabilities and vocational education and training.*

Participants must be aged 20 years old or older and have a learning disability or acquired brain injury.

Särvox courses are available at three levels:

- Basic Särvox corresponding to training school;
- Basic Särvox corresponding to compulsory school; and
- Secondary Särvox corresponding to secondary special school national programmes.

Courses are free and cover a wide variety of areas. For example the Gothenburg Municipality offers courses in history, natural sciences and vocational courses such as health and social care. Guidance counsellors and teachers are available to provide support, with participants developing their own study plan detailing their goals, needs and prior knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

An important aspect of the programme is that 15% of all teaching time must be in the workplace, providing practical experience for participants.<sup>14</sup>

It is also possible for people to undertake apprenticeships, with work based learning.

In 2010/11 215 municipalities provided Särvox courses.

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<sup>12</sup> Government Offices of Sweden, Special Education for Adults, <http://www.government.se/sb/d/6997/a/67939>

<sup>13</sup> Goteborgs Stads Skolor, programs [http://goteborg.se/wps/wcm/connect/b85750ae-7765-4864-a0cc-4d37fd62bf0e/Sarvoxkatalogen\\_webb.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://goteborg.se/wps/wcm/connect/b85750ae-7765-4864-a0cc-4d37fd62bf0e/Sarvoxkatalogen_webb.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

<sup>14</sup> CEDEFOP, Lifelong learning in Sweden, [www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5112EN.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/5112EN.pdf)

## 2.5 Legislative Basis

The education system in Sweden is based on the Education Act 2011.

Under the Swedish Education Act all children and young people have equal access to education regardless of gender, ethnicity, place of residence or social/economic factors. The Act is the basis of education from pre-school to upper-secondary.<sup>15</sup>

The revised Act introduced the following changes to the system:<sup>16</sup>

- **A new curriculum:** New consolidated curricula for compulsory schools for all students, Sami schools, special schools and upper secondary schools (high schools) came into force 1 July 1 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 studies;
- **A new grading system:** The old Swedish system of Pass (G), Pass with Distinction (VG), Pass with Special Distinction (MVG) and Did Not Pass (IG) has been replaced by a new grading scale with six grades from A to F. A to E are passing grades, with F as a failing grade. Since the fall term of 2012, grades are assigned starting in year 6; and
- **Introduction to teacher certification:** Beginning 1 December 2013, professional certification will be required for school and primary/nursery school teachers on permanent contracts. This aims to raise the status of the teaching profession, supporting professional development and thus increasing quality in education.

As part of the Education Act, steering documents are produced, such as ordinances on school forms, curricula, syllabuses and timetables. As stated by the Ministry for Education and Research:<sup>17</sup>

*These stipulate goals and guidelines, what subjects are to be available and the minimum guaranteed number of tuition hours pupils are entitled to in different subjects.*

Most Swedish schools are public and run by municipalities, although there are also Independent schools which make up around 10% of schools. Independent schools follow the same curriculum as municipality run schools.

School is compulsory in Sweden from ages seven to sixteen, although municipalities have a duty to organise pre-school activities from the age of five.

<sup>15</sup> SPSM, The Swedish Education System, <http://www.spsm.se/sv/Om-webbplatsen/English/The-Swedish-Education-System/>

<sup>16</sup> Sweden, Education in Sweden, <https://sweden.se/society/education-in-sweden/>

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, From Preschool Pedagogy to Nanotechnology, <http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/22/19/90/363df43e.pdf>



A point of note is the design of the National Curriculum in that:<sup>18</sup>

*All compulsory education will be organised in such a way that individual solutions are possible for all pupils. This is a way of strengthening the pupils' influence and personal responsibility, but also a way of taking into account all pupils' needs and individuality.*

## 2.6 Example of Support: Nossebro School, Essunga Municipality

Essunga is a small municipality in Västra Götaland County. It has 5,520 inhabitants which is split almost fifty/fifty rural-urban split. The main town of the municipality, Nossebro, is home to almost 2,000 residents.<sup>19</sup>

In 2007, Nossebro School, the only compulsory school in Essunga, had only 76% of learners eligible for Upper-Secondary School. In addition, twenty percent of learners from Grades 6 – 9 had been placed in segregated support units.

The low results forced a rethink of school strategy regarding support for pupils with learning disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

A major change was the closing of the segregated support unit with learners with special education needs returned to the general classrooms.

Alongside this, the resources made available to special education were reassigned to the classrooms. This included the special education teachers and assistants.

The key strategies used by the school to encourage inclusivity are:<sup>21</sup>

- Shared values 'embedded' an all policy and practice as a basis for the school and wider community development that engages all stakeholders. These values underpin the development of beliefs and attitudes that support the inclusion of all learners;
- A change in culture with mutual trust and strong team relationships;
- A focus on learning across the whole school community – leaders, teachers and learners – is at the centre, with success for every individual seen as the school's responsibility; and
- Strong leadership at all levels, combined with effective management to set the direction and to turn vision into action.

As part of this refocusing of the school's efforts the Principle of Nossebro School stated that the school has adopted:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Complete National Overview – Sweden, <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/sweden/national-overview/complete-national-overview>

<sup>19</sup> Essunga Kommen, Welcome to Essunga, <http://www.essunga.se/In-English.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2013, Organisation of provision to support inclusive education, Meeting the needs of learners – a school transformation, <http://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Essunga-visit-report.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

*Individual inclusion – different solutions for different children.*

As such, pupils with more complex needs may be supported in the classroom by an additional teacher. They can work shorter hours in the classroom and then receive support from a social worker for practical activities or may receive some one to one support for a particular subject.

The additional teaching resources also meant that classes can be more flexible. For example, the numbers in a classroom can be split at certain times, allowing the teacher greater time to focus on smaller groups or individual pupils.

Other factors introduced under the new approach where:

- The school had previously maintained the idea that learners should carry full responsibility for their behaviour and progress. This was changed and a new understanding was adopted: that learners needed adult support, with teachers to be ‘authoritative’ not ‘authoritarian’ – the school policy shifted to:

*It is the teaching situation and context around the pupil that need to change. Not the pupil.*

- Increased learning time: This is done via using “Starter Activities” which can include recaps of previous work or reading texts. Lesson goals and end times are displayed. The approach encourages collaboration but also allows learners to become independent in their learning; and
- The curriculum is the same for all learners with on-going assessment used to strengthen instruction and raise achievement through clear learning intentions, appropriate learning experiences and feedback for learners.

Importantly, Nossebro School did not receive any additional resources to carry out these changes. As stated by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education:

*Existing resources – a high proportion of which were being used to support special classes with poor outcomes – where re-distributed and used to greater effect.*

These changes had the following impact:<sup>23</sup>

- The school moved from among the bottom of the 290 municipalities in Sweden to among the top three in Grade 9 exam results;
- Changes in attitudes and values and consequent changes in practice and in relationships have led to improved academic results and to better motivation, self-esteem, confidence, well-being and resilience in both teachers and learners;
- A substantial number of learners have moved on to upper-secondary education; and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

- The school has become more equitable.

### 3 Examples of Learning Disability Support in Sweden

The following section discusses some of the support available to people with learning disabilities in Sweden.

#### 3.1 Gothenburg's Strad Centrum Day Activities (Post 19 Support)

An EU Commission report identified the work of Strad Centrum (the central urban district in Gothenburg) with people who have complex needs as an example of good practice.

In February 2007 the city began to provide daily activities for a small group of people who did not fit into the traditional day care centres.

As stated by the EU Commission:<sup>24</sup>

*The central urban district of Gothenburg gave priority, in 2006, to the opening of a day care centre for persons with neuropsychiatric disabilities. The handling officers had noticed that there was immediate need for such a centre. This target group did not fit in the ordinary daily activity centres. Very often the persons themselves did not want to go to those centres.*

Following this decision a working group was appointed to take the project forward. The working group found premises which could be used as a day centre and three members of staff were recruited (one "habilitation" staff member and two "habilitation" assistants). Two working advisers were also added to the team to provide additional support.

The target group for the programme is young people aged 16-35 years of age who have neuropsychiatric diagnosis (this includes autism and intellectual disabilities). The target population for the day centre is those who have difficulty in a social context and/or getting a job in the open market. As stated by the EU Commission:<sup>25</sup>

*They also lack an ability to be flexible, an ability to generalise and to benefit from earlier experiences, difficulties to see the whole picture, contextualising and difficulty interpreting the social codes in society. They also have a different way of communicating and often motor disabilities.*

An individual's involvement with the day centre begins when they meet the Handling Officer and Working Consultant. From this a survey of the needs and interests of the person with disabilities is developed and clarified. The individual will then visit the day care centre and meet the staff, with an interview carried out.

<sup>24</sup> European Commission, Report of an EU Study, vol 4: Examples of good practice, the specific risks of discrimination against persons in situations of major dependence or with complex needs.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

Following this, an action plan is developed between staff and the person with a disability within four weeks.

Participants can take part in a variety of activities, depending on their needs, including attending the Day Centre.

The activity at the Day Centre takes a highly structured approach,<sup>26</sup> beginning at 9am with a communal breakfast. Each day, individuals take part in tasks that are aimed at helping them learn skills such as how to prepare food, learning about health and getting regular exercise. The aim of this is to find working tasks that match the individual abilities of the person.

People attending the day centre also visit different work places with the objective of the day centre to find employment for its attendees.

Support is designed to match individual needs and interests, with a large degree of flexibility built into the system.

### **3.2 Gothenburg: A city for everyone<sup>27</sup> (Access/Transport)**

Gothenburg has recently won the Access City Award from the European Union. The Access City Award is given to cities which have made themselves more accessible for disabled and older people.

The Committee may wish to note that Belfast received a Special Mention for its built environment and public spaces.

In Gothenburg, the Property Management Committee has the overall responsibility for the City Council's objective of "A city for everyone". Each district, company and property owner is subsequently responsible for implementing changes.

The city has introduced a number of projects to promote accessibility within the city including an inventory of the city's public buildings and spaces (in order to measure accessibility).

Of note to the Committee is the City's use of procurement to promote Universal Design.

Universal design is an approach used to ensure that the design of the environment, products or techniques enables them to be used by the greatest possible number of people.

The City's governing documents require that procurement must encourage Universal Design. This is achievable as:

*The Procurement Company is wholly owned by the City and is responsible for all central procurement. In 2013 a Corporate Social Responsibility*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/access-city-award-2014-brochure\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/access-city-award-2015/files/access-city-award-2014-brochure_en.pdf)

*(CSR) coordinator was appointed to incorporate the requirement for Universal Design into the procurement process as a part of her job.*

The use of Universal Design in procurement has resulted in a number of changes, including:

- Travel planner: The Public Transport Authority has developed a “Travel Planner” to allow people to research their trips based on their individual accessibility requirements (such as wheelchair space or audible stop notifications).
- ‘Travel Instructors’ are also available to help people who are not used to travelling to take the first step and use public transport. They provide support and security from the person’s home and throughout the journey;
- For people whose disabilities make it impossible for them to travel alone there is a form of public transport specifically for persons with disabilities, the special transport service;<sup>28</sup> and
- Involving disabled and older people in planning: Older people and people with disabilities are involved through advisory boards in developing criteria for Universal Design in areas such as housing.

### **3.3 SIUS - Special Introduction and Follow-up Support (Supported Employment)**

The Swedish Supported Employment Programme is known as Special Introduction and Follow-Up Support (SIUS).

SIUS is provided by the Public Employment Service (PES) and is available across Sweden. It operates under two Regulations:<sup>29</sup>

- The ordinance (SFS 2000:630) on special measures for persons with functional impairments and reduced working capacity; and
- The ordinance (SFS 2000:628) on labour market policy operations.

To access SIUS, an individual must register with their local Labour Office. The Office will then assess their ability to work. If they are deemed as being in need of additional support as a result of a disability or learning disability they are referred to a SIUS consultant.

An individual are deemed as in need of additional support if:<sup>30</sup>

- They have a reduced working capacity because of a functional impairment; and
- They need special support ahead of or during an employment.

<sup>28</sup> City of Gothenburg, A City Accessible for Everyone, [https://goteborg.se/wps/wcm/connect/3b70d50c-6518-4070-a55d-1e006651b992/tillg%C3%A4nglig+stad+broschyr\\_eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT\\_TO=URL&CACHEID=3b70d50c-6518-4070-a55d-1e006651b992](https://goteborg.se/wps/wcm/connect/3b70d50c-6518-4070-a55d-1e006651b992/tillg%C3%A4nglig+stad+broschyr_eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=URL&CACHEID=3b70d50c-6518-4070-a55d-1e006651b992)

<sup>29</sup> Arbetsformedlingen, 2012, Special Introduction and Follow-up Support, [www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.../sius\\_engelska.pdf](http://www.arbetsformedlingen.se/download/18.../sius_engelska.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

An employee can receive financial support from SIUS for a total of 18 months (of which six months is job testing and a follow up period of up to twelve months after being hired). It should be noted that there is no time limit on support.

Once referred to the SIUS consultant, an individual meets with a Job Coach who supports them in developing skills in finding and maintaining a job. This allows the SIUS consultant to concentrate on the relationship with the client and the (perspective) employer.

Support from SIUS is progressively reduced and ceases completely when a client can carry out job tasks independently.

There are a number of incentives for employers to take on a worker through SIUS, including:

- A company can receive a maximum of 80% of 16,700 SEK per month (approximately £1,422.74<sup>31</sup>) to meet a SIUS employees wage costs. The exact amount received is based on the reduction in production generated by an individual's disability type;
- PES reimburses aids an adaptations as necessary for the employee at the workplace; and
- The SIUS consultant can assist the employer with administrative questions and issues such as in regards to insurance.

In 2009, there were 325 job coaches in the SIUS system and 51% of clients found a paid job on the open labour market.<sup>32</sup>

COWI also identified a number of good practice activities under SIUS:<sup>33</sup>

- Job coaches do follow-up visits to the employer and employee to support job retention;
- Employers stressed that the support provided by SIUS is not only given to the employee but also to the employer. This is key for a number of employers in their decision to take on an employee with disabilities;
- The programme budget is specifically earmarked for people with disabilities and cannot be transferred to other purposes; and
- The SIUS consultants are not responsible for authorising wage or other financial subsidies to the employer. Responsibility for this rests with the job coach. This system was introduced (and which is in place across most of Sweden) in order to avoid disturbing the work of the SIUS consultant in establishing positive contacts with employers.

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<sup>31</sup> Based on the exchange rate on the 27 October 2014.

<sup>32</sup> European Commission, COWI, 2012, Supported Employment for people with disabilities in the EU and EFTA-EEA: Good practices and recommendations in support of a flexibility approach, [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/cowi.final\\_study\\_report\\_may\\_2011\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/cowi.final_study_report_may_2011_final_en.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

### 3.4 Samhall (Employment)

Samhall is a government sponsored agency that is tasked with the creation of stimulating jobs for people with disabilities (including intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and repetitive strain injuries).

When it was first formed in 1980, Samhall (then Samhällsföretag) operated 370 sheltered employment workshops. The company was restructured in 1992 into a corporate group with Samhall AB the state-owned parent company.<sup>34</sup>

Over time, an increasing share of Samhall's operations shifted from sheltered employment to contract work and manned solutions.

It matches people who have a 'functional impairment' with appropriate assignments. Samhall operates under a new model with three phases:<sup>35</sup>

- Assessment:
- Temporary rehabilitating employment; and
- Long term employment in the main stream employment market.

Samhall employs approximately 22,000 people in 250 locations. Of these 19,000 have disabilities, with a 1,000 other employees. Samhall has regional offices across Sweden including Goteborg, Stockholm, Malmo and Lulea.<sup>36</sup>

Samhall operates with mixed groups of employees with various working capacities, skills and ages. In this way:<sup>37</sup>

*...employees in the groups complement each other and can manage a complete undertaking together. In this way, Samhall also stands for diversity. Within the company, different groups with various conditions and backgrounds are mixed and combined together. It combats lock-in effects and stand-alone solutions.*

Samhall offers employment in five areas:<sup>38</sup>

- Cleaning and laundry;
- Warehousing and logistics;
- Workplace and property services;
- Elderly services; and
- Manufacturing.

Samhall operates these businesses as a sub-contractor.

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<sup>34</sup> Samhall, Annual and Sustainability Report 2012, [http://www.samhall.se/Global/financial/2012/Samh\\_%c3%85HR12\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.samhall.se/Global/financial/2012/Samh_%c3%85HR12_ENG.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Workability Europe, Samhall, <http://www.workability-europe.org/our-members/107-sweden>

<sup>36</sup> Samhall, Contact, <http://www.samhall.se/kontakt/>

<sup>37</sup> Samhall, Annual and Sustainability Report 2012, [http://www.samhall.se/Global/financial/2012/Samh\\_%c3%85HR12\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.samhall.se/Global/financial/2012/Samh_%c3%85HR12_ENG.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

Samhall, as a state owned company, has a number of targets, including:<sup>39</sup>

- **Number of employees:** Samhall must employ a minimum number of employees with functional impairment, expressed in hours worked (24.4 million). In 2012 Samhall achieved 24.6 million hours;
- **Transitions:** each year a certain proportion (6%) of permanent employees should leave Samhall for a position with another employer. Samhall must provide the possibility of re-employment to employees making a transition to work with another employer, valid for 12 months. In 2012 Samhall achieved 5.2% transition rate;
- **Recruitment from prioritised groups:** a certain minimum proportion (40%) of new recruits should come from prioritised groups in accordance with the definition established by the Public Employment Service and Samhall (people with mental impairments, people with intellectual or neurological impairments and people with multiple impairments which cause reduced working capacity and job seekers in the occupational phase). In 2012 Samhall achieved 43% recruitment within this group.

### 3.5 The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM)

The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM in Swedish) works to ensure that children, young people and adults have adequate conditions to fulfil their educational goals.<sup>40</sup>

SPSM acts as a partner with schools and adult education bodies, offering skills support to these organisations (both municipal and independent) through its regional offices. There are twenty offices in five regions, with offices in locations such as Gothenburg, Ostersund, Uppsala, Vasteras and Malmo.<sup>41</sup>

The support offered by the SPSM includes:<sup>42</sup>

- Support on teaching strategies and attitudes;
- Competency development;
- Pedagogical consequences of disabilities;
- Long-term special needs support;
- In-service training for teachers;
- Producing teaching materials in fields in which the commercial market does not satisfy the need;
- Making adjustments to published textbooks and promoting the development and choice of special education teaching material through financial aid and counselling support to publishers; and
- The SPSM National Resource Centre conducts special needs studies and analysis.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> SPSM, Om Oss, <http://www.spsm.se/sv/Om-oss/>

<sup>41</sup> SPSM, An Equal Education for All, [http://www.butiken.spsm.se/produkt/katalog\\_filer/00378.pdf](http://www.butiken.spsm.se/produkt/katalog_filer/00378.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid



SPSM also operates five national and five regional special schools. The five national special schools are:<sup>43</sup>

- Åsbackaskolan in Gnesta is for pupils with congenital deaf-blindness and pupils with impaired hearing in combination with severe learning disorders;
- Hällsboskolan in Sigtuna and Umeå is for pupils with severe speech and language disorders; and
- Ekeskolan in Örebro is for pupils with impaired vision in combination with other disabilities.

The five regional special schools are for pupils with deafness or impaired hearing and are located in:

- Kristinaskolan in Härnösand;
- Manillaskolan in Stockholm;
- Birgittaskolanin Örebro;
- Vänerskolan in Vänersborg; and
- Östervångskolan in Lund.

### 3.6 Agency for Participation

The Swedish Agency for Participation works to ensure that disability policy will have an impact across Swedish society. This is done through:

- Monitoring and analysing developments;
- Proposing methods, guidance and guidelines;
- Disseminating knowledge;
- Initiating research and other development work; and
- Providing support and proposing measures to Government.

As part of the Swedish Government's commitment to implementing its disability strategy, 22 National Authorities were allocated responsibility for this. The Agency for Participation co-ordinates and supports the efforts of these authorities and reports back to the Government.

The Agency for Participation is also responsible for monitoring Sweden's implementation and adherence to the UN convention ON THE Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It does this through:

- Monitoring the disability policy aims and initiatives which the Government wishes to accomplish during the period 2013-2016;
- Compiling information on the living conditions of persons with disabilities; and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

- Making annual open comparisons of the measures taken by National Authorities, County Councils and Municipalities.

The Agency for Participation is located in Sundbyberg, Sweden.