

# Teacher Identities and Professionalism Research

## Sweden



### Headline Findings

#### Decline and Reform

- After years of **declining PISA scores**, reforms have started to reverse the downwards trend. **PISA 2016 results** brought Sweden in line with international averages.
- A consensus-based approach to school reform has been taken through a **Schools' commission** of teachers, researchers and representatives from unions and organizational bodies supported by a 'Trust in Teachers' attitude amongst policy-makers.
- New initiatives and programmes** are being put in place to address improvement priorities, as identified by the OECD, and challenges, such as those created by immigration.

#### The Teaching Profession

- Swedish teachers do not see their profession as highly valued in society** and there is an **acute teacher shortage** in some areas. This is a long-standing problem partly due to the heavy workload, relatively low salaries and limited opportunities for appraisal and feedback. In spite of this, teachers' sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction is high.
- Considerable attention is being paid to **improve the attractiveness of the profession** by raising teacher salaries, providing funding for increased numbers of support staff, developing professional standards and resourcing professional development activities.

#### Making Collaboration Work

- Swedish teachers have a **high degree of autonomy** and a long tradition of teamwork. Many teachers however do not have the **conditions** they need for good quality teaching.
- Improvements to leadership, particularly around **pedagogical leadership**, are seen as key to addressing this. Currently however principals have heavy workloads and devote large amounts of their time to administration.
- New initiatives** will involve **collaboration between the National Agency and individual schools** with great needs, pioneering new approaches to collaboration.

## Swedish Education System Overview

Priorities and Organisation	Teacher Roles, Recruitment and Retention	Professional Development, Teaching and Learning	Leadership, Accountability and Assessment
<h3>System organisation and governance</h3> <p>The Swedish School system is regulated through the <b>Education Act</b>, and the national educational goals are set and evaluated by the <b>Ministry of Education and Research (MoER)</b>. Decisions on how to achieve those goals are left to municipal and school level. The MoER is supported by three agencies, each with different responsibilities: The <b>National Agency for Education (NAE)</b>, the <b>Swedish Schools Inspectorate</b> and the <b>National Agency for Special Needs Education in Schools</b>.</p> <p>Education in Sweden falls into <b>3 phases</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Pre-school or förskola</b> – Swedish children begin their educational life at an early age. In 2012, 93% of 3 year olds were enrolled in pre-school (ages 1-5), significantly above the OECD average of 70%. Guaranteed places are provided in the year prior to compulsory education (<i>förskoleklass</i>).</li> <li><b>Compulsory schooling</b>. This consists of 3 stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Lägstadiet</b> – years 1-3 (ages 7-9)</li> <li><b>Mellanstadiet</b> – years 4-6 (ages 10-12)</li> <li><b>Högstadiet</b> – years 7-9 (ages 13 -15)</li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Gymnasium</b> – years 10-12 (ages 16-18). This phase is <b>optional</b> and leads to higher education and vocational programmes.</li> </ul> <p>In Sweden there are <b>2 main types of school</b>: State run <b>Municipal schools</b> and Privately run <b>Friskola or charter schools</b>. Both are publicly funded, must be approved by the Schools Inspectorate and follow the national curricula and syllabuses. There are also a small number of other school types such as <b>Sami schools</b>, <b>Special schools</b> and <b>Fee paying private schools</b>.</p> <h3>National Priorities, Cultures and Contexts</h3> <p>The education system and wider society and culture are focused on a widely-shared set of fundamental values. Educators aim to foster knowledge and value development, prepare students to live and work in society and develop students in creative, active, responsible and competent individuals and citizens. There is increasing investment in the education of 6-10 yr olds. Swedish society has also embraced the value of <b>lifelong learning</b>. The Swedish adult population shows an <b>above-average proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving</b> in technology-rich environments, compared with other OECD countries.</p> <p>PISA scores declined from 2000 to 2012 from around average to significantly below average. No other country taking part in PISA has seen a steeper fall. PISA 2016 results reversed the negative trend to bring Sweden in line with international averages. The government continues a programme of reform with 3 main priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving the <b>attractiveness of the teaching profession</b> (see right)</li> <li><b>Early intervention</b> to address low attainment, (e.g) through the Reading/writing and arithmetic guarantee</li> <li><b>Improving Equity /Equality</b> between students where results show a widening attainment gap</li> </ul> <p>A <b>Schools' commission</b> of teachers, researchers and representatives from unions and organizational bodies was put together to produce a thorough overview and make proposals for a systemic approach to system improvement. This was informed by a "national gathering of teachers".</p> <p>Another challenge presently shaping the system is that</p>	<h3>Teacher Status and Autonomy</h3> <p>Teachers are required to work within the confines of the <b>curriculum for compulsory schooling</b>, which underwent reform in 2011. Local planning seeks to give practical expression to the goals set out in the Education Act, the curriculum and syllabi. Within Sweden's decentralised steering of the school system, the choice of tools and methods used to achieve this are left to school organisers to determine.</p> <p>Swedish <b>teachers do not see their profession as highly valued</b> in society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual teacher <b>salaries</b> are negotiated annually between principals and teachers. This has led to starting salaries slightly above the OECD average, but salaries at the top of the scale are far below average. The <b>Teacher salary boost initiative (Lärarlönelyftet)</b> allows principles to request up to 3000 SEK per month per teacher. In 2016/17 60,000 teachers are expected to benefit from pay increases</li> <li><b>Almost 1 in 5 (18%) lower secondary teachers regret becoming a teacher</b>, and only 53% would still choose to work as a teacher if they could decide again.</li> </ul> <h3>Training, employment and retention</h3> <p>There is currently an acute <b>shortage of teachers</b> and current projections point towards significant challenges in the <b>mismatch between the supply and demand</b> of new teachers, owing to low numbers of applicants to initial teacher education programmes, and the large anticipated number of teachers retiring or considering a career change. In 2015, against this backdrop, the OECD recommended that Sweden should <b>improve the attractiveness of the teaching and school leadership profession</b>. Strategies for this include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Raising teacher salaries (Lärarlönelyftet)</b></li> <li><b>Developing professional standards</b> to underpin appraisals and career structure</li> <li><b>More selective entry</b> into teacher education programmes</li> <li><b>Adequately resourced CPDL</b> for educators</li> </ul> <p>According to the OECD (2015), <b>conditions in the Swedish system are not conducive to nurturing excellence</b> in the teaching profession. Teaching is considered a low status and relatively unattractive profession. This is partly due to the <b>heavy workload, relatively low salaries, limited opportunities for appraisal and feedback</b>, and <b>unclear relationships</b> between principals and employers.</p> <p>In spite of this, teachers' <b>sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction is high</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>85% report</b> overall satisfaction with their jobs.</li> <li><b>96% report</b> being satisfied with their performance in their current school.</li> </ul> <p><b>The quality of teachers is variable</b> throughout Sweden. In the past, there have been reports of many teachers teaching subjects in which they are not qualified, and in 2012, <b>76.5% of teachers held a university-level degree</b>, leaving <b>almost a quarter without the required qualification</b>. In recent years (2011 onwards), reforms have been initiated to ensure a high quality workforce, and as of 2015, there are <b>4 university-level initial teacher education programmes</b>, provided by 28 universities. Also, funding has been put in place to increase the support staff workforce to 20,000 (2017).</p>	<h3>Professional development and Learning</h3> <p>A lack of career paths has for many years hindered the professional development of Swedish teachers. In recent years, however, two statuses were added to the career structure for teachers: <b>First Teachers</b> hold additional responsibilities and a higher salary. <b>Senior Subject Teacher</b> require a licentiate degree or above and must demonstrate at least 4 years of high quality teaching.</p> <p>Responsibility for <b>teacher CPDL</b> is divided between the government and municipalities. Though not a legal requirement, Swedish teachers are currently <b>entitled to 104 hours per year for CPDL</b> during working hours. The NAE must ensure that <b>in-service training courses are available</b> in all parts of the country, while school organisers must ensure all staff are adequately trained. Other providers include educational broadcasters, teachers' unions, other state authorities and independent education companies.</p> <p><b>Effective induction and mentoring programmes</b> can help new teachers deal with the challenges during their first months of employment. However, <b>participation in such programmes is low</b>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2013, Swedish lower secondary teachers reported a <b>lack of support mechanisms</b> for new teachers.</li> <li>Newer teachers demonstrated much lower confidence in their abilities.</li> <li>Almost one third of lower secondary teachers receive <b>no performance feedback</b> at all; those who do typically receive it from the school principal, who they report as being poorly equipped for the task.</li> </ul> <p>In 2013, the <b>most important professional development needs</b> reported by Swedish teachers are related to <b>student evaluation and assessment practices</b>, along with <b>ICT skills for teaching</b> and knowledge of the curriculum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Several <b>state-supported education programmes</b> have been initiated to enhance teachers' skills in specific areas (for example, <b>Mathematics Boost</b> and <b>Counselling for Learning</b>).</li> <li>In 2014-15, the government invested around 300m SEK in a pilot project aim to enhance teachers' professional development in the area of reading and writing. This is planned to continue full scale 2015-18.</li> </ul> <h3>Pedagogy, Curriculum and Classroom Culture</h3> <p>The 2015 OECD Sweden perspective notes attitudes of <b>low expectations of students, high tolerance to disciplinary and truancy issues</b> by schools and parents, and an apparent <b>general feeling of complacency</b> throughout large parts of the school system.</p> <p>There is a strong focus on <b>classroom-based assessments</b> in Swedish schools, through which, teachers collect a range of evidence of students' progress and provide regular feedback. The <b>NAE</b> has many open courses in assessment and grading; however, the evidence suggests that teachers need to strengthen their formative and summative assessment skills. The <b>Swedish Schools Inspectorate</b> report finding teachers assessment skills underdeveloped, particularly in relation to implementing day-to-day formative assessment.</p>	<h3>Collaboration and leadership</h3> <p>There is a long tradition of <b>teamwork</b> in Swedish schools, supported by a flat organisational structure. Teachers are typically organised into small groups which share responsibility for organising their work. Teachers also have a <b>high degree of autonomy</b>, and are required to contribute to school strategies to achieve the national student learning goals. Activities which bring teachers together to <b>stimulate peer learning</b> and <b>increase cooperation</b> include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Interpreting the curriculum</b> and adapting to the locals context</li> <li><b>Establishing student assessment methods</b></li> <li><b>Ensuring fairness</b> in the grading of national tests</li> </ul> <p>School development in Sweden involves as many staff as possible in the processes of self-evaluation, follow-up and improvement. Teachers cite the benefits as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support by colleagues</li> <li>Shared responsibility for learning</li> <li>Counselling of students – teamwork is perceived as essential to dealing with students in a comprehensive way</li> </ul> <p>In 2015, the NAE reported that many teachers do not have the conditions they need to be able to carry out good quality teaching, concluding that improvements to leadership were key to addressing this. The NAE recommend that <b>pedagogical leadership</b> needs to occupy a greater portion of principal's day-to-day work, to give them the opportunity to monitor, analyse and take action in teacher development. This requires <b>lightening principals' administrative burdens</b>, and education providers taking greater responsibility for ensuring that principles have the right conditions to do a good job. Principals' <b>challenging workload</b> limits their ability to prioritise pedagogical leadership and causes stress and an unhealthy work-life balance. TALIS 2013 found that Swedish principals devote <b>51% of their time to administration</b>.</p> <h3>Accountability and Assessment</h3> <p>The <b>National Agency for Education (NAE)</b> is responsible for National curriculum goals, managing the collection and analysis of quantitative data, national follow-up and evaluation and developing support materials, such as advice and guidelines. The NAE are supported by the <b>Swedish Schools Inspectorate</b> who are responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular supervision of all municipal schools, from preschool to adult education – 9 regional units undertake school visits throughout the country</li> <li>Providing qualitative feedback to schools, based on site visits and on-the-spot observations</li> </ul> <p>'<b>Collaboration for better schools</b>' (2015) is a new initiative where the national agency is tasked with going into individual schools with great needs. They have the mandate together with the school to perform diagnosis and action planning. This is the first time a state-level agency has undertaken support and intervention in individual schools.</p>

Sweden has become a **more culturally diverse** country. In 2013, 15% of the Swedish population was born abroad, putting Sweden among the OECD countries with the largest foreign-born population. Integration of immigrant families and children is therefore of key importance to Swedish society. **Fast Track initiatives** (2016) are in place to help for both pupils integrate into schools and to enable qualified foreign teachers to more quickly enter the profession with shortened teacher training.