



**BILAG  
10**

**THE SWEDISH BACHELOR  
– A DEGREE OF SUCCESS**

*NOTAT OM DET SVENSKES VIDEREGÅENDE  
UDDANNELSESSYSTEM*

UDARBEJDET AF HANNE SMIDT  
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KVALITET OG RELEVANS I DE  
VIDEREGÅENDE UDDANNELSER



Udvalg for Kvalitet og Relevans  
i de Videregående Uddannelser

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## The Swedish bachelor – a degree of success

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**Report on the Swedish higher education system by Hanne Smidt,  
Senior Advisor, European University Association/Hanne Smidt Consulting  
February 2014**

The Swedish higher education system is in many ways quite different from most higher education systems, and the system is closely interlinked with the Swedish cultural tradition of inclusiveness, equal access and opportunities. The first reforms that intended to open up higher education were introduced when Olof Palme was minister of education in the early 1960's, and those reforms were based on a vision for widening participation and ensuring better access to higher education for all citizens (with a secondary school leaving certificate throughout their lives). The most wide-ranging reforms were introduced in the 1970's, reforms that increased the flexibility of the system and offered a great freedom of choice and greater access for the individual. They made it possible for the individual student to choose from a large number of courses<sup>1</sup> and programmes with a variety of specialisations and different scopes. The course is established unit (with x amount of credits at provided at a given level) and the student can either choose to apply for a single course or for a programme. The system had a liberal art philosophy (Anglo-Saxon tradition) as its basis for the general degrees in humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

The Swedish higher education system had prior to 2007 only two cycles: the undergraduate (three year "kandidatgrad" + 1 year "magistergrad") and the post graduate (4 year doctorate). The system was changed to three cycles in 2007 as part of the Bologna reforms and now consists of a three year bachelor degree (kandidatgrad) and a one or two year master degree (magister/mastergrad); the doctoral degree has remained a four year degree. The Bologna reforms have thus in contrast to most other European countries meant a prolongation of studies and a level of studies outside the doctoral education that didn't exist before.

The majority of Swedish students have traditionally left the higher education system with a general bachelor degree and only if the student intended to enter into a more "academic job market" would he or she have taken a "magistergrad". The professional degrees like medicine, law, civil engineering, nursing etc. meet the European requirements of scope and length, but for the general degrees it has been and largely still is common for the majority of candidates to finish with a bachelor degree

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<sup>1</sup> A particular feature of the Swedish higher education system are the "fritstående kurser" or free-floating courses that can be taken one by one and be combined by the student to an individualized degree or shadow a degree-programme. The availability of these courses make it possible to add these to a degree programme as the student see fit.

(kandidatgrad<sup>2</sup>). The introduction of the Bologna reforms, the advanced level and the development of many master degree programmes<sup>3</sup> has changed this.

The first report on the longitudinal progression path of students in Swedish higher education: “Students’ study patterns and total lengths of study”, HSV 2012 (see figure below) indicates that: “Out of all new entrants to higher education during the 20-year period of 1978/79–1997/98, over 40 per cent have had at least two periods<sup>4</sup> of study. The women have returned to new periods of study to a much greater extent than the men. Half of the women and a third of the men have had at least two periods of study. The longer time that women have had to return, the more they have done so. Men do not seem to be as dependent on time as a factor (p. 7).”

**New entrants 1978/79–1997/98, divided into four groups of five annual intakes and the proportion of these who studied at least 1, 2, 3 or 4 periods.**

<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>New entrants</b>	<b>Proportion (%) who studied for at least</b>			
		<b>1 period</b>	<b>2 per</b>	<b>3 per</b>	<b>4 per</b>
78/79–82/83	141 706	100	53	26	11
83/84–87/88	125 447	100	51	23	9
88/89–92/93	146 639	100	49	19	5
93/94–97/98	179 610	100	43	12	2
78/79–97/98	593402	100	49	19	6

<b>MEN</b>	<b>New entrants</b>	<b>Proportion (%) who studied for at least</b>			
		<b>1 period</b>	<b>2 per</b>	<b>3 per</b>	<b>4 per</b>
78/79–82/83	89 538	100	35	12	4
83/84–87/88	88 813	100	36	12	4
88/89–92/93	110 740	100	37	12	3
93/94–97/98	140 731	100	33	8	1
78/79–97/98	429 822	100	35	11	3

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<sup>2</sup> Note that a “kandidatgrad” in Sweden is a three year bachelor degree

<sup>3</sup> The introduction of the advanced level or the master-level resulted in the introduction of 480 new degrees in 2007 ((HSV-11-27 2007/9)

<sup>4</sup> As it has not been a tradition to count in degree programmes in Sweden, a period can most likely be from courses at university level to a new degree – thus the length of the studies in a period is not specified in the report.

<sup>5</sup> The information is from a report published by the former national Agency for Higher Education: Report 2012:6 Students’ study patterns and total lengths of study, HSV 2012: the report has a longitudinal and illustrates lifelong learning in Sweden. Unfortunately there is no newer information available.



About fifty per cent of the graduates return to higher education once or several times, the report does not specify if it is for a whole degree or the free-floating courses. The figures indicate thus that while the first study period might be shorter than in most European countries, the open system promotes continuing education to a very large extent throughout - especially women's lives.

The Swedish higher education system has remained open, inclusive and focused on lifelong learning in the spirit of the Bologna Process. People may study or stay in higher education at any age as long as they have a secondary school leaving certificate. All potential students (young, old, Swedish or international students) apply through a central platform called NyA. Any graduate can return to higher education for new or supplementary studies simply by applying through the central application system for a course<sup>6</sup> or for a degree programme. The system is one could say truly student-centred. The flexibility is very high and this has implications for funding and planning (see p. 10). Resources are allocated to the institutions for first and second-cycle courses and programmes on the basis of the number of students enrolled in each cycle, expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTEs) and the number of credits attained (annual performance equivalents). Every year the Government determines a funding cap for the institutions, which lays down the maximum amount that can be paid to each HEI. Application is made through a central system and if there are more applicants than student places allocated, the selection at institutional level is made on the basis of points obtained in the secondary school leaving certificate or on a national test (högskoleprovet) that can be taken as many times as the student wishes<sup>7</sup>.

In Sweden there is one higher education sector with both universities and "högskolor" (see p. 7) and a degree has been since the 1970's been based on an accumulation of "högskolepoäng" (HP) with a requirement of progression that could be accumulated and if need be transferred between institutions (in fact an ECTS like system). The HP was used both for programmes and the individual free floating courses (fritstående kurser) that is very unique to the Swedish system. A great number of courses are within each department every semester defined as free-floating, and students can take them either as part of a programme or as an individual credit, and students from all over can apply directly through the centralized system on a competitive basis. If the student chooses to make his or her own combination of the free-floating courses, he or she has to apply through the central application system. The openness and the availability of these courses are the very essence of the Swedish higher education system: it is open and flexible, and access to the courses can be and is given to anyone irrespective of age who has a secondary school leaving certificate.

In the old system prior to 2007 the division of students between programmes and free floating courses and the ones who combines the two is quite striking<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> The courses are called free-floating courses.

<sup>7</sup> Information from [Higher Education in Sweden, 2013 status report, 2013, UKÄ](#)

<http://www.uk-ambetet.se/download/18.1c251de913ecec40e780003405/annual-report-2013-ny.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Table from HSV Rapport 2009:29R: Mått för genomströmning i utbildning på grund och avancerad nivå, p. 29  
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Studenter läsåret 2003/04 uppföljda t.o.m. 2007/08.

Studieform	Totalt	Kön		Ålder			
		Män	Kvinnor	-20 år	21-24 år	25-34 år	35 år-
Enbart fristående kurser	47 939	16 729	31 210	3 563	4 316	14 989	25 071
Enbart generella program	4 651	2 246	2 405	1 167	1 263	1 275	946
Fristående kurser och generella program	15 723	6 549	9 174	6 302	5 011	2 914	1 496
<b>Totalt</b>	<b>68 313</b>	<b>25 524</b>	<b>42 789</b>	<b>11 032</b>	<b>10 590</b>	<b>19 178</b>	<b>27 513</b>

The “soft data from Swedish universities” indicates that students entering the higher education system after 2007 seem to be slowly moving in the direction of students being more interested in a programme.<sup>9</sup>

A student can thus choose between applying to a programme or to individual (free-floating) courses that can be combined for an individual degree (with credits from different faculties if that is desired) by accumulation HP (there are requirements of x-amount of credit at first, second and third year to obtain a bachelor degree and 1 HP is one ECTS point).

The HP credit system that has been in existence since the 1970’s has become so accepted by the employers that students use their credit transcript in a job application rather than the formal degree – and thus a great number of graduates have never taken out their degree despite the fact that they could<sup>10</sup>. There thus is no real threshold between the university and the labour market, the student is judged on his or her own choices more so than the university formally acknowledging the quality in a diploma<sup>11</sup>. It is very unique and possible in line with a flat societal structure, but because of the increasing globalization, the demand for a diploma is changing and the universities are now actively promoting that student take out their diplomas.

The flexibility and the “lack” of formal requirements around the diploma have made it difficult to get a good overview of the system and this can only be done by looking at the progression path of students in a longitudinal study.

Change takes time as observed in the EUA Trends 2010 report (Sursock & Smidt) and while the majority of European countries are coming to terms with the bachelor degree as a degree that forms the basis of further education, the Swedish higher education system and the labour market is coming

<sup>9</sup> This can be seen in the changes in the number of registered students in general programmes as opposed to free-floating courses in the UK-Å statistical database <http://www.uk-ambetet.se/statistikuppfoljning/statistikdatabasomhogskolan.4.782a298813a88dd0dad800011884.html#h-Grundochavanceradniva>

<sup>10</sup> “Dessutom skiljer sig den svenska arbetsmarknaden från övriga Europa på så sätt att själva examensbeviset är mindre viktigt för svenska arbetsgivare” (SULF 2013-01-22.)

<sup>11</sup> For the professional degrees diplomas are and have been common.

to term with a new type of degree: the master degree. There is no automatic transfer between the bachelor level and the master level, the student always has to apply in competition with students from their own university, from other Swedish universities and international students. A yet unpublished study on the progress and development of the graduate level at Gothenburg, Lund and Uppsala universities indicate that these three universities have developed very differentiated recruitment patterns at least when looking at the institutional level. One has the largest internal recruitment, one the largest national recruitment and one the most international recruitment. Another important fact to take into consideration when trying to understand the Swedish higher education system is that the introduction of the master degree was seen by many Swedish universities and högskolor as a way to introduce internationalisation of their institutions. This led to the development of 480 new degrees in one go in 2007, and the majority of students were international students who then could study free of charge. With the introduction of tuition fees as of 2011 for non- EU/EES students this all changed again and many especially högskolor have had to close a great number of master degree programmes. Due to the difficult job market post-2008, it is slowly becoming more common for Swedish bachelor graduates to opt for the two year master - even for students who are not aiming for the academic job market.

Generella examina	2010/11	2011/12	Förändring	Procent
Högskoleexamen	1 585	1 796	211	13
Kandidatexamen	20 270	22 975	2 705	13
Magisterexamen (2007)	4 759	5 509	750	16
Masterexamen	5 809	7 308	1 499	26
"Gamla" magisterexamina	4 922	3 012	-1 910	-39
Totalt	37 345	40 600	3 255	9

**Tabell 6. Antal utfärdade generella examina läsåret 2011/12 jämfört med läsåret 2010/11.** Antalsmässigt ökade kandidatexamina mest, med drygt 2 700 examina. Antalet masterexamina ökade med drygt en fjärdedel eller nästan 1 500 examina det senaste läsåret. "Gamla" magisterexamina avser magisterexamen med ämnesdjup samt magisterexamen med ämnesbredd som båda utfärdas enligt 1993 års examensordning.

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Another post- 2008 effect is that the average age of a first time student has come down due to the financial crisis. It is expected that the total average age remains relatively stable as student of all ages are encouraged to keep obtaining credits throughout their lives.

The most common general degree is still the bachelor degree and the most recent employability study performed by the Swedish Statistical Office and the National Higher Education Authority indicates that the bachelor degree remains the most popular degree on the labour market. The master degree so far does not seem to offer the young graduate a competitive advantage on the

## 1 <sup>12</sup> UK-Ä: Årsrapport för universitet och högskolor

Swedish labour market. An example is taken from the most recent report on the employability patterns of the Swedish higher education graduates (Etablering på arbetsmarknaden 2011 – examinerade 2009/2010 , UK-Ä, 2013) the figure only contains graduates with general degrees. One example is the kandidat.ex.naturvetenskap where 63 per cent were employed and 57 per cent with a master degree. It is important to note that 2009 were the first year where the master candidates came on the labour market; there are no newer figures available at national level. The graduate surveys done by universities indicate that the master candidates are gaining access as more graduates are entering the labour market.

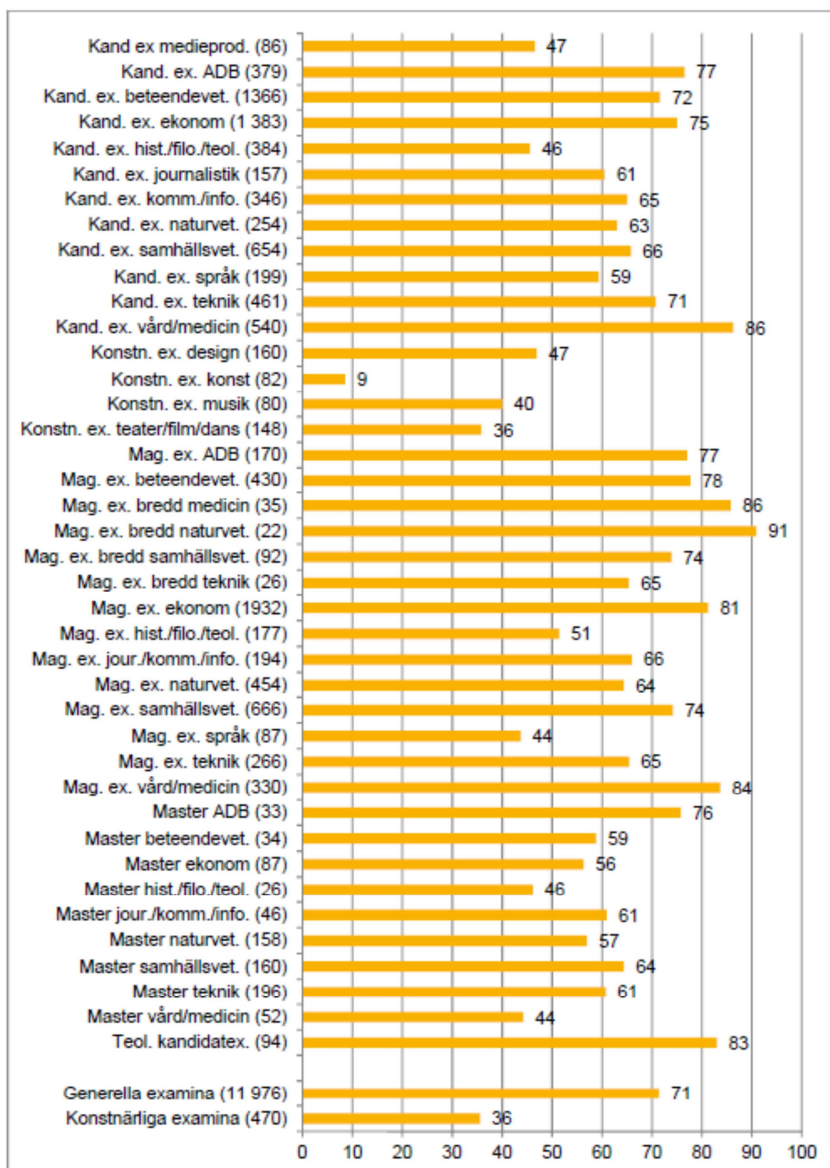


Diagram 4: Andel (procent) etablerade på arbetsmarknaden 2011 av dem som avlagt en generell respektive en examen inom det konstnärliga området läsåret 2009/10 (antal examinerade i uppföljningen inom parentes). Även för generella examina är det stor variation i andelen etablerade mellan olika ämnen i examen. De två sista raderna i diagrammet anger totalsiffror.



There are most likely several explanations for the weak position on the labour market: the master degree is still largely unknown (there has been no joint effort made by the department of education, the universities and the labour market representatives to explain what the benefits would be for employers by hiring a candidate with a master degree as opposed to a candidate with a bachelor degree), there are still very few Swedish graduates on the labour market with a master (as more than 50 per cent of the graduates were international students between 2007 and 2012), and there are a very large variety of different types of degrees (see below) and programmes available thus making it difficult to for an employer to get an understanding of the new degree level.

When the two-year master degree was introduced a number of different types were developed and they can largely be divided into three types aimed either at: research-oriented preparation for research, more applied labour market oriented or continuing education. The intentions are best described in this figure from Smidt & al. 2010. The figure indicates the many different backgrounds the master degree student can have: direct access from a bachelor degree, based on a degree and labour market experience (RPL), a degree from a related area and as lifelong learning. The master degree in the different subject areas can lead to many different types of jobs on the labour market from a profession to an entrepreneur or researcher.

**Figure 6 Ways in and out of the Swedish master programme**



The open higher education system, that is characteristic of Swedish higher education, entails some difficulties with the statistical description of the students' periods of study. Such descriptions have

primarily been limited to information about periods of study for programmes leading to a professional qualification, which have a start date and an end date. Statistical follow-ups based on degree statistics are made additionally difficult as students in Sweden must request their degree certificates, though many choose not to do so despite completing their studies.

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## **Extract: Higher education in Sweden 2013 status report by the Swedish Higher Education Authority**

*Facts about the Swedish Higher Education System extract from the Status Report 2013 from the Swedish Higher Education Authority*

All higher education is offered by public-sector HEIs or by independent education providers granted degree-awarding powers by the Government. Third-cycle courses and programmes are offered by universities and university colleges that have been granted entitlement to award third-cycle qualifications. There are 14 public-sector universities and 20 public-sector university colleges in Sweden. In addition there are three independent HEIs that are entitled to award third-cycle qualifications: Chalmers University of Technology, the Stockholm School of Economics and Jönköping University Foundation. There are also ten independent education providers entitled to award first-cycle, and in some cases second-cycle, qualifications as well as four independent course providers entitled to award qualifications in psychotherapy. The Riksdag decides which public-sector HEIs are to exist. The Government can decide whether a HEI has university status.

### **The regulations that govern higher education institutions**

In Sweden, public-sector HEIs are agencies in their own right that report directly to the Government. The operations of HEIs are regulated by the laws and statutes that apply to the area of higher education. The HEIs are also subject to administrative and labour-market legislation and the provisions of the Instrument of Government. Their operations are also governed by the parameters and funding decided by the Riksdag and the Government.

The mission of the HEIs is to offer education based on an academic or artistic footing and proven experience. They must also undertake development work, including research and artistic development. In addition, the HEIs must co-operate with their surrounding communities, provide information about their operations and also act to ensure that benefits are derived from the findings of their research. Higher education in Sweden is governed by the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance.

The Higher Education Act is enacted by the Riksdag and contains regulations about the operations of HEIs. These are often supplemented by the provisions laid down in the Higher Education Ordinance. The Higher Education Act contains basic regulations about the courses and programmes offered by HEIs. For instance, it sets out what should characterise these courses and programmes at the different levels and stipulates freedom of research. It provides a framework for the organisation and

governance of the HEIs, and states that every HEI must have a board of governors and a vice-chancellor.

### **Expenditure on tertiary education**

Comparison of the expenditure by education providers (HEIs and others) in different countries on tertiary education including research reveals that for many years Sweden has been one of the countries that devotes the highest funding per student. In 2009 the total expenditure per student was highest in the USA, followed by Switzerland, Canada and Sweden. In several other Nordic countries expenditure per student was also high in 2009.

In 2000 the list was topped by the same countries as in 2009, apart from Finland and Australia. In Finland expenditure per student in 2000 was considerably lower than the OECD average but since then it has doubled in current prices. This can be compared with the average rate of increase in the OECD, which is 24 per cent. Australia was one of the countries that devoted most per student in 2000 but since then the rate of increase has been lower than in many countries. In Sweden expenditure per student has risen by 32 per cent between 2000 and 2009.

The proportion of the total expenditure by the education providers devoted to research depends on the way in which research is organised in the different countries. HEIs in Sweden undertake a considerable amount of research. In Sweden – as well as in Switzerland – it is largely expenditure on research that means that expenditure per student is so high. Other countries which have a relatively large proportion of expenditure for research are Finland, Norway and the Netherlands, about 40 per cent.

### **Allocation of resources to higher education institutions**

The Riksdag decides on funding for the HEIs. Resources are allocated to the institutions for first and second-cycle courses and programmes on the basis of the number of students enrolled in each cycle, expressed in terms of full-time equivalents (FTEs) and the number of credits attained (annual performance equivalents). Every year the Government determines a funding cap for the institutions, which lays down the maximum amount that can be paid to each HEI.

In June 2010 the Riksdag decided that resources for first and second-cycle programmes are also to be allocated on the basis of the results of the Swedish Higher Education Authority's quality evaluations. Institutions that receive the highest rating will be given the incentive of additional funding (quality funding). Quality based allocation of resources will apply to public sector HEIs as well as Chalmers University of Technology and Jönköping University Foundation and has taken effect in 2013.

The direct funding for research and third-cycle courses and programmes is based mainly on past allocations, but since 2009 10 per cent of the funding and new resources are allocated on the basis of two quality indicators. These are publications and citations and research funding from external sources.

The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences has a special budgeting and reporting system in which funding for research, courses and programmes is allocated for a three-year period together with the educational targets for the same period.

### **Admission to higher education**



Sweden has a more uniform system of admission to higher education than many other countries. National admission regulations are laid down in the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance and the regulations issued by the Swedish Higher Education Authority. The detailed national regulations apply mainly to the admission of HE entrants to first-cycle courses and programmes. There are also regulations on admission to second and third-cycle courses and programmes, but these are less comprehensive.

Specific prior knowledge is required for admission to higher education. Those who have the required knowledge qualify for entry. Entry requirements can be either general or specific. The general entry requirements apply to all courses and programmes in higher education; specific (additional) entry requirements are also demanded for many courses and programmes. All first-cycle courses and programmes, apart from those that lead to the award of a qualification in the fine, applied and performing arts, use more or less the same selection criteria. These are based mainly on school-leaving grades or results from the Swedish Scholastic Aptitude Test. The Higher Education Ordinance stipulates the general entry requirements that apply for all courses and programmes, as well as listing any selection criteria that may be invoked. It also contains regulations on the evaluation of final school grades.

The Government has decided that the Swedish Council for Higher Education is to issue further regulations regarding admission, for example concerning applicants with foreign grades. The vast majority of admissions are pooled. The Swedish Council for Higher Education is responsible for pooled admissions on behalf of the HEIs, but the individual HEIs decide on the admission of students. An appeal may be made to the Higher Education Appeals Board against a HEI's admission decision regarding eligibility but not regarding selection.

### **Student finance**

It is possible for students to obtain financial support from the state if they meet the stipulated requirements. Student finance consists of a combination of study grants and study loans. In 2013 the grant portion of student finance for an academic year of 40 weeks amounts to SEK 28,280 and the loan ceiling to SEK 61,960. The maximum total available government-sponsored student finance for an individual student pursuing fulltime studies thus amounts to SEK 90,240 per annum. Student finance can be paid for a maximum of 12 semesters or 6 academic years.

Repayment of the loan element is based on an annuity system and in normal cases the total debt should have been repaid in 25 years or before the borrower reaches the age of 60.



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