

# The Swedish higher education system

According to legislation before 1 January 2007.

The following description is approved by the Swedish Council for Higher Education.

## General

Higher education institutions have great autonomy in the organisation of studies, use of resources and general administration. The Government may award the status of universitet to higher education institutions that meet certain criteria. Independent higher education providers may apply for recognition by the Government, obtain degree awarding powers and receive state funds. Qualifications from all higher education institutions that are recognized by the Government have equal official value. The same law governs all state higher education institutions.

## Grading

The Higher Education Ordinance stated that the following grades could be awarded: Pass with Distinction (*väl godkänd*), Pass (*godkänd*) or Fail (*underkänd*) unless the institution decides to grade on some other scale. A number of courses use only two grades: Pass and Fail. Others, like Law and Engineering, traditionally use scales with several levels – expressed as letters or numbers. No overall grade is given for a degree and students are not ranked. From 1 January 2011 the grading is not nationally regulated.

## Degrees

Higher education is provided in the form of courses. These may be combined to constitute degree programmes with varying levels of individual choice. Students themselves are also able to combine different courses for the award of a degree. A course syllabus is required for each undergraduate course and a curriculum for each degree programme.

Sweden has a national system of credit points (*poäng*); one week of successful full-time study is equivalent to 1 credit point. One academic year usually yields 40 credit points.

After 1 January 2007 credit points have been converted to credits (*högskolepoäng*) comparable to ECTS. One credit awarded before 1 January 2007 is equivalent to 1.5 new credits.

In the Degree Ordinance, the Government has laid down which degrees may be awarded and the objectives for these degrees. In the Swedish higher education system there are generally no intermediate qualifications. All degrees are regarded as final qualifications, even if there is a possibility to continue studying. Degrees are divided into general degrees and professional degrees.

## General degrees

1. *Högskoleexamen* requiring a minimum of 80 credit points/120 credits.
2. *Kandidatexamen* requiring a minimum of 120 credit points/180 credits with 60 credit points/90 credits in the major subject including a thesis/degree project of 10 credit points/15 credits.
3. *Magisterexamen med ämnesdjup* (Master of) requiring a minimum of 160 credit points/240 credits with 80 credit points/120 credits in the major subject including one thesis/degree project of 20/30 or two theses/degree projects of 10 credit points/15 credits each.
4. *Magisterexamen med ämnesbredd* (Master of) requiring a minimum of 40 credit points/60 credits with specialisation including a thesis/degree project of at least 10 credit points/15 credits. A prerequisite for *Magisterexamen med ämnesbredd* is a general or professional degree of at least 120 credit points/180 credits or a comparable foreign degree.

*Kandidatexamen* and *Magisterexamen med ämnesdjup* may indicate the major subject or faculty, e.g. *ekonomie magisterexamen* (... of Science in Business Administration or ... of Science in Economics). The most advanced courses (at the 61–80 credit points/91–120 credits level) for *Magisterexamen med ämnesdjup* can be accepted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for a doctoral programme. →

## Professional degrees

Professional degrees are awarded in the fields of engineering, health care, agriculture, law, education, the arts etc. There are around 60 professional degrees. Programmes leading to professional degrees vary in length depending on their character.

Some of the professional degrees demand a previous undergraduate qualification as a prerequisite, especially within the field of health care.

Institutions have to apply for the right to award professional degrees.

## Access and admission to higher education

Higher education in Sweden has two strata of eligibility: general/ basic and (additional) specific requirements. The general eligibility is the same for all higher education. General eligibility is attained by completing an upper-secondary school programme and obtaining a pass grade or better in courses comprising at least 90 per cent of the credits required for the programme, or by providing proof of an equivalent level of knowledge. People who are at least 25 years old, who have been employed for four years and who have a command of English and Swedish corresponding to that obtained by completing a national upper-secondary programme are also considered to have general eligibility. The specific requirements vary according to the field of higher education and are expressed in terms of upper-secondary

school qualifications in specific subjects. Restricted admission is used for all study programmes and courses.

## Postgraduate studies

Higher education institutions with the status of *universitet* have permanent allocations of funds for research and postgraduate programmes and may award doctoral degrees, whereas at institutions designated as *högskola* these rights may be restricted to specific research areas only or they may have research links with a *universitet*.

For admission to postgraduate programmes undergraduate qualifications of at least 120 credit points/180 credits were required. Furthermore, the appropriate faculty board could stipulate additional requirements for admission. Postgraduate programmes nominally comprise 160 credit points/240 credits (four years of full-time study) and lead to a *doktorsexamen* (PhD). A PhD student must complete a number of taught courses and write a doctoral dissertation.

The dissertation must be defended at a public oral examination. A *licentiatexamen* (licentiate degree) can be obtained after a minimum of 2 years (80 credit points/120 credits) and requires course work and a thesis. Normally students aim directly for a *doktorsexamen* but it is also possible to take a *licentiatexamen* as an intermediate degree. All faculties can award a *licentiatexamen* or *doktorsexamen*, in which the discipline is named, e.g. *teknologie licentiatexamen* (Licentiate in Technology). However a faculty of engineering, like any other, may also award a *filosofie doktorsexamen* (PhD).